

Adorno, Hegel, and the Philosophical Origins of Classical Social Theory

Brian W. Fuller

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**Abstract**

The central claim of my dissertation is that the work of Theodor Adorno offers a valuable framework for reevaluating the philosophical heritage of classical social theory. In his ongoing engagement with the philosophy of German Idealism, and with Hegel in particular, Adorno's philosophical, sociological, and cultural critical writings involve a critical rethinking of the relationship between subject and object, and between individual and society. I make two primary arguments to substantiate my claim. The first is that Adorno's work must be understood within the context of the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. In particular, I show that Hegel's critique of Kantian philosophy structures Adorno's own understanding of the work of philosophy and of critical social theory. In the first part of the dissertation, I review the substance of Kantian epistemology, and of Hegel's critique (Chapter 2); I then demonstrate that the Adorno's critical philosophical procedure is grounded in his reading of Kant and Hegel (Chapter 3). My second primary argument is that Adorno's attempt to articulate a critique of classical social theory is hampered by his own philosophical commitments. Through a juxtaposition of Marx's critique of Hegel's practical philosophy with Adorno's own critique of Hegel (Chapter 4), I show that Adorno's commitment to the negativity of the dialectic entails a conception of social theory that has not sufficiently addressed the implications of its materialist transformation. Adorno's work relies upon a reduction of Hegel that remains problematic and unacknowledged. Next, I use a reading of Durkheim's own philosophical commitments, through the lens of German Idealism, to show that Adorno's immanent critique of Durkheim reproduces the aporiae that it seeks to rescue (Chapter

5). In the conclusion to the thesis (Chapter 6), I employ a discussion of the common themes and problems of Adorno's critical-philosophical interpretation of classical social theory to suggest a reconsideration and renewal of its Hegelian heritage.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Adorno on the philosophical and the sociological

Sociology as organized *Wissenschaft* is the outcome of objective societal power and its objective spirit — anathema to individuals, because that power is not so easily determined as the opinions, forms of reaction, and ways of behaving of the socialized individuals; at best these index the word society (NSO 241).

Dialectic is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion, not that which has already escaped (ND 398/406).

#### 1. Introduction to the problematic

This thesis uses the philosophical and sociological writings of Theodor W. Adorno as a framework for interpreting the philosophical origins and nature of a distinctively sociological mode of thought. My conceit is that Adorno’s broad interests and objects of critique—spanning philosophy, literary and cultural criticism, musical theory, and sociology—provide a unique opportunity to explore and better comprehend the conceptual *transition* between philosophy and sociology.<sup>1</sup> While not a “typical” sociologist, Adorno was invested in sociological ideas and debates, partly as a result of pragmatic considerations, but more importantly because his critical-materialist perspective demanded a constant attention to the totality of society. Adorno’s struggles to articulate his version of “nonidentity thinking” often included discussions of sociological concepts and thinkers; while his more properly sociological efforts relied heavily on his interpretation of philosophical notions. As Bernstein (2006, 107) has

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<sup>1</sup> I mean here that the narrative that I have crafted here, partly as a result of its anachronism, is better understood as a *conceptual history*, rather than as a primarily historical account of persons, ideas, and texts. In this way, I envision it falling somewhere between a Hegelian perspective on the history of concepts, and Adorno’s own configurational approach. On the notion of conceptual history, the origins of which have been variously attributed to Hegel and to Dilthey, see, e.g., Koselleck (2002); on Hegel’s history of philosophical concepts, see Macdonald (2006); for more on Adorno’s configurations and constellations, see, in particular, Benzer (2011b); Jarvis (1998); Paddison (1993).



articulated, straightforwardly, “Adorno’s conception of dialectic welds together philosophical and sociological elements.”

Rather than claiming that Adorno is uniquely situated to shed light on this topic simply by virtue of his professional activity as both a philosopher and a sociologist, I believe that his significance stems from his understanding of the essential tasks of a contemporary critical thought. Adorno was famously skeptical about the project of Enlightenment reason, arguing, in a series of works, that it constituted a form of thought which was incapable of achieving the fundamentally *new*, but rather merely passively reproduced existing conditions. This form of “identity thinking,” stemming as it does from the foundations of Western culture, broadly permeates the forms of contemporary art and science alike. In this sense, Adorno’s critique of “positivist” modes of sociological thought and research, and of philosophical trends such as phenomenology and “fundamental ontology,” share significant commonalities.

Adorno looked above all to the philosophy of German Idealism as a source of inspiration for his endeavors to articulate a “negative dialectic,” and his work is incomprehensible without a grasp of this background and his engagement with it. While Adorno’s relationship to German Idealism has been mined significantly in the last decades, this has primarily only been with reference to his philosophical and aesthetic work. Adorno’s own version of sociological research, as well as his understanding of the nature of society and of sociology, has more often been neglected—as least within the English language literature. As a result of this neglect, the implications of Adorno’s philosophical education for his own sociology and theory of society have yet to be seriously investigated.

Additionally, the relationship between the dominant themes of German idealist philosophy and “classical” social theory has been significantly neglected. Despite the extraordinary significance of the work of Kant and Hegel to major contemporary philosophical positions, there has been very little literature from the perspective of sociology. When combined with the fact that philosophical and epistemological concerns are central to sociology and social research, this gap becomes even more significant. One reason for this neglect may be the difficulty of the relevant texts, along with the rise of the analytic philosophical perspective. However, many problems and themes from the German idealist era continue to haunt philosophy, as the recent resurgence of interest in Hegel has indicated.

My perspective here focuses largely on the epistemological shift that occurs in Hegel’s critique of Kantian theoretical philosophy. After Kant’s “Copernican” turn—which significantly revised the Cartesian conception of the subject—Hegel’s admiration for, and trenchant critique of, Kant’s version of “transcendental idealism” attempted to understand both subjectivity and objectivity in relationship to an “absolute.” Although Hegel’s doctrine of “absolute idealism” is still being interpreted in diverse ways, its influence has been enormous.<sup>2</sup> His reinterpretation of the Kantian subject within the absolute involves an attention to social-historical dynamics; but the systematic character of his work, along with his prose style, make interpretation and appropriation difficult.

The plan for the present work is to tease out the relationships between the critical philosophical, the epistemological, and the sociological thought of Adorno, by looking at his critique of idealism (idealistic philosophy), of Kant and Hegel in particular, and his

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<sup>2</sup> Pippin (1989, 3) begins his first book on Hegel by noting the irony that “Hegel seems to be in the impossible position of being both extraordinarily influential and almost completely inaccessible.”

relationship to the epistemological and sociological perspectives of Marx and Durkheim. Adorno's particular understanding of society is indebted to both Marx and Hegel, but also shares affinities with Durkheim. More importantly, Adorno's interpretation of German Idealist philosophy structures his engagement with classical social theory in a way that sheds light on its philosophical origins. To put this another way, it is not that Adorno investigates these origins explicitly, but rather that his own attempts to articulate critical versions of philosophy and sociology—as Rose (1978) has put it, his “search for a style”—illuminate the conceptual issues at play.

The significant conceptual issues here revolve around the conceptualization of the subject. Kant introduced the concept of the autonomous or “spontaneous” subject, which determines itself through its own reason; however, the abstractness of his account was roundly criticized. Hegel's approach sought the autonomy of the subject, somewhat paradoxically, not in the abstract transcendental sphere, but rather in its social-historical context (Pippin 1997, 171). The “idealism” which characterizes both of these positions contains this notion of the freedom of the subject at its core; in the critique of idealism that often marks a “sociological” turn, this notion is often excised theoretically.

### 1.1 From philosophy to sociology: the context of German idealism

To briefly situate Adorno's work in the context of German Idealist philosophy: his efforts to situate his own critical intentions within the intellectual disciplines of philosophy and sociology can be framed in terms of the modern “problem of knowledge.” If we emphasize the origins of this problematic in Descartes' attempt to come to terms with modern science, then Adorno's own extended critique of the “identity thinking” inherent in the modern scientific method contains an engagement with this central problem of

modernity: that the scientific revolution has undermined our philosophical forms of knowledge, and they must be set right (though not on a new foundation). The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* laid out the terms of Adorno's version of this criticism, but his work would continue to probe its contours for the remainder of his career. My intention, in situating Adorno's work within this broad philosophical problematic, is to highlight the significance of philosophical heritage for his ultimate understanding and critique of modern society and sociology. I agree on the whole with Kilminster's analysis that the "development and character of European sociology cannot be fully understood without taking into account the ways in which its practitioners have tried—though not always fully successfully—to transform into social scientific research programmes various problems and issues they encountered in the writings of philosophers" (1998, 27). Often taking the form of a series of critiques of various philosophers, as well as of multiple cultural forms, Adorno's work must be situated within a much larger discourse in order to be properly understood.

The question then arises as to the proper scope of such an undertaking. Although keenly attuned to the limits of human reason, Adorno's own critical lens recognized very few boundaries. In the following study, I will focus on those figures whose work is most important for questions concerning the problem of modern knowledge within the disciplinary transition from philosophy to sociology and social theory: Kant and Hegel on the philosophical side, Marx and Durkheim on the sociological. The full justification of this selection will come out over the course of the dissertation; however, a brief account begins with the significance of Hegel's philosophy for the entirety of Adorno's work (Jarvis 1998; O'Connor 2004). Adorno devoted individual chapters of *Negative*

*Dialectics* to Kant and Hegel, and his work cannot be understood outside of the German Idealist context. This philosophical (epistemological and ethical) context is important because it remained so central to Adorno's own interdisciplinary concerns.

With regard to sociology and social theory, Adorno cast a similarly wide net in terms of his critiques, but considered Marx to be of primary importance. A significant question here is the extent to which we can say that it is Marx's explicitly sociological concerns which are influential for Adorno. He clearly viewed himself as a critical materialist. My emphasis on Marx and Durkheim here is based upon two primary considerations. First, each is significant for Adorno's own work. Marx's imprint, especially his critique of Hegel and his theory of value, are all over Adorno's work, while Durkheim is most often used as a foil in Adorno's writings on sociology. However, he did write an introduction to the German translation of Durkheim's book *Philosophy and Sociology*, which arguably gives the best view of his critique. Second, my selection follows the status and position of Marx and Durkheim within the sociological "canon." Although representing only two of the "big three" classical sociologists, Marx and Durkheim are often characterized as "structural" or "functional" theorists. This makes them important figures for my analysis here, since it will emphasize the significance of the Hegelian concepts of "totality" and "objective spirit" for thinking sociologically.<sup>3</sup>

In isolating the intellectual connections between Adorno and the classical German Idealist philosophers, and the "classical" sociologists, my intent is to conduct a kind of "dual movement," with respect to Adorno's work, which (1) locates Adorno's

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<sup>3</sup> The original plan for the work included a chapter on Adorno's reading of Weber, which had to be omitted due to concerns of time and space. Such a study, which will be completed in the future, is important for a full understanding of Adorno's perspective on the relationship of the individual and society, the character of subjectivity in modern society, and the interpretative character of social critique.

philosophical and sociological work within the philosophy of German Idealism; and (2) situates his work within the classical sociological tradition, by looking at his engagement with the work of Marx and Durkheim. Although this may be an unorthodox approach, through it I hope to provide a means of understanding the continued sociological significance of these philosophical origins, and contribute to the meager literature on this topic. The broader significance, and the further goal of my study, is (3) to illuminate the ways in which philosophical paradigms have been translated into sociological concerns, and what has been lost in the process.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.2 Caveats and limitations

Working analytically with Adorno's writings poses some problems for the researcher. Adorno's intellectual procedure, as a critical method, is based in the concept and practice of negation; as a result, attempting to draw out a *positive* theory is typically folly.<sup>5</sup> While I try to avoid this trap here, the reader can judge the success of my efforts. The problem is exacerbated by looking at Adorno's thought in comparison to Durkheim, a very

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<sup>4</sup> The present work also follows on a recent revival of interest in Hegel's philosophy among some of those who were previously most skeptical of it: analytic philosophers. Andrew Bowie (1994b, 2) puts it nicely: "The recent revival of interest in German Idealism has been fuelled by the widespread rejection of philosophies which entail a subject-object duality and a notion of cognition which depends upon assuming a mind separate from the rest of the world. The suspicion that the mechanistic, objectifying forms of explanation that came to dominate natural science and philosophy in the second half of the nineteenth century are seriously inadequate has led to a reconsideration of some of the major philosophical positions of the early nineteenth century." But he also points to a paradox that will be relevant here: "On the one hand, [German Idealism] is seen as a form of totalising metaphysics that merely conjured away, rather than overcoming, the modern problem of the relationship between thought and being that was revealed by Kant's critique of previous metaphysics. On the other hand, German Idealism is seen as that strand of modern philosophy which began to develop a methodologically defensible way of overcoming the split between consciousness and the world" (1994b, 2). For additional commentary on this theme, see Beiser (2008); Redding (2007).

<sup>5</sup> This point was recently acknowledged by Honneth (2005), who corrected his earlier (1993) critique of Adorno's social theory, saying that he now conceives of Adorno's work as a *hermeneutic* of capitalism.

different kind of thinker. The differences in their approach to *reason* is often the explicit target of Adorno's criticisms; however, the significance of the comparison goes beyond this. While I do not attempt to uncover an explicit theory of society or theory of knowledge in Adorno's work, I do try to emphasize the ways in which his interpretations are partial and/or polemical, and any significant consequences that result therefrom.

My own perspective here has additionally led to some difficulties. While much of the following will concern Adorno's interpretation of Kant and Hegel, I then propose to examine Adorno's reading of Marx and Durkheim, *in light of* his interpretation of German Idealist philosophy. While I believe that this is a fruitful approach—for reasons briefly mentioned above and which will be clear by the end of the thesis—I have had to tread a line through classical social theory, discussing the approaches of Marx and Durkheim, but typically not addressing these thinkers directly. The significance of my claims I think can be seen best through Adorno's eyes, and, while I try to give pointers about the limitations of his perspective, I do not spend time arguing for its veracity. In my opinion, this path would be a dead end. The problematization of Adorno's interpretation of Durkheim, in particular, would be an easy task, but where would it get one? For a thinker who was explicitly concerned with the line between truth and falsity, who admitted an approach based on exaggeration and fiercely criticized clarity in philosophical thought, the significance of any particular critique is often performative. Given this, it may be hubristic to approach my questions in this way. I can only hope that I have, by the end of the work, convinced the reader of its value.

One more caveat regarding Adorno relates the nature of his thought to the sheer volume of his writings. While I have read a significant portion of Adorno's *oeuvre*, I

cannot claim mastery, especially of the works concerning music and aesthetics. Acknowledging that one cannot neatly categorize his work into categories of “philosophy,” “sociology,” “aesthetics,” etc.—indeed, this point is of central concern to my discussion here—I thereby admit some fundamental limitations and potential flaws. I have necessarily had to limit the discussion to the present themes. This problem relates back to the dialectical nature of the work of both Hegel and Adorno,<sup>6</sup> as well as pragmatic concerns. I have tried to find a balance between analysis and expression here, while bracketing some themes and texts.

While I have drawn from a wide range of Adorno’s texts, I have focused on the themes within *Negative Dialectics*, which are discussed in many other works (e.g., EDi, H, KK, LGF, SO, VND), and on his writings about sociologists and sociological themes (e.g., EDu, EP, ES, G, PETG, PS). For the former, I believe that it represents the “pinnacle” of his philosophical efforts, and is certainly rich enough to sustain my topic. With regard to Adorno’s “sociological” thoughts, I have chosen to focus on his writings *about* thinkers and themes, rather than explicitly on the texts which comprise his empirical sociological efforts, such as *The Authoritarian Personality*, *Currents of Music*, the *Group Experiment*, and *The Stars Down to Earth*. While my original plan for the work included these texts, I soon realized that they would be beyond the scope of my concerns here. I hope that the present work on the relationship of philosophy to

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<sup>6</sup> Though the problem is different in each case. In Hegel the issue concerns the systematic nature of his thought, which unifies logic, nature, and spirit, leaving nothing untouched. For Adorno, despite his stark criticism of Hegel’s totality, and his corresponding “micrological” focus and configurational form, everything nevertheless remains related through the inescapable mediation of the social. There is the additional issue of his employment of Hegelian terminology, discussed below.



sociology in Adorno's writings will lead to a more thorough investigation of his empirical sociological efforts.<sup>7</sup>

Adorno's style of writing stems directly from his theories. Hohendahl has noted, with respect to Adorno's work in the mode of literary critique, that it is impossible to understand Adorno's contributions from a conventional perspective. "To appreciate them, one must pay attention to their form and manner of presentation as much as to their topics and arguments . . . Their artistic form makes Adorno's essays incompatible with and suspect to the project of academic criticism, which is based on the idea of research and scientific argument" (1995, 75-77). Although the "incompatibility" mentioned here may be an overstatement, the problem is real enough, and applies to a significant number of his works. I hope to have successfully drawn out meanings and implications here, without too much reduction. I have quoted liberally from his texts, often choosing to let his words "speak for themselves," rather than relying of excessive paraphrase.

A final, related, note concerns translations. I have generally worked with the original German texts when available, providing reference to both the original text and the English translation; and have indicated when the translations given are my own. The translation of Adorno's texts presents a number of issues, well-discussed by Hullot-Kentor in his introduction to his translation of *Aesthetic Theory*. I have chosen here to

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<sup>7</sup> As this project was nearing its latter stages, the first comprehensive work in English on Adorno's sociology appeared (Benzer 2011b). While Benzer's book is rich and well-reasoned, and admirable in its thoroughness and clarity, I believe that my perspective here complements it. Benzer seeks to not only describe, but also to evaluate the contemporary significance of Adorno's sociology (13), and he highlights its origins in, and relationships to, Adorno's theory of language and his critiques of concepts from various philosophers. However, I believe that his discussion neglects precisely what I focus in on here: that Adorno's work (philosophical *or* sociological) cannot be understood without a thorough reckoning of its engagement with Hegel, the details of which have implications for sociological thought. I'll discuss this critique in more detail in my conclusion.

stick rather closely to the German text, reproducing some of the idiosyncrasies of his style.

## ***2. The plan of the work***

The thrust of my argument in the following is twofold. First, I aim to demonstrate that Adorno's relationship to the classical social theorists cannot be understood outside of his interpretation and critique of German Idealist philosophy; second, that with this philosophical interpretation Adorno commits himself to a reproduction of the aporiae of sociological thought. While Adorno would surely not claim that philosophy can or should be consistent, rooted as it is in a society of contradiction, his attempt to recover a "negative" dialectic out of the remains of Hegel's own contains difficulties that cannot be written off to the necessities of the constellation, or to the rejection of enlightenment thought's obsession with clarity. In terms of the broader story of the philosophical origins of classical social theory, I hope to demonstrate that the significant break with the reflective thought of Kantianism remains with Hegel, rather than Adorno.

My argument obtains its bearings not from a general conception of idealism, but from Hegel's critique of Kant, or more generally the relationship between a Hegelian, "objective," speculative form of idealism and a Kantian transcendental one. In Chapter Two I introduce the relevant themes in Kant's philosophy, and elaborate my interpretation of Hegel's critique and its significance. This chapter sets the stage for a discussion of Adorno's reading of both Kant and Hegel, to which Chapter Three is devoted. The result of these chapters will be an understanding of the philosophical difficulties involved in Adorno's project. In an attempt to situate himself somewhere

between Kant and Hegel, Adorno develops an account of experience intended to overcome the problems of each.

The discussion then takes a sociological turn, spending the next two chapters on Adorno's relationship with Marx (Chapter Four) and Durkheim (Chapter Five). I frame these discussions in terms of the attempt, within classical social theory generally, to evolve a methodology in part out of the critique of philosophical reason. Marx and Durkheim would have their own versions of what constitutes the "objectivity" of the social. Adorno, while taking his cues explicitly from Marx's critical and dialectical perspective rather than Durkheim's static scientific one, cannot provide a satisfactory critique, given his philosophical orientations.

### ***3. Review of the relevant literature***

As a means of organizing the previous work which is relevant to my topic here, I have broken the discussion down into two categories. The first examines works which have discussed sociology, and/or sociological theory, within the context of German Idealist philosophy; the second examines the research on Adorno which is related to his social theory in particular.

#### ***3.1 From philosophy to sociology***

The significance of German idealism on the development of sociological thinking in the late 19th century should not be underestimated. Although significantly mediated by such important successor movements as left-Hegelianism and neo-Kantianism, it is the watershed of Kant's "Copernican revolution," and Hegel's reaction to it, which is ultimately foundational for classical social and sociological theory. Adorno's concern

with the philosophies of Kant and Hegel can be read through this lens, which we can then apply to his understanding of the sociological canon, and the tasks of sociology itself. More broadly, I believe that these themes represent a hidden heritage of classical sociological theory. Most often discussed in terms of its philosophical grounding in neo-Kantianism (Weber), left-Hegelianism (Marx), and positivism (Durkheim), the “canon” of classical sociological theory has a relationship to older philosophical traditions which has yet to be investigated in its full complexity. Of course, these later traditions are extremely important, but each draws upon, or can be seen profitably in relation to, the German idealist tradition. In particular, the twin themes of autonomy and objectivity highlight the relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge, and the conception of the subject-object relationship which essentially underlies social theory.

There is a familiar story here, which tells of the origins of the attempt to analytically separate the *Geisteswissenschaften* from the *Naturwissenschaften*, an effort which originated in the post-Hegelian era. One of the key figures here is Dilthey, whose own hermeneutic approach explicitly attempted to abstract the Hegelian notion of “objective spirit” from its philosophical (metaphysical) context, and use it for a new fledgling *Wissenschaft*. “For Dilthey, the need to liberate Hegel’s idea of *objectiver* [sic] *Geist* from his systematic metaphysics meant extracting it from his tripartite classification of spirit into its ‘subjective,’ ‘objective,’ and, crucially, ‘*absolute*’ forms. It was ‘absolute spirit’—often taken simply as a synonym for ‘God’—that showed Hegel’s commitment to a pre-Kantian dogmatic, and in particular, *spiritualistic*, metaphysics” (Redding 2011, 213; see also Bambach 1995; Rose 1981; Schnädelbach 1984). Dilthey’s attempt was

influential for the two schools of neo-Kantianism, who, as I'll briefly discuss in my commentary on Rose below, sought a more explicit route back to Kant's critique.

Rather than focus on these historical themes, here I review more contemporary literature, leaving aside the mediating factors of Dilthey's hermeneutics, neo-Kantian epistemology, and left-Hegelianism.<sup>8</sup> Within the set of texts which have discussed the philosophical origins of classical social theory, there is a small group which explicitly examines the German Idealist heritage. Among these, there is no general consensus as to the significant themes, nor the nature of the influence. Instead, we have a plethora of stories with a diverse set of characters. Here I will only review the texts which discuss the figures that I deal with in this study. First, I'll briefly evaluate a number of minor papers, before turning to a few book-length studies.

### 3.1.1 Minor texts

John Hund (1998) frames the topic here in perhaps the broadest fashion, arguing that Hegel's critique of Kant marked a transition from an individual, psychological ("asociological") perspective, to an explicitly sociological one. He goes so far as to claim that Hegel provides a "paradigm" for sociology. However, while Hund does focus on a neglected strain of thought, he goes little further than associating "collective ideas" and "social objects" in an attempt at a quasi-Hegelian story of constructionism. "The nucleus of Hegel's idealism is the idea that self and society are synthetic unities that cannot be reduced to collections of self-subsistent phenomena out of which they are constructed"

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<sup>8</sup> I also omit discussions within the philosophy of social science literature, which are typically situated with an analytic philosophical perspective, discussing the paradigms of social science within a framework of positivism, realism, interpretivism, and Marxism/critical theory. Even in more recent texts, even ones focusing on "continental" themes, the discussion does not extend back to German Idealism, and rarely discusses Adorno outside of a general "critical theory" interpretation, centered on Horkheimer and Habermas (see, e.g., Baert 2005; Sherratt 2006).

(239). While this may be an appropriately sociological reading of Hegel's intent, it is hardly an accurate statement of Hegel's idealism. Hund's account is geared towards making a basic analogy between the Hegel-Kant split, and that between sociology and psychology, and his article culminates in a table comparing the Kantian (individual, psychological) and the Hegelian (collective, sociological) paradigms of philosophy. The latter is suggested to have been the source of the sociologies of Durkheim, Simmel, and Dilthey. While Hund's article is suggestive, it eschews any kind of detailed analysis.

In a couple of articles that seem to have been largely ignored, Knapp (1985; 1986) issues a call for a thorough examination of the relationship between Hegel and the diverse and divergent paradigms of sociological thought. In Knapp's analysis of the time, "the most commonly accepted family tree of sociology hardly recognizes Hegel even as a distant ancestor" (1986, 586). He proceeds to provide a brief discussion of the ways in which the complex meaning of Hegel's concept of the "universal" serves to structure the conflict (Marx), functionalist (Durkheim), and organizational (Weber) approaches in classical sociological theory. Although this work has some cogency, and would be followed up by more detailed work on the Hegel-Durkheim relationship (discussed below), Knapp's approach was limited by his conception of Hegel's universal. Although his intent was to show its complexity, in understanding the universal according to the meanings of "general, public, common, universal, and universalistic," Knapp explicitly removed the problematic concept of the absolute. While this may have been a reasonable strategy, for my purposes here of understanding Adorno's relationship to both German idealism and classical social theory, the speculative portions of Hegel's philosophy are crucial. Although he took his inspiration from Rose (1981), by restricting the "universal"

in this way, Knapp fundamentally cuts himself off from a thorough understanding of the intellectual tradition that he wants to re-value.<sup>9</sup>

With a more historical approach, but a roughly similar goal as Knapp, Bubner (1984) laments the excision of Hegel from Anglo-American philosophy. Taking his cue from Hegel's assertion that "Philosophy is its own epoch comprehended in thought", Bubner discusses the history of the reception of Hegel by the left-Hegelians and neo-Marxists, Dilthey, Freyer, and Mannheim, before moving on to his own perspective. Rather than the concept of "objective spirit," or the "critical confrontation of theory and reality" addressed in dialectics, Bubner examines the significance of this dictum of Hegel's for philosophy and its historical context. In this interpretation, philosophy must come to terms with the relationship between its own essence and its historical manifestations. In other words, it can only abstract from its own historical specificity at its own peril—every philosophy, no matter how dogmatic, will ultimately, in the long run, be relativized to its own time period. Philosophy thus faces the paradoxical situation of needing to assert its own autonomy, while recognizing its own historicity (1984, 151f.).

Philosophy must therefore conceptually articulate the essence of an era, without the removal of its own perspective. To achieve this, it must differentiate itself from an everyday or common sense perspective through this mode of reflection.

The result of disinterest in the contingency of the moment over against the genuine philosophical interest in reason is that those factors in any given historical situation which resist the activity of rational elucidation prove to be the fundamental structures of an epoch. *What philosophy is unable to relativize to any greater degree, it must recognize* in the name of reason itself. This is precisely the meaning of Hegel's provocative motto of the actuality of the rational and the rationality of the actual (1984, 154).

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<sup>9</sup> Knapp does make the important recognition that with the rise of new approaches in social theory related to literary criticism, phenomenology, existentialism, among others, the intellectual background of Hegel has only grown more significant (1986, 607).

The social sciences, however, as precisely *sciences*, are more involved in the formation of common opinion about our world, rather than with its *comprehension*. Philosophy attempts to uncover the rational “structures;” it “brings to light that which, independent of the historical moment, is worth considering on generally valid grounds” (1984, 156).

Despite its relative lack of development, Bubner’s perspective brings up some important issues for my discussion here. Most importantly, the issue of Hegel’s significance for the social sciences goes beyond a particular concept such as the “universal” or even “objective spirit.” In attempting to articulate his own system of philosophy, Hegel provides some indication (if not a model) of the relationship between philosophy and other forms of thought, including both “common sense” and science. Although Bubner’s aim was to move beyond conceptions of this intellectual history which prioritize “objective spirit” and dialectical critique, my own approach in this work will be more to attempt to relate the significance of all three of these approaches. Admittedly, this is a large undertaking; however, I believe that it is necessary to discuss the relationships among various aspects of the Hegelian influence in order to grasp his relevance for Adorno. Taking inspiration from Knapp’s attempt to unify sociological paradigms through their common intellectual heritage, I will attempt a broader, if not unified, perspective here.

Shalin (1990) argues that German idealist philosophy, or, as he refers to it, “transcendental idealism”, was instrumental in providing an alternative model of the subject-object relationship, opposed to the dualism of rationalism. He identifies the importance of idealism’s “distinctly sociological dimension,” namely that it conceives of sociality and rationality as “dialectically intertwined,” and discusses its influence on the



“cultural science” tradition in Germany (Dilthey, Weber, Simmel), and the interactionist tradition in the United States (Mead, Cooley, Dewey, Pierce) (1990, 4). Although Shalin’s work provides a useful starting point, it is essentially a very broad overview, and fails to differentiate between the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, or between the various social theorists that he covers.

There is a small body of literature that focuses more narrowly on Durkheim’s relationship to German Idealism in general, and to Kant and Hegel specifically. Collins (1985) notes the influence of Hegel on the philosophical work of both Renouvier and, through him, Hamelin, both of whom were important intellectual influences on Durkheim. Although for Kant the transcendental “I” is perceived as the “ground” of the empirical “I,” Renouvier’s “personalism” holds that the grounding of the self, as a moral agent (practical reason has priority over theoretical reason here) is not in the transcendental sphere, but in the “concrete empirical individual” (Collins 1985, 58). Durkheim began with this basis in the *empirical individual*, and moved to an empirical conception of the social.

Knapp (1985; 1986) and Tekiner (2002) have examined Durkheim’s Hegelian heritage explicitly. Knapp in particular finds that many of Durkheim’s acknowledged intellectual influences were themselves significantly Hegelian, and that the Hegelian conception of *Geist* is reminiscent of Durkheim’s conception of society, the collective conscience, collective representations and even the *homo duplex*. He iterates a list of “common elements” of the work of Hegel and Durkheim, including the focus on “objective, supra-individual” processes; the conception of a functional system; a focus on the sphere of culture; and the idea that “[r]eligion expresses the moral reality of the

society” (Knapp 1986, 596; 1985, 5). Although his reading suffers from an overly simplified account of Hegel (*Geist*, for instance, is glossed simply as ‘culture’), Knapp provides a plausible explanation of the reasons Durkheim might have had for explicitly distancing himself from the work of Hegel, and he usefully juxtaposes a properly scientific approach from the speculative philosophy of Hegel.

In a more recent article, Gangas (2007) has provided the most sophisticated “rethinking” of the relationship between Hegel and Durkheim. He focuses primarily on the similarities between the accounts of Durkheim and Hegel of the *reconciliation* of individual and society. He correctly notes that many of the readings of Durkheim and Hegel suffer from a misunderstanding of how each treats the concept of the “individual.” According to Gangas, neither thinker subordinated the individual to the social, as is commonly believed. Gangas’s reading is interesting in the context of Adorno’s critique of Durkheim, because it highlights the notion of organic solidarity as an “organic-teleological model” of society, against the abstract universal of mechanical solidarity. It would certainly appear that Adorno misreads Durkheim in a way that is criticized by Gangas; but my goal here is less to fit Adorno into Gangas’s or any other particular critique (I believe that Adorno misreads Hegel’s version of “totality,” and the corresponding state organism, in a similar way to his misreading of Durkheim), but more to further refine the delineation of conceptions of the social at work in German idealism, Durkheim and Adorno. However, I certainly will not claim that Adorno provides a sophisticated reading of Durkheim as a Hegelian—as elsewhere, Adorno’s focus is on the *productivity* of critique, rather than its accuracy. But his account of Durkheim relies crucially on his understanding of Hegel, and so with this examination, I hope to map out

these relationships more fully. Like both Gangas and Knapp, I believe that the significance of the Hegelian *Geist* is of crucial importance for an understanding of Durkheim's sociology. In addition, it is the conception of *coercion* and its *experiential* grounding which is important to Adorno. The aporias created through Durkheim's attempt to socially ground the categories of thought are addressed in part through what may be considered his "Hegelian" conception of social reality. Adorno picks up on the vague Hegelian roots of Durkheim's thought.

### 3.1.2 Rose

Gillian Rose (1981) gives by far the most comprehensive account of the relationship between sociological thought and the German Idealist heritage. As opposed to traditional accounts, which tend to dichotomise the perspectives of Durkheim and Weber, Rose lumps them both under the heading of neo-Kantianism. Although they are to be differentiated within this category, according to the two main schools, of more significance is their similarity in refusing to go beyond a merely transcendental sociology, which presupposes the existence of its objects. This was the effect of the turn away from Hegel and his metaphysical system of philosophy, and the "return to Kant" of the neo-Kantian philosophers. Rose's account emphasizes the neo-Kantian distinction between *Geltung* (validity) and *Werte* (values), and the shift from a transcendental logic, concerned with the conditions of experience, to what Rose calls a "general logic," which discusses the creation of objects. This general logic, a "logic of validity" (*Geltungslogik*), took objectification under its scope, and detached perceptual and empirical reality, a move which entailed the independence of the process of cognition from the "logic of thought" (HCS 9). She traces this grounding through the Marburg and Heidelberg

schools of neo-Kantian philosophy, and into the canon of sociology (and Marxism), claiming that the important distinction between the opposing sides of the debate is only whether they considered values or validity to be primary.

This heritage is crucial for understanding “the idea of a scientific sociology” for Rose, since both Durkheim and Weber adhered to this perspective of an independent realm of validity (apart from individual perception). “It was the ambition of sociology to substitute itself for traditional theoretical and practical philosophy, as well as to secure a sociological object-domain *sui generis*” (HCS 14). Rose analyzes the sociologies of Durkheim and Weber in terms of Kant’s constitutive versus regulative principles. Durkheim, giving priority to validity over values, considers society to be constitutive of its objects (moral facts), since it is a transcendental precondition of their possibility. Weber, on the other hand, giving values the priority and *sui generis* status, used his notion of “objective possibility,” which grounds the ideal type, as a regulative principle with which to make sense of the object. Validity here is constituted by subjective belief. This has led to “two logics of the social,” one, identified with Durkheim, that “identifies social reality by a critique of consciousness,” and the other modeled on Weber which “locates social reality within the realm of consciousness and its oppositions” (HCS 21). Only the latter is properly “sociology,” in the sense of a differentiation from the natural sciences, while the other has traditionally been accused of positivism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In Rose’s analysis, a third variant of *Geltungslogik* was provided by Simmel, who considered the sphere of validity to be a “third realm,” existing beyond both subjective being and objective being, which are its modes of realization. Rose considers this to be merely a recasting, in Simmelian *lebensphilosophische* terminology, of the Kantian critique of neo-Kantianism. “His critical philosophy of culture examines the relation between the independent realm of validities and the soul or life, which dwells partly in harmony with the realm of validities and partly in opposition” (HCS 25). This cultural sphere of moral or practical consciousness is comprised of forms of life which attain an independent validity (alienation) from their creators. This sphere is starkly opposed by Simmel’s analysis of theoretical consciousness, which alone constitutes the unity of sociation.

Taking on Marxist critics of Hegel, Rose categorizes the work of both Lukács and Adorno as original but unsuccessful attempts to break out of the “neo-Kantian paradigm of validity and values.” “The relation of their work to neo-Kantianism is the source both of its sociological power and the peculiarity of its contribution to Marxist theory. They turned the neo-Kantian paradigm into a Marxist sociology of cultural forms by combining Simmel’s philosophy of form with a selective generalization of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism” (HCS 27). Lukács made it clear that “reification is the specifically capitalist form of objectification” (HCS 28). Social forms only become valid when they are viewed from the standpoint of totality, not in isolation from it. In this way, Lukács shifted *Geltungslogik* into “a theory of historical mediation.” However, the problem with this is that, without the connection to Marx’s theory of value, Lukács’s crucial categories of “mediation” and “totality” are really only “a kind of shorthand instead of a sustained theory” (HCS 29). By tracing the concept of reification back to Kant’s distinction between the rationality of the cognitive synthetic capacity, and the irrationality of the sphere of noumena, Lukács set up a Fichtean resolution in the standpoint of the proletariat.

Adorno, in Rose’s account, despite his Hegelian-inspired critique of Lukács, could not fully incorporate it. “Adorno largely accepted Lukács’ generalization of Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism. Instead of understanding capitalist social, cultural and artistic forms as ‘objectifications’ or ‘facts of consciousness,’ Adorno analysed them as determinants of the contradictions of consciousness” (HCS 32). Rose’s critique of Adorno places him squarely within the “neo-Fichteanism” which characterizes the theoretical dead end leading from the critique of Kant. Adorno’s “morality of method”

remained too abstract, and trapped within “a realm of infinite striving or task, a morality, in the limited sense which Hegel criticized: a general prescription not located in the social relations which underlie it, and hence incapable of providing any sustained and rigorous analysis of those relations” (HCS 33).

The point of Rose’s analysis is that Hegel’s thought has been “mystified” by Marxist and non-Marxists sociology alike, the former by postulating an artificial distinction between the “conservative system” of Hegel, and his “radical method,” and the latter by either remaining explicitly within a neo-Kantian logic (Weber, Durkheim), or by trying to divorce Hegel’s “objective spirit” from its context of the absolute (HCS 41f.). This explains their inability to account for Hegel’s prior critique of Kant. Her goal is then to begin the process of recovering the value of Hegel’s thought for social theory. “In their very different ways, both the non-Marxist and the Marxist critiques of Hegel attempt to drop the notion of the ‘absolute,’ but, at the same time, retain the social import of Hegel’s thought . . . Hegel’s philosophy has *no* social import if the absolute is banished or suppressed, if the absolute cannot be thought” (HCS 42).

Rose’s critique forms the background and basis of my investigation here. Her analysis of Adorno (1993) has him eschewing a properly speculative form of reason in favor of a merely dialectical one, a point which my analysis will support. Despite some of his claims, Adorno’s work constitutes a “repudiation” of speculation; he “replac[es] recollections of the whole with judged oppositions” (Rose 1993, 54).<sup>11</sup> Adorno’s critique

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<sup>11</sup> “In passage after passage of *Negative Dialectics* Adorno represents Hegel in terms of oppositions—between individual and ideal, or between particular and universal—which Hegel is alleged to have invariably reconciled in favour of the latter term of the opposition against the former” (Rose 1993, 61).

of Hegel relies on the accusation of false reconciliations; while Adorno “remains with the dialectical antinomies” (Rose 1993, 61).

The difficulty of Rose’s work has perhaps been the cause of its relative neglect, but I hope to demonstrate something of its value here. Although in Rose’s terms, the entire field of sociology as it has been constituted historically is within a neo-Kantian framework, I believe that there is something to be gained from further investigation into Adorno’s quasi-Hegelian perspective. His struggle to come to terms with Hegel’s systematic philosophy, and his struggle to situate sociological perspectives within his own work, shed further light upon this debate. The absolute is “the formation process of subjects and objects” (Rosen 1974, 42); it is the whole. But in Adorno’s terms, the whole means something different, which is why it must be false. Adorno’s claim about the falsity of the whole marks his Marxian shift towards the materialization of Hegel. Adorno tries to *understand society itself as spirit*, as concept, a move which muddles the issues and leads to complexities and confusions in his work. I’ll return to a discussion of her interpretation of Hegel and sociological thought in the conclusion.

### 3.1.3 Kilminster

Outside of Rose’s work, there are been few substantive attempts to come to terms with the heritage of German Idealism. Kilminster (1998, 27) reviews the “sociological revolution in knowledge” as a “*break with philosophy.*” Identifying Kant and Hegel as the lynchpins, and neo-Kantianism and Marxism as the most significant mediators, Kilminster argues that, rather than a transition to an Hegelian “speculative position”, advocated by Rose, sociology must differentiate itself explicitly from philosophy through “socio-genesis” (1998, 31). By succumbing to the “Hegelian temptation,” sociologists

move decisively towards a new metaphysics; the move is, in any case, unnecessary, since Hegel's philosophical perspective has "already been incorporated and reformulated on to another level as part of the sociological revolution in knowledge" (1998, 40).<sup>12</sup>

One of the primary difficulties with Kilminster's narrative is its reliance on an outdated and simplified interpretation of Hegel as first and foremost a metaphysician. His call for the "end of philosophy," while reminiscent of Marx's own, rejects both the system and the method of Hegel. For Kilminster, the empirical analyses of sociology have made Hegel (and philosophy) redundant. Kilminster wants to promote a kind of reduction of philosophy to the sociology of knowledge, claiming that Hegel misunderstood the significance of the social context of his own philosophy (1998, 39). He criticizes the "Hegelians" —whom he never actually identifies, other than Rose — for assuming that "sociological paradigms must possess philosophical underpinnings or make philosophical assumptions" (1998, 39).

#### 3.1.4 Abbinnett

In a neglected work exploring the idea of a "speculative social science," Abbinnett (1998) claims "that the historical determination of truth within the 'substance' of ethical life demands that we acknowledge the relationship of self-consciousness (subjectivity) to the 'objective' structures in which its activity is situated (economy, state, culture, etc.)" (1998, 1). He attempts to "expound the relationship of sociological conceptions of

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<sup>12</sup> Kilminster's analysis is based upon the type of interpretation of Hegel that others (notably Pippin 1989 and Rose 1981) have argued against. He believes that Hegel's work can be mined for theoretical insights, and that one can find its sociological core beneath its metaphysical cover. "Expressed in Hegel's works in a baroque and forbiddingly complex and plastic manner, are, nevertheless, important insights. To recover the spirit (no pun intended) rather than the letter of Hegel, one needs to break with his archaic metaphysics and appropriate the dynamic, relational and synthesizing force of his work in a sociological fashion and go forward. This truly constitutes the 'end of philosophy'" (1998, 36).



community, identity, subjectivity and totality to Hegel's speculative conception of *Sittlichkeit*" (1998, 2). The key here is in the nature of this relationship. For, while Abbinnett is right that for Hegel, "the autonomy of the subject must be understood in terms of the objective/existent conditions of its activity," the nature of these conditions is what is precisely at stake (1998, 3). The key Hegelian categories are "nature" and "spirit," but we cannot translate this into a dualism of mind and body, individual and society to get a form of "sociological" thinking. Abbinnett explicitly poses the question of the compatibility between speculative thought and social scientific reason, and seeks to explain why Kantian thought has established itself as the philosophical inspiration of sociological thought (1998, 10).

Like Rose, Abbinnett agrees with Hegel that if we are going to "re-cognize the 'idea' of sociality", we can only do it *through* the antagonisms of Kantian philosophy (1998, 11). The key Kantian categories for him are "identity," "autonomy," and "synthesis." He undertakes a detailed analysis of the ways in which various strains of sociological thought—including the Marxian paradigm of production, the Durkheimian model of cohesion and interdependency, and the Weberian "idealist" conception of agency and meaning—manage to give only a partial perspective on social reality, by structuring their interpretations around only one of its aspects. "Marxist and functional explanations have tended to marginalize the concepts of 'reflection' and 'subjective formation.' Cognitivist sociologies, on the other hand, have reproduced conceptions of subjectivity which are abstracted from the 'actual' complexity of the ethical life" (1998, 161). Each of these options is made possible only through the labor of reflection, the creation of duality between subject and object, concept and intuition, etc. (1998, 26).

Abbinnett's work is unique, in that he seeks to understand the notion of the "substance" of modernity in a *speculative* fashion; for him this means that

it develops (non-teleologically) through re-cognition of the contradictory relations into which the concept (universality) of self-consciousness is articulated . . . [A] speculative conception of a social science . . . demands re-cognition of "heteronomy" (otherness, exteriority) as a form reproduced through the "reconstruction" of ethical life: it is the "thought" of reconciliation among elements (productive relations, social differentiation and interdependency, subjective meaning and cognition) represented, experienced and theorized as discrete independent and hierarchical (32).

Abbinnett's work is rich, and is complementary to my focus here. His focus on the particularities of the paradigms of sociological thought, and their convergence on the themes of alienation, solidarity, and morality (161ff.) opens up a space for a speculative construal.

### 3.2 The literature on Adorno

While the research on Adorno is voluminous, work that pertains to his sociology, or to his relationship to sociological theorists, remains sparse. Many of the texts that attempt a kind of overview or relatively broad coverage of Adorno's work (e.g., Hammer 2005; Jay 1984; Wilson 2007) contain some discussion of his understanding of sociology and social theorists, but tend to focus more on the "critical theory of society" and the "positivist dispute." In terms of monographs, exceptions to this rule are Benzer (2011), Jarvis (1998), and Rose (1978), who each spend some time discussing Adorno's interpretation of the work of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.

As the first comprehensive study of Adorno's thought published in English, Rose's work (1978) has arguably never been surpassed. She offers a thorough discussion of the concept of "reification" in Adorno's work, and its relationship to Marx, Lukács, and Simmel, while her discussion of Adorno's critique of positivism contains a reading of his

sociological writings and coverage of his understanding of Weber and Durkheim. She interprets Adorno's critique of sociology as a part of his attempts to reconceptualize dialectical thought. Rose's work on Adorno (see also 1981 and 1993) is incisive, and will be used in my analysis here.<sup>13</sup>

Jarvis's "critical introduction" to Adorno (1998) contains a discussion of some aspects of classical sociological theory in his chapter on Adorno's "critical theory of society." According to Jarvis, Adorno's reading of the limitations of the thought of Durkheim and Weber was due to his Marxian materialism. Consequently, he focuses his energy on a discussion of concepts such as "class," "ideology," and "commodity fetishism," which illuminate the critical character of Adorno's materialism.

Benzer (2011) has recently provided the first complete interpretation of Adorno's sociology.<sup>14</sup> Framing his discussion around the idea of "society as a sociological problem," Benzer provides great detail and insight on the nature of "sociological material" for Adorno, questions of theory, critique, and praxis, and an especially illuminating discussion on the nature of his sociological "constellations." However, the present work is complementary to Benzer's, in that it provides some of the philosophical background for the approach to sociology it examines.

Articles addressing sociological aspects of Adorno's work have tended to focus either on questions of methodology and the empirical (Drake 1990; Wilson 2004), or on his relationship to particular sociological figures (Gartman 2012; Hagens 2006; Karakayali

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<sup>13</sup> Indeed, over the course of my research, I have come to largely agree with Rose that Adorno's work remains within the orbit of neo-Kantianism, and the story I tell here supports her more esoteric work. While her *Hegel Contra Sociology* spelled out an elaborate and sophisticated account of the need to "return to Hegel," its exceedingly difficult style, combined with its free roaming over Hegel's entire *oeuvre*, have resulted in its neglect within sociology.

<sup>14</sup> An earlier book (Müller-Doohm 1996), available only in German, took Adorno's sociology as its focal point, but attempted a less comprehensive view.

2004; Morrison 1978; Susen 2011). There has been some work on Adorno's critique of Durkheim (Benzer 2011; Hagens 2006; Jarvis 1998; Rose 1978). The relatively sparse coverage here may be in part because of the belief that, as Hagens (2006, 228) has recently put it, "[t]he critical approach to Durkheimian sociology carried out by Adorno has in its general form become an integrated part of sociology itself." In other words, the critique is at this point standard. Yet I believe that there is more to the story than Hagens acknowledges. He schematically partitions sociology into a "hypercritical" camp, which is anti-empirical, in his opinion, against empirical social research. In Adorno's terms, from the *Positivismusstreit*, this is the "social engineers" versus the "totality" theorists. The upshot of Hagens' argument is that, since Adorno and Durkheim represent the two polar tendencies that still today structure the field of sociology, we can consider the relationship between them as a means of overcoming that split. His prospective account of the "correctives" that the thought of Durkheim and Adorno can supply for one another takes the form of something like a "mutual recognition." However, despite Hagens' efforts, the split remains.

This attempt to essentially place Durkheim within the sphere of the "positivists" that Adorno took such pains to criticize is well-founded, but ultimately unproductive. It interprets the distinction between "critical" and "positivist" approaches in terms of a dichotomy, and in this sense resembles Adorno's own method of understanding the classical tradition in sociology. In Adorno's analysis, the "double character" of sociology reflects the contradictory nature of modern society, and is reflected in the conflicting approaches of Durkheim and Weber (EP 33/316; ES 23ff./10ff.; PE; PS; S; See Benzer 2011, 19-21; Jarvis 1998, 44-48; Rose 1978, 82-86). While Adorno emphasizes this split

in order to highlight the objective contradictions of society, Hagens suggests that the bifurcation of sociology in traditional and critical components follows the acceptance or rejection of “prevalent social conditions” (229). I would like to link these two problematics in my discussion here. By vaguely proposing that Adorno and Durkheim can “serve as each other’s correctives”, Hagens avoids the significance of this issue for Adorno’s own sociological contributions. Downplaying Adorno’s commitment to empirical sociological research, Hagens presents a caricature of a “critical theorist” who negates everything which does not consider the totality. Adorno’s commitment to sociology in fact went well beyond the critique of its main practitioners. Hagens’ analysis begs the question of the nature of the relationship between traditional and critical forms of sociology, which haunts all of Adorno’s own work in the form of the relationship between philosophy and sociology.

## Chapter 2                                      The philosophical context: German idealism

### 1. Introduction

Due in part to the primary position of the analytic perspective within North American philosophy, the significance of German idealism has been relatively neglected until recently.<sup>15</sup> Paralleling the broader split between analytic and continental philosophy, the neglect of post-Kantian idealist themes has been felt within social theory as well. In a recent review article, Espen Hammer notes that the “Kant-to-Hegel” story in particular, which has been so important within German philosophy, has been largely neglected within the Anglo-American philosophical and intellectual-historical tradition (2003, 521). More broadly, Robert Pippin (1997, 5f.) argues persuasively that the framework articulated in German idealism (in particular, in its Kantian and Hegelian varieties) regarding conceptions of “agency, self-determination, and rationality” remains profitable in coming to terms with contemporary, modern or postmodern, society, and has been more often misunderstood than comprehended, even within “continental” philosophy. However, as Hammer’s article is in part intended to demonstrate, the tides have turned in recent years, with interest in post-Kantian German idealism flourishing concurrent to the demise of the dominance of the analytic philosophical paradigm.<sup>16</sup> As my argument here centrally concerns this neglected tradition, in this chapter I will cover some of the necessary philosophical background.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> This has been noted recently by several commentators, e.g., Ameriks (2000a), Beiser (2007), Hammer (2003; 2007), Rockmore (2005). The most thorough account of the “rehabilitation” of Hegel within analytic philosophy is Redding (2007).

<sup>16</sup> In Ameriks’ (2000a, 3) analysis, analytic philosophy arose specifically from a rejection of German idealism.

<sup>17</sup> My account of German idealism is necessarily schematic; I select the themes most relevant to my problematic, without a claim that this is *the* story of German idealist philosophy.

In their post-Enlightenment quest for what Pippin (1997, 6) has called a “wholly critical, *radically* self-reflexive or rationally ‘self-authorizing’ philosophy,” German idealists sought to understand the modern quest for, and meaning of, freedom. This involves fundamentally the overcoming of dogmatism through a commitment to reflexivity and “rational justification.” Accordingly, Hammer traces two primary themes within German idealist philosophy, those of “autonomy” and “objectivity” (represented in his account by, respectively, the work of Terry Pinkard and Frederick Beiser).<sup>18</sup> The concern with autonomy or self-determination focuses on the notion that “to be self-determined means to have one’s thinking and acting open to the *authority of reasons* as opposed to *external givens*, and thus to be able to say why one prefers one line of thought or action over another; it is to take up a critical stance on oneself such that what one does becomes transparently endorsable within a community of thinkers and actors” (523; emphasis added). To put it schematically, the concern with autonomy was in part directed against the Kantian separation of freedom and materiality, and for an integration of the *subject* of freedom and its “objective” context (527).

Within an *epistemological* account of objectivity, on the other hand, the concern is placed on overcoming a *limited* subjective viewpoint. As Frederick Beiser notes, “The problem with the subjectivist [i.e., Kantian] interpretation is that it stretches the mental

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<sup>18</sup> Hammer’s analysis is useful in making a very broad distinction between those who view Hegel’s work as a continuation — and perhaps completion — of Kant’s transcendental idealism (e.g., Pinkard and Pippin), and those who claim that his intent was to return to some form of pre-critical (in the Kantian sense) metaphysics (e.g., Beiser). While this debate is vibrant in the recent philosophical literature, I leave this frame aside in the present work, as it is arguably beyond reasonable scope. It could, however, be productively taken up in future work, as the central philosophical issues (for example, whether to consider the social in ontological terms, or social constructivist ones) remain at stake within social theory. On the recent debate in philosophy, see Beiser (1995); Kreines (2005); Pinkard (1996); Siep (1991).

and the subjective to do the work of the ideal or the intelligible, so that it becomes the reality of the entire world; but then the concept of the subjective is in danger of losing all meaning” (2002, 6). Beiser tells the story of a progressive “de-subjectivization” of philosophy, from Kant to Hegel, which is a move away from the philosophical grounding of knowledge in the claims of the autonomous subject. “In subjective idealism the ideal or the rational is the subjective, mental, or spiritual; in objective idealism it is the archetypal, intelligible, and structural” (11).

Though schematic, the interpretations of Hammer and Beiser capture the themes I would like to explore here. At the substantive heart of accounts of the philosophical heritage of early sociological theory is the conception of the subject-object relationship. As we’ll see below, one of Hegel’s primary complaints against Kant was regarding the essential “subjectivity” of his approach. Having made his Copernican turn, Kant was seemingly trapped within a subjective perspective, and any attempt to move beyond this resulted in contradiction. The Kantian dualism of subject and object was sharply criticized by the “absolute” idealists, most prominently Schelling and Hegel. For instance, Manfred Frank (1989, 256) claims that “one thought . . . sustained Schelling’s philosophy from beginning to end: It is the conviction that Being (understood as seamless identity) cannot be deduced by unfolding reflective relationships.” This is the claim that brought him, and consequently his friends and intellectual colleagues Hölderlin and Hegel as well, beyond Kant’s “subjective idealism”, and “beyond the point where the abstract subject stands in opposition to its other.” The notion of an overcoming of a formal dualism is thus central to the discussion here. Kant had attempted to put some basic limits on human knowledge, and thereby to preclude



properly *metaphysical* inquiry. Hegel's early proclamation that the task of philosophy was precisely to *know the absolute* (D 93f.) constituted the ground of his Kantian critique; but the precise nature of his aims has been long debated.<sup>19</sup> What is less contentious is that the concept of the absolute is the key to the *speculative* nature of Hegel's philosophy.

The absolute can be said to contain the "identity" of subject and object, but, as Beiser points out, the claim of subject-object identity is not easy to parse from our contemporary perspective (2005, 61f.). As opposed to the Kantian theory, according to which the constitutive subject *imposes* a form of subject-object identity on the object, and in the process retains a fundamental dualism, for Hegel, the identity of subject and object "essentially means that the subjective and the objective, the intellectual and the empirical, the ideal and the real — however one formulates the opposition — are not distinct substances but simply different aspects, properties or attributes of one and the same substance" (Beiser 2005, 64).<sup>20</sup> For Hegel, famously, identity also includes the "identity of identity and non-identity," and his version of idealism is designed not to collapse everything into the absolute, but rather to illuminate its speculative character. "If philosophy is to explain the opposition between subject and object in ordinary

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<sup>19</sup> Regarding the debates about the religious or secular, metaphysical or non-metaphysical nature of Hegel's philosophy, Beiser notes that we cannot even assume a uniform sense of "metaphysics" in both Kant and Hegel, since Hegel would not accept a Kantian notion of the transcendental:

For Hegel, the problem with traditional metaphysics is not that it attempted to know the infinite, but that it had a *false interpretation* of the infinite as something transcending the finite world of ordinary experience . . . Regarding the precise status of Hegel's metaphysics, it is necessary to walk a fine line, a middle path between inflationary and deflationary, or exorbitant and reductionist readings. While inflationary or exorbitant readings make the absolute into a superentity, deflationary or reductionist readings reduce it to nothing more than abstract or pious talk about particular things (Beiser 2005, 55-6).

The problem of the interpretation of the absolute will become relevant as it is used to understand the concept of society.

<sup>20</sup> Beiser thus emphasizes the Spinozist origins of the Hegelian identity of subject and object.

experience, then it must somehow show how the single universal substance, in which the subject and object are the same, divides itself and produces a distinction between subject and object. The philosopher faces an intrinsically difficult task: he [*sic*] must both surmount and explain the necessity of the subject-object dualism” (Beiser 2005, 65).

The concept of “idealism” itself, whose sense underlies the philosophies of both Kant and Hegel, can be approached through this notion of subject-object identity. Some of the distinctions between the Kantian and Hegelian versions will become clear in the following discussion; however, there is no single straightforward meaning of the term to which we may appeal. “The negative meaning of ‘idealism’ implies that most things that are commonly taken to be real are *not* so in fact . . . The positive interpretation of ‘idealism’, in contrast, involves seeing the term as *adding* rather than subtracting significance” (Ameriks 2000a: 8). The idealism of neither Kant nor Hegel should be considered along the lines of a British idealism;<sup>21</sup> the critical, or transcendental, idealism of Kant, did not bring the reality of “real” objects into doubt, but rather attempted to link them essentially to the *forms* of subjective experience.

Hegel’s version can be (and has been) seen to be an extension of Kant’s claims, in terms of the further extension of the power of the subject, but in my opinion this is misleading. Rather than a transcendental realm of the subjective, for Hegel the ideal of reason which structures the world stems from the absolute. Reality is “conceptual” in that consciousness cannot simply grasp it immediately according to its own (i.e., consciousness’s) rules.

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<sup>21</sup> As Marx well understood, it is a kernel tenet of German Idealist philosophy that the knowing subject is capable of *productive* activity. Although he stresses the priority of the object, this notion of the spontaneity of the subject is crucial for Adorno as well.

[T]hought seeks to form a *concept* of things, this concept . . . Cannot consist in determinations and relationships that are alien and external to the things . . . [T]hinking things over [*Nachdenken*] leads to what is *universal* in them; but the universal itself is one of the moments of the concept. To say that there is understanding, or reason, in the world is exactly what is contained in the expression “objective thought.” But this expression is inconvenient precisely because “thought” is all too commonly used as if it belonged only to spirit, or consciousness, while “objective” is used primarily just with reference to what is unspiritual (EL §24R).

Reason, as the ideal, is not *brought* to things by the subject, but rather is already *within* things.

The history of social and sociological theory has also been haunted by the dichotomy of subject and object. Hegel is frequently cited as an important influence on Marx, whose “conflict” approach to sociology has long since been canonized. However, the significance of Hegel and the entire post-Kantian “objective” or “absolute” turn, has rarely been discussed in detail in this context.<sup>22</sup> I begin here with a brief interpretation of Kant’s “subjective” idealist perspective, followed by the significant aspects of Hegel’s philosophy, as they were developed through an engagement with Kant. This is intended to serve as both a brief introduction to their philosophical perspectives, as well as

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<sup>22</sup> The dominant philosophical concepts of the time found their way into new forms of “sociological” theory. However, charting the history of these appropriations and transitions is difficult. The relevant philosophical concepts underwent significant change during the period, and are hotly contested today. Yet an account of them remains central to intellectual work today. Karl Ameriks has noted recently that Kant’s critical philosophy had by the 1780s “quickly achieved extraordinary prominence, and yet by the 1790s it was overshadowed to such a degree in his own land that that the very ideas that Kant had put at the center of philosophy — the new ‘transcendental’ notions of ‘deduction,’ ‘idealism,’ and ‘autonomy’ — took on a meaning that he could no longer recognize” (2000b, 2-3). Ameriks here makes the point that our current understanding of the concepts of German idealism, and those of contemporary philosophy that have derived from them, is still fundamentally up for debate, and this “has ramifications for our own era’s conception of itself as an heir to the Enlightenment” (3). Ameriks is concerned primarily with the “fate of autonomy” in the conception of the self, and his goal is to recover the original sense of Kantian autonomy that was “covered over” by the post-Kantian idealists, but we can extend the point: it is only through continued engagement with and interpretation of the intellectual heritage of our contemporary theories, and an attention to the ways in which concepts have shifted meanings in relationship to various systems of thought, that we can understand our relationship to our own heritage, which in turn is essential for contemporary self-understanding.

preparing the groundwork to understanding Adorno's specific appropriation of their philosophies.

## **2. Kant**

Kant's "Copernican revolution" marks the onset of his critical philosophy, and is typically regarded as the beginning of an idealist philosophy in Germany. Responding to the dominant empiricism of his time, Kant claims that our knowledge of the external world is in fact limited by the necessary forms that our cognition must take. He emphasizes that we cannot have direct knowledge of the "external world;" rather, the *object* of knowledge must reflect the *subject*; subject and object are epistemologically connected in that the *forms* of consciousness, which are given transcendently, necessarily structure our perception of the world. Kant criticizes the philosophers who came before him, who believed that they could discover rigorous metaphysical knowledge, claiming that they were "groping among mere concepts."

[U]p to now it is been assumed that all our cognition must conform to the objects; but all attempts to find out something about them *a priori* through concepts that would extend our cognition have, on this presupposition, come to nothing. Hence let us once try whether we do not get farther with the problems of metaphysics by assuming that the objects must conform to our cognition, which would agree better with the requested possibility of an *a priori* cognition of them, which is to establish something about objects before they are given to us (CPR B xvi).

Kant's intention is to demonstrate that reason can only access what is within our experience, and thus to rein in improper metaphysical speculation. Beginning with the subject of knowledge rather than the object, Kant hypothesizes that one must analyze reason itself in order to find out what we may legitimately know. Paradoxically, it is only

from this beginning that we will be able to transcend the contingent knowledge of our own experience.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant attempts to recuperate such an *objective* basis for knowledge, through his form of transcendental criticism. In part, this was a response to the skepticism of Hume, who claimed that all knowledge must be empirically and subjectively based. Kant focused on the delineation of a form of judgment and knowledge that he called the “synthetic *a priori*” — a notion which is fundamental to Kant’s epistemology and his critical philosophy in general. *A priori* judgments are made prior to any form of experience, while judgments which are *a posteriori* are made on the basis of experience. It is this *a priori* knowledge that had been criticized from an empirical standpoint by Hume. However, Kant wants to rescue another type of judgment and knowledge, the synthetic *a priori*, which is both *prior to* and *independent of* experience. These requirements then form the condition of possibility of experience, according to Kant’s transcendental argument. Kant used this category to show how knowledge required both the *passive* senses and the *active* understanding. Against the empiricists, who claimed that all knowledge was grounded in sensory experience, and the rationalists, who claimed that knowledge stemmed from the structure of the mind itself, Kant postulated a new category of knowledge which is *prior to* experience, yet not analytic nor tautological. According to this view, there are *categories* which structure our thought (forms) that in some sense *depend upon* experience but that do not *derive from* experience.

This unusual and contested form of knowledge stems from the fundamental split that Kant assumes between the intuition and understanding. According to Kant, the

understanding uses an active *synthesis* to make sense of chaotic information coming through the intuitive senses. For Kant, experience is “nothing but a continual joining together (synthesis) of perceptions” ([1783] 1997, §5). “Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind . . . The understanding is not capable of intuiting anything, and the senses are not capable of thinking anything. Only from their unification can cognition arise” (CPR B 75). Kant’s “transcendental” critique then investigated not *empirical* forms of knowledge, but the *conditions of possibility* of knowledge. These conditions are both *necessary*, and *universal*, and thus constitute an objective foundation for knowledge, against the arguments of the skeptics. “[I]t is easy to show that in human cognition there actually are such necessary and in the strictest sense universal, thus pure *a priori* judgments” (CPR B4). The notion of the *a priori* applies to both intuition and understanding. There are “pure forms of sensible intuition”, namely space and time, which Kant analyzed in the “Transcendental Aesthetic” section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But there are also the *categories*, which are forms which structure the way that the understanding processes sensory intuitions.

Synthesis is a procedure which Kant believes lies at the root of our cognitive abilities. He refers to it as “the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition” (CPR A78/B103). The *manifold* is the term Kant uses to refer to the “material” which comes to the mind through the senses (see CPR A77; B139). Pure synthesis is *transcendental*; an “act of spontaneity” or freedom (CPR B151; A 78/B103; CPR B130). The autonomous

synthesizing power of the subject is thus reliant upon the dualism inherent in Kant's account between cognition and intuition; synthesis, or combination, is the *productive* subject acting upon the pure *receptivity* of sensation.

One of Kant's primary aims was to establish once and for all which types of knowledge are valid and which are not. He established some basic limits on human knowledge, and showed that there are some fundamental questions (i.e., the traditional questions of metaphysics) that cannot be answered. We can have no knowledge of what lies "beyond" physical reality. Or rather, the only knowledge of the 'beyond' that we have is the formal knowledge of the categories of reason. For example, we can know "substance" and "cause." It is therefore time to move away from traditional metaphysics and investigate our knowing itself, rather than naively assuming that we can unproblematically access the 'true' nature of reality. Kant, in making this move, because he believed that he had effectively established the existence of the noumenal realm, could not find a way to bridge the gap between the subject and the objects of knowing. Consequently, although there is a "real" empirical world out there, which is to be distinguished from the world as it appears to us, the only knowledge we can have about it will be necessarily structured by the form of our cognition. The critique of reason then shows that reason itself is necessarily limited, and this strict limitation on our certain knowing has implications for our forms of science and our scientific method. Kant's transcendental critique can be seen to be an argument for a method of scientific knowledge.

A fundamental feature of Kant's critique then is its focus on the *subject* of knowledge. After Kant, epistemology no longer looks to uncover the objective structure

of reality, but rather to investigate the forms of knowledge that are imposed by the subject of knowing itself. As both Hegel and Adorno would emphasize, the objective ground of knowledge for Kant flows through the subject (see, e.g., EL §42; KK 56/33; 143ff./93ff.). In epistemological terms, this has a kind of individualizing effect: the certainty of our knowledge is based upon the requirements of a “transcendental” subject. Although not equal to an empirical individual subject, the concept of the transcendental subject is *abstracted* from individual subjects; and in any case, this foundation for knowledge is secured through an analysis of subjectivity itself.<sup>23</sup> Kant wants to move past a merely subjective experience to an objectively valid knowledge, but the only way he can do this is by moving through the individual subject itself to the “transcendental subject”.

The I think must be able to accompany all my representations, for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all . . . Thus all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation to the I think in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered. But this representation is an act of spontaneity, i.e., it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. I call it the pure apperception, in order to distinguish it from the empirical one, or also the original apperception, since it is that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation I think, which must be able to accompany all others . . . I also call its unity the transcendental unity of self-consciousness . . . (CPR B 132).

The notion of apperception, which was to be so influential for Hegel, describes the act of the transcendental subject, the requirement for the combination of concept and intuition which constitutes experience as the experience of a subject. As “the highest principle in the whole sphere of human knowledge” (CPR B 135), transcendental apperception intends an “original combination” which creates the condition under which representations “belong” to a particular subject. Here Kant posits a form of consciousness which lies “behind” the empirical consciousness and accompanies it in its

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<sup>23</sup> The point is Adorno’s. His complaint is that this “reduction” of knowledge to the individual eliminates altogether the social factors through which the individual itself is always already mediated. For Adorno’s criticism of Kant, see (KK 219/144-145).



experience. The unity of consciousness is *necessary* for thought; also, the unity of the world is constituted by the subject itself. I unify my world through my mind's activity, yet in doing this I discover my own relation to the fundamental structure of subjectivity. The critical turn in philosophy, which would influence early sociological theory and method, is in large effect a turn inward towards the individual subject, in the sense that this subject is the model for its transcendental counterpart. There is, in effect, no unity of the social world, except that which is constituted by each individual subject in their manifold of apperception.<sup>24</sup>

Kant splits his theory of the subject further by assuming a strict separation between theoretical and practical reason. The beginnings of this split are evident in the Third Antinomy of Pure Reason, where Kant exposes the problems that pure reason gets into when it tries to think about freedom and causality (CPR B 472ff.). Quite simply, the physical necessity that characterizes nature cannot hold for the subject as well. There must rather be two forms of causality: one which holds in the natural world, and one belonging to the world of the rational will, or of freedom.<sup>25</sup> This split, which takes hold both within causality and within the subject, has origins in the fundamental split (which may be traced back to Descartes) that Kant assumes between knowing and doing. Each has its own form of reason: pure reason is that faculty which is used to know the phenomenal world; practical reason is that which is used to know how to act. Kant's critiques of these forms of reason both focus on their *a priori* basis in law. The result is a subject which is both a part of the phenomenal world, and separate from it: ". . . [A]

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<sup>24</sup> This point is emphasized by Hund (1998).

<sup>25</sup> "*Will* is a kind of causality of living beings in so far as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of such causality that it can be efficient independently of alien causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings to be determined to activity by the influence of alien causes" ([1785] 1996, 94).

rational being . . . has two standpoints from which he can regard himself and cognize laws for the use of his powers and consequently for all his actions: *first*, insofar as he belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); *second*, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws which, being independent of nature, are not empirical but grounded merely in reason” ([1785] 1996, 99). While Hegel would have an extensive critique of Kant’s moral philosophy, as well as of his epistemology, the importance of this theme is in the legacy of Kant’s abstract dualism of knowledge and action for the classical social theorists.<sup>26</sup> We can read this as the beginnings of the split between knowledge and practice that Hegel, Marx and the critical social theory which followed them tried to overcome.

### ***3. Hegel’s critique of Kant’s theoretical philosophy***

I will briefly outline a few of the important moments in the development of Hegel’s version of an “absolute” or an “objective” idealism, in contradistinction to Kant, and then explicate some of the key concepts of Hegel’s philosophy that are crucial for understanding Adorno’s version of critical social theory. I do not wish to launch any new grand interpretation of the relationship between Kant and Hegel, but rather just to discuss those elements which are relevant for Adorno’s critique of philosophical

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Stedman Jones (1980, 101-4) takes Kant’s twin foci on science and morality and through them reads the history of the discipline of sociology. Kant wanted to validate both concepts, in light of the skepticism of Hume. “[I]nsofar as the aim of sociology is an objective understanding of man, it is tied up with the idea of science. But, insofar as it is concerned to improve or emancipate man, it throws in its lot with morality and must therefore deal with or give accord to the idea of freedom . . . [A]lthough Kant rescued the idea of an objective describable world from the dangers of skepticism, solipsism and idealism, he handed it on to the human sciences with an apparently unbridgeable chasm between theoretical understanding of action and concern for its moral significance.” Curiously, Jones doesn’t investigate Hegel’s critique of Kant in this context.

idealism, which in turn structures his entire body of work.<sup>27</sup> Adorno appropriates much of Hegel's critique of Kant; and in many ways the question as to the exact nature of Adorno's Hegelianism is important here. Ultimately, I agree with Rose (1981) that Adorno fails to overcome the neo-Kantian influence which structures virtually all sociological thinking, but it is the details here which prove to be interesting.

Hegel understood philosophy historically; and he very consciously situated his own work within the philosophical tradition. From very early on in his career he was concerned to present an alternative to the subjective forms of idealism, represented most prominently by Kant and Fichte.<sup>28</sup> Kant, in Hegel's opinion, made a tremendous step forward philosophically, in his articulation of the concept of the transcendental subject, through which reason may potentially grasp itself as the absolute; yet it remained content with a merely finite and subjective form of knowledge (VGP3 426f.).<sup>29</sup> One of the primary goals of Kant's critical philosophy — the determination of a set of limits which would serve to legitimate non-metaphysical forms of thought — served effectively to fatally curcumscribe his own philosophical thinking. Since philosophy, in Hegel's historical version, is "the story of the discovery of the *thoughts* about the absolute which is [philosophy's] subject matter" (EL §10), Kant became derailed from the true task of philosophical thought. The understanding of thought as merely *subjective* forestalls the possibility of adequately reflecting on the oppositions of subject and object, finitude and

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<sup>27</sup> I give no review of the literature on Hegel, which is voluminous; rather, I will detail my own understanding with reference to a few key secondary sources. The following works have been influential in my understanding of German idealism and Hegel's philosophy in particular: Beiser 2002, 2005; Fackenheim 1967; Franco 1999; Hinchman 1984; Marx [1975] 1988; Pippin 1989; Rose 1981; Rosen 1974; Stern 1990, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> See D and GW; as well as later comments in EL and VGP3.

<sup>29</sup> "Critical philosophy *holds on to the factum* that *universality* and *necessity*, being also essential determinations, are found to be present in what is called experience. And, because this element does not stem from the empirical as such, it belongs to the spontaneity of *thinking*, or is a priori" (EL §40).

infinity. This implies that the “fundamental principle” of his philosophy is “the absoluteness of finitude and, resulting from it, the absolute antithesis of finitude and infinity, reality and ideality, the sensuous and supersensuous, and the beyondness of what is truly real and absolute” (GW 62). By remaining within a subjective, “psychological” standpoint, Kant’s philosophy retains a strict dichotomy between subject and object; it institutes the limit as law.

A result of this flaw is a problematic understanding of knowledge itself. Kant’s method of philosophizing and his theory of knowledge come necessarily under joint critique here. His prioritization of subjectivity leads to his method of transcendental critique, in which he sets out to use thought reflexively to discover its own nature. Although it has a long history in Western philosophy, this procedure of trying to secure a foundation of certainty for knowledge is, from Hegel’s perspective, “absurd.” In his Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel unpacks the implications of this type of approach, which begins with the “fear of falling into error,” and “presupposes that the absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other” (PG §74). Hegel’s famous reply is to undertake an explication of the “science of the experience of consciousness,” which attempts to “follow” natural consciousness on its path towards true knowledge.

There are a couple of characteristics of this approach that I’d like to foreground. The first is the very idea of *phenomenological procedure* which begins with consciousness taken “naturally” and proceeds to show how it develops within itself. Hegel’s description of the path that natural consciousness must take as a “series of configurations which consciousness goes through . . . the detailed history of the *education* of consciousness itself to the standpoint of science” (PG §78) can easily be misunderstood. Although the

*Phenomenology* culminates in “absolute knowledge,” it does not follow a linear path to enlightenment. The point to emphasize is Hegel’s refusal to provide a solid foundation for knowledge. Although there are numerous thorny issues that arise here, Hegel’s science provides a procedure through which the conscious subject comes to reflect on its own knowing as it happens. There is no appeal to a transcendental realm.

The second related point is that the relationship between the subject of consciousness and its object becomes an *internal* one. Once conscious knowledge “finds itself” through the recognition that it has itself been going beyond its own limits, it begins to understand itself, to grasp its “concept.” “With the positing of a single particular the beyond is . . . established for consciousness, even if it is only *alongside* the limited object” (PG §80). Consciousness distinguishes itself from its object, and in the process ties itself to it; it distinguishes the objects being-for-consciousness from its being-in-itself, and calls the latter “truth” (PG §82). However, its philosophical education begins with the recognition that what it takes to be the object, the *in-itself*, is actually an in-itself *for-consciousness*. That is, in contemplation of the object, the subject of consciousness realizes that it simply cannot be outside of its reach; it is only *in-itself* according to the knowing consciousness that contemplates it (PG §85). When Hegel says that consciousness now has *two* moments, and *two* objects, he refers to this reflexive doubling; both aspects “fall *within* the knowledge which we are investigating” (PG §84).

Again, while this is a feature that has been variously interpreted, the key is to recognize that Hegel has not thrown away the real world, but rather reconceptualized it. Hegel wants consciousness, and the observing philosopher, to recognize that it has no privileged access to the real, independent world, and that knowing objects fundamentally

involves knowing that we know them. The “criterion” by which we judge the veracity of our knowledge cannot be simply the object; rather, it involves a comparison of “whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not.” If there is found to be a lack of correspondence between them, consciousness does not “alter its knowledge to make it conform with the object,” the object itself is altered alongside the knowledge of it: “as the knowledge changes, so too does the object” (PG §85).<sup>30</sup>

Kant’s version of philosophy thus served as a crucial starting point for Hegel. He placed great significance on Kant’s distinction between merely reflective “understanding” and properly speculative “reason”; for Hegel the former consists of finite forms of cognition which are based upon experience, which are termed “appearances” (EL §45 A). The understanding is a limited, *subjective* form of cognition, in that it knows its objects only as appearances, rather than as things-in-themselves. “[T]hey do not have the ground of their being within themselves, but within something else” (EL §45 A). Hegel’s opposition here – the distinction between appearance and essence – is not merely *for consciousness*, but is rather one that holds for the objects *in themselves*. This distinction captures Hegel’s proposed move away from a subjectively-based idealism to one which is speculative, which thinks the absolute.

Before I discuss Hegel’s conception of philosophy in more detail, I want to briefly mention his criticisms of the philosophies of Fichte and Schelling.<sup>31</sup> Unsatisfied with the

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<sup>30</sup> Hegel refers to this movement of consciousness as “experience,” which I will examine further below.

<sup>31</sup> I cover Hegel’s critique of Fichte and Schelling briefly, due to their significance for Hegel’s own approach. He claimed that beyond the philosophical systems of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, “there are none” (VPG3 479). Pippin argues that “In beginning to outline his own position by contrast especially with Kant and Fichte, and by beginning early on to distance himself from Schelling, Hegel reveals more clearly [in the early Jena essays] than elsewhere how to understand his position in terms of those of his predecessors, how his contrasts make sense only within a certain continuity, and how that continuity is often more important than the contrasts” (1989, 60).

dualisms of Kant's philosophy, Fichte proposed to understand the "I" of self-consciousness as an *activity*, as the *source* and *original unity* of both subject and object. In his explicit attempt to complete Kantian philosophy, Fichte took the principle of the transcendental unity of apperception and "extracted" the Ego as its purer form (Fichte [1802] 1982; see D 79). This allowed him to move beyond Kant's "dead pigeonholes of the intellect" to the "principle of speculation" as "the identity of subject and object" (D 80). However, in Hegel's estimation, Fichte was no more successful in properly handling this move than Kant had been.

The principle of Fichte's system is the pure thinking that thinks itself, the identity of subject and object, in the form of Ego = Ego. If one holds solely and directly to this principle and to the transcendental principle at the basis of Kant's deduction of the categories, one has the authentic principle of speculation boldly expressed. However, as soon as [Fichte's] speculation steps outside of the concept that it establishes of itself and evolves into a system, it abandons itself and its principle and does not come back to it again. It surrenders Reason to the intellect and passes over into the chain of finite [acts and objects] of consciousness from which it never reconstructs itself as identity and true infinity (D 81).

While this conception proved influential for Hegel, he also found it too dualistic, as Fichte had no coherent conception of the relationship between the subjective "I" and the objective "I" (Hinchman 1984, 35f.). Fichte had not completed the shift to a speculative form of philosophy, because he did not understand the "identity in difference" between subject and object. His philosophy thus ultimately remained *subjective*, and forestalled any attempt to gain knowledge of the absolute: "The Absolute of the system shows itself as apprehended only in the form in which it appears to philosophical reflection" (D 81).

If he derived a notion of the identical subject-object from Fichte, Hegel's notion of the absolute stemmed also from Schelling. Schelling responds to Kant and Fichte by attempting to ground their transcendental philosophy in a *Naturphilosophie*. The identical subject-object is for Schelling not the subjective "I" but rather "nature" (Bowie

1994, 57). Schelling referred to this development as a move from subjective idealism to objective idealism. “In making the universe the subject rather than predicate in his formula for objective idealism, Schelling was reversing the order of logical priority from subjective idealism. The world was now the ground or explanans of the ego, and not conversely, as in [Fichte’s] *Wissenschaftslehre*” (Beiser 2002, 555). Schelling’s dissatisfaction with subjective forms of idealism stemmed from his opinion that consciousness itself cannot serve as a proper grounding for philosophy. For Kant and Fichte, it is the “I” that is the ground or requirement of thought; however, for Schelling and other Romantics, this is inadequate, because the identity of subject and object that self-consciousness requires *cannot* be given by self-consciousness. “[T]he very possibility of self-consciousness requires a higher ground that transcends it . . . Because subject-object identity transcends self-consciousness, it cannot be regarded as something subjective; hence the romantics identify it with being, substance, or the absolute” (Beiser 2002, 357-8; see Schelling [1801] 2012).

Hegel’s version of philosophy took its leave from these origins within German idealist philosophy. Although strongly influenced by Schelling and Romanticism, Hegel’s famous criticism highlighted his attachment to the critical, transcendental tradition. The trouble with Schelling’s conception of the Absolute is that he cannot articulate it (Pippin 1989, 87). In the famous critique from the *Phenomenology*, it is the “night in which . . . all cows are black” (PG §16). The critical, subjective tradition of Kant and Fichte led to the realization that reflexive analysis of self-consciousness will lead us to a form of objective knowledge. Schelling’s insight is that reason is the “total indifference of subjective and objective” ([1801] 2012, 145); and so it proposes to overcome the dualism



of subject and object, of concept and intuition. However, Schelling's reliance upon an indeterminate "intellectual intuition" became more objectionable to Hegel, and his idealism moved to a conception of the "concept," through which the articulation of subject and object can be made (Hinchman 1984: 42; see PG, Preface).

Pippin makes clear that through all of this we remain within the Kantian intellectual orbit:

[I]f Kant is right and knowledge cannot (ultimately or totally) be a matter of empirical determination and association, or a matter of the mind's rational grasp of its own ideas . . . *because* the human subject must be in some sense self-determining, somehow responsible for what it takes to be a unity within its experience . . . then the proper account of such an activity, and especially what quickly became the problem of its "ground", are indeed the fundamental problems of philosophy . . . If Kant's reliance on the pure forms of intuition and the fixed, logical requirements of judgment will not ground such an activity, then we have either a theory of a self-creating subjects (terminating in Fichte's *Sollen*) or Schelling's self-intuiting subject (1989, 63-64).

The problem of the "ground" continues to haunt contemporary epistemology. If we cannot accept Kant's attempt to circumvent skepticism through recourse to the transcendental, then our options appear to be limited. Hegel's attempt at a non-foundational approach has intrigued many; yet, as I've emphasized, its complexities and implications are still being parsed.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Žižek similarly encapsulates the relevant distinctions here, arguing that the two options for interpreting Kant's transcendental, as either noumenal or not, both lead to the dissolution of his system, but in different ways; he identifies this as a "necessary equivocality:"

[I]f, on the one hand, we stick to the identification of the transcendental I with the noumenal Thing-Self, *the noumenal Self phenomenally appears to itself*, which means that the difference between phenomena and noumena dissolves — "I" becomes the singular subject-object given to itself in the "intellectual intuition", the "eye which sees itself" (the step accomplished by Fichte and Schelling, but unconditionally prohibited by Kant: *intellektuelle Anschauung* as the "absolute starting-point" of philosophizing). If, on the other hand, the I of apperception — this autonomous agent of the constitution of reality — is *not* a noumenal Thing, then the difference between phenomena and noumena again dissolves, yet in a wholly different way: in Hegel's way (Žižek 1993, 19).

The character of "Hegel's way" here, as Žižek also points out, relies upon his rejection of the conception of intellectual intuition, his commitment to the "irreducible gap that separates discursive intellect . . . from intuition".

Hegel of course explicitly formulated his philosophical vision as an alternative to those of Fichte and Schelling; he was committed to finding a way of incorporating both while moving beyond their limitations. His task was to show how a truly speculative philosophy could think an absolute which is not hypostatized or abstract. While the full depth of Hegel's solution is beyond my scope here, in the remainder of this section, I will explore — through a discussion of some of Hegel's key concepts — some of the ways in which his philosophy provided an alternative vision which would prove so influential for Adorno. The concepts I will discuss are “speculation,” the “absolute,” the “I,” the “concept,” “spirit,” and “experience.”

### 3.1 “Speculation”

As I've mentioned above, in his analysis of Kant's philosophy, Hegel engages in a critique of what he refers to as merely *reflective* forms of philosophical thought, which he counterposes to properly philosophical (speculative) thought.<sup>33</sup> The opposition between reflection and speculation parallels that between understanding and reason. In brief, the distinction is based upon the ability to conceptualize the absolute. For Hegel, the central, defining task of philosophy lies in this effort to grasp the absolute, and therefore must move beyond the limitations prescribed by Kant.

The task of philosophy is to construct the absolute for consciousness. But since the productive activity of reflection is, like its products, mere limitation, this task involves a contradiction. The absolute is to be posited in reflection. But then it is not posited, but canceled [*aufgehoben werden*]; for in having been posited it is limited. Philosophical reflection is the mediation of this contradiction (D 25/94).

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<sup>33</sup> Pippin (1989, 68) notes that Hegel's early conception of speculation is primarily negative, specifying that moves beyond the empirical or the metaphysical; a positive conception is more difficult to grasp: the mind's activity as “freely determined moments of Absolute Subjectivity.”

Philosophical reflection — the understanding, the “instrument of philosophizing” — fails to conceptualize the absolute because it is merely the “positing of opposites.” It instead finds itself locked in an infinite regress: “Every being, because it is posited, is an opposite, it is conditioned and conditioning;” each time it attempts a determination, it is left with its opposite, the undetermined (D 26/95). The merely reflective activity of the intellect results in contradiction because all it is capable of producing are oppositions. Each determination is only determinate by virtue of being bounded by the indeterminate; its work is therefore never complete, and never capable of being completed. Speculative reason allows a way of escaping this perpetual motion, through the recognition of the unity in opposition.

Yet, importantly, philosophical reflection is not merely an error, or a dead end; rather, it is a necessary step on the path towards a properly *speculative* form of philosophical thought. There can be no speculative reason without reflective understanding. “[U]nderstanding as the force of separation already presupposes an identity into which its dissolving power cuts” (Gasché 1986, 39). In this way, it is led, in a sense, through its own unresolved contradictions, to speculative reason. In Hegel’s own characterization, philosophical reflection is only *ideal*, and can only posit ideal oppositions. The subject-ego which is in “absolute opposition” to the object is not real, but only a “mere form of cognition” (D 98/158). To obtain a *real* form of opposition, both the subject and the object must be “posited as Subject-Object, both subsisting in the absolute” (D 99/159). Absolute, or speculative, reflection then comes about through the self-destruction of philosophical reflection, as it recognizes that it, as reflection, can only exist in opposition to the absolute (D 28/96; see Gasché 1986, 40). The move to

speculative reason is then made through the cancellation of the opposition of the subject of reason and its object.

True philosophical thought *must* be speculative, according to Hegel.<sup>34</sup> Philosophy here moves into its own, beyond *finite* forms of thought. In this sense, speculation overcomes the hypostasis of the ego, and “coincides with the necessity of philosophical thought as such, to the extent that philosophical reflection transcends the factual given and moves towards its ultimate determining grounds . . . [it begins] to signify . . . the necessary demonstration of the givenness of being, of the cognitive objectivity of the world and its absolute ground” (Gasché 1986, 42). We can identify this as a type of *pure* reason, although not in a Kantian sense. Kant’s form of purity was established via the transcendental turn, through which any relation to experience is excised, while for Hegel, the transition from reflection to speculation consists in a mode of unification. Hegel assesses Kant’s analysis of natural cognition versus transcendental critique, and finds a “third alternative, one that Kant himself pursued: reflection on the nature of experience and on the concepts involved in it” (Inwood 1992, 272).

In the *Encyclopedia Logic*, Hegel describes speculation as constituting the third, unifying, *productive* or *positive* moment of the dialectic (EL §82). While philosophical reflection ends in endless opposition, speculation manages to *unify* these contradictions. In this context, Hegel separates “the logical” into “three sides”: 1) abstraction, or the understanding; 2) dialectic, or the “negatively rational;” and 3) speculation, the “positively rational” (EL §79). The dialectic entails the self-sublation of the finite

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<sup>34</sup> “Thinking is the absolute activity of reason itself and there simply cannot be anything opposite to it. But if it is not so posited, if it is taken to be nothing but reflection of a purer kind, that is, a reflection in which one merely abstracts from the opposition, then thinking of this abstracting kind cannot advance beyond the intellect, not even to a logic supposed capable of comprehending reason within itself, still less to philosophy” (D 28/96-7).

determinations of the understanding. While, for the understanding, such determinations are limited *externally*, the dialectic recognizes that “the finite is not restricted merely from outside; rather, it sublates itself by virtue of its own nature, and passes over, of itself, into its opposite” (EL §81A1). The dialectic is concerned with things in and for themselves; it operates *immanently*, and leads to an “immanent transcending” (EL §81R). While the dialectic is then negative, in the sense that it sceptically undermines the certainty of the understanding, speculation turns this into a positive result, by grasping the *oppositions* of the determination of the understanding and the dialectic. If the understanding, despite its own self-understanding, is not static certainty but rather sublates itself, then speculation is the achievement of true rationality, because it encompasses both the understanding and its opposites (EL §82A). Speculation thus entails a move beyond mere abstraction to a grasping of the concrete:

(1) The dialectic has a *positive* result, because it has a *determinate content*, or because its result is truly not *empty, abstract nothing*, but the negation of *certain determinations*, which are contained in the result precisely because it is not an *immediate nothing*, but a result. (2) Hence this rational [result], although it is something-thought and something-abstract, is at the same time *something-concrete*, because it is not *simple, formal* unity, but a *unity of distinct determinations*. For this reason philosophy does not deal with mere abstractions or formal thoughts at all, but only with concrete thoughts (EL §82R).

Although a key to Hegel’s thought, the concept of speculation is not itself easily grasped. It is essentially a move to totality, which is a move beyond a mere “standpoint” to something fundamentally broader. If Hegel’s philosophy of speculation represents the *unification* of thought and nonthought (Gashé 1986, 44), this explains the difficulty many have had in comprehending it. We’ll see below that both Marx and Adorno determined Hegel’s philosophy to be ideological because of this pretension to totality. Each attempted to follow Hegel only part way along the path of speculation, exiting

before reaching the absolute. For now we can get a better grasp on Hegel's originality by examining the concept of the absolute, which is precisely where speculation leads us.

### 3.2 The "Absolute"

Hegel's own version of idealism can be seen as an attempt at a synthesis of what I've examined here as subjective and objective idealism, and his originality lay in his discovery of "a way to conceive of the absolute such that it would only manifest itself to human consciousness (and hence only exist at all!) within the dualistic terms mapped out by Descartes, Kant, and Fichte" (Hinchman 1984, 41). As I've emphasized, Hegel agrees with Schelling that Fichte's attempt to solve Kantian problems via the concept of the absolute ego did not resolve its dualisms, but only shifted the conflict. Schelling's romantic vision of the absolute as an organic whole which encompasses both subjectivity and objectivity is the idea for the Hegelian absolute; but Hegel also critiques Schelling's absolute for remaining indeterminate as an intellectual intuition, the famous "night in which . . . all cows are black" (PG §16). In his formulation (which foreshadows Adorno's critique of "repetition") Hegel complains that Schelling's version of objective idealism *only apparently* illuminates a mediation between consciousness and the absolute. "[A] closer inspection shows that this expansion [to a speculative science] has not come about through one and the same principle having spontaneously assumed different shapes, but rather through the shapeless repetition of one and the same formula, only externally applied to diverse materials" (PG §15). In other words, Schelling's absolute is merely an "abstract universality."

As discussed above, Hegel views speculation as leading in fact not towards indeterminacy but to concreteness. "[E]verything turns on grasping and expressing the

True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*” (PG §17). With this statement — from the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is designed to be an introduction to Hegel’s entire system — Hegel announces his intention to unify subject and object, as well as the philosophies of subjective and objective idealism. The key is to provide an account of the absolute as a *concrete* totality, rather than merely an abstract one. By conceiving of the absolute in this way, Hegel essentially removes the limits to philosophical thought set by Kant. For Hegel it is possible to know the thing in itself, the noumenal realm, because there simply is no strict heterogeneity between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, between the subject and the object.

[E]ven the objectivity of thinking in Kant’s sense is itself . . . only subjective in its form, because, according to Kant, thoughts, although they are universal and necessary determinations, are still *only our* thoughts, and are cut off from what the thing is *in-itself* by an impassable gulf. On the contrary, the true objectivity of thinking consists in this: that thoughts are not merely our thoughts, but at the same time the *In-itself* of things and of whatever else is ob-jective (EL §41A2).

The very notion of objectivity is reconceptualized here, from a characteristic that derives from the transcendental, to one that is developed through connection to the absolute. As Hegel points out in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, both the essence of the object (its being-in-itself) and its appearance (its being-for-us) fall within consciousness. “[T]hese two moments, ‘Notion’ and ‘object’, ‘being-for-another’ and ‘being-in-itself’, both fall within that knowledge which we are investigating” (PG §84). It is therefore wrong to presume them to be opposed. They are to be differentiated, but only with the recognition that they lie within a greater dialectical unity of subject and object. As the subject changes, so too does the object. The object moves from being an object in-itself, to being for-consciousness in-itself, just as the subject’s knowledge of the object changes accordingly.

Although Hegel's concept of the absolute is thus designed to avoid the problems of indeterminacy he attributed to Schelling's view, it is nevertheless often relegated to a metaphysical obsolescence by critics. Hegel in fact states that his philosophy both begins and ends with the absolute, a circularity that can mask the process of development that occurs within the system of philosophical thought. The true is the whole, for Hegel, meaning that philosophy's goal is to begin with the absolute as an abstract universality, and to eventually grasp it as a concrete totality of substance-subject (PG §20). A key aspect of this journey is the recognition of the reflexive structure of the "I" and the "concept."

### 3.3 The "I" and the "Concept"

In Hegel's philosophy, the subject, or the "I," retains an essentially *active* character; "Thinking represented as a *subject* is *that which thinks*, and the simple expression for the existing subject as thinker is 'I' (EL §20).<sup>35</sup> The "I" is negative activity, a self-relating; it is comprised of a "distinguishing of itself from itself" (EG §413). The "I" is the activity of diremption, of splitting of subject from object. This negation occurs as a determination, as the *creation* of the subject ("I") and the object (not-"I"). The "I" as subject and its object only come into being through this process of negation. Hinchman explains the process concisely:

When I try to think this "I" [i.e., the Fichtean absolute ego] as it is "before" it splits apart into subject and object, I thereby split it (i.e., myself) into subject and object. This defeats my attempt to think it as a third thing "behind" them. But I can now think it as the *activity of negation* through which subject and object are *determined* (i.e., given limits and hence specific being). Thus, paradoxically, the "I" reveals itself to me in the same movement by which it is concealed (Hinchman 1984, 44; emphasis added).

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<sup>35</sup> The combined discussion of the structure of "I" and of the "concept" was suggested to me by Hinchman's approach (1984, 44f.).



This notion of the negative activity of the subject has important consequences for the conception of the absolute at work in Hegel's philosophy. The absolute is this *process* of determination, rather than a "thing," an abstraction. The "I" is a form of negation, determination, through which subject and object are first posited. This is the key to Hegel's form of speculation.

The key to the concept of the concept is the Kantian unity of self-consciousness. Hegel notes this explicitly in the *Science of Logic*. "The concept, when it has progressed to a concrete existence which is itself free, is none other than the "I" or pure self-consciousness. True, I *have* concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the "I" is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into *determinate existence*" (WL 2:253/514). According to Hegel, we cannot understand either the concept or the "I" unless we do so in tandem; furthermore, this must be done for each through the two moments of *universality* (as "pure self-related unity") and *individuality* (as "self-related negativity") (WL 2:253/514). The key to the structure of the "I" and the concept then lies precisely in this transformation of the relationship between subject and object. The "I" only appears through its negative, determining activity. It self-dirempts, splits into subject and object, and in so doing it shows the connection not just between subject and object, but between the prior whole, the totality, and its finite moments. "The 'I' is one side of the relation and the whole relation in the sense that as a self confronting a not-self, it is limited, finite, empirical 'I'. But it is also the absolute as the negative activity that posits the difference between 'I' and not-'I', dividing and identifying them at the same time" (Hinchman 1984, 45).

At the risk of getting lost in complexities, here is Hegel's own description of the "objectivity" of the "I" and of the concept, from the final chapter of the *Phenomenology*:

The nature, moments and movement of this [absolute] knowing have, then, shown themselves to be such that this knowing is a pure *being-for-self* of self-consciousness; it is "I," that is *this* and no other "I," and which is no less immediately a *mediated* or superseded *universal* "I." It has a *content* which it *differentiates* from itself; for it is pure negativity or the dividing of itself, it is *consciousness*. This content is, in its difference, itself the "I," for it is the movement of superseding itself, or the same pure negativity that the "I" is. In it, as differentiated, the "I" is reflected into itself; it is only when the "I" communes with itself in its otherness that the content is *comprehended* [i.e. in terms of the Notion]. Stated more specifically, this content is nothing else than the very movement just spoken of; for the content is Spirit that traverses its own self and does so *for itself* as Spirit by the fact that it has the "shape" of the Notion in its objectivity (PG §799).

The move beyond understanding to speculation is shown here through consciousness's own comprehension of itself as self-differentiation. The reconciliation here between the subject and the object, or between the concept and its content, is made through this comprehension. Instead of an "I" which "possesses" its concepts, which subsumes its intuitions under conceptual universals, we have an "I" which makes the object its own, "brings it into *its own form*" (WL 2:255/516). The process of the "I" coming to comprehend itself in its other, involves the absolute because this very process *constitutes* the absolute.

The structure of the concept, which mirrors that of the "I," is also centered around this process. Hegel takes pains to differentiate his "concept" from the way in which it is typically understood. In the philosophy of reflection, the concept is essentially a form of abstract universality, under which particulars are brought together. The concept in this view is a universal which is brought by the mind to order sensory intuition. Hegel's speculative concept, by contrast, is itself "self-particularizing," in that it undergoes its own process of diremption into moments (Hinchman 1984, 46). "What is universal about the Concept is indeed not just something common against which the particular stands on

its own; instead the universal is what particularises (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, in unclouded clarity” (EL §163 A1). As the “truth of substance,” and the result and foundation of being and essence — the first two moments of the *Science of Logic* — the concept of the concept gives Hegel’s philosophy a characteristically post-Kantian perspective. Here we see again how the subjective perspective has been transcended. The realm of objectivity and universality that is accessed through the level of the concept turns Kant’s thought upside down, in the sense that it represents a logical basis for spirit (as well as for nature). Taking his inspiration from the synthetic unity of apperception, Hegel lauds Kant’s distinction between the subjectivity of the empirical “I” and the objectivity of the transcendental “I”, but complains that for Kant, although “the concept is given as the objective element of cognition, consequently as the truth . . . it is taken to be something merely subjective, and we are not allowed to extract reality from it, for by reality objectivity is to be understood, since reality is contrasted with subjectivity” (WL 2:256/516). What comes before the concept, for Kant, is the “empirical material”, which is raised to universality through the abstraction of the understanding. Hegel views Kant’s recognition of synthetic *a priori* judgment as a good beginning to speculation, as it is “fully opposed to any empty identity or abstract universality which is not internally a synthesis ” (WL 2:261/520). However, Kant’s theory did not live up to this promise, instead relying upon a notion of “synthesis” which implies a merely external form of unity.

The structure of the concept and of the “I” are then central to Hegel’s speculative philosophy. Both refer to a level of logic, or conceptuality, which forms the basis of his version of absolute idealism. We will see below that the status of the logical within

Hegel's system becomes problematic on any attempt to employ his thought. A related concept, to which both Adorno and Marx would refer, is that of "spirit."

### 3.4 "Spirit"

For Hegel, the world, even the world "of appearance," cannot possibly be unified by the (individual) knowing subject. If we were to try to do this, for example, we would not be able to account for the subject's additional status as object. Hegel's solution is to begin with the "absolute" which is the whole out of which the subject/object split is generated, and to conceive of the absolute *as spirit*, which is another way of talking about the absolute as a *process*.

That the True is actual only as system, or that Substance is essentially Subject, is expressed in the representation of the Absolute as *Spirit* . . . The spiritual alone is the *actual*; it is essence, or that which has *being in itself*; it is that which *relates itself to itself* and is *determinate*, it is *other being* and *being-for-self*, and in this determinateness, or in its self-externality, abides within itself; in other words, it is *in and for itself* . . . The Spirit that, so developed, knows itself as Spirit, is *Science* (PG §25).

For Hegel, the journey to knowledge entails the recognition that there is a larger totality in which the individual subject moves. If there were not this Absolute, then we would merely be isolated subjects.

The point of Hegel's chapter on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is that the naive consciousness necessarily must go through this process in coming to know itself. It begins by trying to find certainty in its own sense perception, and then subsequently through the understanding. In each of these moments, consciousness attempts to ground its knowledge in something *external* to it. However, it comes to the realization that the in-itself which it has been seeking is in reality a moment of itself as subject. With this recognition, consciousness has raised itself up toward the truth of the Concept as the unity of subject and object. "If we give the name of [*Concept*] to the movement of

knowing, and the name of *object* to knowing as a passive unity, or as the “I”, then we see that not only for *us*, but for knowing itself, the object corresponds to the [Concept]” (PG §166). Consciousness is now aware that in its process of attaining knowledge of the external, of the other, it is in fact knowing *itself*.

With the formulation of consciousness knowing itself we approach the concept of *Geist*. As Inwood notes, in its most general sense, *Geist* refers to “the human mind and its products, in contrast to nature and also to the logical idea” (1992, 275). With the category of spirit we can begin to see the reach of Hegel’s concepts; far from being merely a logical term, spirit is intended to capture concrete social history. The inspiration for *Geist* in the Kantian transcendental ego should not be read as a latent Kantianism; rather the category denotes the shift from “subjective” to “objective,” in the sense of “social” or “intersubjective” (Williams 1987, 3f.). The story of the experience of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* moves from the relationship of consciousness to its objects, to intersubjective relationships in the chapter on self-consciousness.

A self-consciousness, in being an object, is just as much “I” as “object”. With this, we already have before us the [concept] 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”. It is in self-consciousness, in the [concept] of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colourful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present (PG §177).

Self-consciousness becomes spirit, the “truth of self-certainty,” as it progresses through a dialectic of recognition with an “other.”

As Williams points out, this move to spirit is the move beyond the Kantian transcendental realm, to the immanence of social interaction. Spirit, unlike the Kantian transcendental ego, is not a structural *a priori*, but rather the *result* of intersubjective

experience (Williams 1987, 3). The question for Kant becomes how to account for the relationship between the transcendental subject and the empirical one. In his abandonment of the transcendental as a structural *a priori* realm, Hegel moves past the aporia of their relationship.

The problem of foundations is not simply abandoned, but is rather displaced from the beginning of philosophy (the so-called first philosophy) to its end, i.e, to the results of philosophical labor. Critical subjectivity is not a given, but must be accomplished, brought about. The result of philosophical labor is not a transcendental ego purified of all empirical content, but rather something which is historically and culturally shaped, a developing foundation. What holds this notion of a non-foundational transcendental together with the equally strange notion of a developing foundation is *Geist* (Williams 1987, 7).

Williams goes on to discuss the ambiguities in Hegel's conception of *Geist*. Using the reading of Habermas, which postulated a fundamental conflict between the interpretation of *Geist* as interactive communication, and an idealist version in which *Geist* is formed through reflection on the finite, Williams notes that the interpretive options for *Geist* constitute the split between the left and right Hegelians.

Whether the absolute spirit is interpreted theologically as God, or anthropologically as the community, obviously has implications for the conception of the relationship between the individual and the social community, as well as that between consciousness and its object. It is perhaps the relationship between these two dyads that is at the heart of the issue. By using the term *Geist* ambiguously (as Williams and Habermas would say), Hegel "is never able to clarify satisfactorily the relation between the *Geist* which functions as a medium, and the *Geist* which is the self-consciousness which comprehends the intersubjective medium" (Theunissen 1970, 58; quoted in Williams 1987, 13). We'll see below that this ambiguity is central to Adorno's thought.<sup>36</sup> Spirit is in

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<sup>36</sup> That is, the relationship between spirit as a social dialectic and spirit as a mode of philosophical thinking, through which it ascends to absolute knowledge, reflects its origins in the philosophy of "identity." Since, as we will see, Adorno cannot abide such identity, the ambiguity becomes in fact

a sense the absolute in its self-movement, the movement towards what Hegel refers to as the “idea.” The principle of movement stems from the negation at its heart. As the “unity of Concept and objectivity” or of the concept and “reality”, the idea represents a state of “truth” (WL 2:499/698; EL §213). The idea is *present* in the thing, in the institution (Hinchman 1984, 61). If it is present, then it is *true*, it is *actual*. The idea is the “immanent standard of judgment for each thing” (62). If it is not actual, not true, then it is merely contingent, arbitrary. For Hegel, this is of no interest to philosophy.

Making sense of Hegel’s use of spirit is not an easy task. After delineating nine distinct senses of the term in Hegel’s work, Inwood (1992, 275f.) identifies three common features among them: (1) spirit is “pure activity”, with no “underlying substratum”; (2) it develops in stages through self-reflection; and (3) “it takes over, both cognitively and practically, what is other than itself, nature as well as lower levels of *Geist*, and realizes itself in them.” This last refers to (subjective) spirit’s capacity for “over-reaching” its object.<sup>37</sup> This is essentially the power of speculative, dialectical movement, the power to move through the process of diremption and reconciliation. “[I]n the negative unity of the idea the infinite overreaches the finite, thinking overreaches being, and the subjective, the objective” (EL §215).

Some of the key paired moments of spirit are finite/absolute and subjective/objective. Subjective spirit refers to the activity of consciousness, while the finite, objective spirit is the social context, the network of social relations. Spirit thus captures the dichotomy between the individual and the social in a way that Kant’s concept of the transcendental could not. “In searching for adequate terms, then, we are

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more severe.

<sup>37</sup> See also Fackenheim 1967, 20f.; 98f.

faced with the problem that genuine social standards cannot be simply external to individual selves, nor be simply their individual or collective product” (Fackenheim 1967, 46). In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel’s discussion of spirit comes as the “truth” of observing reason, which is pressed towards the recognition of itself in the “external” world. While this makes some intuitive sense, the link between this form of spirit and that represented by self-consciousness is obscure. The “turning point” for consciousness in its journey towards spirit comes with the development of self-consciousness.<sup>38</sup> The two themes I would like to draw out here are these movements of consciousness: to self-consciousness, through the breakdown of self-certainty, and to an objective form of spirit. There are two primary developments of consciousness here: one is the recognition that being-for-itself is identical to being-for-another (i.e., knowing the other is knowing oneself) (PG §166); the other is the transition from reason to spirit, through the recognition of itself in the world. In less Hegelian language, the distinction here is between two different relationships: (1) of individual consciousness and its perceptual other, and (2) of individual consciousness and the “social whole.” The corresponding relationships are of subject/object and part/whole. This sets up the dialectical relationship between the subject and the object, and between the part and the whole. Both are crucial.

### 3.5 “Experience”

We finally come to the notion of experience, which Hegel discusses most directly in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. The subtitle of the work is the “Science of the

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<sup>38</sup> On this “turning point”, see Pippin (1989, 143ff).



Experience of Consciousness,” which suggests the centrality of the concept.<sup>39</sup> Hegel’s conception of experience stems from the negation of mere “understanding,” the transition to speculation. As we’ve seen above, for Hegel philosophical reflection is merely a finite reason; it is a means of abstracting the subject from the object, of breaking up the concrete whole into its abstract parts.<sup>40</sup> It is an analytical form of reason, which subsumes particulars beneath abstract universals.

To break an idea up into its original elements is to return to its moments, which at least do not have the form of the given idea, but rather constitute the immediate property of the self. This analysis, to be sure, only arrives at thoughts which are themselves familiar, fixed, and inert determinations. But what is thus separated and non-actual is an essential moment; for it is only because the concrete does divide itself, and make itself into something non-actual, that it is self-moving (PG §32).

With the overcoming of the separation between understanding and intuition, Hegel merged the logic of thought with that of the empirical world, and he brought together the phenomenal and the noumenal. The categories are not merely categories of our subjective understanding, but apply to the world itself (Lumsden 2003, 44). The concept of a philosophical experience of consciousness is designed to work from this state of reconciliation. The world is unified not through the transcendental subject, but rather through this idea of a philosophical *experience*.<sup>41</sup>

Hegel introduces the concept of experience in the *Phenomenology* as a “*dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object;” such experience produces a “new true object” (PG §86). This is clearly a critical conception of conscious experience, in which consciousness reflects upon its

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<sup>39</sup> Though it also brings up questions about the relationship between the *Phenomenology* and the rest of Hegel’s system. See, e.g., Forster (1998).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, W. Marx (1988, 44f.)

<sup>41</sup> As Lumsden also notes, the overcoming of the dualism of concept and intuition is the central concern of both the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*’s concept of experience. These are the two Hegelian texts most important to Adorno.

object, discovering a new object which is no longer in-itself but rather for-consciousness. Here we have effectively a splitting of consciousness and of its experience of itself. Hegelian experience is this dialectical move through the splitting and unifying of subject and (new) object. Against our common sense notion of experience, Hegel posits experience as a reflexive action, as consciousness beginning to experience itself. Consciousness is led towards this form of experience by necessity. “Only in plumbing the depths of what [the object] is *for us* shall we ever attain to what it is in itself” (Lauer 1976, 37).<sup>42</sup>

Experience then for Hegel captures the relationship between subject (consciousness) and object, as they move dialectically. Hegelian science is the science of the experience of consciousness, because it is here that we can enter into Hegel’s system of philosophy. The relationship between a “natural” or common sense form of consciousness, and the critical variety that comprises philosophical experience, also points to that between empirical science and Hegelian scientific philosophy, and has numerous repercussions for a conception of science which was to be appropriated by Adorno. The “objectivity” of the categories is then differently grounded in Hegel than in Kant. For Kant, objectivity was grounded through the universality and necessity of the transcendental subject. For Hegel, on the other hand, the categories are objective simply because they reflect the

<sup>42</sup> See also (PG §36), where Hegel discusses the experience of consciousness in terms of spirit:

The Science of this pathway is the Science of the *experience* which consciousness goes through; the substance and its movement are viewed as the object of consciousness. Consciousness knows and comprehends only what falls within its experience; for what is contained in this is nothing but spiritual substance, and this, too, as *object* of the self. But Spirit becomes object because it is just this movement of becoming an *other to itself*, i.e. becoming an *object to itself*, and of suspending this otherness. And experience is the name we give to just this movement, in which the immediate, the unexperienced, i.e. the abstract, whether it be of sensuous [but still unsensed] being, or only thought of as simple, becomes alienated from itself and then returns to itself from this alienation, and is only then revealed for the first time in its actuality and truth, just as it then has become a property of consciousness also.

logic of the concept which underlies spirit. The concept of experience unifies the subject and object. It is the process of alienation and reconciliation, in the progress towards science (PG §36). This is obviously not an empiricist conception of experience.

Experience is not solely empirical, and consciousness does not simply receive passive sensations and form them. "Consciousness is conscious of an object and its own consciousness of what it takes to be the truth of that object. Experience is this comparison" (Lumsden 2003, 46). Hegelian science is then built upon a form of "naive" experience, on which it operates.

While it is difficult to concisely explicate Hegel's philosophy, in the foregoing discussion I have briefly discussed some of his key terminology. Within the context of German idealist philosophy, as I have presented it here, Hegel's work represents an attempt to overcome what he sees as the limitations of Kant's perspective. Kant's transcendental solution to the modern problems of autonomy and objectivity resulted in conception of the conscious subject which is strictly cut off from its surrounding world. While keeping the same motivating questions and concerns in mind, Hegel refused any recourse to transcendental argument, relying instead on a phenomenological perspective through which philosophical reason became more properly self-grounding. A significant question is the extent to which Hegel's solution provides another plausible position or framework for interpretation within social theory and philosophy. If Kant's work provided a fundamental challenge to philosophical positions such as rationalism and empiricism, as well as those of naturalism and realism, how should we characterize Hegel's own approach? Although this question cannot be answered definitively here, below I discuss

Hegel's critique of empiricism in more detail, as a means of both further specifying his particular version of idealism, and to prepare for a later discussion of the Hegelian influence on forms of classical social theory.

#### **4. Hegel's critique of empiricism and the *Wissenschaftlich* task of philosophy**

Hegel's version of philosophical *Wissenschaft* ("science") is of course a far cry from the empirical scientific method that has developed since the enlightenment, and the Hegelian heritage of thinkers such as Marx and Adorno draw precisely on some of these moments which apparently diverge so starkly from this heritage. Now that I've covered some of the basic conceptual aspects of Hegel's philosophy, I'd like to focus on the question of Hegel's relationship to empirical science.<sup>43</sup> This question is central for understanding the Hegelian heritage in current forms of critical thinking, as well as the relationship between philosophy and sociology in general.

In many ways scientific thinking is, for Hegel, analogous to forms of reflective philosophy. Inwood (1983, 51) notes that Hegel differentiates between the conceptions of experience which relate to philosophical versus scientific thought. Both philosophy and science have their origins in experience. Perhaps the broadest distinction is that empirical philosophy and empirical science do not seek truth "in thought itself", but rather from experience, from "what is outwardly or inwardly present" (EL §37). Hegel does not condemn empiricist thought; the empirical stance of consciousness has the advantages of both self-certainty and freedom, liberation from tradition and doctrine.

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<sup>43</sup> To avoid confusion, I will refer to Hegelian science by its German name, *Wissenschaft*, and reserve the term "science" for the empirical methodology which is characteristically associated with it in the North American context.

“In empiricism there lies this great principle, that what is true must be in actuality and must be there for our perception. This principle is opposed to the ‘ought’ through which reflection inflates itself, and looks down upon what is actual and present in the name of a *beyond* that can only have its place and thereness in the subjective understanding” (EL §38R). Although empirical science cannot (à la Hume), guarantee universality or objectivity, Hegel’s complaint is that it rests on a set of unquestioned assumptions regarding its objects and its methods (EL §1). The ultimate reliance on the empirically given is, in actuality, a sign of *unfreedom* for Hegel, since the empirical is ultimately merely something given (EL §38A; Inwood 1983, 67). Scientific reason begins with the empirical, and it produces laws and theoretical concepts (EL §7). In doing so, it both “prepares” perceptual data for philosophical thought and compels consciousness to go beyond this finite, limited perspective. Consciousness experiences “cravings of thought,” which lead to the need for and the rise of philosophy (EL §12).

Hegel’s critique of the scientific rationality characteristic of the Enlightenment emphasizes the need for a philosophical reason which will adequately address *truth*. Both empirical philosophy and empirical science neglect the “sole obligation of philosophy — to determine whether . . . thoughts and relationships possess truth in-an-for-themselves” (VGP3 310). Science takes what is empirically given as fact, and even though it reasons about it, it does so by employing concepts in an empiricist way. It uses concepts to tell a story of what happens in the natural or human world. Philosophy’s task is quite different. Rather than being comprised of “a narrative of what happens,” philosophy should be “a cognition of what is true in what happens” (WL 2:260/519).

The true is the *conceptual*, in Hegel's sense; it is what is universal within thought, what is objective (EL §21). "[E]ven though the universal is a product of thought, it is nevertheless objective: without its presence in being there would simply be nothing there to experience" (Hinchman 1984, 78). The empiricists cannot recognize this truth, but stay committed to using concepts blindly, not seeing their intimate connection to "reality." Hinchman explains the critique clearly:

On the one hand, they take sense particulars to be real and independent of mental activity. Yet in order to say anything about sense experience they must use categories of the understanding, dissecting and analyzing the concretum of sense experience. This procedure has two consequences. First, the empiricists do not realize that the products of analysis — abstract thought like force and law or, in political philosophy, natural rights and passions — transform the concrete totality of experience precisely because they are so abstract . . . Second [Hegel] argues that these empiricists deceive themselves into believing that they have depicted things as they really are, when in fact they are doing just the opposite" (1984, 78; See EL §38).

True philosophical reason then recognizes the import of the empiricist procedure. The universals, in the form of concepts, that it brings to bear on sensory data are *already immanent to it*. The independence of the scientific observer from her reality, which she takes for granted, is *already a product of abstraction*, of the negative activity of the "I". Hegel's philosophical reason is the *process* of recognizing this, it is the "reduction and absorption" of the material of sense perception "into its essential being that in turn manifests itself only in the concept" (WL 2:259/519). Empiricists in this way have made an error which was not overcome by Kant; even though he grasped the significance of the "I", he nevertheless upheld the strict separation of intuitions and concepts.

The turn towards philosophy involves a version of Kant's Copernican revolution, a turn towards the subject and its powers of constitution. Philosophy only begins, in a sense, *after* science, when consciousness comes to reflect upon itself and its mode of apprehending its world. The abstractions of scientific reason are the beginning point of

speculative philosophy, in which they are seen in their false abstractness. Here the “object” of science changes from the unproblematic empirically given to that which is observed by the subject. The object therefore comes to *contain* the subject, because the subject understands its own role in its formation. “The essential character of all development in Hegel’s philosophy requires . . . that the thinker to whom an object is given shed his ‘detached’ attitude toward it and recognize that his increasingly more adequate cognition of the object is simultaneously an ever more concrete development of self-knowledge” (Hinchman 1984, 54). The “I” makes itself into its own object, and only through this procedure can it come to grasp the concept.

As “reason,” philosophy seeks a form of comprehension that the “understanding” cannot achieve. It goes beyond empirical science because it attempts to comprehend its own concepts, rather than trusting in them blindly. But still, it works only with “what is,” in the sense that it begins not in arbitrary abstraction, but instead with the immediacy of sensation (EL §38); however, it recognizes that what presents itself to consciousness is not “the unconditioned in and for itself” (WL 2:260/519). In the pursuit of “truth” in that which already is, Hegel’s philosophical reason does not import ideality; rather, it tries to recognize the conceptual (ideal) in “reality.” Philosophy which is “genuine” is then necessarily an *idealism*, a *speculative idealism*. Its “most important proposition” is the “ideality of the finite” (EL §95).

This ideality is, for Hegel, the *conceptual*. It is also described as the “objectivity” of thought, discovered through the self-reflection of consciousness. “[T]hinking things over leads to what is *universal* in them; but the universal itself is one of the moments of the Concept. To say that there is understanding, or reason, in the world is exactly what is

contained in the expression ‘objective thought.’ But this expression is inconvenient precisely because ‘thought’ is all too commonly used as if it belonged only to spirit, or consciousness, while ‘objective’ is used primarily just with reference to what is unspiritual” (EL §24R). For Hegel, this is the path to the “logical.” In performing this task, reason goes beyond modes of reflective thought, in that it attempts to account for itself, and its own negativity. It cannot rest content with pursuing an empirical mode of thought, once it comes to the recognition that it has created the empirical world through its own negation. The *speculative* nature of idealism, as philosophy, stems from this move of the “I” attempting to understand itself. “The ‘truth’ of empiricism is the ‘I,’” and, since the “truth” of the “I” is spirit, philosophy is lead directly into the intersubjective, societal realm in its pursuit (Hinchman 1984, 93). The nature of speculation involves this ability to grasp the whole, to see the “I” in its power of negativity and differentiation.

### **5. Conclusion: the German idealist heritage**

Though abbreviated, I hope to have given a sense in the foregoing of some of the issues involved in Hegel’s critique of Kant. The issue is substantially more complicated than as articulated by, e.g., Hund, according to whom the transition is hallmarked by a move from psychological subjectivity to sociological objectivity, through Hegel’s “complete sociological overhaul” of the Kantian transcendental subject (Hund 1998, 233). There is more at stake than simply reading *Geist* as the social or the institutional. Hegel’s key concepts of *Geist*, *absolute*, *concept*, and *speculation* involve not only a recognition of the insufficiency of Kantian subjectivism, but also an appreciation for the (speculative) identity of subject and object.



Kant's critical revolution provides a way of rethinking the relationship between subject and object (or mind and world) by claiming that the first necessary task is an examination of the *possibility* of the subject's own knowledge. Kant sought a way out of strictly metaphysical accounts, and his transcendental solution radically undermines both rationalist and empiricist accounts, and began the perspective of transcendental idealism. Hegel criticizes Kant's conception of the subject as being merely formal, complaining that the subject is not just an empty form which receives its content. Instead Hegel introduces the idea that the "I" and the "concept" are identical, in terms of having the same structure, and articulates the dynamic character of both. The formal quality of the transcendental unity of apperception is rejected, and Hegel substitutes a subject that is self-relating, that determines itself through its own judgment. It is in this way that, for commentators like Pippin, Hegel's account should be understood as a *completion* of Kant's critical turn, rather than as a turn to some pre-critical metaphysical position. Kant's criticism of empiricism led to his account of the transcendental conditions of experience, for the active, spontaneous character of consciousness, but relied upon a form of deduction that Hegel could not accept.

The move from a "subjective" to an "absolute" form of idealism is then at the center of the Kant to Hegel story; but the details are notoriously difficult to spell out. Pippin articulates one of the difficulties: "If one denies that there are 'formal' conditions for the possibility of any apperceptive experience, what else can one counterpose except an empirical or psychological or conventional or pragmatic account of how we come to acquire 'what we find the hardest notions to give up' in the self-construals that make up our experience?" (1989, 38-9). What precisely are we to make of the self-determining

subject (and the self-determining concept), and what impact should it have on our philosophy and social theory? If we accept the claim that the Hegelian spirit does not refer to some theological or cosmic entity, how should we understand it? The history of Hegel interpretation quickly demonstrates the difficulty of these questions; however, this does not deny their significance. My account takes seriously that claim that Hegel's philosophy is more accurately (and interestingly) conceived as a proposal for understanding the nature of a self-conscious subjectivity, and its relationship to its own "conditions of knowledge" (see Pippin 1989, 39). The social-theoretical significance of Hegel's philosophy stems in large part from this attempt to "de-transcendentalize" the Kantian subject, including the confusion about how we then might interpret its "conditions."

A brief examination of Hegel's conception of the relationship of spirit to nature will underscore the complexity of his response to Kant. As I've discussed, Hegel's philosophical system involved *Geist* as a central concept, in which it is primarily related to both nature and to logic. *Geist* is a complex concept; in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel traces the path of consciousness as it progressively develops into *Geist*, while in the *Encyclopedia*, there is a transition from nature into spirit. The issue of the relationship between the natural and the spiritual (human) is an important one, especially for my narrative here. Adorno's own concept of "natural history," which is a rethinking of the concept of "second nature" in Marx and Lukács, relates fundamentally to this question. How should we understand the difference between the natural world and the human world? What implications does this have for our practice of science, philosophy, and politics?

In terms of the relationship of spirit to nature, Pippin (2008, 45ff.) highlights three aspects of Hegel's claim: (1) anti-dualism; (2) self-relation; (3) freedom as achievement. Pippin emphasizes that, for Hegel, nature is explicitly *not* the other of spirit. There is some point at which nature evolves into spirit, but a spirit which has always presupposed nature. Spirit is the "truth" of nature, in the sense that, for nature to *know itself*, it must become spirit. The structure of self-relation is then also a key to the category. "Natural beings begin to understand themselves in ways not explicable as self-sentiment or mere self-monitoring because the form of their reflexive self-relation is an aspect of what is to be represented, not a separable, quasi-observational position and they come to be able to hold each other to account on bases other than natural need" (Pippin 2008, 46). We are then beyond the realm of "natural facts;" but we have achieved a form of spirit which is not fully abstracted from its natural origins.<sup>44</sup>

The second theme that Pippin discusses, in the context of the relationship of spirit to nature, is self-relation, which "has a normative as well as an irreducible first-personal character and beings which can be said to have established such a relation require a different sort of account from those applicable to nature itself, or require a different way of rendering intelligible the (still) naturally embodied states and relations achieved" (Pippin 2008, 51). Spirit involves negation of immediacy, the overcoming of nature

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<sup>44</sup> Pippin admits that his interpretation makes Hegel into a rationalist, committed to the assumption that "*to be is to be intelligible*" (2008, 49); and he notes that this points toward a concern with standards of explanation.

[F]or Hegel, while knowledge of anything finite and conditioned inevitably gives rise to questions about the conditions for such finite knowledge and so ultimately to a search for the unconditioned (or the ultimately satisfying explanation), that ascent does not lead us beyond the limits of experience, but deeper into ourselves and the nature of our own normative requirements, "legislated" for ourselves. This is not to "anthropologize" the unconditioned (for Hegel, free, rational self-legislation is what he calls the "Absolute") . . . Hegel just takes very seriously the claim that "God" became man, that spirit's (finally satisfying) knowledge of itself and its legislative activity is "the unconditioned" (Pippin 2008, 49-50).

through the subjective *taking* of nature.<sup>45</sup> While the subject can exist in a natural state, spirit constitutes itself through a reflection on this state as a process of achievement, which cannot be understood as a natural process; it is, rather, a “*way* of taking up the world and so presupposes a way of understanding the world, with several presuppositions and so already a distinct mode of orientation and direction” (Pippin 2008, 53). In this way, there is no ontological break through which spirit “appears;” it is a “return to itself out of nature.” Hegel’s non-dualist account here is an example of the kind of “foundationlessness” which occurs in his philosophy. The relationship of nature to spirit cannot be described as one of foundation, nor can spirit be considered to be “emergent” in a Durkheimian sense. Both accounts remain mired in dualism.

The third characteristic in this account is “spirit as freedom as achievement.” The essence of spirit is freedom. “[I]t is of the very nature of spirit to be this absolute liveliness, this process, to proceed forth from naturality, immediacy, to sublimate, to quit its naturality, and to come to itself, and *to free itself*” (EG; quoted in Pippin 2008, 56). Spirit actively achieves its own freedom, not by getting rid of necessity, but by coming to recognize itself in its own context. Spirit is the process of freeing itself from nature.

For Hegel, then, spirit is a complex concept, intended to encompass a variety of “improvements” on Kant. It encompasses both “subjective spirit” and “objective spirit,” as well as “absolute spirit.” While the full scope of its intricacies cannot be examined here, I intend to investigate some of its implications for the development of a social science, a mode of investigation which aims, at some level, precisely to investigate this realm. Although some have attempted to detach the notion of “objective spirit,” to serve

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<sup>45</sup> Pippin notes in this context that “an awful lot of work . . . is being done by the notion of ‘negativity’ appealed to, the denial of immediacy.” The objects of this “stance” are initially “feelings, sensation, rituals, habits” (2008, 53).

as the object of a social science or *Geisteswissenschaften*, it is not so easily abstracted. The absolute, as the “formation process of subjects and objects” (Rosen 1974, 42), or as spirit coming to know itself, is simply not separable from its subjective and objective moments. If it is the absolute that joins the subjective and the objective, how can it be excised without relinquishing a grasp on the whole? If we try to see the social as that which mediates subjective and objective, how can we avoid losing a conception of freedom? In many ways, we will see that the attempt to manage this detachment is at the center of key issues for classical social theory.

## Chapter 3

### Adorno's critique of philosophical reason: Engaging German idealism

#### 1. Introduction

The entirety of Adorno's broad intellectual work is deeply indebted to the heritage of German idealist philosophy. Although there are many other important intellectual touchstones for Adorno (e.g., Freud, Nietzsche, Weber, Benjamin), it is the philosophies of Kant and Hegel, and the complex relationship between them, which most significantly structure Adorno's views of the nature of knowledge and our experience of the social world. One needs to go no further than Adorno's key category of the "nonidentical" to view the significance of the German idealist heritage. This is not an original recognition; as O'Connor, among others, points out, an understanding of Adorno's philosophy is simply impossible without understanding his relationship to Kant and Hegel (2004, 16).<sup>46</sup> I will argue that it is equally true that an understanding of Adorno's sociology and social theory is impossible without this background as well, in part because his conception of sociology and science is so intimately tied to his understanding of philosophy. Consequently, the numerous critiques of styles of philosophical thought which recur throughout Adorno's *oeuvre* are integrally related to his critiques of forms of sociology and social theory. We cannot look at one without looking at the other, not because together they constitute some kind of Hegelian whole of reason, but rather

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<sup>46</sup> One of the characteristics of Adorno's work is the diversity of the ancestral relations that have been attributed to it. Bozzetti (1996; 2002) makes the detailed case for Hegel as the primary touchstone; O'Connor (2004) for Kant; Bernstein (2001) for Weber. In my opinion, the priority of Hegel for Adorno seems clear: "These days it is hardly possible for a theoretical idea of any scope to do justice to the experience of consciousness, and in fact not only the experience of consciousness but the embodied experience of human beings, without having incorporated something of Hegel's philosophy" (H 252/2).

because Adorno's understanding of the possibilities for modes of *thinking* and *experiencing* in modern, capitalist society, takes its cue from the concrete history of the relationship between philosophy and science, and because, for Adorno, any form of properly philosophical thought must come to terms with the social character of its content. The idea is that, if Adorno's perspective on knowledge owes much to the German idealists, then by examining this relationship, we can better understand both Adorno's own conception of knowledge – including its relationship to philosophical and sociological practice – and the significance of the German idealist heritage for versions of classical social theory.

In this chapter I would like to isolate a few of the most relevant themes from German idealism that inform Adorno's work. The topic is of course extremely broad, and I cannot hope do justice to its complexity here. Through a detailed discussion of Adorno's engagement with the philosophies of Hegel and Kant, I will lay out the groundwork for understanding Adorno's conceptions of subject and object, their relationship in terms of identity and nonidentity, and the category of experience. To do this, I will begin with Adorno's understanding of the significance of Kantian philosophy, and then move on to describe his attempts to come to grips with Hegel. This order reflects what I consider to be Adorno's deeper engagement with and commitment to Hegel's philosophy, and also the significance of Hegel's critique of Kant for Adorno's own perspective. For Adorno, Hegel is the most significant of the post-Kantian German idealists, and at the same time he represents a fundamental move away from Kant towards a dialectical philosophy of the *absolute*. Accordingly, I will pay attention to the ways in which this move haunts the whole of Adorno's work. The argument that I will

propose is that this problem of the relationship of a subjective, transcendental, and an objective, absolute idealism will explicate Adorno's complex understanding of the ways in which the social experience of the individual as a knowing consciousness must be understood, as well as the ways in which the social, or society, is to be found within the process and product of reason itself.

This chapter will also serve as an explication of Adorno's distinctive conception of the nature and demands of critical philosophy. The defense of a nonidentical relationship of subject and object in Adorno's philosophy must be seen in relation to these debates. I will work out my interpretation of the notion of the nonidentical during the course of this discussion. Adorno's critical reaction to idealism was based upon his recognition of the failure of enlightenment reason; accordingly, it is important to remember that Adorno is involved in a specifically *philosophical*, and *epistemological*, task. "Adorno develops [his] account of rational experience through a critique of the epistemological models available in modern philosophy" (O'Connor 2004, 1). It is difficult to, as O'Connor does, reduce Adorno's thought to a couple of main concepts. Due to the nature of his thought, there is not an easy hierarchy of concepts, some of which are more fundamental than others. My discussion of his work in terms of the heritage of German idealism is intended to begin to explicate Adorno's conception of what the nature of philosophy, or critical thought generally, should be in the context of contemporary capitalist society. It is largely a story of nonidentity against identity, or dialectic against positivism, but I will not attempt to reduce it to such a slogan. One of the most important things for a "*geistig* experience" is to reflexively recognize the priority of the object, and its (the conscious subject's) own "natural" attempt to dominate



the object. But in addition to explicating this process, I want to begin to bring out the conception of the social that lies behind, as it were, Adorno's critique of idealist philosophical thought, both in terms of the subject and the object; and also to view this within the framework of German idealism's problematics of autonomy and objectivity. This will set up a more explicit discussion, in later chapters, of the ways in which Adorno's thought goes beyond, as he was always quick to point out, some form of a sociology of knowledge.

Adorno's work is not then *strictly* philosophical; he considers philosophical reason to be fundamentally imbricated with society and social forms, and to that extent there is no "internal" and "external" of philosophy.

Adorno argues . . . that reference to social experience is part and parcel even of apparently "purely" logical or epistemological concepts themselves. Adorno calls such reference "metalogical" [ND 139/135]. Metalogical reference is not brought to concepts from somewhere else. All concepts already contain an element of reference to experience and are unthinkable without such reference. Immanent critique seeks to make explicit the reference to social experience which is already sedimented in the *form* of an analogy, not because philosophy and social experience are really in some way unconnected matters, but rather because the division of intellectual labour which has increasingly led them to be separately considered, under the professional headings of "philosophy" and "sociology," is a real division, and cannot be wished away (Jarvis 1998, 153).

In this way, as Adorno puts it in the preface to *Negative Dialectics*, philosophy needs "stringently to transcend the official separation of pure philosophy and the substantive subject matter" — a prescription that he derives from Hegel (ND 10/xx). Through his engagement with the German idealism of Kant and Hegel, Adorno begins to unfold the defects and potential of an "adequate" philosophical reason, and to formulate his attempt to articulate and *present* critical intellectual work which is "adequate" to its context.

In this chapter I will demonstrate the relevance of these issues for Adorno's critical philosophy, which in turn will prepare my larger argument about his social and

sociological theory. Adorno's work can be read as an attempt to "rematerialize" German idealist philosophy, in terms other than those of Marx or the Marxists of the Second International. To the extent that Adorno seeks a materialist philosophy — and we will see that he considers his thought to be materialist, according to his conception of the term — we need to understand the concept of idealism against which it was directed; otherwise, we cannot get beyond a superficial understanding of his work. In his engagement with the philosophies of Kant and Hegel — as well as with the work of Marx, which I will cover in a later chapter — Adorno prepared the critical philosophical framework through which he interpreted both the concept of society and the nature of critical and scientific sociological thought.

## ***2. Adorno's critique of Kant's philosophy***

In his elaboration of the negative dialectic, Adorno frequently refers to aspects of Kant's critical philosophy. The broad outlines of Adorno's critique of Kant are clear: Kant's philosophy remained unconsciously riddled with the contradictions of bourgeois society. However, in characteristic Adornian fashion, this fact is both the source of the strength of Kant's philosophy, as well as its limitation. For Adorno, the philosophical expression of the separation of the subject and object, as expressed most importantly and forcefully by Kant's transcendentalism, is a correlate to their *real, material* separation, "the rivenness of the human conditions, the result of a coercive historical process" (SO 742/246). Kant's work is important to Adorno because he (Kant) managed to express — even if only implicitly — the contradiction that is necessarily inherent in philosophical epistemology and experience. Any philosophy which claims to promote a new experience of the object, and a new relationship between subject and object, must come to terms

with the current situation for, and understanding of, these terms. For Adorno, Kant's philosophy is not just important for the history of philosophy, but it is also important *historically*, in that his philosophy expresses the nature of bourgeois subjectivity. "Like all intellectual phenomena [*wie alles Geistige überhaupt*], a philosophy does not stand outside time; it exists within time — not merely in the sense that it can be forgotten, or subject to different interpretations, but rather in the sense that its own content [*Gehalt*] unfolds in time, forming a variety of configurations [*Konstellationen*] that release meanings and generate meanings that were not remotely considered at its inception" (KK 270-1/178). Adorno will reconfigure both the subject and the object in part from a critique of Kant's understanding of these concepts.

Adorno considered Kant's philosophy to be fundamental for an understanding of modern thought, and his engagement with Kant's work lasted throughout his life.<sup>47</sup> The characteristic dualisms of Kant's philosophy were read by Adorno as signs of a problematic underlying reality. Adorno relied partially on Kant's refutation of idealism to establish his own conception of materialism.<sup>48</sup> For Kant, the subject's self-consciousness cannot be prioritized over its consciousness of external objects. The subject may afford itself primacy, but it does not know itself more immediately than it does externalities

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<sup>47</sup> In an essay on his early mentor Kracauer, Adorno explains how he learned to approach philosophical texts:

For years Kracauer read the *Critique of Pure Reason* with me regularly on Saturday afternoons . . . Under his guidance I experienced the work from the beginning not as mere epistemology, not as an analysis of the conditions of scientifically valid judgments, but as a kind of coded text from which the historical situation of spirit could be read, with the vague expectation that in doing so one could acquire something of truth itself. If in my later reading of traditional philosophical texts I was not so much impressed by their unity and systematic consistency as *I was concerned with the play of forces at work under the surface* of every closed doctrine and viewed the codified philosophies as force fields in each case, it was certainly Kracauer who impelled me to do so" (NL2 58-9; italics added).

<sup>48</sup> The content of Adorno's version of materialism, and its relationship to Marx and Marxism, will be discussed in a later chapter.

(CPR B276; O'Connor 2004, 23f.).<sup>49</sup> The relation between subject and object then in Kant shows, through the notion of experience, an “immediate relation”, that is both “nonconceptual,” since it is a relationship of a subject to an object that is undetermined, but yet still remains within “the space of reasons.” Although Kant’s thing-in-itself supplied inspiration for the Adorno’s conception of the non-identical, it also contains problems for Adorno, the most central of which is the “*chorismos*” – Adorno’s term for the gap – that exists between the noumenal and phenomenal realms. On Kant’s model, the subject-object relationship remains an aporia. In an attempt to get beyond this impasse, without crossing over into a problematic Hegelian “identity,” Adorno insists that the object retain a fundamental *conceptuality* (read: subjectivity), and he relied in part on Hegel’s critique of Kant to argue this.

[F]or Adorno the problem with the thing-in-itself is not, as it was for Kant’s immediate successors, that it is incompatible with idealism. Rather the problem is that it is an empty and therefore nonviable concept of an object. Kant’s strategy is, in effect, to demonstrate the limits of subjectivity, and that limitation leaves space for objects. However, because objects *in themselves* are what is on the other side of a limit, they are characterized as entirely other than the objects that can be apprehended by a subject . . . Adorno offers a certain picture of Hegelian philosophy in order to give objects conceptual quality, something which Kant, it seems, cannot (O'Connor 2004, 178n6).

Adorno’s critique of Kant begins with this critique of the thing-in-itself, but his goal is to both illuminate the contradictions of Kantian philosophy, as well as to show just how it should be surpassed.

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<sup>49</sup> O'Connor goes on to give a short critique of Kant’s Refutation of Idealism, on the grounds that Kant has made a leap from the idea that time consciousness requires external objects, to the subject’s “immediate experiential grasp of them”. By mixing up the *conditions* of inner experience, with *experience itself*, Kant neglects to demonstrate any necessary connection between object and representation. This then “leads to conflicting accounts of what objects are: are they representations, or are they entirely other than representations, being things-in-themselves that underlie representations.” This critique is insightful because it shows how Kant shows only the *limitations* of subjectivity, but “cannot give substance (quite literally) to the objects which mark these limits” (2004: 24-5). Framing the issue in these terms highlights Adorno’s central concern with Kantian philosophy.

2.1 The fetish of the transcendental (i.e., the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity)

Adorno's perspectives on "nonidentity," and/or the "priority of the object," are his way of attempting to counteract the influence of idealist philosophy, which in his opinion falsely prioritizes the subject of knowledge. One way in which Kant succumbed to this prioritization was through his submission to a "foundation mania [*Fundierungswahn*]" (KK 30/16).<sup>50</sup> Adorno concedes that Kant's philosophical procedure of the self-reflexivity of reason allowed him to establish what he saw as the transcendental *foundations* of experience (KK 18/7; ND 178ff./176ff.). He notes in his interpretation that this self-reflexive method of Kant allowed him to both *ground* knowledge positively in our experience, and, on the other hand, to *limit* reason from straying into "speculations about the Absolute." These are obviously two sides of the same coin: by seeking to provide a positive foundation for our knowledge, Kant draws a line of validity between our forms of knowledge, ruling some out and some in. Such a method is premised on the assumption that our reason may just as validly investigate itself reflexively and criticize itself, as it may take other more "externally" directed forms. The issue of the "foundation" and that of "self-reflexivity" are then essentially linked for Kant, as the path towards a secure foundation is through reason's own reflection on itself. The idea of a foundational *prima philosophia*, or "first philosophy" is anathema for Adorno, because it arrogantly assumes that there must be some principle to which everything can be reduced. In Adorno's opinion, any first philosophy is necessarily a dualistic and idealist one (ND 142/138, 188/187; KK 242/160; ME 22f./14f.). So, it is not just Kant's

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<sup>50</sup> Adorno critiqued others, for instance Heidegger in *Negative Dialectics* and Husserl in *Against Epistemology*, for similar reliance on certain foundations for knowledge. Unlike Hegel, he generally read the attempt by the subject to secure a sure foundation for its knowledge as a part of our "craving for security" (ND 185n/184n). See also the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

transcendentalism that is at fault, but merely his very intention to get to the “bottom” of things. This is the hubris of idealist (and other) philosophy. “It is not for philosophy to exhaust phenomena, according to scientific custom, to reduce them to a minimum of propositions” (ND 24/13).

The idea of a first philosophy requires a belief in what Adorno refers to as the “subjective reduction,” which is the process by which the subject “forgets” itself in its essential mediation with the object, and attempts to “reduce” the object to the subject, as precisely in Kant’s transcendental deduction (ND 178ff./176ff.). Here Adorno’s critique follows more or less directly that of Hegel. This ultimate reduction to the subject paradoxically results from an attempt to reach a kind of epistemological “objectivity.” It also goes hand in hand with the attempt to understand the world completely, to create a complete system of philosophy. In an examination of the hidden assumptions of Kant’s transcendental procedure, Adorno notes that the very notion of the transcendental has the character of reality [*Gegebenheit*] (KK 32/17).<sup>51</sup>

In Kant’s terms, the manifold which is intuited is “given” in a way that is left undetermined; but also, as Adorno is quick to note, on the other side, the “peculiarity of our understanding,” the *a priori* unity of apperception, may also not be examined further (CPR B145; KK 32/17). There is a tension here between the procedure of reduction through *abstraction*, the uncovering of the “foundations” of certain phenomena or forms

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<sup>51</sup> Regarding the very idea of assumptions in philosophy, Adorno notes that

A mode of thought that is absolutely free of assumptions would in reality be a kind of thought that is tied to nothing but pure thought itself. In other words, the philosophical problem *par excellence*, namely the problem of the relation of consciousness to its objects, of the subject to the object, would be prejudiced in a quite specific sense, namely in the idealist sense that everything that exists is the subject, that is, consciousness or spirit. Only if that were the case, only if spirit could itself generate all the preconditions of all knowledge without reference to anything alien to itself, would the postulate of a knowledge free of assumptions be satisfied (KK 30/15).

of knowledge, and the positing of the “given.” The given of course serves as a foundation, and the “mania for foundations” must at some point come to an end in something which is merely *taken* as given. The lesson that Adorno takes from this is that one should not, in philosophy, “feel the need to begin at the very beginning” (KK 31/16), since it will only lead to a problematic positing of a subject as the “origin” of the very *objectivity* of the world — “[t]he appearance [*Schein*] that the transcendental subject is the Archimedean point” (ND 182/181). In Adorno’s analysis, the very attempt to provide an objective foundation for knowledge is *necessarily* subjective.

In this way, the subjective reduction, as an attempt at a form of scientific objectivity, paradoxically results in *more* subjectivity, rather than less. Accompanying the supposedly foundational transcendental subject is what has been termed Kant’s “empirical realism,” his thesis that we only have access to appearances, to phenomena, and not to noumena, things-in-themselves.<sup>52</sup> Adorno refers to this as a Kantian theory of alienation.

By making the experienced world, the immanent world, the world in its this-ness, commensurate [*kommensurabel*] with us, by turning it into our world, so to speak, something like a radical metaphysical alienation is achieved simultaneously . . . The more the world is stripped of an objective meaning and the more it becomes coextensive with our own categories and thereby becomes our world, then the more we find meaning eliminated from the world . . . [T]he more the world in which we live, the world of experience, is commensurate with us, the less commensurate, the more obscure and the more threatening the Absolute, of which we know that this world of experience is only a detail, becomes . . . In other words, this darkness, that is, this consciousness, means that the more secure we are in our own world, the more securely we have organized our own lives, then the greater the uncertainty in which we find ourselves in our relations with the Absolute. The familiarity with our own world is purchased at the price of metaphysical despair’ (KK 168-9/110-1).

This interpretation sets up Adorno’s characterization of Kant’s philosophy as a “salvage operation [*Rettung*]” (KK 172/113). It is the attempt by a subject, through the limitation

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<sup>52</sup> I am not differentiating between noumena and things-in-themselves here, since the distinction is not important to my concerns. On this distinction, see Collins (2009).

of consciousness, to “make himself at home” in the world (a theme which Adorno had first explored in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). It also implies an unstable system in which, as consciousness becomes more and more certain of its “objective” knowledge, it creates at the same time an ever increasing irrationality of the noumenal world. Perhaps against “common sense,” Adorno sees the process of subjectivization in Kant as being the counterpart to that of reification. “[T]he more that is inserted into the subject, the more the subject comes to constitute knowledge as such, then the more that determining factors are withdrawn from the object, and the more the two realms diverge” (KK 174-5/115; see also KK 267f./176; ND 190ff./189ff.). The philosophical prototype for this dynamic Adorno finds in the rationalism of Descartes.

Adorno also, however, explicitly criticizes the concept of the transcendental, Kant’s particular version of foundationalism. His critique here is based upon the nature of abstraction. The movement through abstraction to the sphere of the transcendental is a loss of the subject’s relation to the object. Adorno’s proclamation of the priority of the object means that the subject should remain aware of the thing that it thinks, in its very thingness (i.e., as distinct from its apprehension by thought). Adorno describes the object as the “something” which is indissoluble, which may not be abstracted away. This critique is reflected as well in his proclamation that there can be no *Sein* without *Seiendes*, no “being” without “beings.” Adorno refers to this “something,” which must not be forgotten, as a “metalogical rudiment [*Rudiment*]” (ND 139/135). It is the element that is *beyond* the logical, which we nevertheless discover within it.

This is the “anthropological-materialist turn” of his critique, which Adorno credits to Schopenhauer (H 263/16; see O’Connor 117ff.). There are two main aspects of this



critique, which are articulated, naturally enough, in the hyphenated term. The “materialist” aspect of the turn, or critique, is highlighted by the critique of idealist forms of abstraction. One of the keys to idealist philosophy — which applies to both the Kantian and post-Kantian varieties, albeit in importantly different ways — is that it ends up with only an *abstract* conception of the world, it loses its connection to material substance at some point along the way. The priority of the object thus applies to the object of the conscious subject, as well as to the subject itself *as* object.

What results from abstraction can never be made absolutely autonomous vis-à-vis what it is abstracted from; because the *abstractum* remains applicable to that which is subsumed within it, and because return is to be possible, the quality of what it has been abstracted from is always, in a certain sense, preserved in it at the same time, even if in an extremely general form. Hence if the formation of the concept of the transcendental subject or the absolute spirit sets itself completely outside individual consciousness as something spatiotemporal, when in fact the concept is achieved through individual consciousness, then the concept itself can no longer be made good; otherwise that concept, which did away with all fetishes, becomes a fetish itself (H 263/15).

Kant’s work is problematic because of his comfort working within the transcendental sphere. In a sense, the transcendental subject becomes dually abstracted, twice removed, from the object. The very notion of the transcendental is contested by Adorno both due to its origins in abstraction, and more generally due to its attempt to serve as a source of grounding. The critical materialism of Adorno’s philosophy is designed to begin its criticism with these abstractions and rediscover, or rescue, their materialist sediment.

As an example, Adorno criticizes Kant’s conception of universality with the claim that it stems simply from a general understanding of concept formation. A concept is universal if it covers all of the individual items which have characteristics which it includes (KK 214/142). Concepts arise through the selection and isolation of “arbitrary” elements; this procedure is not aimed at real understanding of the thing, but rather aims to subsume things under concepts. Adorno characterizes this as a means of imposing the

qualities of the subject on the object of knowledge. In terms of universality, then, Kant's model stems from this method of extensional logic: something is universal if it holds for all. Adorno characterizes this as "the universality of *subjective reason*, a universality generated simply by the constitution of the human subject that comprehends things in this way and no other" (KK 216/143). In other words, in order to understand and know the object in front of it, to seek objective validity, the subject "reduces" itself to this form of universality (ND 142-3/139). In order to justify the universality that he requires for his account of knowledge, Kant simply uses the notion of the *structure* of experience, and consequently of the mind. The mind *requires* such universality in order to experience and know. In Adorno's terms of a critical materialism, this critique essentially holds that Kant has unacknowledged assumptions in his argument, which relate to the concrete, material nature of the subject. By claiming that universality is a necessary *condition* of "objective" knowledge, Kant follows the logic of *subjective* concept formation. This method abstracts problematically from the objects themselves; however, it also abstracts from the subject of knowing. Instead of the empirical individual knowing subject, we have the subject in its transcendental-ness; instead of the way that actual human individuals think, we have the necessary preconditions of all experience.

The critique holds as well for the fundamental Kantian distinction between sensations and intuitions, content and form. If experience, according to Kant, is to consist in the unity of sensation and intuition, in that the sensual content is structured by the forms of the understanding, then how are we to make sense of the abstract transcendental subject? The idea of the "form" has been derived through abstraction, or "hypostatization," and thus separated from anything empirical. How then can empirical

sensation be “given” to such a form? (ME 147/142). Perhaps a more pressing issue concerns what it is that we are doing when we attempt to reason about reason in such a fashion. Adorno argues that Kant ends up with some form of knowledge which lies somewhere between psychology and logic — that is, between a form of knowing focused on the empirical aspects of the mind, versus one that deals with a so-called “pure reason” (KK 40/22). Kant’s critique thus falsely implies that there is a mode of reasoning which may retain the connection between the logical (or transcendental) and the material (or empirical). Although Adorno’s criticism is easy to make, we’ll see below that Adorno’s own work brings up similar issues.

On the other hand, this form of critical procedure is also *anthropological*, in that the metalogical “sediment” that it attempts to rescue is fundamentally *social*. With respect to the Kantian transcendental subject, Adorno argues that its universality reflects necessarily the universality of our *social* existence; and more generally that the categories derive *their* universality (problematically under-theorized by Kant) from their *generality*. They

have their universality in the fact that they are the forms of all conscious persons . . . and that compared to them the individual consciousness stands opposed to the social consciousness in the same ratio as the relatively accidental and particular stands opposed to necessity and its laws, to the universal which operates in accordance with rules . . . In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant made the sustained attempt to make a very clear distinction between the subject that he made the focus of his analysis and the empirical subject. He arrived at this abstract subject, as is the case with every concept, *by abstracting from a multiplicity of individual subjects*. We might then say that I cannot meaningfully talk about the transcendental subject or what he calls in the *Prolegomena* “consciousness as such,” if I insist on discussing just one single consciousness. For the single consciousness will never yield more than what is in it, and there is not direct evidence to support the idea that what we say about it possesses universality (KK 218-19/144-5; emphasis added).<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Also see the critique in *Negative Dialectics*: “What becomes manifested as universal in [moral categories], according to the model of the Kantian concept of law, is secretly something societal [*ein Gesellschaftliches*] . . . The concept of universality was won by the multiplicity of subjects and then became independent as the logical objectivity of reason, in which all particular subjects, and, apparently, subjectivity as such, disappear” (ND 277-8/282).

In other words, the universal is obtained through a process of comparison and elimination, through the jettisoning of everything that is merely contingent.<sup>54</sup> In Kant's estimation, however, it derives its authority from the "law." Objectivity and universality stem from conformity to law, be it laws of reason or moral laws. As Adorno argues, if we begin from a strict individual subjectivity, we are unable to reach a universality; and if we try to simply begin with the universality, we presuppose what we endeavor to establish (KK 219-20/145). This is one of the moments in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant comes up against the dialectic, and Adorno praises him for leaving the matter unresolved. At the moment where the move to the "true speculative sphere" was indicated, Kant chose to stick to his transcendental guns. "Adorno argues that as soon as we are able to identify the 'I think' in empirical terms its status (as the ground of experience) is denied as a consequence" (O'Connor 2004, 119). The material moment of the transcendental subject must be admitted; but once it is admitted, the Kantian system breaks down.

Adorno further discusses the character of the transcendental subject in both material and social-anthropological terms as related to the activity of labour. This critique has a dual structure. The subject of knowing is said to be related to the activity of labouring on an object; and the transcendental subject is said to be in reality a function of the system of capitalist labour. The status of these relationships is in question. With the notion of self-preservation, Adorno further extends his anthropological critique. The domination by the subject, in Kantian idealist philosophy as well as in other philosophies, is seen to be a natural part of the human struggle for existence. Nature

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<sup>54</sup> From the perspective of Hegel's critique regarding Kant's attempt to *critique* reason before *employing* it, we could consider this problem in Kant's philosophy to stem from his lack of secondary reflexivity with regard to his own thought processes.

must be subdued because the subject perceives its own powerlessness. “The primacy of subjectivity is a spiritualized [*spiritualisiert*] continuation of the Darwinian struggle for existence. The oppression [*Unterdrückung*] of nature for human purposes is merely a relationship of nature; therefore the superiority of the nature-dominating reason and of its principle [is] appearance [*Schein*]” (ND 181/179; translation modified). The idea of labour as a form of coming to terms with a hostile nature is central here. The spontaneity of the subject in Kant’s system, its ability to actively structure its experience through its transcendental form, Adorno claims is derived from the sheer activity of working on nature. The transcendental subject, in addition, has its origins in “the immortalizing domination [*Herrschaft*], won through the principle of equivalence . . . However, provided that the unity of consciousness is modeled on objectivity — that is, is measured according to the possibility of the constitution of objects — it is the conceptual reflex of the complete, unbroken fusion of the acts of production in society, through which the objectivity [*Objektivität*] of commodities, their ‘concreteness’ [*Gegenständlichkeit*], is first established at all” (ND 180-1/178-9).

The thesis of the transcendental subject is, according to Adorno, simply unfeasible, because Kant has not solved the problem of its relationship to the empirical, individual object. In more general terms, Adorno is at pains to demonstrate, against Kant, the inseparability of the *constituens* from the *constitutum*. In this context, the argument attempts to re-link the transcendental subject, the “I think,” with the empirical subject. “If you separate the *constituens* — that is, the pure consciousness through which the actual world comes into being—from the *constitutum* — that is, the world in its broadest sense—then the former, the *constituens*, cannot even be imagined without the

*constitutum* being imagined simultaneously” (KK 223/147). The refusal of Kant to make a speculative move beyond this dichotomy was criticized, as Adorno notes, by the post-Kantian idealists, who ended up with an absolute which could encompass both *constituens* and *constitutum*. This move is no more open for Adorno than it was for Kant. The contradiction — that we cannot conceive of either the *constituens* or the *constitutum* without its counterpart, and hence cannot find an ultimate ground — cannot, according to Adorno, be solved *philosophically*.<sup>55</sup> In the particular terms that we are examining here, this contradiction obtains in the relationship between the empirical and the transcendental subjects. It

must instead be comprehended in its truth. If there is a point at which the transition to a dialectical conception of philosophy is compelling, this would seem to me to be the place to start. There is no empirical self without the concept, without those elements not reducible to mere existence and objectivity. On the other hand, there is no concept, that is, no such pure “I” that could not somehow be reduced to an empirical self. Both of these are present in Hegel (KK 223-4/148).

Although this critique of the Kant’s transcendental subject in many ways mirrors that of Hegel, Adorno’s concerns are also quite different. For Hegel, Kant’s work was necessarily limiting, in its restrictions to a possible experience, and problematically dualistic. It refrained from moving from the perspective of the understanding to that of speculation. While Adorno’s critique is indebted to both Marx and Lukács, he uses Hegel most consistently in his writings on Kant. Below I will investigate the ways in which Adorno’s

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<sup>55</sup> This theme of philosophical activity versus its others will be discussed further below. For Adorno, the positive and negative aspects of Kant’s philosophy collide in the notion of the given, the irreducible, the foundation. “The search for the utterly first, the absolute cause, results in infinite regress. Infinity cannot be posited as given with a conclusion, even though this positing seems unavoidable to total spirit. The concept of the given, the last refuge of the irreducible in idealism, collides with the concept of spirit as complete reducibility, viz. with idealism itself. Antinomy explodes the system, whose only idea is the attained identity, which as anticipated identity, and finitude of the infinite, is not at one with itself” (ME 37/29-30). Kant at least showed that this attempt at an unconditioned form of knowledge is inherently contradictory (O’Connor 2004: 27-8).

critique differs from that of Hegel, in the course of coming to terms with his general Hegelian inheritance. As a first step, I'll discuss Adorno's positive use of Kant.

### 2.2 The "deepest thing in Kant:" the experience of the block

Adorno also takes pains to emphasize the continued value of Kant's philosophy for contemporary critical thought. According to Adorno, it is one of the hallmarks of Kant's philosophy that it illuminated the antinomies which result from this form of subjectivist, foundational philosophical procedure. This very recognition continues to enamor Adorno of Kant's philosophical perspective. For Adorno, the distinction between Kantian and post-Kantian idealism lies in this crucial recognition by Kant, if only unconsciously within his writings, that a systematic philosophy, a *prima philosophia*, is ultimately an untenable goal. Kant's saving grace is his continued reliance on the concept of the thing-in-itself. "[W]hile Kant does situate the unity of existing reality and also the concept of Being in the realm of consciousness, he simultaneously refuses to generate everything that exists from that realm of consciousness" (KK 33-4/18). Rather than a problem, Adorno sees this fundamental contradiction in Kant's philosophy as an important benefit. The recognition that there is a "block" to consciousness, a limit beyond which we simply may not go, is essential to Adorno's thought as well.

This block, which represents the fundamentally antinomical character of Kant's philosophy, is the "anti-idealist" element of Kant, and an inspiration for Adorno's own conception of materialism (ND 379/386). That the *constituens*, for instance, cannot be separated from the *constitutum*, is *both* recognized and denied by Kantian philosophy. In the Kantian conception, the block points to the *particular kind of experience* that Adorno wants to salvage. Although Kant valued the rationality of science, he understood

that it was not revealing “the ‘true’ essence of nature . . . [I]t is a *metaphysical experience* implicit in the doctrine of the block in the *Critique of Pure Reason* that the object of nature that we define with our categories is not actually nature itself. For our knowledge of nature is really so preformed by the demand that we dominate nature . . . that we end up understanding only those aspects of nature that we can control’ (KK 266/175-6; emphasis added). Here we can see the importance of the theme of alienation, and its essential link to a form of subjectivism. The importance does not lie ultimately in the cognitive sphere, but in alienation from nature as an *experience*. When we find that we are “alienated from what we are really looking for,” this constitutes an experience which “is hard to express in rational terms, because the sphere of rationality is the sphere that contradicts experience”. Adorno’s move beyond cognition to a variety of experience — a move which is “embedded” within Kant’s own work — becomes central for Adorno (KK 267/176).<sup>56</sup>

This Kantian block is clearly read by Adorno as the philosophical precursor to his own notion of the nonidentical: “it is a kind of metaphysical mourning, a kind of memory of what is best, of something that we must not forget, but that we are nevertheless compelled to forget” (KK 268/176). For Adorno, Kant represents an important stage in the dialectic of reason, because in his work the important metaphysical questions of philosophy — which have since been forgotten — remain to be discovered. Adorno goes so far as to say that the most central aspect of Kant’s philosophy is the idea of rupture

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<sup>56</sup> It is this experiential core which separates Kant sharply from the positivists, who recognize no such contradiction in our procedure of knowledge. Adorno notes that Kant’s philosophy was the last instance (before the analytical or “linguistic” turn, that is) of philosophy being in fundamental agreement with science. With Hegel, all of this went out the window. But in Kant, although he believed strongly in science, his thought retained antinomies which would not be tolerated by scientists or by positive thought in general.



(KK 270/178). One of the interesting aspects of this account, is that it is precisely the form of critique which cannot rely solely on a form of rationality, since a form of experience is at its heart. In this way, the dualisms which characterize Kantian philosophy are both *real*, and only *apparent*. The block on the achievement of an absolute knowledge, the fundamental limits on our thought, are real, but for Adorno they are related not to the transcendental structure of experience, but rather to our modern structure of society. Kant was right to find this sphere outside of the capacity of reason, but he erred when he legitimated it by securing its position too well. The Kantian block represents the “truth” of bourgeois society. It thus contains the central contradiction of Kant’s idealism within itself.

Adorno’s work thus ultimately relies upon a conception of the form of a society based upon exchange. Although his work is riven with implied analogies between forms of thought and social forms, he refrains from specification. Kant’s philosophy becomes an index of a contradictory society. The transcendental subject

has its reality in the immortalizing domination, attained through the principle of equivalence. The abstraction process, transformed by philosophy and only attributed to the perceiving [*erkennend*] subject, occurs in the actual [*tatsächlich*] exchange society. The determination of the transcendental as that of the necessary, which accompanies [*sich gesellen zu*] functionality and universality, expresses the principle of the self-preservation of the species. It provides the legal basis for the abstraction, without which it cannot proceed [*abgehen*]; it is the medium of self-sustaining [*selbsterhaltend*] reason (ND 180/178-9).

In plain terms, Kant’s transcendental subject serves as a form of legitimation for exchange society, since it institutes its form of abstraction. The cognitive and the social in this analysis are linked in an indeterminate way, as are the cognitive and the experiential. In the terms of his anthropological-material critique, Adorno suggests that

Kant's texts themselves encapsulate an experience which reflects, in some sense, both corporeal and social forms.

### 2.3 From the block to the nonidentical

The "block" that Adorno emphasizes in Kant's philosophy stands for the centrality and importance of what Adorno termed the "nonidentical." Both terms serve to provide a limit to reason, although we cannot simply read the nonidentical as the thing-in-itself. As Thyen emphasizes, interpreting the nonidentical as merely the nonconceptual gets us into trouble, for then we cannot make sense of Adorno's claim to use the power of the concept to break through conceptuality. Nonidentity instead defines a limitation of thought, the recognition of thought's inability to truly identify the object.

Nonidentity is not just the complement to identity, the other of identity. It is rather the constructive limit-concept [*Grenzbegriff*] of the conceptual, of identity itself. A positive determination is therefore presumably impossible, because *Negative Dialectics*, whose subject is mediation, cannot define the nonidentical as positive, utopian counter project to identity thought. Its program is something different: negative dialectic aims at the remembrance of what Hegel's formula of the "identity of identity and nonidentity" implied. If one grasps nonidentity as a moment of an open-ended reflection, then nonidentity moves conceptually close to that which negative dialectics means at its core. It is specified as the consistent consciousness of nonidentity (Thyen 1989, 198).

Nonidentity is the "limit of identity," and therefore cannot be separated from it (Stahl 2005, 180). Insofar as Adorno's critique of idealist philosophy is constituted by a critique of identity,<sup>57</sup> the concept of nonidentity lies at its center (as does the priority of the object, contrasted with idealism's priority of the subject).

Nonidentity has been examined as an expression for a collection of related concepts, such as "other," "foreign," "different," "nonconceptual," "particular," and "indissoluble" (Stahl 2005, 179; Guzzoni 1981, 105ff.; Thyen 1989, 204), which stem from Adorno's myriad uses of the term. However, the notion of the nonidentical as something which is

<sup>57</sup> This will be demonstrated in the next section.

fundamentally other can be misleading, as Thyen (1989) has emphasized. Adorno's use of the substantive may be partly to blame here. Yet he introduces the concept, in *Negative Dialectics*, in the context of the claim that "thinking means identifying," stating that "[d]ialectic is the consistent consciousness of nonidentity" (ND 17/5). Nonidentity signifies here the limits of identification; although thinking *is* identifying, there is always something that is not encompassed within this relationship of identity. If we choose to interpret this as a "remainder" — "[t]he smallest remnant [*Rest*] of nonidentity sufficed to deny the identity, which was total according to its concept" — as a "something," we are in fact identifying and hypostatizing (ND 33/22).

Against an ontological conception of nonidentity, Thyen argues persuasively that the dialectical mediation of identity and nonidentity means precisely that they are not independent of one another, in the way that the terms "conceptual" and "nonconceptual" are. "Nonidentity as a mode of cognition is remembrance that identity is not an ontological last; even more, that there is absolutely no last in the sense of a final principle, whether it is called identity or nonidentity" (Thyen 1989, 203). The distinction is crucial, for it relates centrally to the question of the status of Adorno's critical procedure, and its relationship to scientific or more rational forms of thought (Adorno's "identity thinking"). Yet this account also reminds us that Adorno's conception of nonidentity cannot be fully understood from within a Kantian framework. The very tendency to interpret the nonidentical on analogy with the thing-in-itself — although Adorno himself is guilty of this at times — stems from the occlusion of Hegel's own critique. The concept of nonidentity thus captures the immanent critique of Kant, and sets up Adorno's engagement with post-Kantian idealism. "What survives in Kant . . .

is . . . the memory of nonidentity. . . The construction of the thing in itself . . . is that of a nonidentical as the condition of possibility of identification, but also that which eludes categorial identification' (ND 286/290-1; translation modified). As a memory or remembrance of the priority of the object, the nonidentical captures a moment of what Adorno referred to a "metaphysical" or *geistig* experience.

Kant's philosophy, then, according to Adorno, contains a fundamental paradox, which is (paradoxically) its strength. The substance of this paradox is that the relationship between the knowing subject and its object is considered to be *constitutive*, in terms of the phenomenal appearance of the object, but nevertheless remains fundamentally incomplete, in the sense that the object in its noumenality remains forever uncaptured by the knowing subject. It is easy to see the appeal of this interpretation for Adorno, since his work is based upon the essentially nonidentical relationship between subject and object. In fact, it is the "subjective reduction" of the world which is in many ways the beginning point of Adorno's critique. To the extent that Kant attempted this, his philosophy went wrong; to the extent that he failed to fully achieve it, his philosophy should be retained as a model of thinking.

The transcendental abstraction must be relocated within its social and material context, otherwise, it will be "overcome [*ereilen*] by the forgotten" (ND 178/176). The remedy, in Adorno's terms, is the addition of a second reflection to the first, Kantian one. Kant takes experience and, through reflection, produces the transcendental; taking his initial cue from Hegel, Adorno reflects on the reflection and, through the negation of the negation, produces a subject which is *rematerialized* (rather than reconciled with the absolute). He attempts to reverse the abstraction, the attempt by the subject to make

itself autonomous; this is not an undoing, nor a sublation, but rather a further determinate negation. The subject is to recognize its continued reliance on its object. In the terms of the relationship of universal to particular, the particular (empirical subject) has become only an *exemplar* of the universal, a contingency, without any *necessary* relation to it. The universal effectively splits the particular into two: the part that it subsumes, and the part that is left over. “The particular reduces itself, as the other of the universal, to an indeterminate in-itself without relation to an other . . .” (Tichy 1977, 78). The claim to universality is the beginning focus of critical resistance. “Universality, itself a concept, comes thus to be conceptless and inimical to reflection; for the mind to perceive and to name that side of it is the first condition of resistance and a modest beginning of practice” (ND 337/344).

To the extent that Adorno seeks to transgress dualisms through a second reflection, his critical philosophy is the direct inheritor of the Hegelian dialectic. Although “[a]ntinomy explodes the system” of idealism (ME 37/29) — a crucial feature for philosophy, according to Adorno — Kant was not a witness to such an event. He thus missed the dialectical potential of contradiction. Hegel on the other hand, as we’ll see, made it in a sense *too* dialectical, in terms of too progressive or developmental. The alienation of subject from object, of universal from particular, can be witnessed from an Hegelian perspective.

### **3. Reading Adorno reading Hegel**

The reconciled condition would not annex the alien with philosophical imperialism; rather, [it] would have its happiness in [the fact] that, in the granted proximity, it remains the distant and different, beyond the heterogeneous and [beyond] its own (ND 192/191).

As we've seen, Adorno derives his critique of Kant directly from Hegel, although he also substantially modifies it. One of the advances of the Hegelian philosophy, if not the primary one, according to Adorno, is its ability to go beyond the mere formalism of the Kantian perspective. In the move from a subjective idealism to an objective or absolute one, philosophy began to speak about content once again, instead of just form. Although Adorno's writings are full of praise for Hegel's philosophical work, he also provides a substantive critique, in many ways modeled on those of Marx and Lukács. "Hegel had provided philosophy once again with the right and capacity to think substantially [*inhaltlich*], instead of putting itself off with the analysis of empty and, in an emphatic sense, void forms of knowledge. Where it even deals with the substantial at all, contemporary philosophy falls back either into the convenience of the *Weltanschauung*, or into that formalism, that "indifference" [*Gleichgültige*], against which Hegel had risen up" (ND 19/7; translation modified).<sup>58</sup> This move to "substantiveness" eliminates the problematic grounding of objectivity in subjectivity, that we saw in Kant; but the way that Hegel achieved this substantive perspective was through an identity of subject and object, which translates, for Adorno, into the unacceptable priority of the subject. The way in which consciousness can have access to its object (rather than just to the appearance of the object to consciousness) is by positing its identity. "For Hegel, the determinate particular was determinable from spirit, because its immanent determination must be nothing but spirit. Without this supposition, according to Hegel, philosophy would be incapable of recognizing [*erkennen*] that which is substantial and essential" (ND 19/7; translation modified). In Adorno's mind, Hegel has clearly erred

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<sup>58</sup> See also (H 306f./67f.), where Adorno claims that the contemporary relevance of Hegel's philosophy is exactly in this going beyond Kant to where philosophical knowledge has lost its limitations.

here, in that he has effectively canceled the supposed substantiveness of philosophy at the same time as he established it. This “materialist” perspective results in Adorno’s reading of the idealistic and ideological perspective of Hegelian philosophy in the social and historical realm. For Adorno, as we’ll see below, the turn toward content in philosophy must be achieved solely through negation.

Adorno’s claim is that his own critical moves come from *inside* the philosophy of Hegel, rather than simply making an abstract negation of his absolute idealism. He attempts to rescue the key category of the negative, the nonidentical, and the contradiction that it entails from the core of Hegel’s thought, against what he views as the turning point, at which Hegelian philosophy ultimately settled back upon identity (Jarvis 1998, 172). Adorno’s reading of Hegel will ultimately be grounded in paradox; he wants to keep the notion of the thing-in-itself from Kant, an effort which corresponds with his rejection of the Hegelian absolute through the reinstitution of a primary Kantian dualism; but he also wants to keep the critical moment of Hegelian dialectics, and he suggests that if Hegelian philosophy had remained true to itself, that it would have found its way to his own “negative” dialectics. But this is clearly wishful thinking. What we can observe in Adorno is a two-fold heritage from Hegel: 1) the notion of critique, of determinate negation, which is the heart of the dialectic that Adorno finds so crucial; but also 2) the notion of the absolute, which Adorno will appropriate through Marx for his understanding of modern society. But there is a third point, which is that Adorno believes the radical moment of Hegel comes *through* his conception of absolute idealism, not despite it. We cannot just take the method and leave the system, as some thought we

could. Adorno knows this is not possible. But then how do we come to terms with his understanding of Hegel?

As I've already noted, the crucial significance of Hegelian idealism for Adorno lies precisely in its transgression of the Kantian block, its attempt to remove the barriers to thinking the absolute which were postulated by Kant. It may not be immediately apparent why such a move *back* to idealism from this "anti-idealist" moment of Kantian philosophy should be so important for Adorno's critical materialist philosophical perspective. But it is the very connection which Hegel finds between subject and object which is crucial for Adorno, although this is paradoxically the very motor of what he considers to be an untenable and ultimately ideological Hegelian idealism.

"The first lesson that Adorno took from Hegel is that philosophical categories preserve societal and historical experience" (Bernstein 2006, 90). In this way, Adorno appropriated a level of "second reflection" from Hegel, through which philosophical concepts were examined, in order to gauge their appropriateness to their subject matter (Walsh 1987, 212). However, as we'll see, this claim brings its own set of theoretical difficulties. The general idea of Adorno's critique of Hegel is to take his "positive dialectic" and recoup from it a more critical "negative dialectic." Although this claim is stated simply enough, there is no simple relationship between these two forms.

"Adorno's idea of negative dialectic is not a simple reversal of Hegel, another attempt brusquely to 'stand the dialectic on its feet' . . . Adorno attempts to prevent a dialectical thinking of which he takes Hegel to be the outstanding exponent from freezing into a method or a world-view and thereby becoming, precisely, undialectical" (Jarvis 1998, 168). The idea is more to take the critical, negative potential of the (early) Hegel, and



take it down another path, one that avoids the later Hegel's conservative turn; such a move will involve an attempted reconceptualization of the relationship between concepts and concrete history.

Adorno ostensibly understands the logistical difficulties in appropriating Hegel's work: it cannot be taken piecemeal, artificially separating a method from the system; and it clearly cannot be taken in its systematic entirety. Although the initial point is that forms of reason and rationality must be situated socially and historically, it is decisive for Adorno's philosophy that it begins from an engagement with Hegel's claims about logic and epistemology, rather than his social and political thought (Jarvis 1998, 169; Rose 1978, 58). He does not, for example, just want to excise the radical dialectical "method" of Hegel and leave the metaphysical Hegel behind. Rather, he wants to critically examine the *spirit* of Hegel's philosophy, and to find its key. Adorno's reading of Hegel engages most positively with the work of the early Hegel, primarily in the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*, against his critical reading of the *Realphilosophie* of the later Hegel — especially the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Philosophy of History*. The key categories that Adorno appropriates from the early phenomenological Hegel are those of dialectic, mediation, and experience, which of course are all closely interrelated. Adorno wants to rescue the *critical intention* of Hegel, but to leave his actual *employment* of it — especially in the social-historical realm — aside.

In the following discussion I use Adorno's theoretical relationship with Hegel as a means of articulating Adorno's own social-philosophical categories. This analysis will then highlight the fact that Adorno's struggles to articulate his philosophical position relative to German idealism result in his own sociological aporiae. My discussion takes

the form of a series of examinations of Hegelian themes which have been reconfigured by Adorno to suit his own concerns. Throughout, we should keep in mind Bernstein's (1997a) caution that Adorno should not be read as a naïve commentator on Hegel. This is an important consideration, because, at times, Adorno's linguistic style can make his critique seem more simplistic than it is.

### 3.1 Dialectic and speculation

Adorno clearly takes his key category of the dialectic from his reading of Hegel (and Marx). The notion of the dialectic, Adorno argues, is the "epitome of Hegel's philosophy" (H 258/9). As I discussed in the previous chapter, in the Hegelian conception of dialectic, thinking is *negation*, rather than simply an operation that follows transcendental rules (H 304/64; see EL §12R). Although he largely agrees with Hegel on this count, in his articulation and employment of the "negative dialectic," Adorno attempts to divorce dialectic from the corresponding notion of speculation – a move that isn't possible from Hegel's own perspective.

Adorno agrees with Hegel that "[t]he central nerve of the dialectic as a method is determinate negation" (H 318/80). As the central nerve, the procedure of determinate negation aims directly at the object of thought itself. Rather than subsuming the object under some classificatory rules of thought, it attempts to recognize the fundamental *priority* of the object. Such an attempt is valued by Adorno because it goes beyond the attempt by the subject to deceive itself about its own hegemony. In Adorno's reading, by recognizing the priority of the object, the subject necessarily puts itself in check; but this leads, for Adorno, to the continuation, rather than the resolution, of antagonism. For Adorno, this contradiction is not "the vehicle of complete identification," but rather 'the

*organon* of its impossibility' (ND 156/153). In other words, the very emphasis on nonidentity over the identifications of thought signifies the *reality* of contradiction, which philosophy cannot, and should not try to, overcome. In terms of the Hegelian schema of the dialectic, Adorno notes that it is his own intention to explicitly deemphasize the moment of "synthesis;" instead, he wants to capture the "inner structure" of thought (VND 16/6), rather than merely deducing how it is regulated. The commitment to contradiction and the rejection of synthesis, is Adorno's way of emphasizing "the way in which, as Hegel used to express it, the concept moves towards its opposite, the non-conceptual" (VND 17/6).

This is quite clearly a selective reading of Hegel. Although his concepts are difficult to pin down, we can consider two aspects of his category of negation. As discussed above, the concept of negation for Hegel can mean something like determination, as in the negative activity of the "I" as self-determining, an "immediately negative self-relation" (EG §413). In the context of his *Logic*, Hegel breaks "the logical" down into the three moments of (a) the abstract understanding; (b) the "dialectical or negatively rational" moment; and (c) the "speculative or positively rational" moment (EL §79). Although the distinction between the negatively rational and positively rational moments of the logical isn't an important feature of his philosophical system as a whole, Hegel here refers to the negative moment of the dialectic as "the soul of all genuinely scientific cognition" (EL §81). Working with the results of the understanding consciousness, the dialectical process is a negation and "immanent transcending" of the one-sidedness of its determinations. The speculative moment is then the "apprehension of the unity of the determinations in their opposition" (EL §82). Although this analysis may help to

understand Adorno's motivation for his proposed negative dialectics, it arguably mischaracterizes Hegel's own view. Insofar as negation for Hegel is *determinate* negation, it always in fact has a positive moment.<sup>59</sup>

Like Marx, Adorno wants to give the dialectic a "materialist" twist, though he is clear to differentiate this from any form of actually existing "dialectical materialism." For Adorno, Hegel's idealism remained ultimately idealist, because it remained premised on the priority of the subject, as demonstrated by the dialectical synthesis of the concept. In the move to the priority of the subject, Hegel, in Adorno's opinion, did not adequately maintain his critical negativity, and his philosophy ultimately became a "positive dialectics." In other words, Adorno cannot locate enough resources for his "nonidentical" within Hegel's account of dialectical philosophy. He claims that the negation of the negation will not suffice – it is an affirmation (ND 161/158). The process which leads the negation of the negation into positivity is criticized by Adorno as fundamentally at odds with the *spirit* of the dialectic, and as contradicting the youthful inclinations of Hegel.<sup>60</sup>

The negated is negative, until it passes away [*vergehen*]. This breaks decisively from Hegel. On the other hand, to smooth out the dialectical contradiction, the expression of

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. The *Science of Logic*:

The one thing needed to *achieve scientific progress* – and it is essential to make an effort at gaining this quite *simple* insight into it – is the recognition of the logical principle that negation is equally positive, or that what is self-contradictory does not resolve itself into a nullity, into abstract nothingness, but essentially only into the negation of its *particular* content; or that such a negation is not just negation, but is *the negation of the determined fact* which is resolved, and is therefore determinate negation; that in the result there is therefore contained in essence that from which the result derives – a tautology indeed, since the result would otherwise be something immediate and not a result. Because the result, the negation, is a *determinate* negation, it has a *content*. (WL /33).

<sup>60</sup> Adorno makes it clear that his vision of the relentless negativity of negation stems from his reading of the *Phenomenology*: "The Hegelian synthesis is throughout an insight into the insufficiency of that movement, into its production costs. It solidly achieved the consciousness of the negative essence of the dialectical logic which he undertook as early as in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology*. Its imperative – to merely watch such a concept until it begins to move, by virtue of its own meaning, its identity, becoming unidentical with itself – is one of analysis, not synthesis" (ND 159/156).

the indissoluble nonidentical, through identity, is to ignore what it conveys, to return to pure consistent thought. That the negation of the negation is something positive, can only be asserted by one who presupposes positivity, as all-conceptuality, from the beginning (ND 162/160; my translation).

This decisive break is required because of Hegel's unjustified philosophical assumptions; he presupposes the absolute, an identity which must always be rediscovered.

Adorno's critique here depends importantly on his analysis of social reality. We could say quite simply that the negativity or irreconcilability of Adorno's thought is based upon his experience and understanding of contemporary society. He views any movement towards reconciliation with an objective, institutional reality is in effect a *capitulation* to a wrong reality (VND 27f./14f.). Although Hegel's idea of the falsity of the abstract individual, its necessary interrelationship with the objective social totality, was foundational for social thought and the theory of society, with the theory of reconciliation he in fact underestimated the alienated character of society. Modern society is doomed to remain "pure externality" according to its essence; or at least it may not be reconciled through the actions of the individual subject. For Adorno, any attempted reconciliation of the subject with objectivity presupposes that this objectivity "must itself be in the right" (VND 31/16).

Adorno thus argues that it is the third movement of any particular stage of the dialectic which is so problematic. The "ascent," which constitutes the progress of the Hegelian dialectic, approaches the perspective of the absolute, overcoming all particulars. But for Adorno, this dialectical progression reflects in fact the *domination of the subject*, which it also simultaneously hides; the contradictions which have arisen between the subject and the object become inscribed in the object itself.

Irreconcilably, the idea of reconciliation forbids its affirmation in the concept. If it is objected that the critique of the positive negation of the negation injures the vital nerve of

Hegel's logic and allows absolutely no more dialectical movement, then this is restricted, through trust in authority, to Hegel's self-conception. The construction of his system would unquestionably collapse without that principle; dialectic has its experience-content not in this principle but rather in the *resistance of the other*, against identity. Hence its power [*Gewalt*]. Subject is also embedded in this, insofar as its real domination produces contradictions; but these seep into the object. Ascribing dialectic purely to the subject, [it] removes the contradiction through itself, [and] removes the dialectic also, in that it is expanded to the totality. It arose, for Hegel, in the system, but does not have its measure therein (ND 163/160-1; my translation; emphasis added).

In other words, in Adorno's estimation, it is only from within Hegel's own vision of the dialectic that the severing of the moment of reconciliation proves fatal to the dialectic. From the perspective of Adorno, the "experience-content" of the dialectic lies in the moment of resistance, the experience of thought as negation, not that of reconciliation. And so the "vital nerve" of the dialectic is expressed in this moment of contradiction, and the move towards reconciliation is the move *back* towards the domination of the subject, away from the resistance of the object, because it is the subject itself which achieves it.<sup>61</sup>

This is a crucial distinction which may be difficult to grasp. While Hegel's own concept of experience is centered upon the subject's consciousness of its own relation to its objects, and its corresponding progressive development, Adorno wants to claim that *true* dialectical experience is instead based upon the permanence and ubiquity of contradiction. While Hegel's subject is on its way to the recognition of itself in its object, Adorno's counterpart is — like that of Kant — bound for a disappointment, in that it will come to the realization that this recognition is always only partial. One of the keys here is that, for Adorno, the path to Hegelian conceptuality is therefore blocked. I will discuss the impact of this further below.

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<sup>61</sup> Simon Jarvis captures this point nicely: "For Adorno dialectic is thought's repeated experience of its inability finally to identify what is non-identical to it. So far from being an experience which is only made possible by the 'identity of identity and non-identity' . . . this is an experience which is only made possible by the *non-identity* of identity and non-identity, by the fact that identity and non-identity are not the same. Non-identity, more radically than identity, makes dialectical experience possible" (1998, 173).

Crucially, a negative dialectics recognizes the contradictory or antagonistic nature of the totality, and this is what Adorno believes separates it from Hegelian dialectics. The persisting contradiction “is the index of the untruth of identity, of the realization of the comprehended in the concept.” Since thinking is an identification, identity “appears” in thought. “Conceptual order contentedly veils that which thought wants to understand” (ND 17/5; my translation). The “conceptual totality” is structured according to our formal logic, and therefore reflects its limits. Contradiction is then the nonidentity that is implicit within this system of identity. In Adorno’s vision, we simply begin with our own thoughts, and we are moved towards their inadequacy; thought is compelled in a dialectical direction by its “inevitable insufficiency, its guilt about what it thinks” (ND 17-8/5-6; my translation). This dialectical movement of consciousness is familiar from the *Phenomenology*, but Adorno wants to re-situate it within a “real” totality — that is, society — a move which he believes will prevent the subjective identifications of Hegel’s system from winning out. The despair of the experiencing consciousness that Hegel described so potently is merely the expression of a larger despair, the pain of the “administered world,” “raised to a concept” (ND 18/6).<sup>62</sup>

For Adorno, then, dialectics is the recognition of the necessary *inadequacy* of thought, and Hegel is accordingly criticized for his presumption of the attainment of an “absolute” knowledge, which relies on his *presupposition* of an all-encompassing absolute (ND 164/160). The ultimate acceptance of the identity of identity and non-

<sup>62</sup> One can appreciate the ambiguities of Adorno’s language here. With his style of writing, and his continuous engagement with different philosophical perspectives (sometimes acknowledged and sometimes implicit) it can be exceedingly difficult to interpret such a significant concept as “concept.” Adorno often appears to be using such a term according to Hegel’s own distinction between formal and speculative reason; but then his critique can seem to imply a lack of self-understanding on Hegel’s part with regard to his own perspective. As a result, Adorno may easily appear to be have a naive understanding and critique of Hegel; or he may be seen as attempting to “use Hegel against Hegel.”

identity is at the heart of the problem. This is correlated with the *real* nature of contradiction, the antagonistic whole. The particulars, which Hegel took joy in overcoming as isolated and partial, represent for Adorno the critical persistence of contradiction. Hegel's "circular" methodology, his systematic philosophy, must presuppose the totality before it even begins, and for Adorno this invalidates it, as based upon the indefensible claim that the truth is the whole. Such a claim admits the ultimate *spiritual* and *absolute* nature of the totality, which in turn reflects a "fetishistic" perspective on the concept as in itself a "self-sufficient totality" (ND 23/11). The recognition by consciousness of the necessary yet problematic identifications of thought is the recognition of the contradiction between concept and object, between subject and object, and this in turn admits the fundamental *heteronomy* of the concept, its necessary dependency on the nonconceptual. This is the move from the domination of the subject to the "priority of the object."

The priority of the subject is cognition via identity, while the priority of the object is the consciousness of nonidentity. Yet Adorno's precise understanding of Hegelian identity is difficult to puzzle out. He clearly understands it as a form of *speculation*, and believes "that what makes speculative identity speculative, rather than merely abstract, is its continued reliance on the experience of difference. He repeatedly stresses Hegel's insistence that absolute knowing is nothing without the process which leads up to it" (Jarvis 1998, 170; see ND 379/386). This understanding of speculation is imperative for sufficiently grasping Hegel's work, and it initiates a distinction between propositional claims and their truth content. Adorno's analysis of the copula stems directly from Hegel. The proposition of identity can state a formal form of truth, but not a speculative



one. When the claim is made that “A is B,” this expresses the identity of A and B, but it misses their nonidentity; or rather, it cannot express both at once. As Hegel emphasizes, “the proposition, in the form of a *judgment*, is not adept to express speculative truths” (WL 1:93/67). Its formal truth relies on a process of abstraction from the multiple “determinatenesses” of the subject of the sentence. In other words, the (formal) *form* of the proposition does not match the (speculative) *content* of the proposition.

This appears to be Adorno’s point, as well as Hegel’s. The difference comes in terms of the *result* of the dialectical reflection. In his discussion of “pure being” and “pure nothing” in the first chapter of the *Science of Logic*, Hegel notes that the trouble with the formal proposition which states the identity of being and nothing is contradictory – it has “movement” – because it attempts to simultaneously express their identity and nonidentity. This type of contradictory expression is impossible with the proposition. The speculative content could be expressed by the combination of the proposition and its negation, but this creates a problem in that the propositions would not be connected, would “present their content only in an antinomy,” while their content itself is identical. Hegel’s solution is to bring together the determinations of the propositions, to unite them “absolutely – in a union which can then only be said to be an *unrest* of simultaneous *incompatibles*, a *movement*” (WL 1:94/67). The movement is of course that of *becoming*, which represents another way of attempting to articulate the speculative content. The distinction between “pure being” and “pure nothing” is “empty,” according to Hegel, because each is pure and hence completely indeterminate. “[T]he distinction depends, therefore, not on them but on a third element, on *intention*. But intention is a form of subjectivity, and subjectivity does not belong to the present order

of exposition. The third element in which being and nothing have their subsistence must however also be present here; and it is present indeed, it is *becoming*” (WL 1:95/68).

What results is a *unity* of moments. From the perspective of the understanding, unity is a “subjective reflection,” as expression of “*abstract* sameness.” But the *third* which results from the dialectical motion is *not* merely an abstraction; it has “various empirical shapes” (WL 1:97/69). The key is in the *recognition of the being of consciousness in the world*; consciousness does not exist in isolated abstraction from its content (WL 1:103/74). The copula is the attempt to unify thought and the world. Although “there is never a neat resolution to the meaning of the copula, the ‘is’ or ‘and’ that binds together logic and nature or logic and spirit” (Hutchings 2006, 106), Adorno believes that this is not emphasized enough in Hegel’s work. He wants to keep speculation in terms of the interconnection between form and content, but rejects the speculative unity of logic and spirit that goes with it.

Hegel’s version of speculative thinking holds that contradiction may obtain “objectively,” and so thought has no right to rule it out. This is the position that Adorno wants to follow; but, while getting his inspiration for the objectivity of contradiction from Hegel, he at the same time wants to go beyond it. Hegel identified the objectivity of contradiction, but, while it served as the motor of the dialectic, it ultimately brought that dialectic to a standstill in the absolute. In contemporary society, “objective contradiction . . . weighs more heavily than for Hegel, who first sighted it” (ND 155-6/153; my translation). The change that Adorno alludes to here consists in the vast difference between human experience in contemporary society, in relation to that of Hegel’s era. Hegel could delude himself that the reconciliation of contradiction was

possible in the absolute, because the experience of contradiction was not as severe as it is in Adorno's time. In the contemporary world, "[e]xperience denies, to that which appears contradictory, reconciliation in the unity of consciousness" (ND 155/152; my translation). Adorno's critique accordingly seeks those contradictions which *cannot* be eliminated in thought.

Adorno's own category of the nonidentical then takes its direct inspiration from Hegel's understanding of speculation, of dialectical movement. His complaint is ultimately that Hegel's philosophy could not live up to its own dialectical standards. Adorno's rhetorical style makes an analytical presentation of his conceptual content challenging. At the risk of some repetition, I would like to now re-approach the postulation of the nonidentical against Hegelian identity from the perspective of a couple of key concepts. The first is what Adorno terms "compulsory substantiality," what we could call "materialism;" the second is "mediation;" and the third the "particular." The discussion of these concepts I believe is essential in fully fleshing out Adorno's relationship to idealism.

### 3.2 The "compulsory substantiality" of subject and object

Despite the Kantian tone of what we've seen so far of his critique, Adorno does not simply impeach Hegel for an out of touch idealist method; rather, he praises Hegel's philosophy explicitly for moving towards a concreteness or "substantiality" [*Sachhaltigkeit*] that he believes could never be illuminated through the formalism of Kant. In his analysis, rather than accepting the limitations that Kant put on reason, Hegel refused to be intimidated by them (H 252/2, 306-7/67). He thus emphasizes that Hegel's philosophy is a move away from the *pure* epistemological perspective of Kant,

away from the merely transcendental characteristics of knowledge. With the negation of the separation of form from content, Hegel brought the *content* of thought itself within the purview of philosophy; the concrete material was then open to it. With Hegel, “[p]hilosophy acquires the right and accepts the duty to appeal to material moments originating in the real life process of socialized human beings as essential and not merely contingent” (H 306/67). The important point here for Adorno is that Hegel has performed this move *through his method of critique*. He has not simply shifted to a “realistic frame of mind” [*realistische Sinnesart*] (H 253/3), but rather has concentrated the power of idealism and brought it to the material. Therefore the concrete, material moment should not be thought of as something which is sought *outside of* idealism, but within it.

This issue is at the heart of the relationship between thought and reality, as well as that between Hegel’s philosophical “method” and its subject matter. Adorno puts this point as follows: “Hegel’s substantive insights . . . are *produced by speculation*, and they lose their substance as soon as they are conceived as *merely empirical*” (H 253/2-3; emphasis added). As we’ve seen, the substance of Hegel’s “absolute idealism” is the speculative identity of form and content, and of thought and being. This can seem a paradoxical source of material knowledge, but Adorno finds just the opposite. Beginning with the subjective, finite understanding, Hegel created a ladder leading to the absolute; Adorno, on the other hand, seeks something like a trap-door, or an escape hatch, that allows the subject access to its other, without ever acknowledging the absolute which encompasses them. Perhaps a better way to put this is that the Adornian subject identifies the absolute as ideology, as constituted by the exchange society.

Adorno, however, seems to waver on his interpretation of the absolute, at times referring to the “suspended” quality of Hegelian philosophy (H 261/13), and at others declaring that Hegel, by considering that absolute to be developed through the motion of the finite itself rather than as something existing *a priori*, has avoided a “leap” into the absolute that Adorno notes was characteristic of Schelling and others (H 254/5). While the inconsistency is characteristic of Adorno, we can consider this an indication of the significance of Hegelian thought for his philosophy, and of his struggle to “liberate” the dialectic from idealism.

The problem is similar to that of the positive result of the negation of the negation, which we encountered above. Hegel’s idealism approaches a materialism *through its very character as idealism*. In Hegel’s version of a “total knowledge,” he considers that “every one-sided judgment intends, by its very form, the absolute” (H 255/6). This idea is, somewhat paradoxically, essential for Adorno:

Speculative idealism does not recklessly disregard the limits of the possibility of knowledge; rather, it searches for words to express the idea that a reference to truth as such is in fact inherent in all knowledge that is knowledge; that if it is to be knowledge at all and not a mere duplication of the subject, knowledge is more than merely subjective . . . In proper Hegelian terms one might say — at the same time altering him in crucial respects through interpretation that subjects him to a further round of reflection — that it is precisely the construction of the absolute subject in Hegel that does justice to an objectivity indissoluble in subjectivity (H 255/6).

Knowledge must go beyond mere subjectivity, which it may do by finding the objectivity inherent in it. While Kant regressed towards the transcendently objective, Hegel proceeded outwards, towards the absolute.

The individual, finite judgments that comprise the understanding, must in fact find their way to the absolute if they are to constitute any form of objectivity. Adorno believes that the key to avoiding this subject-duplication is for the individual subject to follow

Hegel's prescription in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* to achieve a method of "mere watching" [*reines Zusehen*] of the object (PG §85). According to Adorno, by means of this method, "Hegel is able to think from the thing itself out, to surrender passively, as it were, to its authentic substance" (but he also notes that this is only possible "by virtue of the system") (H 255/6). This passivity, or receptivity, on the part of the subject implies a "respect for the specific, comprehending which means nothing other than obeying its own concept" (H 256/7).

However, the passivity of the subject to which Adorno wants to adhere, while designed to oppose the autonomous spontaneity of the Kantian transcendental subject, can be easily misunderstood. It is not intended to be a submission to the empirical object, as with a presumably subject-less empiricism, but rather a form of waiting, or "prioritization." The priority of the object does not imply a purely passive consciousness, but rather one that is constrained (ethically, if not epistemologically) by the particularity of the object. As discussed above, the Adornian subject does not constitute the object, it is the object's "agent" (SO 752). Such a role requires an attention to the nonidentity between subject and object, as well as an understanding of the subject's own role in perpetuating it. Adorno's understanding of the relationship between subject and object results in a seeming bifurcation of consciousness, but rather than a naïve consciousness and a "scientific" one, Adorno's theory gives rise to a reified and a critical consciousness.

To illustrate the distinction between the Hegelian and Adornian schemas here, consider the relationship of the naïve subject of consciousness and its object. In both cases, this natural consciousness begins, through reflection, to question its own relationship to its object. In Hegel's case, the subject overcomes the immediate

“objectivity” of the object, its in-itselfness, and realizes that it is only in-itself for-consciousness; it discovers its own role in negating or determining its object, and such a recognition results in a transformation of both subject and object, which Hegel refers to as *experience*. Although the subject does not constitute its object in a Kantian sense (i.e., transcendentally), it does play an essential, active role in its determination.

It is Hegel’s conception of the activity of the subject that Adorno cannot abide; Adorno’s subject is active in a very different way. The reified subject of consciousness must become conscious of its fundamental *nonidentity* with its object, and it does so through its own thoughtful activity. This movement is motivated not by a desire for reconciliation, but rather through a very bodily experience of suffering. While this is a mode of self-reflection, and a rejection of the immediacy of the given,

The effort implied in the concept of thought itself, as the counterpart of passive contemplation, is negative already – a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing. Critical germs are contained in judgment and inference, the thought forms without which not even the critique of thought can do: they are never determinate without simultaneously excluding what they have failed to achieve (ND 19).

In this way, Adorno focuses on the “failure” of thought to achieve identity with its objects through judgment. The key to the subject’s activity is then recognition of a visceral rejection of its “natural” state of reification; an “unconscious tendency” becomes conscious. The subject’s activity is negative in the sense that it plays a fundamental role in the *prevention* of continued identification. In characteristically paradoxical fashion, such an activity is also a form of passivity, yet requires “the most intense efforts on the part of the concept” (H 256/7), because, as we’ve seen, it is part of the “nature” of subjectivity to identify, to project itself onto the object. For Adorno, this *Zusehen* is the attempt to rescue the spirit of dialectical analysis from the disaster of its synthesis.

Adorno's misinterpretation of Hegel here is instructive. Hegel's discussion of the procedure of *Zuschauen* is part of his critique of Kantian epistemology, but he uses it to emphasize the *internal* character of the criterion. We could say that Hegel's subject is watching the "concept" here, while Adorno's is primarily watching the thing, the object. At the center of Hegel's argument is the claim that the concept and the object are both present within the subject, within consciousness. The "movement" that occurs stems from consciousness's recognition that what it took to be an object in-itself is really an object in-itself for consciousness. In this way, a *new object* arises. For Adorno, by contrast, the object, or thing, is allowed to speak through the efforts of consciousness. These efforts, however, according to Adorno, do not involve recognition of the identity of thought and being, but rather a recognition of the limitations of the concepts of which consciousness makes use.

Adorno's point here is that he has taken from Hegel the recognition that, since the object is always already *mediated by spirit* (H 256/7), that since the "given," with which the subject is confronted, is *already concept* (ND 156f./153f.), the subject needs to be passive through its own exertion, because this is the only way to truly grasp it as what it is, rather than merely seeing it subjectively, through identification. Adorno's stated reliance on Hegel for this recognition is puzzling; one interpretation is that Hegel is more significant for Adorno *rhetorically* than *theoretically*. "Because as Hegel conceives it all phenomena . . . are inherently spiritually mediated, what is needed in order to grasp them is not thought but rather the relationship for which the phenomenology of a hundred years later invented the term 'spontaneous receptivity.' The thinking subject is to be released from thought, since thought will rediscover itself in the object thought; it



has only to be developed out of the object and to identify itself in it” (H 369/140). In this context, Adorno is making a point about Hegel’s disinterest in forms of argument, but the two points are importantly related, and will allow me to make a crucial distinction between Adorno’s style of expression and its theoretical content.

Hegel’s philosophy requires “the most extreme efforts” of thought, but it *also* “moves within the medium of a thought freed from tension” (H 370/141). Adorno takes his own approach to the linguistic expression of philosophy from Hegel’s model. Consciousness moves into a state of “relaxation” and allows itself to open up to “associations.” This works successfully for his own critical style of philosophical writing; but it causes other problems. Adorno’s intellectual subject encounters the texts of Hegel as its object, and it moves ethically in the direction of relaxation. But the further claim is that what is given is always already mediated, “spiritually mediated,” which implies that the relaxation of thought opens itself up in the direction of spirit. Adorno effectively makes his roughly-Marxian interpretation of spirit work for him here; while the nonidentical that he seeks is precisely filtered out of a pre-established mediation of subject and object, Adorno at this point excises the absolute, reducing spirit to “the objective dynamic of society” (H 256/8). The confusion is compounded by his retention of the Hegelian language: spirit/society is always already “concept.”

Just what the notion of the object as always already mediated by society as spirit is supposed to do for us theoretically will be uncovered, gradually, in what follows. For now, I would like to emphasize the significance of the concept of spirit, and the ways in which it is *translated* from a Hegelian to an Adornian idiom. Adorno’s move away from Kant’s dualism of subject and object, to the dialectical mediation of subject and object in

Hegel, is a move from Kantian subjectivity to Hegelian “spirit”-uality, which correlates with a move from a merely “subjective experience” to a form of “spiritual experience.” Two dimensions should be pointed out here: the “compulsory substantiality” that Adorno’s version of philosophy incorporates from Hegel, through the shift from subject to spirit, reconfigures the *relationship* between consciousness and its object, but it also, consequently, fundamentally alters the *nature* of both subject and object. The subject is now materially and ontologically grounded; it is not abstract and formal as in Kantian philosophy. The object is also uncovered in its *materiality*, and in particular this contains both a material (physical) axis as well as a social (conceptual) one. The particular object is linked to totality and universality in two basic ways: through a social mediation of labour, and through a mediation by consciousness, which employs concepts and language that are always already socially mediated. It is this duality that is responsible for some of Adorno’s most perplexing passages, in which a conception of the relationship between “spheres” of society and knowledge is key. The confusion stems, I believe, from a conflation of two dynamics: that of the part and the whole, and that of the subject and the object. Each of these corresponds to a different dimension of the “object” or the “nonidentical,” as well as to a conception of “spirit.”<sup>63</sup>

To return to the “compulsory substantiality” of the subject-object relationship, the theoretical innovation Adorno attributes to Hegel, we can see that Adorno’s

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<sup>63</sup> This situation necessarily alters the conception of philosophy and its object. If it must bring in content, rather than attempting to isolate its discussion to form, then this implies that philosophy’s self-image as a discipline which is “internal” to reason must be discarded. The relationship between philosophy and the special or individual sciences, with which Adorno was concerned from the time of his inaugural lecture, is traditionally characterized as if philosophy provided theoretical reason and access to validity claims, while the sciences handled the “extra-philosophical” empirical. “Philosophical analysis encounters immanently, within the supposedly pure concept and its truth content, the ontical, before which the purity-claim cringes, and which it, trembling arrogantly, assigns to the individual sciences” (ND 141-2/138; my translation).

interpretation relies upon an selective reading of Hegel. Adorno wants to claim that Hegel's work provides a model for philosophy overcoming its abstractness; however, this "material" moment of Hegel's idealism relies upon the Hegelian understanding of the identity of subject and object, and cannot easily be translated into Adorno's framework. Adorno instead retains a commitment to Hegelian idealism due to his own understanding of the "conceptuality" of the object; yet the subject's own activity in relation to its object should be seen as a refusal to remain content with its own role. Hegel has brought the subject and object together substantially, but ignored or misunderstood, according to Adorno, the need for the subject's resistance to its own task.

### 3.3 Mediation and foundationlessness

As O'Connor (1999) has identified, the concept of mediation is essential to Adorno's thought.<sup>64</sup> However, providing a reasonable degree of specificity to the term requires some work. We have seen already Adorno's hostility to the idea of anything "first," or primary, in philosophy. This first, as an immediate, denies the ubiquity of mediation (ME 15/7). The concept of mediation refers to that by which the subject and object are connected, as are all of the conceptual dualisms that Hegel and Adorno criticized in Kant. In the previous section I discussed Adorno's claim that philosophy finds its "substantiality" through the subject's mediation with the object. Here I focus on the character of this mediation. "[D]ialectic means nothing other than insisting on the

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<sup>64</sup> O'Connor claims that the concept of mediation is in fact the most central concept for Adorno, despite the fact that it remains "equivocal" in the work of both Hegel and Adorno. While I will not investigate the concept in as much analytical detail as he has, I agree that, at least for Adorno, the concept is too "adaptable." O'Connor errs, however, in finding only two significant axes for the concept of mediation in Adorno, "subject-object mediation" and "conceptual mediation." Part of my task here is to argue that Adorno relies heavily on a third sense of mediation, a "social mediation," which, although it is constituted by the relationship between the particular, or individual, and the universal, cannot be reduced to O'Connor's "subject-object mediation."

mediation of what appears to be immediate and on the reciprocity of immediacy and mediation as it unfolds on all levels” (CM 11).<sup>65</sup>

Adorno is fond of referencing Hegel in his claim that “there is nothing between heaven and earth that is not mediated” (NL1 20; see also KK 275/181; H 298/57), a claim which follows directly from the central place that Adorno accords the dialectic. While we could derive a similar claim from the substance of Hegel’s philosophy, Adorno’s use goes beyond the merely Hegelian idea of mediation. One of the advantages of the Hegelian terminology for Adorno is that with it he utilizes what he calls, in relationship to the concept of dialectic, its “double-character.” Dialectic is “both a method of thought, but also more, namely a determinate structure of the thing [*Sache*]” (EDi 9). The same holds for mediation, contradiction, etc. But the Hegelian heritage is also problematic here, since Adorno never clarifies exactly in which sense this double character is intended. In arguing that everything is mediated, Adorno refers not just to conceptual mediation, but also to a social mediation, which stems from the nature of capitalist society. While Hegel’s concept of mediation arguably applies both to a conceptual mediation and to an historical version, these are not strictly separated, due to the systematic nature of his philosophy. For Adorno, on the other hand, social mediation is a form of historical mediation, but it is also different.

Adorno’s idea of a “mediation through objectivity” goes beyond Hegel’s idea of the movement of the concept. The question in a sense is the nature of mediation as it concerns the nonidentical.

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<sup>65</sup> “[T]he point about dialectics is not to negate the concept of fact in favour of mediation, or to exaggerate that of mediation; it is simply to say that immediacy is itself mediated but that the concept of the immediate must still be retained” (VGF 32-3/21).

The mediation of essence and appearance, of concept and object [*Sache*], also does not remain as it was, the moment of subjectivity in the object. What the facts mediate is not so much the subjective mechanism, which preformed and grasped them, as the *objectivity behind that which it can experience*, which is heteronomous to the subject. It refuses to surrender to the primary subjective sphere of experience, is prior to it. In the subjective mechanisms of mediation, it extends to the objectivity, in which any subject, even the transcendental, is harnessed. The pre-subjective order, which for its part essentially constitutes the epistemologically-constituting subjectivity, ensures that the data, according to their requirement, are apperceived in this way and not otherwise' (ND 172-3/170-1; my translation; emphasis added).

The idea of an objectivity which lies beyond the realm of experience, reminiscent of the thing-in-itself, becomes central to the negative dialectic, and at times appears to define the nonidentical itself. In terms of society, this split within the “concept,” of subjectivity and objectivity, is reproduced. In other words, the priority of the object is socially and historically (materially) determined, and the subject is therefore deformed by its determination with the social system. “The superiority of what is objectified in subjects, which prevented them from becoming subjects, inhibits also the knowledge of the objective [*das Objektive*]; this is what became of what once was called the ‘subjective factor’. Now subjectivity is rather the mediated as objectivity, and such mediation is more urgently in need of analysis than conventional [mediation]” (ND 173/171; my translation). The subject’s encounter with objectivity comes from its own experience of the object, which it understands through a conception of its own mediation by objectivity. If it recognizes its own “going beyond” of subjectivity, in terms of its own objective content, then the subject can recognize objective mediation in general.

The immediate with which we begin our quest for knowledge is only a false immediate. Discussing the famous passage from the *Phenomenology*, in which Hegel explains how the truth is the whole since the absolute must be a *result*, Adorno emphasizes the anti-dialectical dread with which the concept of mediation is initially

rejected by consciousness, which as Hegel notes stems only “from ignorance of the nature of mediation” (EDi 32f.; PG §21). Mediation comes into play with the recognition “that one does not grasp concepts unchanged, but instead must change them in order to grasp them — in other words, that being is a becoming, that truth itself is actually dynamic” (EDi 32). The “movement of the concept” in Hegel’s philosophy is not a component of thought, but is *required* in order to affirm concepts. It stems from the matter [*Sache*] itself, from its internal contradiction” (EDi 36; H 310/71). Adorno goes on to note that Hegel’s claim that the “true is the whole” is a step that need not be taken. Although Hegel found his version of truth in the ascension to the absolute, Adorno of course claims that this is unnecessary. In fact, Adorno’s turn away from the absolute and the truth of the whole can be seen precisely as the elevation of the notion of mediation over any kind of absolute or whole. In the movement of mediation, “determined in itself from the matter [*Sache*], movement itself has the character of truth, when there can be no absolute as all-encompassing totality” (EDi 36).<sup>66</sup>

The relevance of the emphasis on mediation is illuminated in Adorno’s conception of the relationship between the particular and the universal. The point of mediation is that it is not the middle, in between its relationship poles that characterizes it; rather, mediation occurs within each pole itself.<sup>67</sup> For example, for Adorno the individual is a dialectical category because it cannot be understood apart from the whole in which it is situated. Both the individual thought, and the material individual, are always “false” in

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<sup>66</sup> The role of subjectivity, as we’ve seen, is to actively/passively “surrender” to the movement of the *Sache*. This will “cure thought of its arbitrariness,” of its limiting subjectivity (H 314/75).

<sup>67</sup> “Precisely this, that not only is each one moment the problem of the other moment but each moment necessarily requires the other moment in order to be thought at all — this inner mediation, not simply mediation between moments, seems to me the strongest argument in favour of dialectical philosophy” (PT 1: 222; quoted in Bozzetti 2002, 310n9).

that they are always more than themselves. Each is an individual, but nevertheless reveals the inadequacy of its individuality (H 319/81). Going beyond the Kantian block means precisely moving from a consideration of individuals in relationship within the whole, to a dialectical conception, because we take what is immediate (the individual) but we do not take it as final. Identical thought recoils from the block, from the indissoluble. It surrenders to the ideal of knowledge, and thereby shows its respect for it (ND 163/161). Such a “resignation of theory before the individual” cancels the potential of philosophy that was discovered by Hegel.

“What is, is more than it is. This more is not imposed upon it, but remains immanent to it, like that which is displaced from it” (ND 164/161; my translation). Dialectics, nonidentity thinking, is then designed to lead *through* the particular to the universal, through the object to the subject. The “thinking insistence” leads from the individual object, not outward to the universal that it supposedly exemplifies, but rather inward to its essence. But here it nevertheless finds the universal.

Communication with the other crystalizes itself in the individual, which is, in its existence, mediated through it . . . The universal dwells in the center of the individual matter [*Sache*]; it does not first constitute itself in the comparison of an individual with others, because absolute individuality . . . is the product of the process of abstraction, [a product] which is elicited [*ausgelöst*] for the sake of universality. While the individual cannot be deduced from thought, the core of the individual would be comparable to those works of art which are the most individuated, which deny all schemata, whose analysis typically rediscovers moments of universality in the extremes of their individuation, their own buried participation (ND 164/162; my translation).

For Adorno, the universal is *immanent* in the particular, a fact which defines both the strength and the weakness of Hegel’s philosophy. The priority of the object, the focus on the particular, as against the domination of the universal, is the liberation of mediation, in a sense, since it is the moment of mediation in which negation is primary, and the Hegelian dialectic “incomplete.”

Through the role of the subject examined above, negative dialectics finds the *possibility* inherent in the object, which has been denied to it. The object contains “conceptual mediation” within itself.

The reason for [the] insistence on the *τόδε τι* [particular existent] is its own dialectic, its conceptual mediation in itself; it is the place of operation for comprehending the nonconceptual in it. Mediation in the midst of the nonconceptual is no remnant from a complete subtraction; it is not that which refers to a bad infinity of such procedures. Rather mediation is the *ύλη* [matter] of its implicit history . . . In the reading of the existing as text of its becoming idealist and materialist dialectic converge. However, while, for idealism, the inner history of immediacy justifies this as a stage of the concept, it materialistically becomes the measure not only of the untruth of concepts, but also of the existing immediate (ND 62/52; my translation).

For Hegel, it is through the experience of *Geist* that the fallacy of the primacy of the immediate is undermined. Think here of the progress of spirit in the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*. This is an adequate expression of “the experiential content [*Erfahrungsgehalt*] of idealism” (H 301/61), and expresses the ways in which idealism is important beyond its “epistemological and metaphysical positions.” The crucial movement of knowledge through dialectic or speculation, from isolated reflections to a connection with the absolute, is identified by Adorno as stemming from a spirit of idealist philosophy present not only in Hegel but in Fichte and Schelling as well. Their willingness to go beyond Kant towards an experience of “infinity” or “wholeness” signaled precisely their ability to critique the “privations of the finite.” “In the theoretical sphere, idealism represented the insight that the sum total of specific knowledge was not a whole, that the best of both knowledge and human potential slipped through the meshes of the division of labor” (H 302/62).

Idealism represents this materialist insight because there is a form of wholeness or totality which goes beyond that of mere “objective spirit.” Here Adorno creates tensions



again, because he has difficulty articulating how these insights are simultaneously so revolutionary and restrictive, how the dialectic can be divorced from the system.

In Kant, critique remains a critique of reason; in Hegel, who criticizes the Kantian separation of reason from reality, the critique of reason is simultaneously a critique of the real. The inadequacy of all isolated particular definitions is always also the inadequacy of the particular reality that is grasped in those definitions. Even if the system ultimately equates reason and reality and subject and object, the dialectic turns its polemic against the irrationality of mere existence, the enduring state of nature, by confronting a specific reality with its own concept, its own rationality (H 315-6/77).

Since negativity is not abstract but determinate for Hegel, it does not merely criticize concepts, but it “intervenes in the reality that is the content of the self-criticizing concept: society” (H 316/78). The move to content, then, is only a part of the move towards the immanent sociality of the object.

The fact of the individual consciousness confronting the actuality of their relationship to the social totality, the discovering or uncovering of the mediations of the individual and the universality, is the beginning moment of the negative dialectic. It is the reflection on Hegel’s own reflections.

The *methexis* [participation] of each individual in the universal, through thinking consciousness — and the individual first becomes as thought — already transcends the contingency of the particular vis-à-vis the universal, on which the Hegelian and later the collectivist disdain for the individual was based. Through experience and consistency [*Konsequenz*], the individual is able to see the *truth of the universal*, which this disguises, for itself and for the other, as blindly self-asserted power. According to the current consensus, the universal is justified by its mere form as universality. Itself a concept, it thereby becomes conceptless, inimical to reflection; the first requirement of resistance, and modest beginning of praxis, is that spirit sees through it, and names it (ND 337/344; my translation; emphasis added).

The form of universality that is at work here, and which goes beyond the merely formal conception, is a concrete totality which becomes reified. Adorno here uses the concept of “concept” again, describing reification as the process of moving from a conceptual form of being to a state of being “conceptless.” But the perspective of the individual consciousness, with respect to the immediate universal or totality can only be described

in terms of spirit with difficulty. Adorno is banking on Hegel again here, but his own view cannot justify the claim. The self-reflection of spirit cannot be translated into a consciousness seeing through a reified form of universality. The significance of dialectical mediation has led Hegel's epistemology to be called "circular" and "foundationless."<sup>68</sup> Although he gives the dialectic a critical, negative turn, Adorno is also attempting to achieve a similar state of knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Everything is mediated, nothing is merely complete in-itself. But the foundationlessness that Adorno seeks relies upon a Hegelian conception of the absolute, just as much as "mediation" does. In the transition to his own categories, Adorno loses Hegel's framework, and is forced to rely upon a dualistic perspective on the individual/universal relationship, as well as on the subject/object one.

### 3.4 The judgment of the particular

To briefly touch upon a topic that will be of more significance below, the power and potential of Hegel's idealist dialectic is effectively canceled by his treatment of the particular. Adorno criticizes Hegel for inconsistency regarding the individual consciousness, and his handling of the category of the particular in general. According to Adorno, Hegel's "aversion" to individual consciousness led him to back away from the recognition of the *universality* which is inherent *within* individuality; instead they are subjected to the *necessity* of society. Hegel "mistreats the individual, as if it was the immediate, whose appearance he himself is destroying. With this, however, the absolute

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<sup>68</sup> On the former, see Rockmore (1986); examples of the latter are Winfield (1984) and Houlgate (2005).

<sup>69</sup> Bernstein (1997a); see also (2004, 46, n3).

contingency of individual experience also disappears” (ND 55-6/45-6; my translation).<sup>70</sup>

The individual loses its “contingent” character in two ways, in terms of its subjection by the universal of society, and in terms of its *subjectification* through discursive thought.

The universal character of thought, in terms of its employment of concepts, connects individual experience to the universal; but also in terms of its “natural history.”

Through its participation in the discursive medium, [individual experience] is, according to its own determination, more than merely individual. The individual becomes the subject, insofar as it objectifies itself, by virtue of its individual consciousness . . . Because it is universal in-itself, and to the extent that it is, individual experience also reaches the universal. Yet, in epistemological reflection, logical universality and the unity of individual consciousness are mutually dependent. This pertains not only to the subjective-formal side of individuality; every content of individual consciousness is brought to it by its bearer [*Träger*], for the sake of its self-preservation, and reproduces itself with it. Through self-examination [*Selbstbesinnung*], individual consciousness can free itself from it, to expand itself. Toward that end is the agony of the universal, compelled to a tendency to attain dominance over individual experience (ND 56/46; my translation).

The universality which is inherent in the individual comes as a result of its own determination. Through its own thought, the individual subject objectifies itself, which results in universality not only through its conceptual determination, but also through what we could call its “material determination.” But how are we to make sense of this type of determination? We can make a distinction between the individual subject in its role as object, and in its role as subject. In the latter, consciousness makes itself a subject through its own negative process. But the former has another dimension; in addition to its own determination through its negative process as subject (and hence simultaneously object), consciousness presumably, as content, has its own material history, a residue.

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<sup>70</sup> This stems from the unrecognized ideological character of his thought: “In unresolved opposition to the pathos of humanism, Hegel explicitly and implicitly orders human beings, as those who perform socially necessary labor, to subject themselves to an alien necessity. He thereby embodies, in theoretical form, the antinomy of the universal and the particular in bourgeois society” (H 290/46).

The agony of the domination by the universal spurs consciousness to a forgotten mode of “differentiation [*Differenzieren*],” through which the mimetic moment — the “elective affinity between that which knows and that which is known” — becomes a model for experiencing the object. “The mimetic moment . . . fuses [*verschmelzen*] . . . with the rational one. This process synthesizes itself [*sich zusammenfassen*] as differentiatedness [*Differenziertheit*]” (ND 55/45). The key to this process is that the subject has “fused” the material (the “mimetic power of reaction”) with the logical (“logical organ”), into a power or faculty that can then retain its “contingent” character. The opposition to Hegel here is focused in the conception of contingency which Adorno believes Hegel’s philosophy cannot accommodate. The “formal side” of individuality, determined reflectively and discursively, must be balanced by a mode of individuality which is *materially grounded* in the mimetic moment of differentiation. What Adorno will alternately call a “philosophical,” “metaphysical”, or “*geistig*” experience requires that the individual consciousness grasp the universal through self-objectification. Rather than seeking a universal concept to subsume itself under, it looks within. To reason and experience “scientifically” is to simply use abstractions; philosophical experience rather reflects upon itself, and this allows it to recognize the contradiction between the universal and the particular.

However, Hegel’s emphasis on the reconciliation of the dialectic entailed an ideological identification with the totality, and hence with the “subject” of idealism. Hegel’s philosophy was always in fact moving towards the absolute, and although Adorno found this problematic enough in the realm of consciousness and logic, it was unequivocally totalitarian in the sphere of social and political philosophy. Due to the

continued development of capitalist rationality since Hegel's time, his philosophy has become more and more ideological, coming to describe aspects of social reality more and more accurately.

“The whole is the untrue,” not merely because the thesis of totality is itself untrue, being the principle of domination inflated to the absolute; the idea of a positivity that can master everything that opposes it through the superior power of a comprehending spirit is the mirror image of the experience of the superior coercive force inherent in everything that exists by virtue of its consolidation under domination. This is the truth in Hegel's untrue. The force of the whole, which it mobilizes, is not a mere fantasy on the part of spirit; it is the force of the real web of illusion in which all individual existence remains trapped. By specifying, in opposition to Hegel, the negativity of the whole, philosophy satisfies, for the last time, the postulate of determinate negation, which is a positing (H 324-5/87-8).

Adorno claims that Hegel unconsciously forecasted the triumph of the absolute, which simultaneously gave his philosophy new meaning, and condemned it to impotence.

The starting point for Adorno then, in the individual's self-reflection, leads directly, through the always already embedded social, to the recognition and negotiation of contradiction — the persistence of the particular. What Adorno reads as the demise of the particular within Hegel's system can be recuperated through a recognition of the continued “negativity” of the capitalist social totality. Society is a “negative totality,” constituted through the antagonistic relations of capital. Adorno's analysis situates individuality, and individual experience, within the “objective” social tendency, and hence privileges it. The conception of social reality as an externality is an ideological untrue, yet also true; and to that extent it is experienced as an immediate self-certainty. The individual experiences an otherness, which it must get beyond through critical reflection. In so doing, in realizing the ideological nature of its absoluteness, “the possibility emerges of discovering the universal in the individual itself” (Tichy 1977: 108).

The very grimness with which a man clings to himself, as to the immediately sure and substantial, makes him an agent of the universal, and individuality a deceptive notion. On this, Hegel agreed with Schopenhauer; what he had over Schopenhauer was the insight that the abstract negation of individuality is not all there is to the dialectics of individuation and universality. The remaining objection, however — not just against Schopenhauer but against Hegel himself — is that the individual, the necessary phenomenon of the essence, the objective tendency, is right to turn against that tendency, since he confronts it with individuality and fallibility (ND 319-20/325-6).

Adorno's own notion of the individual here is then an attempted revision of Hegel, who did not take it far enough. Although he acknowledged the dialectical relationship between individual and universal, Hegel continued to suggest that a reconciliation was possible.

My discussion here over the course of the chapter has focused primarily upon the multiple criticisms and interpretations of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy that structure Adorno's thought. Through an exploration of the primary significant themes of dialectic and mediation I have emphasized some of the ways in which Adorno takes his critical inspiration from Hegel's philosophy, as well as some of the issues that arise from his attempt to hold on to both Kantian and Hegelian perspectives. With this understanding, I would like to turn to an explication and discussion of Adorno's key concept *experience* which is at the heart of the negative dialectic. It is here that we will find the key to both the significance of the German Idealist heritage for Adorno's thought, and to his conception of the nature of intellectual work involved in philosophy and sociology.

#### **4. The negation of idealism through *geistig* experience**

The wealth of experience on which thought feeds in Hegel is incomparable . . . Through what is experienced, the abstract idea is transformed back into something living, just as mere material is transformed through the path thought travels (H 293-4/50).

Adorno's engagement with German Idealism culminated in his conception of a form of experience capable of breaking through the reified social and intellectual forms which characterize modern capitalist society. The problems of thought in contemporary society, its tendency towards identity, are reinforced and compounded by what Adorno refers to as the "withering" or "emaciation" of experience (MM §33; AT 54/31). This phenomenon describes the demise of the individual within the universal structures through which society is constituted. Alienation has progressed to such an extent that the individual has become utterly powerless within the totally socialized society. The disproportion of reality "to the powerless subject, which makes it incommensurable with experience, renders reality unreal with a vengeance. The surplus of reality amounts to its collapse; by striking the subject dead, reality itself becomes deathly" (AT 53/31). Bernstein notes that the demise of experience, for Adorno, involves two trends: universals are no longer constitutive for individual lives; and the objectivity of truth claims is not recognized as related to individual experience (1997b, 182). The collapse of experience is specifically the loss of the experience of diremption, of the capacity of the individual subject to feel and to recognize its separation from the universal, a state that Bernstein calls "radical immanence."

In contrast to the analysis of the historical withering of experience, Adorno puts forward a conception of a form of experience which may access a mode of being beyond this state of immanence. The concept of a *geistig* experience stems directly from Adorno's engagement with German idealist philosophy.<sup>71</sup> Although the phrase "*geistige Erfahrung*" has been translated as both "intellectual experience"<sup>72</sup> and as "spiritual

<sup>71</sup> It is also heavily indebted to Benjamin. On this relation see Bernstein (2001, 111ff.); Foster (2007); Jay (2005, 312ff.).

<sup>72</sup> E.g., by Rodney Livingstone in the English edition of *Lectures on Negative Dialectics* (VND).

experience”,<sup>73</sup> I will retain the German adjective here in order to highlight its distinctive character, and because of the unfortunate connotations of the English terms. The term derives from the Hegelian *Geist* — “spirit” or “mind” — and thus inherits all of the translation difficulties of the earlier term. While not claiming that Adorno’s *geistig* experience contains the same nuances as Hegel’s *Geist*, I do want to emphasize its fundamental Hegelian origins. In this section I will cover how Adorno characterizes this form of experience in relation to other forms of experience as well as other forms of reason. One of his aims, in turning to a notion of experience over mere thought, is to bring together the split between sensation and cognition which, as we saw above, characterized Kantian philosophy. *Geistig* experience for Adorno captures the recognition of the priority of the object, of nonidentity, and therefore understands the limits of reason; but it also includes a bodily, affective component, as well as a collective or social one, both of which supplement the negation of idealism that Adorno hopes to achieve. The term *geistig* experience is suggestive in that it helps us to understand that for Adorno, there is no “pure” form of experience. Experience is always mediated with thought, and is in this sense always *intellectual* experience. But it is also always mediated by spirit, and so can be considered *spiritual* experience as well.

#### 4.1 Geistig experience against mere “science”

In his essay on “The Experiential Content of Hegel’s Philosophy,” Adorno notes that it is precisely the conception of *Geist* in post-Kantian German idealism that he is interested in, because it is this concept alone which adequately encompasses the dialectic of subject and object which is so important to him. This has applications at the levels of both

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<sup>73</sup> E.g., in Foster (2007).



ontology and epistemology. The shift is one from a mere epistemological subject to *Geist*; and there is a corresponding move from a conception of philosophy as a science, to a form of critical philosophical practice which is based upon *geistig* experience.

Adorno's conception of a philosophical *geistig* experience obviously owes much to Hegel's own conception of experience. Hegel's description of the path from natural consciousness to science (or, alternatively, from reflection to speculation) emphasizes the relationship between experience and development and change. Hegel shows the reader how consciousness may change itself, through its own power of "going beyond," in contradistinction to Kant who deduces the universal laws or limits of thought. Consciousness thus has a history, in both its form and its content.

Adorno, however, in discussing the significance of this form of experience, makes it clear that he is not adopting Hegel's own concept of experience. In a characteristic move, he reads Hegel's philosophy as a philosophical expression, as a riddle that needs to be deciphered, as well as reading it for content:

My theme is the experiential substance of Hegel's philosophy, not experiential content in Hegel's philosophy. What I have in mind is closer to what Hegel, in the introduction to his *System of Philosophy*, calls the "attitude of thought to objectivity" . . . I am interested in . . . the Hegelian spirit, the compelling force of the objective phenomena that have been reflected in his philosophy and are sedimented in it . . . My inquiry is concerned with what [Hegel's] philosophy expresses as philosophy, and this has its substance not least of all in the fact that it is not exhausted by the findings of individual disciplines' (H 296/54-5).

Adorno assesses the timeliness of his attempt to rescue the concept of experience, noting that the Kantian emphasis on what is immediately given has only increased in strength, as the "omnipresent mediating mechanisms of exchange" have taken over our social world. In Adorno's estimation, the Kantian conception of subjective experience underlies diverse modes of thought, from positivism to phenomenology, and he views his work as

the recuperation of a conception of a form of experience which accords with Hegel's understanding of the priority of dialectic and mediation. "At the present time Hegelian philosophy, and all dialectical thought, is subject to the paradox that it has been rendered obsolete by science and scholarship while being at the same time more timely than ever in its opposition to them" (H 297/55).

Hegel's philosophy is thus significant for its mode of expression as well as for its theoretical substance. The conception of science put forward by empiricist positivism, which has come to dominate the sciences according to Adorno, relies upon the notion of a pure sensible experience, which in Kantian fashion is effortlessly taken up and presented to the intellectual capacity of the mind. Adorno's argument against this form of scientific conception is based upon his reading of Hegel's (and Fichte's) critique. The notion of a *geistig* experience is derived from the move towards a *substantiality* that we discussed in the previous section, which was pioneered by the post-Kantian idealists, and which goes fundamentally beyond a *constitutive* subjectivity, to the objects themselves, to a recognition of "what is not itself one with cognition" (VND 122/82). Such a mode of experience, which constitutes Adorno's model for philosophical thought in general, is characterized as "a full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflexion" (ND 25/13; VND 122/82). It is "unreduced" because it reflects on and transcends the "reduced" experience of empiricism, and in doing so, it dialectically rescues the intention of empiricism, by working from the bottom up, rather than from the top down.

In terms of content, at the core of the Hegelian philosophy, according to Adorno, is the notion of experience, which is integrally related to the dialectic as the "unswerving effort to conjoin reason's critical consciousness of itself and the critical experience of

objects” (H 258/9-10). A key move for Hegel, as we’ve seen, is the discovery of the mediation which is inherent within any immediate. For experience, this means that that which is immediately perceived is debunked through a critical reflection (i.e., consciousness establishes the object through negation/determination, and then comes to see itself doing so). Since there is no more strictly inaccessible sphere of noumena, everything which exists is *spiritual*, i.e. mediated by spirit, and the perceiving consciousness must always take this into account. As Hegel famously demonstrated in the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*, consciousness may not experience the pure particular, but always finds the universal at the same time.

Adorno, on the other hand, complains that Hegel’s understanding of dialectical experience ultimately relies too much upon reconciliation, upon identity. But this critique stems from an understanding of the negativity of the antagonistic system of society, and a commitment to the experience of it. Hegel’s “negation” is not negative enough, because it posits an identity of subject and object, and consequently forgets the fundamental difference between idea and reality (ND 329/335). Hegel’s version of experience contains an account of the critical education of consciousness, but it remains limited, in Adorno’s opinion, simply because it overcomes the Kant’s limitations only by presupposing identity (ND 162/160). The failure to account for the radical nonidentity of the object produces a “reduced” form of subjectivity and experience.

There is a tension here between the version of Hegelian philosophical critique that Adorno wants to appropriate, and his transformation of it through his own immanent critique. For all of its insight, the critique of Kantian and scientific thought performed by Hegel must now be modified; its materialist core must be brought out. Adorno claims

that there is an element of Hegel's philosophy which is unconscious, that it does not properly understand itself, and it is ultimately this element — *and not its own self-understanding* — which separates it from the heritage of Enlightenment rationalism. It articulates a “new expressive need” which is “more important even than Enlightenment's self-critique, the emphatic incorporation of the concrete subject and the historical world, or the dynamization of philosophical activity” (H 304/64). This is the need to articulate aspects of our experience of the social world which are not captured by individual scientific pursuits, or by scientific reason itself. Rather than simply inquiring into the conditions of possibility of experience or of the validity of scientific knowledge, Hegel represented a trend which sought to reflectively examine the limits which had been placed on knowledge, which made it so obviously incongruent with experience. Adorno wants to reflexively apply a form of Hegelian critique to Hegel himself.

The “experience of consciousness,” which is followed in the *Phenomenology*, is Adorno's model for the *social* experience of modernity. The turn towards content constitutes the “doubling” of the subject of consciousness in post-Kantian philosophy. Hegel thematizes the relationship between the naïve consciousness which directly knows its object, and the critical reflective consciousness which examines the naïve consciousness. The limits of the naïve consciousness are then overcome through this process of splitting and reflection. The finite, limited consciousness is grasped in its finiteness by a critical consciousness which posits itself as infinite, as able to achieve the absolute. By viewing the critical limitations of the limited, scientific consciousness, the doubled subject understands the relationship between consciousness and its objects; it sees its own failures; and it is the contradiction between these two aspects of

consciousness which drives philosophical thinking. “Contradiction, proscribed by logic, becomes an organ of thought: of the truth of *logos*” (H 311-2/73).

The naïve consciousness, which Adorno refers to as a scientific consciousness, is the Kantian mode of thought which alienates subject from object, form from content. It is myopically concerned only with its own rules and procedures, with the ways in which it handles objects. The critical Hegelian turn through this doubling of consciousness, is also the materialist moment in which the content of thought is considered in its relationship to the subject. The experiential content of Hegel’s philosophy is then this moment of dialectical contradiction. His attention to the suffering of the alienation of subject and object, consciousness and world, forms the basic experience that moves his philosophy. He recognized that it is only through this second reflection that consciousness can realize its own untruth, that thought can move beyond itself. “This says more about his reflection of reflection than the irrationalist gestures into which Hegel sometimes let himself be misled in his desperate attempts to rescue the truth of a society that had already become untrue. Hegel’s self-reflection of the subject in philosophical consciousness is actually society’s dawning critical consciousness of itself” (H 313/74-5).

This highlights an additional reason for the contemporary significance of the experiential content of Hegelian philosophy. Adorno claims that Hegel’s thought in fact foreshadowed the rise of society as a total system. “Dialectical contradiction is experienced in the experience of society . . . ; it is in the dialectical contradiction that there crystallizes a concept of experience that points beyond absolute idealism. It is the concept of antagonistic totality” (H 316/78). It is at this point that Adorno again

launches his social critique. Capitalist society, as an antagonistic totality, reflects, has an “affinity” with, the conception of antagonistic totality in Hegel’s thought. Adorno’s critique is then not just a realization about the character of contemporary society, it is just as much a realization about the status of Hegelian philosophy. The experience that is had by subjects in contemporary capitalist society is captured, presciently, by Hegel’s dialectical philosophy, which now contains the key for an understanding of our society. This might appear a strange result, as it has little or nothing to do with Hegel’s actual analysis of society, but stems directly from his conception of dialectical contradiction. Hegel’s understanding of what Adorno terms “reification,” of the necessary dialectical relationship of immediacy and mediation, has come to describe the relationship of consciousness to its social surroundings. The necessary principle of division or alienation, which Hegel attributed to the natural consciousness, is then related in a much more specific way to its social context. Such divisions were the source of the contradictions that drive Hegel’s dialectical philosophy forward, and their concrete versions are just as much the motor of social development.

The key, as before, is the necessary ubiquity of mediation. Just as the subject as consciousness is always already mediated by the universals of thought and logic, the concrete human individual is always already mediated by society. The apparently primary individualism of the subject of capitalism is analogous to the apparent primacy of the conscious subject of philosophical reason. But the category of totality is essential to each case. For consciousness, it is the whole of the absolute through which diremption and mediation are understood. And for the social subject, it is the totality of a society which structures social antagonisms. Each whole is only constituted through its

contradictions. However, the spheres of the social and the conceptual, which Adorno often seems to be analogically relating are in fact related in a much more determinate manner. Because of the turn towards content performed by Hegel, we know that knowledge is never pure in itself, but it always centrally related to its content, and its content is always already social. In effect we have the social moving in both on the side of the subject/form and on the side of the object/content. The *forms* of thought are social because they are always already mediated by universality — a universality which is essentially related to the social sphere, rather than to some transcendental-logical world. The *content* of thought, what it is that we are thinking about, is always already social because it has been constituted through the social process of history.

This explains what it is about the concept of experience as dialectical contradiction that, according to Adorno, “points beyond absolute idealism.” Absolute idealism breaks down the apparent immediacy of both the subject and the object of knowledge. It does not rest with appearance and tradition. For Adorno, the crucial limitations of absolute idealism lie in its failure to critique the totality itself (H 323/86). Adorno believes that Hegel’s critical advance over Kant lay in his transcendence of dualism; but at the same time he laments the loss of the Kantian “discontinuity” between phenomena and noumena. “Hegel thought away the difference between the conditioned and the absolute and endowed the conditioned with the semblance of the unconditioned. In the last analysis, by doing so he did an injustice to the experience on which he drew” (H 323/86). In other words, in Hegel’s philosophy, the very movement towards a reconciliation of subject and object, universal and particular is the negation of the foundational

experience of dialectical contradiction — a move which presages the actual withering of experience in contemporary capitalist society.

Such a philosophical, or *geistig*, experience begins phenomenologically with that which is given to consciousness, and it must find contradiction where seemingly none exists, in the pacified totality. Through its receptivity to the object, it begins to witness the dialectical contradiction which exists between thought and its object. The contradictions that seem to inhere within thought are “reproductions” of the contradictions that objectively exist between thought and its objects (thought’s “other”). And it is the very attempt to *think* in terms of producing judgments of identity that reveals these contradictions in thought itself. The identities which we take for formal are in reality *speculative* (i.e., in Adorno’s sense, riven with contradiction).

Thought, by sinking itself in that which initially confronts it, in the concept, and becoming aware of its immanent contradictory [*antinomisch*] character, clings to the idea of something which would be beyond contradiction. The opposition of thought to what is heterogeneous to it reproduces itself in thought as its immanent contradiction. Reciprocal critique of the universal and particular, identifying acts which judge whether the concept does justice to that with which it concerns itself [*dem Befaßten*], and also whether the particular fulfills its concept, are the medium of the thought of the nonidentity of particular and concept (ND 149/146; my translation).

The effort of thought to negate its object takes the form of a judgment which is aware of its identification and the remainder. Adorno believes that his conception of experience is more critical than that of Hegel because it remains committed to reality’s contradictions and to its own aporia. Its task is to “lend a voice to its unfreedom” (ND 29/18), by sheer negation and revolt. Not content to progress dialectically up Hegel’s ladder to the absolute, Adorno’s version of experience continually recognizes the significance of nonidentity.



This *geistig* character of the given encompasses not only the mediation of the object through *Geist*, but also importantly, the *corporeal* nature of the subject, and the experience of *suffering* of the individual (O'Connor 2004, 71f.).

The allegedly elemental facts of consciousness are more than merely this. In the dimension of pleasure and displeasure, that which is corporeal [*Körperliches*] rises up to it [consciousness]. All pain and all negativity, the motor of dialectical thought, are the often mediated, sometimes unrecognizable, shape of the physical, as all happiness aims for sensible fulfillment and acquires its objectivity in it . . . In subjective, sensible data, this dimension — for its part that which contradicts spirit in it — is weakened, as it were, to its epistemological after-image (ND 202/202; my translation).

Here Adorno emphasizes the material basis of subjectivity and its significance. The motor of the dialectic is in fact in the physical realm, in the pain of the feeling organism. Such feeling becomes “data” for consciousness, but its real origins remain fundamental to it.

The transition towards content then includes not only the priority of the object in its mediation, but also the physical nature of the subject and its social context. Knowledge and being are united through subjective experience. Adorno here takes the despair of consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and transforms it into a bodily sensation, a form of physical suffering. Adorno’s dialectic moves from the force of this suffering, which is both mental and physical; the “radical difference” of body and mind stems only from the subject’s abstractions (ND 202/202).

The role of “theory,” as something of a bridge between a scientific and a dialectical cognition, is to prevent ideology from setting in, or more precisely to undermine it once it has. Theory “corrects the naivety of its self-confidence, without it however having to sacrifice the spontaneity, at which theory, for its part, aims” (ND 41/30-1; my translation). Thought requires both passivity and spontaneous activity, it must be able to “overshoot the object,” since it no longer pretends to be one with it (ND 39/28). Adorno

characterizes this moment as the growing independence of thought, vis-à-vis the object, which is denied by Hegel's total mediation. The subject realizes through its experience of pain and negativity that the subject and the object cannot and will not be reconciled, and the demands upon it only increase in their antagonism.

Such an account contains significant contradictions. Adorno remains committed to a Hegelian recognition that everything is always already spiritual; however, he also upholds the stringent negation of the subject, the "resistance of thought to the merely existing" (ND 31/19; my translation). The Kantian roots of Adorno's conception of the nonidentity of subject and object are perhaps clearest in his occasional comments on the subject's freedom. In order to perform its duties of articulating the priority of the object – a task which consequently discloses the subject's own fullness – consciousness must contain a moment of freedom. This moment is not achieved, but rather appears to stem from its own powers as a material subject. Adorno's theory of the subject thus contains its own form of duality, which consciousness must recognize but not create:

Theory and *geistig* experience require their interdependency. It does not contain answers to everything, but rather reacts to world which is false to its core. Theory has no jurisdiction over what would be carried away by its spell. Mobility is essential to consciousness, [and] no accidental quality. It means a doubled mode of behaviour: that from within, the immanent process, essentially dialectical; and a free one, just like one stepping out from the dialectic, unattached. Both however are not merely disparate. The unregulated thought has an elective affinity to the dialectic, which as critique of the system, remembers what would be outside the system; and the power, which the dialectical movement releases in cognition, is that which revolted against the system. Both positions conjoin themselves through critique, not through compromise (ND 41-2/31; my translation).

Here we can see that Adorno's conscious subject retains an enigmatic quality, a recollection of the "outside," which constitutes its own transcending power.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Adorno also addresses the freedom of the subject in the context of its activity of judgment:

Judgment and inference [*Schluß*], the thought forms which the critique of thought cannot dispense with, contain in themselves critical germs. Their determinateness is always simultaneously the exclusion of what they did not achieve, and the truth they want to

It is clear that Adorno's concept of *geistig* experience is reliant upon a "dialectical cognition" or a "nonidentity thinking," but the concepts are decidedly not coterminous. Adorno's attempt to expand philosophy beyond a merely scientific — and for that reason, subjective — reason, in the model of Kant, is based upon the critique that cognition itself is "living experience." The attempt to reduce reason from experience to mere cognition excludes non-scientific thoughts — i.e., ones that are not universal and necessary — as inferior. The struggle of cognition to understand its own inadequacy is one part of *geistig* experience. "In the identifying attempt [*Ansatz*], what it eliminates, according to its own essence, cannot be retrieved later [*läßt sich nicht ergänzend nachholen*]; at best the attempt is to be changed out of the knowledge of its inadequacy. However, that it does so little justice to the living experience that cognition is, indicates its falsity, the inability to achieve what it itself puts forward, namely to ground [*begründen*] experience" (ND 380/387; my translation). The mere idea of cognition providing such a grounding contradicts "what experience knows about itself," which is that it "always also changes its own forms" (ND 380/387). This is the key Hegelian shift towards a notion of experience, through the permission thought gives itself to think the absolute; however, Hegel and the other post-Kantian idealists ultimately remained under the same spell as Kant, the spell of the social totality (ND 161/158).

organize negates — albeit with questionable justice — that which they did not characterize [*das nicht von ihnen Geprägte*]. The judgment that something is so potentially repels [*abwehren*] [the fact that] the relation of its subject and object may be other than the judgment expressed. The thought forms aim further than that which is merely existing, which is given. The peak [*Spitze*], which thought directs against its material, is not only the domination of nature become spiritualized. While the thought does violence to that which it synthesizes, it simultaneously follows a potential that waits in its opposite, and unconsciously obeys the idea of atoning, to the pieces, for what it did. This unconscious becomes conscious for philosophy. Unreconciled thought is joined with the hope of reconciliation; because the resistance of thought to the merely existing, the domineering freedom of the subject, also aims at what was lost through its preparation [*Zurüstung*] of the object (ND 30-1/19; my translation).

The notion, then, of a *geistig* experience captures in part Adorno's critical-phenomenological Hegelian inspiration. The *subject* which undergoes such experience is the one which seeks to heal the deformation brought on by the historical processes which "ground" intellectual abstraction. The Kantian subject of experience is "reified" in the sense that it has already experienced this "emaciation" of experience, its diremption into form and content. It becomes a constituting subject, by forgetting something fundamental, and this is the main form of delusion that philosophy must combat, using the "power of the subject" to do so (ND 10/xx). The form of alienation with which Adorno is primarily concerned is that of subject and object, or of mind and world, and it is Hegelian to that extent.

But how are we to characterize this mode of experience, which cannot be primal or originary, nor reconciled in a Hegelian sense? What is the subject of a restricted experience supposed to achieve? The answer for Adorno is importantly related to his conception of forms of intellectual pursuit. I agree with Foster, who claims that Adorno's understanding of the problematic forms of abstraction, alienation, and restricted experience "must ultimately be understood in term of the expressive possibilities of language" (2007, 13). Adorno's remedy is not modeled on the systematic character of German idealist philosophy, nor on a Marxian conception of praxis. Rather, Adorno "sought to show that the systematic narrowing of the possibilities for cognitive experience is, in the modern world, ultimately related to a specific distortion within language" (Foster 2007, 16). The notion of a *geistig* experience that Adorno develops can be seen to be the basis for his theory of language. In general, the issue falls under a broader one, which is the relationship between aesthetic and intellectual forms in

Adorno's work. Although I cannot explore the intricacies of Adorno's aesthetics here, a few further comments on this dimension of experience are in order.

Adorno's emphasis on the priority of the object is, of course designed to be a mode of individual, subjective experience. Adorno wants no part of the fetish of a rational or scientific "objectivity." In the "Dedication" of *Minima Moralia*, he argues that Hegel's characteristic "liquidation" of the particular, due both to his commitment to philosophical system and to his "indifference" to actual social-historical trends, mirrored a devaluation of *individual* experience. The experience of consciousness, on which the analysis of the *Phenomenology* was based, cannot be directly carried over into a contemporary pedagogical form. In his attempt to make philosophy substantive, Hegel (according to Adorno) neglected the individual subject. Adorno's intention, from his post-war perspective, is to remedy this neglect through the disintegration of systematic philosophy into aphoristic, "constellational" form. Only such a form can overcome Hegel's failure to mediate the individual and bourgeois society (MM 16/17-18). Such a reevaluation of the individual is Adorno's way of resisting the totalization of society, by examining the very dialectical relationship between individual and society which has been so neglected in modern thought. "Because for Adorno 'society is essentially the substance of the individual,' then in giving objective expression to ethical life in this [aphoristic] form, the individual 'calls his substance by its name,' that is, reveals the (deforming) social substantiality composing broken subjective existence" (Bernstein 2001, 43).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Although this discussion is truncated for reasons of space, issues of language, representation, configuration and constellation are at the center of Adorno's understanding of *geistig* experience, and they are necessary for a full understanding of the relationship between Adorno's and Hegel's concepts of experience. As Bernstein notes, Adorno's belief is that "now only aphorisms can sustain the Hegelian demand to 'penetrate into the immanent content of the matter' and not

It is not least here, at the level of individual experience and its expression, that Adorno's program is designed to work. The subjective, individual character of experience, and its aesthetic character, intertwine. The individual, both as concrete individual and as subjective consciousness, is always already socially mediated. Through *geistig* experience, it "corrects" its own starting point as individual (H 303-4/63-4). It is experience itself which is contradictory; experience in contemporary, totalized society has been emaciated, but Adorno simultaneously wants to hold onto its contradictory — and therefore revolutionary — nature.

It is this dichotomy of an analysis of the seemingly total destruction of experience brought about through capitalist modernity, and the claim that the contradictions of society can never be reconciled by experience, that bothers many of Adorno's critics. But, as Bernstein (2001, 40ff.) shows, such an antagonistic dichotomy is essential to Adorno's work. Individual, subjective experience must be both "a refuge of ethical life apart from

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beyond it." Bernstein goes on to provide a framework for connecting Adorno's theory of experience to his mode of philosophizing, which I would argue is an essential starting point for understanding the sociological content and import of Adorno's work.

[T]he combination of first-person experience and objective reflection is meant to provide an analogue of the dual perspectives in the *Phenomenology*: natural consciousness and philosophical consciousness. However, instead of the philosophical perspective emerging behind the back of natural consciousness, as in Hegel, in [*Minima Moralia*] each aphorism, as well as groups, or, as he calls them, "constellations" of aphorisms, is meant to invoke both the internal perspective of the subject and the reflected or external view of the observer. Aphorisms, thus, are meant to inherit the procedure of employing negativity — the immanent cancellation of merely subjective experience — and through so doing to track subject becoming substance, i.e., showing the social constitution of individual experience, with the twist that now social substantiality is as much the cancellation of the subject as its support (2001, 43n4).

In his account of constellations in Adorno's sociology, on the other hand, Benzer interprets the procedure as a means of grasping the *complexity* of the social world (2011b, 162ff.). His account portrays Adorno as being trapped in a Weberian dilemma of continually attempting to obtain a level of conceptual (if not scientific) rigor that he knows can never be achieved. Although Benzer usefully highlights the significance of the textual dimension in Adorno's sociology, his limited understanding of Adorno's conception of experience constrains his analysis of his constellation. I develop this critique elsewhere.

the demands of the economy,” *and* be fundamentally deformed by the rationalization of society.

#### 4.2 The experience of objectivity

A *geistig* experience is fundamentally related to the experience of *social objectivity*, and it is this fact that distinguishes Adorno from idealist conceptions of experience, both Kantian and Hegelian. The sheer negativity of experience stems from the negativity of the social totality, from the pain that it causes. The class relationship is the primary conditioning factor of experience. Because of this, a *geistig* experience relies upon, and begins in, the experience of the social. “[O]ur most immediate experience is that we are all harnessed to an objective trend.” This is a fundamental experience for us, but then we are asked to prove the existence of a universal (VGF 28/17). The negotiation of this experience, in terms of the response of a “natural consciousness” to it, determines the future of critical theory. The individual must begin with her own experience, and find the contradictions, and the universal, within it (Tichy 1977, 107f.).

This is clearly not a “rational scientific” procedure. Adorno is not using concepts in an empirical way, nor is he using a form of Hegelian “internal” criteria. He even claims that empiricism’s “trivial” conception of experience as being based in sensible reality has “no validity in *geistig* experience,” because *geistig* experience is always already mediated through *Geist* (VND 131/89). While this shows his hostility to forms of empiricism, it does little to clarify his own practice, which is based upon a form of memory. “The measure of such objectivity 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” (EaF 8).

There is a tension within Adorno’s work between the direct, or immediate, experience of society, and the discovery and articulation of society within forms of thought. We can trace the problem back to his account of the relationship between sensible intuition and intellectual concepts. While he relies upon the claim that everything has always already been mediated by *Geist*, he remains committed to a Kantian separation between concept and intuition. This gives rise to his complex articulation of the activity and passivity of the subject. According to his commitment to the priority of the object, Adorno imagines a subject which “pursue[s] the inadequacy of thought and object” in order to “experience [this inadequacy] in the object” (ND /153). In this sense, society can be just another object which the subject must experience in antagonistic fashion – an object which is socially constituted (historically sedimented) but yet is never fully *conceptual*.

The Hegelian themes of *substantiality* and *foundationlessness* come together in Adorno’s claim that, for example, “[t]he *a priori* and society interpenetrate” (SO 750/252). How do we make sense of such a claim? The *a priori* is the universal and necessary, that which is prior to experience, which is seen as subjective—individual and contingent. The claim that this realm is mediated with society is similar to Adorno’s claim, adopted from Sohn-Rethel, that society is in fact the transcendental subject. If every object is a part of the social totality, then this holds for the cognitive objects of our consciousness, as well as physical objects, including ourselves as physical subjects.



### **5. Conclusion: Adorno between Kant and Hegel**

Any account of Adorno's thought has to come to terms with what he sometimes referred to as its "speculative" nature—that is, its necessarily fragmented, aphoristic, exaggerated character. Given this, any attempt to iron out its contradictions is largely a fool's errand. This holds no less for an understanding of his relationship to German idealism. Adorno reads Kant and Hegel selectively and partially; he makes claims of deception, ideology, lack of nerve, etc., in the aim of establishing and justifying his own perspective. His readings of Kant and Hegel cannot be reconciled. Hegel is valued for his dialectical and critical perspective, for the systematic nature of his thought which mirrors the structure of contemporary exchange society. Kant is derided for his subjectivity and relied on for his transcendental skepticism or realism. Yet such an analysis is instructive, as it helps us hone in on some of the epistemological complexities of social theory. To this end, identifying complexities and contradictions can be useful. To conclude the present chapter, I will discuss the key issues and questions which arise from Adorno's "determinate negation" of German idealism.

My claim in this chapter has been that Adorno's philosophy, in terms of his conception of the nature and requirements of critical social thought, as well as his understanding of *geistig* experience, is situated somewhere in between the "subjective" idealism of Kant and the "objective" idealism of Hegel. Adamant in avoiding the aporiae and ideologies of systematic philosophy, Adorno claims that his "logic of disintegration" — one of his terms for the negative dialectic — will avoid the problematic *syntheses* of either the transcendental subject, or the of the positive dialectic of Hegelian spirit. In this sense, the grand systematic philosophies of German idealism serve, typically, as a

negative model for Adorno's own work. However, according to the primary themes of German idealist philosophy that I have identified above – namely the themes of a self-determining subjectivity and its relationship to a form of objectivity – Adorno's work clearly relates to this philosophical tradition.

In an article that situates Adorno precisely between Kant and Hegel, Bernstein (2006) unifies the perspectives of Kant and Hegel into what he terms the “semantic thesis of idealism:” the identification of the unity of the subject and the unity of the concept. He discusses Adorno's contradictory intentions in *Negative Dialectics* – to (1) break through constitutive subjectivity using the power of the subject, and (2) to strive by way of the concept to transcend the concept – as the critique of both Kantian and Hegelian philosophies. In these terms, Adorno was concerned to move beyond both a constitutive subjectivity (Kant) *and* a constitutive conceptuality (Hegel). Kant had used the power of synthesis, in the subject, to ground his version of objectivity, while Hegel has used the conception of synthesis in the dialectical movement of the concept. What Bernstein refers to as the “ambiguity” of Adorno's interpretations of Kant and Hegel stems from the fact that he sees within them both a form of identity thinking, in terms of the claim of the semantic thesis of idealism, and some aspect of the nonidentical, in the object of thought in Kant, and in dialectical experience in Hegel (Bernstein 2006, 103).

Adorno moves forward from Hegel's dialectic, or perhaps we should say that he moves back. He wants to liberate the particular and the (human) individual, which he believes were ultimately dominated by the universal in Hegel's thought. His appropriation of the Hegelian dialectic and concept of experience are situated within a Marxian materialist theory of society. The result is a mode of thought which wants to

simultaneously lift the Kantian ban on thinking the absolute, and respect it as a socially-necessary ideology. It is the relationship between the particular/individual and the universal which is difficult to grasp here, vis-à-vis the conception of the relationship within Hegel's philosophy. For Hegel, the movement towards the absolute is the movement of the reconciliation of subject and object, particular and universal, a move which Adorno diagnoses as having undermined the original spirit of the dialectic. However, for Adorno, the notion of the absolute is necessary only ideologically.

Yet there is something unsettling about Adorno's use of the antagonistic whole, i.e., society, within his philosophical work. Although he claimed to "remain true to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in [his] view that the movement of the concept, of the matter at hand, is simultaneously the explicitly thinking movement of the reflecting subject" (Adorno, letter to Scholem, quoted in Bozzetti 2002, 296), his reliance on the Kantian "block" belies such Hegelianism. Adorno's rejection of the constitutive subject of transcendental idealism leads to his employment of absolute idealism and consequently to an engagement with the concept of the absolute. It is only the notion of the absolute which allows Adorno to proceed from an immediate engagement with the "given" as a *conceptual* reality, and to examine forms of logic and rationality, as well as forms of art culture such as music, literature, and knowledge, as "containing" social forms.

This recognition stems from the analysis of a nonidentity which critically bounds our rationality. There is always an "additional factor" to rationality, which is rooted in forms of full experience, rather than merely in abstract thought itself (VGF, Lecture 24). Against Hegel's identifications, Adorno wants to *preserve* the nonidentity of identity and nonidentity, in terms of its location within the world and within consciousness, thought,

and language. He essentially goes against Hegel when he claims that the paradox of nonidentity entails that we may not capture its complexities in one simple sentence (EDI 121). This entails the move beyond rational science, and consequently grounds Adorno's critique of any theorist who attempts such a pure form (e.g., Durkheim, Husserl, Popper). It is the attempt by spirit to write its own history that separates Hegelian *Wissenschaft* from the reason of the Enlightenment (H 304/64). Kant remained in the orbit of the positive sciences, while Hegel tried to give expression to that which cannot be captured by science. We can now see that the Hegelian concern with content is with the content of experience, not with some primordial or objective realm of being.

In Hegelian philosophy, the relationship between social and political philosophy and epistemology is closely related. No longer are we in the situation with Hegel, as we were with Kant, in which the "empirical" (real) is strictly bracketed from our knowledge. The real, empirical world is open for philosophizing, and Hegel takes advantage of this. This is in fact one of the reasons for the interest in Hegel within the "social sciences," and for Adorno's long fascination with his work. The stakes of what I have been describing as Adorno's engagement with German idealism relate centrally to his conception of critical philosophical and social theory. My claim is that it is only through this story that we can further understand Adorno's relationship between the classical theorists of society: Marx and Durkheim. In the next chapters, I will investigate the relationship here, focusing on the ways in which Adorno's interpretation of German idealism structured his understanding of these classical sociologists, and how both of these encounters (i.e. the philosophical and the sociological) determined Adorno's ideas about the nature of critical reasoning within, and about, society.

Considering that Hegel's speculative system of philosophy is a critique not only of an instrumental scientific reason, but of metaphysical, empirical, and critical philosophical thought *in toto*, how are we to assess Adorno's critique and appropriation of Hegelian thought? Given the apparent completeness of Hegel's treatment of the options for thought, on what grounds may he be legitimately critiqued? Furthermore, what are the available options for such an "appropriation" of Hegelian speculative and/or critical philosophy for the discipline of a scientific sociological thinking? These are some of the problems that Adorno would ultimately not find his way around.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> It is along these lines that Rose (1981) critiques not only Adorno but all of sociological thought for the inability to sufficiently account for Hegel's critique of Kant. In her analysis, the turn from speculative philosophy to sociology must be constituted by a denial of precisely the speculative character of Hegel's thought. To pose a form of social or historical materialism, in which the categories of thought are "grounded" in real social material being, is to return from the Doctrine of the Concept back to that of Essence (Longuenesse 2007). In this sense it is a denial of the properly speculative potential of Hegel's thought.

## Chapter 4

## Knowledge, objectivity and sociality: Hegel, Marx, Adorno

[S]ociety is manifested [*erscheinen*] in phenomena the way, for Hegel, essence is. Society is fundamentally concept, just as spirit is. (H 267/20).

### 1. Introduction

Adorno had a career-long interest in and engagement with the thought of Marx, which centrally structured his critical accounts of knowledge and society. While the thought of Hegel is central to the work of both Marx and Adorno, teasing out the details of these inheritances is a complicated task. Adorno's critique of Hegel itself contains many typically Marxian moments, although Adorno's version of a "critical materialism" is ultimately quite different from that of Marx. Perhaps the most prominent difference between the thought of Marx and Adorno lies in Adorno's explicit attention to subjectivity, knowledge, and culture, and his tendency to leave social structural theorizing largely to others.<sup>77</sup> In his own analysis, Adorno referred to the critical material method of Marx as of crucial significance for his own approach to critical philosophy, and frequently related his version of critical theory explicitly back to Marx's critique of political economy (see, e.g., EP 307/25). A thinker of his time, Adorno sought to promote a critical, antidogmatic version of Marxist thought to counter the dogma of the Orthodox Marxism of Eastern Europe.<sup>78</sup> However, the value and significance of the Marxist character of his work has been continually questioned. Generally placed within an "Hegelian-Marxist" intellectual genre, Adorno's work exhibits a complex relationship

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<sup>77</sup> Here I'm referring to the ways in which Adorno situated his own work within the broader work of the Frankfurt School. See, e.g. Jarvis 1998; Müller-Doohm 2005; Wiggershaus 1994; Abromeit 2011; Jay 1974.

<sup>78</sup> Here Adorno's starting point involves the mediation of Lukács (1971), who pioneered the conception of Marxism as a "method".

to the thought of both. In this chapter, I explore the ways in which Marx's turn away from philosophy towards a critical social "science" provided a model for Adorno's own critical engagement with both philosophy and sociology. Of particular importance in this regard is the relationship between the logics of philosophy and science, and the *empirical* and *theoretical* investigation of the social world.

Marx famously came to reject his early philosophical explorations, in favor of a critique of political economy which he felt could have a significant political effect on the world.<sup>79</sup> His work has subsequently been seen as a paradigm of sociological thought. However, the nature of Marx's "method," in *Capital* and elsewhere, has continued to be a source of intellectual investigation and debate. Although Marx famously never wrote a work devoted to his dialectical method, the nature of his approach stemmed from his understanding of Hegel. The intellectual connection to Hegel has of course been a significant part of this discussion. Here I'd like to frame the issue in broader terms relating to the translation of philosophy into a sociological mode of thought. As William Maker has pointed out, "Marx's critique is at the center of an *Auseinandersetzung* between what are closely related but nevertheless sharply contrasting views on the nature and limits of philosophy itself and on the proper relation between philosophical theory and reality and the relation between the philosophy and his age" (1989, 72). We could make a similar statement regarding Adorno; although he did not reject philosophy in the manner of Marx, Adorno clearly believed that philosophy had become sterile as a result of its original detachment from, and subsequent colonization by, science.

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<sup>79</sup> Among the voluminous literature on Marx, there are two recent works which stand out for their primary focus on this theme. Brudney (1998) discusses Marx's work in relation to the Young Hegelians from a philosophical perspective, while Mah (1987) puts it in a more historical context.

As I have emphasized above, Adorno sought to make philosophy “substantive” in some Hegelian sense; and he criticizes sharply Kant’s “allergy to the empirical” (KK 248/164). Hegel had the insight to link the forms of consciousness to the concrete events of history in the *Phenomenology*; however, the rising significance of a “positivist” form of science has left philosophy with a correspondingly impoverished role. The recourse here, according to Adorno, is a recuperation of the dialectical conception of subject and object, of *constituens* and *constitutum*. The dualisms of Kantianism must be transcended in an *authentic* way (i.e., not in the fashion of “fundamental ontology”). We must *transcend* the rupture precisely by *moving through it*, by showing that “the rupture is mediated through itself” (KK 250/165). According to Adorno, this is the way that one passes philosophically to social categories (ND 198/198). “What has to be done is to hold fast to this ineluctable duality, a duality that cannot be ignored and that recurs in concrete form at every stage of history, but at the same time, within this state of differentiation, to define the element of unity as its other” (KK 250/165). In Adorno’s conception we are thus led from philosophy to the concrete society, though the recognition of the necessary dialectical relationship between thought and being. We cannot ever ground being within thought, as a first philosophy attempts to do.

Adorno conceived of his philosophical project as an explicit critique of the pretensions of Hegelian philosophy. He understood his critical procedure, at least in part, through the concept of immanent critique, in the sense that his dialectical perspective admitted no “standpoint” for the critique which is *external* to the sphere within which it is performed. In this characterization of a critical method, he drew crucially on Hegelian categories of negation, contradiction, and dialectic (O’Connor



2011); however, the precise nature of his Hegelian heritage is still in question. In the current chapter, as a means of pursuing the relationship between Adorno and Marx, I examine the substance of their critiques of Hegel's social and political philosophy. This will entail a discussion of the the nature of Adorno's understanding of Marx, which structures his appropriation of Hegel's critical philosophy. My problematic in this chapter relates this theme more explicitly to social theory. This discussion will then set up my discussion in the following chapter on Adorno's relationship to Durkheim; this latter discussion will hinge on the understanding of society as some sort of fundamental ground, a "sociologism of Durkheim or a "sociology of knowledge" in the manner of Mannheim. Here I explore the nature of a Adornian-Marxian alternative, as influenced by a critical procedure.

In many ways Adorno should be considered to be a "dialectical materialist," as long as one clarifies the nature of this designation precisely. Adorno certainly believed that Marx had pioneered the most valuable form of critical theory, and his own perspective continually reiterated the necessity of empirical sociological investigation. My ultimate question here is then how does this notion of critique inform an understanding of a *critical theory of society*? At issue here will be both the relationship of "method" and "matter," in Hegel, Marx, and Adorno, as well as — due to the immanent and dialectical character of the critique — the conception of society that develops in the thought of each. The conceptualization of society brings in the theme of the relationship between the individual and the social. This reaction to and critique of Hegel's philosophy framed the understanding of the social reality developed by both Marx and Adorno. I will argue that both took on a view of "society" and of a critical knowledge practice that were shaped by

their engagements with Hegel. The concept of the “absolute” is largely at the center of each of their complaints. The term is frequently conceived of as a kind of ideal entity which swallows up the empirical, concrete world. The remedy to this is then to attempt to sever the dialectical method from the “system” of Hegelian absolute philosophy.<sup>80</sup>

The chapter proceeds as follows. I expand on my discussion of Hegel in Chapter Two, by exploring in more detail aspects of the philosophical program of the *Realphilosophie*, as Hegel understands it. I then explore the critique of Hegel begun by Marx early in his career, followed by a discussion of Adorno’s specific critique of Hegel’s philosophy of history and of right. The concluding discussion will then analyze the options for theorizing society developed by Marx and Adorno through their respective critiques.

## **2. Hegel’s Realphilosophie, the Doppelsatz, and the immanence of thought**

Although I have discussed the speculative character of Hegel’s philosophy in Chapter Two, here I would like to focus specifically on relevant aspects of the *Realphilosophie*, or Hegel’s social and political philosophy, as articulated primarily in the *Philosophy of Right* and the *Encyclopedia*. However, there are some further terminological and conceptual issues which must be clarified before we can truly make sense of Hegel here; a necessary precursor to comprehending the influence of his thought. To put it simply, the systematic nature of Hegel’s philosophy refers to the fact that its parts comprise a

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<sup>80</sup> As I have argued, Hegel’s idealism is an absolute one, in the sense that he comprehends the speculative identity of thought and being. This implies that Hegel’s *Logic*, for instance, is not just a logic, in the traditional sense, but is also an ontology (Hyppolite 1997). It applies to both the categories of thinking and the categories of being. This then has further implications for the rest of Hegel’s “system.” The system is comprised of the logic, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of spirit (Logic – Nature – Spirit). A central question of this chapter then concerns the relationship between the logic and the spheres of nature and spirit.

unity. This is most easily evident in the *Encyclopedia*, which consists of a logic, a philosophy of nature, and a philosophy of spirit. One of the key questions for interpreters has been the relationship among these parts, which is related to the key Hegelian relationship between the “conceptual” and the “real.” While I have gone some way towards an interpretation of this relationship above, here I would like to draw out some of the complexities for understanding Hegel’s practical or political philosophy.

The key to understanding Hegel here is to recognize that he is not advocating the *application* of logical categories to social reality or “the real world” in general (Kolb 1986, 84f.). For Hegel, this distinction simply doesn’t make sense. For example, for Hegel, if an object or a concept has a high level of “reality,” this means that it is further along its path toward “actuality” than one that is less “real.” Here, we do not have a more traditional opposition between “real” and “ideal,” often interpreted as “material” and “immaterial,” but rather a distinction according to the realization of the objects “conceptuality.” While many have interpreted this to mean that, in Hegel’s philosophy, the (ideal) categories of logic *create* the realms of nature and spirit, a more accurate interpretation is that the ultimate duality of these spheres cannot be recognized by Hegel. Here I follow Kolb, who argues that “it is not necessary to resolve this problem in full; we need only emphasize that the transition from the logic to the more real sciences is not a move *outside* the categories of logic. Hegel is not developing a set of categories that is then applied to some foreign entities or embodied in some concrete material” (1986, 85).

To grasp the world *speculatively*, we must move beyond the dualisms of reflective thought, and see the systems of mutual mediations that constitute the whole.

Thought and its relation to reality must be thought in terms of the motion of the absolute form: universality (the logic), particularity (the logical categories spread out in otherness in nature), individuality (the logical categories as forming self-aware individuals, spirit). Each of these moments exists through the others; no one moment is ‘first’ . . . This relentless extension of encompassing unity is meant to forestall questions of the kind we usually ask about causes and mechanisms . . . For Hegel, our yearning for explanatory mechanisms reflects a failure to understand how the logical categories are more fundamental than any explanation we could give of their transition to nature and spirit. Whatever account one gave beyond the logical sequence would be structured in terms taken from prior stages within that sequence and would not get behind or outside it to talk about its application or embodiment (Kolb 1986, 86-7).

This notion of “absolute form,” discussed in the *Science of Logic*, represents the “completion” of the Hegelian system of philosophy; that is, it marks a completion only in terms of reaching the standpoint of the totality, of the “gathering together” of the syllogisms (Gabriel 2011, 89). In short, the absolute form marks the move to absolute knowing.

For our purposes here, we can focus on the *Philosophy of Spirit*, leaving aside the *Philosophy of Nature* and its interpretive difficulties. Again, this move from logic to spirit (via nature) is not a move *beyond* the logic, but rather marks most significantly an advancement in concreteness (EG §377). The key conceptual differentiation within this sphere is between “subjective spirit,” “objective spirit,” and “absolute spirit.” Hegel describes them this way:

The development of spirit is, that it [is]:

(1) in the form of a *relationship to itself*, within it, is the *ideal* totality of the idea; that is, it has before it all that its concept contains; its being is to be self-contained and free — *subjective spirit*.

(2) in the form of *reality*, as of the *world*, which produces, and is produced by it; that in which freedom is existing necessity — *objective spirit*.

(3) as an *in and for itself* and eternally produced unity of the objectivity of spirit with its ideality or concept; spirit in its absolute truth — *absolute spirit* (EG §385; translation modified).

The category of spirit then contains its own path of development, which links subjective and objective spirit into the unity of absolute spirit. If we understand subjective spirit as internally related, and objective spirit as externally related, and also of these moments as following a progressive increase in concreteness and complexity, we can begin to understand the place of social and political “reality” within Hegel’s thought. As Hegel explains in the addition to this paragraph, spirit itself “emerges” from nature, as an undifferentiated determination, as a universal. It then becomes “for itself” by “particularizing, determining itself.” “As long as mind stands related to itself as to an other, it is only *subjective* mind, originating in nature” (EG §385). Importantly, the movement to *objective spirit* marks the progression not just from the “ideal” to the “real,” but also from freedom as a principle to existing freedom.<sup>81</sup> The sphere of objective spirit is that of “supra-individual trans-subjective spirit,” it is the concrete particularization of subjective spirit (Riedel 1984, 3). Individual self-consciousness exists now only in relationship to supra-individual structures.

Hegel began to think about the ways in which the social world should be comprehended *philosophically* early in his career. In his essay on *Natural Law*, he criticized both the empiricist and formal modes of understanding the political world ([1802] 1975). This early critique would be complemented by his later work on the *Philosophy of Right*, which itself is an expansion of the section on “objective spirit” in his *Encyclopedia*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> There are difficult problems related to Hegel’s own philosophical development, and the various ways in which he characterized this practical sphere over the course of his career. The term “objective spirit” was not used until the *Encyclopedia* of 1817. Previously, he had focused on the “system of ethical life” and “practical philosophy.” On the nature and significance of the conceptual development, see Riedel (1984, Chapter 1).

<sup>82</sup> Hinchman (1984, 185) emphasizes the continuity between Hegel’s earlier work and his conception of objective spirit, in the form of the theme of the overcoming of the dualisms of modernity.

In these works, as well as others, Hegel developed his critique into an account of *Sittlichkeit*, or “ethical life.” As with so many Hegelian concepts, the interpretation of ethical life has been contentious. Roughly, it alludes to the overcoming of the subjective and objective positions within social and political life:

Both principles which we have so far considered, the abstract good and the conscience, lack their opposite: the abstract good evaporates into a complete powerlessness which I can endow with any content whatsoever, and subjectivity of spirit becomes no less impoverished in that it lacks any objective significance . . . The unity of the subjective with the objective good which as being in and for itself is *ethical life* . . . [E]thical life is not just the subjective form and self-determination of the will: it also has its own concept, namely freedom, as its content (PR §141A).

With the *Aufhebung* of morality into the sphere of ethical life, Hegel attempts to resolve the Kantian dichotomy of freedom and necessity; however, his speculative move here has typically been misread. While Hegel sought an account of ethical life which stressed the sustained significance of subjective freedom, many continue to interpret Hegel’s social philosophy as containing an implicit conservatism or even totalitarianism.<sup>83</sup>

### 2.1 The project of the Philosophy of Right

The *Philosophy of Right* is not exactly a philosophy of the state; its subject matter is rather “right” [*Recht*]. According to Hegel, the work comprises a speculative “science” of this concept, and thus distinguishes itself from earlier political philosophies. The phenomenon of “right” is the result of the struggle for recognition, through which, famously, the individual consciousness, the “I,” becomes the “we” of spirit (PG §177ff.). There are two significant dimensions of this transition from self-consciousness to spirit: one relates self-consciousness to its *historical-material* world; the other relates it to

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<sup>83</sup> For good discussions of the criticisms, as well as the responses, see Franco (1999) and Patten (1999).

*another self-consciousness*. The dialectic of lordship and bondage results in an accomplishment of “mutual recognition,” which is the beginning of the path to universality, to true freedom. “The result of the struggle for recognition brought about by the concept of spirit is universal self-consciousness . . . The mutually related self-conscious subjects, by setting aside their unequal particular individuality, have risen to the consciousness of their real universality, of the freedom belonging to all, and hence to the intuition of their specific identity with each other . . . It is only when the slave becomes free that the master, too, becomes completely free” (EG §436Z). Here, in the ethical political sphere, we have the creation of a speculative relationship, in which subject and object are united; this becomes the “substance” of ethical life.

The concept of freedom is thus at the center of Hegel’s political philosophy, and a crucial aspect of his understanding of right, *Recht*. Hegel discusses the latter term as “any existence in general which is the existence of the *free will*. Right is therefore in general freedom, as idea” (PR §29). Franco (1999, 173) notes that the German term *Recht* has a much wider meaning than the English “right;” Rather than referring a subjective claim, the German term refers in general to the objective conditions or structures with which the subjective must operate and exist. Hegel’s discussion of right in terms of freedom then refers to the necessity of such objective conditions for the achievement of real freedom. Additionally, Peperzak notes that this term “involves not only positive law, studied in the various divisions of jurisprudence . . . , but also the right which precedes and supercedes all positive law, for example the ‘right’ of history, which lets nations rise and fall. Hegel’s philosophy of right provides an analysis of the whole world of human rights and laws insofar as these constitute an objective realization of

freedom” (1987, 1). Hegel thus seeks to replace the notion of natural law with the “philosophical doctrine of right” or the “doctrine of the objective spirit” (Peperzak 1987, 3), and argues that the doctrine of natural law is problematic in that it uses a restricted conception of nature, as isolated to the “natural world,” rather than including the “essence” of human beings as well (see also EG §502).

The key for Hegel is that the social and political order (objective spirit) is not “unnatural” or artificial, but rather is the very realm in which freedom can be actualized.

The expression “natural law,” which has hitherto been common in the philosophical doctrine of right, is ambiguous as to whether the law is, as it were, already implanted directly by nature, or whether it exists because of the nature of things, i.e., because of the concept. The former used to be the customary meaning, so that . . . a “condition of nature” was poetically created, in which the law of nature should dominate; whereas the condition of society and the state required a limitation of freedom and a sacrifice of natural rights. In fact however, right and all its determinations are based on free personality alone, a self-determination which is the opposite of the determination of nature. A natural condition is therefore a condition of violence and injustice, of which nothing truer may be said than that one ought to leave it. Society, by contrast, is the only condition in which right has actuality. What is to be limited and sacrificed are precisely the arbitrariness and violence of the state of nature (EG §415).

The focus on “right” [*Recht*] marks the *Philosophy of Right* as a text which is primarily concerned with freedom and ethics; this is the substance of the state. Hegel’s approach seeks to look toward empirical social reality, and to discover within it the principles which we may use to comprehend it. Although he would be roundly criticized for his idealist, anti-empirical method, Hegel’s political philosophy and his *Realphilosophie* in general are necessarily tied to the empirical world. However, as Hinchman (1984, 188-9) argues, if, in our judgment of the social world, we eschew the transcendental in favor of existing “second nature,” how do we avoid slipping into conservatism or relativism? This is one of the most important questions regarding the interpretation and potential appropriate of Hegelian social and political philosophy.



How, then, should we categorize the project of the *Philosophy of Right*? Rather than a purely descriptive account of the modern state, or merely a normative one, Hegel approaches the concept of right and the modern state *philosophically*; that is, he seeks to comprehend the state through the concept. As I've emphasized, for Hegel the approach of philosophy is distinctive. To be practicing philosophy when we study a particular topic X, we must seek to grasp the *concept* of X "in its living development and actualization," to see it as a "type of the absolute Idea" (EG §377A). For Hegel, although philosophy cannot anticipate developments in the world, it is not a mere recapitulation. It is rather the "conceptual root" of history, its "supreme blossom;" it is "the consciousness and the spiritual essence of the whole situation, the spirit of the age as the spirit present and aware of itself in thought" (ILHP 25). The most famous of Hegel's claims on this point is that philosophy is "its *own time comprehended in thoughts*," and that "To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy, for *what is* is reason" (PR 26/21).

Again, we should take care to remember that Hegel's philosophy of the state is not an independent work; it comprises a part of his philosophical system, as part of the doctrine of objective spirit. While often appropriated to other purposes, Hegel's concept of objective spirit is thus an essential part of his system, and therefore must be understood as such. Divorced from the system, it "loses at least part of its truth" (Peperzak 1995, 52). One should also note that the *Philosophy of Right* was originally intended as a mere supplement to the discussion of objective spirit in the *Encyclopedia*, and that the state does not represent the highest achievement of spirit in either work.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Peperzak (1995, 52) argues that the transition from objective spirit to absolute spirit was "obscured by Hegel" in the *Philosophy of Right*. He attributes this to Hegel's desire to lessen the conflicts inherent in the level of the state, due to his intention of demonstrating the usefulness of philosophy for national politics.

Rather, the concept of objective spirit is meant to function as a transition between subjective spirit and absolute spirit. As a middle term, objective spirit is, like “essence” in the *Science of Logic*, intended to be merely a way station on the path of dialectical development. The more general point is that in Hegel’s system, the categories of subjectivity and objectivity must eventually be transcended, sublated into an absolute. In the *Encyclopedia*, the realm of spirit develops out of the philosophy of nature, and represents an advance over the natural, in terms of complexity, because of the nature of spirit itself as “absolutely restless being, pure activity” (EG §378A).

As the “truth” of nature, spirit is characterized by its structure, which is that of the “I” (EG §381A). In its most basic form, the “I” is simultaneously something individual and something universal. Spirit does not develop out of nature; rather, nature is spirit in its “self-externality,” is the “absolute *prius*.”

[A] different relationship obtains with the mind or spirit than makes world history. In this case, there no longer stands, on the one side, an activity external to the object, and on the other side, a merely passive object: but the spiritual activity is directed to an object which is active in itself, an object which has spontaneously worked itself up into the result to be brought about by that activity, so that in the activity and in the object, one and the same content is present (EG §381A).

In the *Encyclopedia*, spirit’s progress is from subjective to objective to absolute.

Subjective spirit is spirit in its self-relation, as “self-contained and free”; objective spirit is “the form of *reality*,” in a “*world* produced and to be produced by it.” Despite its own inward freedom, subjective spirit eventually finds itself “in relation to an external and already subsisting objectivity” (EG §483). Absolute spirit is the unity of subjective and objective spirit, spirit in its “absolute truth.” Restricting himself to the social and political sphere, in the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel traces the progression of objective spirit through its moments.

To put it most simply, the most significant issue for the appropriation of Hegel's social and political philosophy becomes how to interpret its relationship to the rest of Hegel's systematic philosophy. Hegel's own thoughts on this relationship are encapsulated most concisely, if not most lucidly, by his well-known claim that "what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational" (PR 24/20). In the next section I discuss the significance of this claim for understanding Hegel's philosophy.

## *2.2 Reading the Doppelsatz*

In the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel famously characterizes the relationship between the "rational" and the "actual." Hegel's dictum, that "what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational," is important in the context of the larger discussion of the Preface. It is a shorthand way of describing Hegel's perspective of absolute idealism, as it applies to the ethical world, the world of spirit. According to Franco (1999, 123), the sentence "contains Hegel's most succinct, not to say provocative, statement of his views on the crucial issue of the relationship between philosophy and historical-political actuality, or between theory and practice." An examination of this "*Doppelsatz*" will allow us to further clarify Hegel's terminology, concepts, and approach.<sup>85</sup> We have seen that the relation between reason and reality is a key theme for our discussion; there are a number of clues we can glean from the Preface regarding Hegel's conception of this relationship.

The claim of the *Doppelsatz* comes in the context of the main theme of the preface: the necessity of Hegel's speculative philosophical perspective for understanding the "ethical world," and most particularly the state. Hegel starkly differentiates his

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<sup>85</sup> My reading of the *Doppelsatz*, and Hegel's philosophy in general, has been influenced by: Hardimon (1994), Franco (1999), Rose (1981), and Longuenesse (2007).

philosophical perspective or method from the more popular philosophy of the time, which is represented by Fries and derided by Hegel as “superficial.” Hegel specifies that his book is primarily concerned with (philosophical) *science*, and his comments in the Preface can be seen as an elucidation of his idea that “in science, the content is essentially inseparable from the *form*” (13/10). Differentiating his work from that which merely attempts to postulate new *opinions* about the state (in which the *form* of the claim is considered to be *external* to its content), Hegel states that speculative or “scientific” philosophy has to help the content, which is already rational, *attain a rational form* by starting out from itself (14/11). There is no simple way to explain the development of the concept as the distinctive form of knowledge of the Hegelian system. The perspective of the concept is what distinguishes speculative philosophy from “superficial” forms as mere opinion.

In order to attain the level of the concept, we have to look at the reason inherent in our subject matter, in this case the state. We have to “consider the rationality of right, and this is the business of our science” (17/14). We cannot just treat the state from the perspective of our subjective feelings, as Hegel believes Fries does, nor can we just look at it “simply” empirically. Instead, we have to consider that it has a “refined structure,” a “complex inner articulation,” a rationality inherent to it (18/15). The philosophy of right as a science then seeks to comprehend the state as a rational entity (Neuhouser 2011). This crucially involves beginning from an empirical investigation of social reality. Although the “science of society” is normative, it is not simply the postulation of an “ought.” “[S]ince philosophy is exploration of the rational, it is for that very reason the comprehension of the present and the actual, not the setting up of a world beyond which

exists God knows where” (PR 24/20). This claim, which precedes the *Doppelsatz*, expresses Hegel’s criteria that thought cannot look beyond current “reality,” because it has actuality only in the present.

For what matters is to recognize in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present. For since the rational, which is synonymous with the Idea, becomes actual by entering into external existence, it emerges in an infinite wealth of forms, appearances, and shapes and surrounds its core with a brightly coloured covering in which consciousness at first resides, but which only the concept can penetrate in order to find the inner pulse, and detect its continued beat even within the external shapes (25/20-1).

The key here is not that the “rational” Idea is an ideal structuring force, existing prior to “external existence;” but rather that there is a “substance” to be sought as the totality of subject-object relations.

The *Doppelsatz* is thus a speculative proposition. Read in one direction, it claims that what is rational is (or “becomes”) actual. In the passage above, Hegel claims that the rational is synonymous with the Idea, a statement that should make us quickly aware that we are not seeking a common sense interpretation of “rational” here. The Idea is the final stage of the “Doctrine of the Concept” in the *Science of Logic*, it is the stage in which thought returns to itself after diremption into essence, aware of itself and its concreteness. The Idea is the “*pure form of the Concept*” (EL §237); and so we could translate the claim that “what is rational is actual” as “what is conceptual is actual.” Of course, we likewise cannot interpret Hegel’s term “actual” in a common sense way. Hegel is not claiming that what is rational or conceptual simply exists in reality. Actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) for Hegel refers instead to what is *conceptually necessary*. In the *Logic*, actuality is the third and final stage in the “Doctrine of Essence,” and represents the unity of essence and appearance. The overall movement of the “Doctrine of Essence” is one of relation, where the immediate being of things has been surpassed. Rather than

simple being, we have semblance or appearance (*Schein*) reflecting an essence. Things here do not simply *exist*, they *appear*. Hegel's section on Essence moves from essence as ground, to appearance, and then to actuality, which represents the unity of the first two moments.

Hegel is clear to differentiate his notion of a speculative form of comprehension from the viewpoint of the "abstract understanding." In this speculative mode, "thought is assumed to be synonymous with subjective representation, planning, intention, and so on; and . . . actuality is assumed to be synonymous with external, sensible existence" (EL §142A). Hegel then clarifies his usage of "actuality:" "As distinct from mere appearance, actuality, being initially the unity of inward and outward, is so far from confronting reason as something other than it, that it is, on the contrary, what is rational through and through; and what is not rational must, for that very reason, be considered not to be actual." It is no mere modality as it was for Kant, a product of an inward reflection; rather, it has as its moments possibility and contingency, which "have their inward reflection in the actual" (EL §145). In other words, actuality, as speculative unity, understands reason as internal to it; it is reason actualized.

Lest we try to understand the actual as a subordinate category for Hegel, note his claim in the *Encyclopedia* that "the content of philosophy is *actuality*" (EL §6).<sup>86</sup> Hegel makes this statement in the course of introducing his philosophical method. He goes on:

The first consciousness of this content is called *experience*. Within the broad realm of outer and inner thereness, a judicious consideration of the world already distinguishes that which is only *appearance*, transient and insignificant, from that which truly and in itself merits the name of *actuality*. Since philosophy is distinguished only in form from other ways of becoming conscious of this same identical import, its accord with actuality and experience is necessary. Indeed, this accord can be viewed as an outward touchstone, at least, for the truth of

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<sup>86</sup> Also see Hegel's comments on the actual in the Preface to the *Phenomenology*.

philosophy; just as it has to be seen as the supreme and ultimate purpose of science to bring about the reconciliation of the reason that is conscious of itself with the reason that is, or actuality, through the cognition of this accord (EL §6).

Here Hegel claims that the truth of philosophy is measured by its accord with actuality.

We can interpret this to mean that philosophical thought reflects on itself and its context; that is, it reflects explicitly on this accord between itself and actuality. In this reflection, it approaches its goal, which is the reconciliation of self-conscious reason with actuality. Actuality, as the *Aufhebung* of essence and appearance, is itself now overcome into the concept. As experience comes to know its actuality, it becomes reason.

In the addition to this paragraph, Hegel refers explicitly to his dictum about actuality and rationality from the *Philosophy of Right*. He notes that these “simple propositions” have not been received well, and have been attacked. At stake here is the *content* of philosophy, i.e. actuality. As we’ve seen, the concept is what differentiates Hegl’s speculative science from other modes of philosophy. Regarding the traditional philosophical concept of “existence,” Hegel clarifies that it must be problematized.

[W]hat there is is partly *appearance* and only partly actuality. In common life people may happen to call every brainwave, error, evil, and suchlike “actual,” as well as every existence, however wilted and transient it may be. But even for our ordinary feeling, a contingent existence does not deserve to be called something-actual in the emphatic sense of the word; what contingently exists has no greater value than that which something-possible has; it is a existence which (although it is) can just as well *not* be . . . The notion that ideas and ideals are nothing but chimeras, and that philosophy is a system of pure phantasms, sets itself at once against the *actuality of what is rational*; but, conversely, the notion that ideas and ideals are something far too excellent to have actuality, or equally something too impotent to achieve actuality, is opposed to it as well. However, the severing of actuality from the Idea is particularly dear to the understanding, which regards its dreams (i.e., its abstractions) as something genuine, and is puffed up about the “ought” that it likes to prescribe . . . If the world were the way it ought to be, what then would become of the pedantic wisdom of the understanding’s “ought to be?” When the understanding turns against trivial, external and perishable objects, institutions, situations, etc., with its “ought” . . . it may very well be in the right; and in such cases it may find much that does not correspond to correct

universal determinations. Who is not smart enough to be able to see around him quite a lot that is not, in fact, how it ought to be? But this smartness is wrong when it has the illusion that, in its dealings with objects of this kind and with their “ought,” it is operating with the concerns of philosophical science. This science deals only with the Idea — which is not so impotent that it merely ought to be, and is not actual — and further with an actuality of which those objects, institutions, and situations are only the superficial outer rind (EL §6A).

The relation between thought and reality is precisely what is at stake in this passage. The understanding is free to think whatever it wants, free to abstract its concepts from the actuality of the world, but in doing so it ends up with impotent criticism of contingent truths. We are reminded here of the bewildering “variety of opinions” from the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*. Just as in that work Hegel counterposes mere “opinion” to the truth of the concept, here he opposes mere existence to actuality, and then mere actuality to the concept. The most important consideration here is that the Idea, as the pure Concept, includes actuality within itself; it cannot be divorced from actuality. From the recognition of this perspective, speculation or “philosophical science” has a stronger claim to criticism than the understanding does. Precisely because of the fact that it has recognized the distinction between existence and actuality, it has rooted its “ought” in the determinateness of its objects.

It may then appear as if the *Doppelsatz* is merely a tautology, an empty claim.<sup>87</sup> However, such a criticism ignores precisely the speculative *form* of the proposition. As Franco notes, “the connection that Hegel is trying to make between actuality and rationality is more than merely analytic or definitional” (1999, 132). Part of what it means for something to be rational or conceptual for Hegel is that it be actualized; and part of the meaning of actuality is that it is necessarily conceptual. But these do not then denote the same states or processes. The *speculative* nature of the statement is crucial

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<sup>87</sup> See, e.g., Franco (1999, 132), Hardimon (1994, 55-6), and Avineri (1968, 127).



for its interpretation, and has led to many confusions. As crucial concepts of the *Logic*, then, the speculative identity of rationality and actuality represents a specific claim about *logical development* of Hegel's philosophy. By saying that rationality and actuality imply or become each other, Hegel is linking two important categories of the *Logic's* doctrines of Essence and of the Concept. I will return to this topic in my discussion of Marx's and Adorno's interpretations of Hegel. The *Doppelsatz* thus indicates the status of the *Philosophy of Right* as speculative science. The state represents the speculative unity of the spheres of the family and civil society, in which the will finally achieves a form of "social freedom" (Neuhouser 2008). The philosophical intention of the work is to provide a "scientific proof of the concept of the state" (PR §256A). In other words, Hegel seeks to demonstrate the dialectically necessary progression of spirit (as the will) from its immediate abstract form to the state of *Sittlichkeit*. In this way, the form of the state is seen to be rational.

### 2.3 The logic of the state

Hegel's *Logic* cannot be easily divorced from his philosophical understanding of society (Kolb 1986, 40; see Rose 1981). If we briefly examine the "Doctrine of Essence" from the *Science of Logic*, and then contrast it with the dialectical move to Concept, we will ultimately be better able to understand the Hegelian heritage of both Marx and Adorno. At the stage of essence within the *Logic*, "each member is thought of as constituted by interaction with others, but there is not yet any thought of the system as a whole distinguished from its members, and the whole remains indeterminate" (Kolb 1986, 58). As the second attempt at understanding the absolute within the *Logic*, essence is the negation of being, the beginning of a transition from being to concept. The middle stage

of essence represents the level of a merely reflective form of philosophical reason, which understands the social system in terms of its dichotomies and oppositions.<sup>88</sup>

In Hegel's analysis, the categories of the "Doctrine of Essence" are insufficient for grasping the modern world. Only the logic of the concept will do. Not only does the logic of essence not provide a satisfying account of philosophy, but it also does not "give a way of thinking the relation of formally universal institutions and independent particular members" (Kolb 1986, 59). The insufficiency of essence is corrected by the perspective of the concept, where Hegel introduces "categories pertaining to questions of idealism and to a kind of ontological monism" (Kolb 1986, 60). The logic of the concept is the speculative comprehension of thought itself. In it, we can understand both its freedom and self-determination. To revisit Hegel's concept of the concept briefly, as we first encounter it in the *Encyclopedia*, we learn that it is "the *substantial might which is for itself* . . . [it] is what is *free*; and since *each* of its moments is *the whole* that it is, and is posited as inseparable unity with it, the Concept is *totality*; thus, in its identity with itself it is what is *in and for itself determinate*" (EL §160).<sup>89</sup> It is only once we reach this stage that we have reached the position of absolute idealism (EL §160A). This is where we shift from a reflective understanding of concept as a form of thought, to a Hegelian

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<sup>88</sup> The *Logic* as a whole can be described as a *logic of reflection*, so central is the concept to Hegel's overall project (Longuenesse 2007, 30f.). The key distinctions are between 1) a simple or "isolated" reflection; 2) a merely *philosophical*, or *external* reflection; and 3) a *speculative*, *absolute*, reflection, which we can also characterize as *immanent*. Both philosophical and speculative reflection attempt to connect reason to the absolute; however, philosophical reflection does this in only a formal way: "Philosophical reflection originates in opposites, and the formal insight into the necessity of a unity of opposite terms. It posits this unity in opposition to the initial dualistic structures, as their 'beyond.' When philosophical reflection expounds the true nature of this identity, it sets it forth as the binding power of irreducible opposites. Consequently, it can conceive of the original synthesis as a union only in the form of an antinomy of absolutely dualistic terms" (Gasché 1986, 36). Philosophical reflection raises itself up to a "purely formal or antinomic synthesis" (37). This is a unity, but only an abstract totality.

<sup>89</sup> For my general purposes here, I refer simply to Hegel's "logic," without differentiating between the quite different works.

conception of it as an “infinite and creative form.” “[T]he concept is a true concrete; for the reason that it involves being and essence, and the total wealth of these two spheres with them, merged in the unity of thought” (EL §160A). But this is also an approximation of the absolute (yet to be further refined), and, like the absolute, the concept is a (speculative) unity of subjective and objective, and of form and content. The concept is not a form which is *applied to* content, as in the view of it from the understanding; rather, the concept *contains its own* content.<sup>90</sup>

If the realm of the conceptual is where we find a Hegelian version of objectivity, then, in terms of the “Doctrine of the Concept,” this is comprised of the moments of universality, particularity, and individuality. The relationship among these moments is crucial to comprehending the concept. If they do not remain intimately interrelated — if, for instance, the universal is detached from the particular via abstraction — then we “stray away from the way of the concept, abandoning the truth,” which of course is the whole. The universal in this scenario “is only a surface that becomes progressively more void of content” (WL 2:296-7/546). Here we have empirical concepts which we may employ, but not ones with “philosophical necessity,” which are “necessary structures for thought, and . . . can serve as criteria for correcting some ordinary conceptions, for example, conceptions of the state” (Kolb 1986, 63).

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<sup>90</sup> In an interesting passage, Hegel discusses why, given the stark differences between the concept of the concept according to the understanding and speculative reason, he has chosen to retain the term *Begriff*. He claims that, on a deeper analysis, the similarities between the two versions can be seen. “We speak of a deduction of a content from the concept, e.g. of the specific provisions of the law of property from the notion of property; and so again we speak of tracing back these material details to the concept. We thus recognize that the concept [viewed from the perspective of the understanding] is no mere form without content of its own: for if it were, there would be in the one case nothing to deduce from such a form, and in the other case to trace a given body of fact back to the empty form of the concept would only rob the fact of its specific character, without making it understood” (EL §160A).

As we have seen above, the concept has the structure of the “I.” “True, I have concepts, that is, determinate concepts; but the “I” is the pure concept itself, the concept that has come into determinate existence” (WL 2:253/514). A feature of this structure is its universality, “a unity that is unity with itself only by virtue of its *negative* relating” (WL 2:253/514). As such a unity, the “I” is simultaneously a singular individuality, and the speculative unity of opposites that gives the concept (and the “I”) its character. “[T]he *conceptual comprehension* of a subject matter consists in nothing else than in the ‘I’ making it *its own*, in pervading it and bringing it into its own form, that is, into a *universality* which is immediately *determinateness*, or into a determinateness which is immediately universality” (WL 2:255/516). The universal thus is a key category for Hegel, and he is careful to emphasize the distinctions between his own concept of the universal and that of other (reflective) philosophers. The key lies in the fact that, for these others, the concept of universal is typically understood in terms of abstract generality, as something that is derived through abstraction from particulars. Hegel wishes to emphasize specifically that “the universal of the concept” is determinate, it is “not just something common against which the particular stands on its own; instead the universal is what particularizes (specifies) itself, remaining at home with itself in its other, in unclouded clarity . . . It is of the greatest importance, both for cognition and for our practical behaviour, too, that we should not confuse what is merely communal with what is truly universal” (EL §163A1). The “true” universal is concrete rather than abstract; it is a concrete unity containing the moments of universality, particularity and individuality. Abstract universality, on the other hand, is abstract because “the mediation is only a condition, or is not posited in it. Because it is not posited, the unity of the

abstraction has the form of immediacy, and the content has the form of indifference to its universality” (WL 2:284/537).

In such passages, we can see that the category of mediation is intimately linked to that of the true or concrete universal. There must be a change in the character of mediation in order to move from an abstract universality to a concrete one. In the context of the *Philosophy of Right*, there are actually three kinds of universality, as Kolb points out (1984, 71). One corresponds to traditional society, in which the moments of the universal are immediately a whole; one (formal universality) corresponds to civil society, in which the moments of the universal are posited as separate, divided from one another; and the final corresponds to the state, which as the absolute form is the speculative unity of the first two. At the second stage, of the formal universality of civil society, the mediation of the moments has not yet been posited; this is what must occur to reach the next stage (Kolb 1986, 71). In this state of concrete universality, *each of* the three moments become more determinate and richer. The mediations between the moments of the “absolute form” are spelled out through the discussion of the syllogism in the *Science of Logic* (see Kolb 1986, 72ff.; Henrich 2004; Wolff 2004). This is where Hegel spells out the significance of going beyond a binary logic of propositions. What results is the articulated, determinate whole, the concrete totality.

To say that the modern state must be comprehended according to the structure of the concept then implies that it is rational in this sense. In terms of the relationship between the concept as a category of the *Logic* and the analysis of ethical life in the *Philosophy of Right*, we would correctly say that the question is malformed, since it

presupposes an understanding of “category” according to analytic or reflective philosophy. Hegel’s concept may not be *applied* since it is always already present.

[I]n general the Concept should not be considered as something that has come to be at all. Certainly the Concept is not just Being or what is immediate; because, of course, it involves mediation too. But mediation is in the Concept itself; and the concept is what is mediated by and with itself. It is a mistake to assume that, first of all, there are objects which form the content of our representations, and then our subjective activity comes in afterwards to form concepts of them . . . Instead, the Concept is what truly comes first, and things are what they are through the activity of the Concept that dwells in them and reveals itself in them (EL §163A2).

More generally, Hegel clarifies that the *Logic* itself is not supposed to “contain” reality:

These concrete sciences [of reality] do attain to a more real form of the idea than logic does, but not because they have turned back to the reality which consciousness abandoned as it rose above the appearance of it to science, or because they have again resorted to the use of such forms as are the categories and the determinations of reflection, the finitude and untruth of which were demonstrated in the logic. The logic rather exhibits the rise of the *idea* up to the level from which it becomes the creator of nature and passes over into the form of a *concrete immediacy* whose concept, however, again shatters this shape also in order to realize itself as *concrete spirit*. These sciences, just as they had the logic as their prototype, hold on to its logical principle or the concept as in them their formative factor (WL 2:265/522-3).

The philosophies of spirit (subjective and objective) and of nature then do not bring in to philosophy some external content; rather, they are generated out of philosophy’s own content. While this can be difficult to grasp, the idea is at the heart of Hegel’s conception of philosophical science. Hegel makes the transition from the *Logic* to the *Realphilosophie* via an internal move.<sup>91</sup>

In his social and political analysis, Hegel is working with the present structure as he encounters it, which includes the acts of cognition (Kolb 1986, 58). Nevertheless, as Kolb (1986, 58) expresses it, the concepts employed in the logic are “categories for modernity.” they give “a way of thinking about mutual relations and particular content in

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<sup>91</sup> See also (EL §43A): “This advance [i.e., to the philosophy of nature], however, should not be interpreted as meaning that the logical idea comes to receive an alien content that stems from outside it; on the contrary, it is the proper activity of the logical idea to determine itself further and further and to unfold itself into nature and spirit.”

terms of the whole system.” In this third part of the logic, the concept is seen as the “truth” of essence, and we can see things as truly mutually constituted for the first time. Here is where the part/whole or particular/universal dynamic is worked out for Hegel; it is where “comprehensive unity becomes the central theme” (1986, 59). In other words, the *unity* or *totality* of the concept is crucial to understanding the state in its terms. This allows us to see ethical life not only as a complex unity of dialectically interacting parts, but also as a whole which necessarily encompasses subjective and objective elements (Wolff 2004). It is only here, at the level of the concept, that we begin to understand “foundationlessness.” It is only here that we begin to see the “perspective” of the absolute. There are no principles, no foundation to his system, “only the motion of the concept and the idea” (Kolb 1986, 88). His system is in this sense presuppositionless. This is one of the great appeals for Adorno; but this feature is directly related to his employment of the absolute. The only way that there are no “one-way dependencies” is due to the structure of the concept and the idea, which is that of “absolute form.”

Thus, the argument of the work is that freedom can only be realized within an “objective” system, a self-determining whole that has the structure of the concept (Neuhouser 2008, 220). The status of the conceptual logic of ethical life clearly comes down to the development of freedom within modern economic and political structures. One of the tasks of Hegel’s philosophical project as a whole — a properly *philosophical* task in his terms — is that of reconciling human beings with their modern, objective social contexts. The *Philosophy of Right* forms a part of this overall goal, by attempting the comprehension of modern social life as rational. “The project proposes to reconcile philosophically reflective individuals by providing them with a philosophical account

showing that they — and modern people generally — can be at home in the modern world (Hardimon 1994, 136). As Hegel put it,

What lies between reason as self-conscious spirit and reason as present actuality, what separates the former from the latter and prevents it from finding satisfaction in it, is the fetter of some abstraction or other which has not been liberated into [the form of] the concept. To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present and thereby to delight in the present — this rational insight is the *reconciliation* with actuality which philosophy grants to those who have received the inner call *to comprehend*, to preserve their subjective freedom in the realm of the substantial, and at the same time to stand with their subjective freedom not in a particular and contingent situation, but in what has being in and for itself (PR §26-7/22).

Hegel's diagnosis here is that individuals are suffering from alienation due to a lack of understanding of both themselves and their social world (Hardimon 1994, 137). The “idealist” or “merely interpretive” nature of this analysis, of course, was hotly contested, an issue I'll revisit after discussing the critiques of Marx and Adorno.

For Hegel, “objective thought” is that of absolute idealism, the perspective of the absolute. This is not *formal*, because it encompasses both form *and* content (it comprises absolute form) (WL 1:44/29). Many have had a difficult time parsing and then stomaching language like the following:

This objective thinking is thus the *content* of pure science. Consequently, far from being formal, far from lacking the matter required for an actual and true cognition, it is its content which alone has absolute truth, or, if one still wanted to make use of the word “matter,” which alone is the veritable matter — a matter for which the form is nothing external, because this matter is rather pure thought and hence the absolute form itself. Accordingly, logic is to be understood as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. *This realm is truth unveiled, truth as it is in and for itself*. It can therefore be said that this content is *the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and of a finite spirit* (WL 1:44/29).

But we do not have to come to an ultimate conclusion here. My goal is to explicate the nature of the Hegelian philosophical enterprise, in order to see how it fits “against” other, later forms of thought. The use of a dialectical relationship between subject and object has been prominent but contested. Sociological thinking that seeks to address



knowledge in some fashion, must come to terms with the subject-object relationship as well as that between individual and society. Both of these have a “model” in Hegel, which cannot be taken up easily. I will return to the topic of the character of Hegel’s speculative philosophy of “reality” below. Now the task at hand is to explore the ways in which the critical appropriation of Hegel’s philosophy has structured sociological thinking. I turn now to a discussion of the critiques of Marx and Adorno of Hegel’s social philosophy.

### ***3. Marx’s critique of philosophy through the critique of Hegel***

Marx’s work is filled with explicit and implicit references to Hegel’s philosophy. He claimed famously in the preface to *Capital* that he had stood Hegel on his head, referring again to the trope of inversion which was so prevalent in his earlier works. The currency of Hegel’s thought at the time of Marx’s philosophical education was overwhelming, a fact which was not to last for long.<sup>92</sup> After an early attachment to Hegel’s philosophy,<sup>93</sup> Marx began his first substantial critique of Hegel’s philosophical perspective with his analysis of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* in 1843, and continued engaging with his work throughout his life.<sup>94</sup> As would be the case with Adorno, Marx’s own self-understanding is dependent upon his understanding of Hegel (Fine 2011). A full analysis of the critique of Hegel as it is exhibited in Marx’s early and late works is beyond the scope of this paper; what I would like to do here is to examine Marx’s understanding of the *deficits* of the philosophical method and outlook, as demonstrated by Hegel’s *Realphilosophie*, which itself was part of the system considered by many to be the philosophical pinnacle of its time. Marx’s understanding of his own “scientific” method was developed through

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<sup>92</sup> Riedel (1984) notes that this is one of the impediments to a full understanding of Marx.

<sup>93</sup> See Mah (1987), Chapter 7.

<sup>94</sup> The most comprehensive coverage of Marx’s relationship to Hegel is Levine (2012).

these early readings and critiques of Hegel. This is often understood as the beginning of Marx's shift from a philosophical orientation to a "scientific" approach; however, I would like to problematize that reading, for there is more at stake than just a rejection of philosophy and a concomitant commitment to an empirical method. My goal in the following is to examine how the speculative idealist perspective of Hegel determines the understanding of the "critical materialism" and the "empirical" in the development of Marx's thought.<sup>95</sup> This will then set up a discussion of similar themes in Adorno, as they are related to both Hegel and Marx.

### 3.1 The critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

So the world that is opposed by a philosophy that is  
complete in itself is one that is rent asunder.  
Marx, *Dissertation* (McLellan 15)

In the unpublished notes that comprise the "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," Marx criticizes Hegel repeatedly for his approach to the study of social reality. The critique takes the form of a series of very detailed reading notes on sections §261 to §313 of the *Philosophy of Right*. These sections comprise most of Section 3, on "The State," of the third part of that work, "Ethical Life." The notes cover nearly all of part A of this section, on "Constitutional Law," and indeed all of its first subsection on the "Internal

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<sup>95</sup> "The difficulty of characterizing Marx's conception of science is compounded by the complex and more general question of Marx's relationship to Hegelian philosophy" (Amato 2001, 97). The point holds good for the discussion here as well. I do not attempt any kind of comprehensive study here. What I shall try to do is to emphasize the ways in which Hegel's *philosophical account of society* influenced Marx, both through its "methodology" and through its conception of society. The issue is the *selective* rejection of Hegelian philosophy. Amato goes on to note that "it has never been clear exactly how Marx reconciles the Hegelian-dialectical legacy with his own, increasingly empirically oriented social scientific ideas," and to suggest that there are few non-analytical attempts to examine this relationship between a Marxian and an Hegelian conception of *Wissenschaft*.

Constitution.” The three parts of this discussion, which Marx uses as divisions for his manuscript, are (a) The Power of the Sovereign; (b) The Executive Power; (c) The Legislative Power. In this part of his work, Hegel analyzes the internal structure of the modern state, in the course of demonstrating how it is part of spirit’s development toward ethical life. In the long and detailed reading notes, Marx responds critically to individual paragraphs of Hegel’s book. Leopold (2007) points out that there are two main foci to examine in this work, the critique of speculative philosophy and the critique of the theory of the state. I will focus primarily on the former here, although I do not believe that these are as separable as Leopold believes; or, rather, while we can separate them analytically, one of my goals here is to examine what may be learned by looking at these together.<sup>96</sup>

In his discussion of Hegel’s conception of sovereignty — which is constituted in the monarch as the necessary *individual* moment of the state — Marx comments,

If Hegel had begun by positing real subjects as the basis of the state he would not have found it necessary to subjectivize the state in a mystical way. “The truth of subjectivity,” Hegel claims, “is attained only in a *subject*, and the truth of personality only in a *person*.” This too is a mystification. Subjectivity is a characteristic of the subject, personality is a characteristic of the person. Instead of viewing them as the predicates of their subjects Hegel makes the predicates into autonomous beings and then causes them to become transformed into their subjects by means of a mystical process (KHS 224/80).<sup>97</sup>

Marx refers here to §279, in which Hegel states that sovereignty “can *exist* only as *subjectivity* which is certain of itself.” According to the concept, the state must have such an individual moment, or aspect, and since “subjectivity attains its truth only as a

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<sup>96</sup> This is of course based upon the more general attempt to separate Hegel’s critical “method” from his conservative “system,” which was explicitly problematized by Lukàcs and inherited by Adorno (see Rose 1981).

<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere Marx puts this point plainly in terms of subject and object: “This leads [Hegel] to convert the subjective into the objective and the objective into the subjective with the inevitable result that an *empirical person* is *uncritically* enthroned as the real truth of the Idea”(KHS 240-1/98).

*subject*, and personality only as a *person*,” Hegel concludes that this moment of individuality must take the form of an individual person, the monarch. Marx complains that Hegel’s understanding of the sovereignty of the modern state, encompassed in the individual as monarch, is *mystified* because it has accorded the primary role to “subjectivity,” which is in fact a predicate of the subject. Hegel of course is working with his previously developed logical categories, viewing the constitution of the state in terms of them; but Marx claims that with this method, Hegel has turned the abstract categories of “subjectivity” and “personality” into “autonomous beings,” which then are mysteriously “transformed” into real-life subjects in the form of the monarch.

Paragraph 279 of the *Philosophy of Right* is interesting in part because in the corresponding Remark Hegel justifies his conception of the monarchy explicitly in terms of his method of philosophical science. The concept of the monarch is a *speculative* one, he claims, and therefore cannot be grasped by the “reflective approach of the understanding.” This is so because the monarchy itself embodies the Idea, and as such it unifies the moments of individuality, particularity, and universality, just as the Idea does in Hegel’s logic. As the *Philosophy of Right* describes the development of the will from abstract right to ethical life, Hegel notes here that the “truth” of personality, and of subjectivity generally, can only be a person, a subject which has “being for itself.” “Personality expresses the concept as such, whereas the person also embodies the actuality of the concept, and only when it is determined in this way is the concept *Idea* or truth.” The previous stages (shapes) of the will, the person, the family, society, only possess personality *abstractly*, whereas the state is precisely that form “in which the moments of the concept attain actuality in accordance with their distinctive truth.”

However, as we've seen, the point of the *Philosophy of Right*, according to Hegel, is “nothing other than an attempt to comprehend and portray the state as an inherently rational entity” (PR 26/21). The point of philosophical science for Hegel is the “comprehension of the present and the actual,” which proceeds by recognizing “in the semblance of the temporal and transient the substance which is immanent and the eternal which is present” (PR 25/20). Hegel claims that the concept of freedom, which is at the center of the work, is best realized by the institution of the monarchy. Hegel believes that the sheer empirical individuality of the monarch is essential to the realization, or actualization, of the subjective moment of the Idea (EG §542R). In the rational state as an organic totality, the monarch, as a single individual, *unifies* the masses.<sup>98</sup> Sovereignty, then, for Hegel is the principle of the “rational constitution,” which is rational insofar as it is differentiated into powers which each are themselves the totality (PR §272). Its determinations are “not self-sufficient and fixed, either on their own account or in the particular will of individuals, but are ultimately rooted in the unity of the state as their simple self” (PR §278).<sup>99</sup>

This “essential” subjectivity is exactly what Marx finds so mystical. He reads this as stemming from Hegel's inattention to the *basis* of the state, which is made up by the people, and the self-imposed necessity of having his procedure *begin* with this fact (KHS 224ff./80ff.). Marx understands the *realization* of the subjectivity of the state as merely a *grammatical* error on the part of Hegel, albeit one with tremendous consequences. The “mystical process” is the transformation of the predicate (“subjectivity” or “personality”) into the actual subject (“subject” or “person”). By “transformation” here Marx intends a

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<sup>98</sup> Brooks goes over the details here (2007, 100f.)

<sup>99</sup> Hegel justifies these claims through reference to “animal organism” in the *Philosophy of Nature* (§278R).

process through which the predicates become *independent* of their subjects (*verselbständigen*). Marx understands Hegel's theory of the monarchy as deriving from the logic of the idea, which it does; however, he finds fault only with the step from the concept of "subjectivity" to the (actually existing) empirical subject, not it seems with the postulation of subjectivity in the first place. The point for Marx is that a quality such as "subjectivity" may not be abstracted from its "real basis," an empirical individual.<sup>100</sup> Hegel's reasoning appears exactly backwards to Marx because he sees it as somehow *resulting* in the justification of the individual empirical subject of the monarch. That is, he understands Hegel to be employing a form of metaphysical idealism in which the material world is seen as an instantiation of "ideal" substances such as concepts.<sup>101</sup>

Marx goes on to clarify what he believes are the implications of this method of understanding:

Hegel makes the predicates, the objects, autonomous, but he does this by separating them from their real [*wirklich*] autonomy, their subject. The real [*wirklich*] subject then subsequently appears as a result, whereas the correct approach would be to start with the real subject and then consider its objectification. The mystical substance therefore becomes the real subject, while the actual [*reall*] subject appears as something else, as a moment of the mystical substance. Because Hegel starts not with a real *Ens* (*ὑποχείμενον*, subject) but with predicates of universal determination, and because a vehicle of the determinations must exist, the mystical Idea becomes that vehicle. Hegel's dualism manifests itself precisely in his failure to regard the universal as the real essence of the finite real, i.e. of what exists and is determined, or to regard the real [*wirklich*] *Ens* things as the *true subject* of the infinite (KHS 224-5/80).

The separation that Hegel enacts between the predicate-as-autonomous-subject and what Marx considers the "real subject" leads him, in Marx's opinion, into an unsustainable dualism. Marx claims that the mystery comes from its uncertain (in

<sup>100</sup> We will see that Adorno employs a very similar criticism.

<sup>101</sup> This understanding surfaces again in the *Grundrisse* (G 101): "Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of the thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of ascending from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the spiritually concrete. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete comes into being."

Hegel's analysis) origin. Hegel has begun his analysis of the state with the *category* of subjectivity, rather than with the real, empirical subject of the monarch, and then reasons backwards to the concrete "vehicle" of that abstraction. The proposed dualism here stems from the hidden origins of Hegel's starting point. Marx declares the proper basis to be in being, the existent (*ὑποχείμενον*). In referring back to the Greek origins of the concept here, Marx draws on the ambiguity of the term, which may refer to a substratum either in an ontological sense or a logical one.<sup>102</sup> Aristotle's concept of *ὑποχείμενον* is that of "substance" or "substratum," both of which underlie and persist without change, and can be predicated, but cannot be a predicate itself (Peters 1967, 92). This ambiguity is profitable for Marx. The "real subject," for which he claims priority, is to be basic *both* ontologically, and logically-methodologically. What then is the "objectification" of this real subject to which Marx refers? He wants to begin methodologically with the empirical individual, and then consider how that subject is objectified. This implies that Marx is making some kind of analogy between the process of predication and that of objectification.

The conclusion of this passage helps to clarify Marx's understanding of "objectification." "Thus sovereignty, the essence of the state, is first objectified and conceived as something independent. Then, of course, this object must again become a subject. This subject, however, becomes manifest as the self-embodiment of sovereignty, whereas sovereignty is nothing but the objectified spirit of the subject of the state" (KHS 225/80). Marx here reduces Hegel's organic conception of the state, comprised of the moments of individuality, particularity and universality, into a dichotomy of subject and object. He reads "objective" here as "something independent" and he reads "subject" as

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<sup>102</sup> *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 10, pp. 373f.

something like non-objectified existence. Although he mixes and matches his terms here, what Marx refers to as “Hegel’s dualism” is considered to be a result of his (Hegel’s) mistaken interpretation of the relationship between subject and object, between the universal and the particular, or between the infinite and the finite.

The essence of Marx’s critique of the Hegelian speculative philosophical method is then that Hegel’s own philosophical commitments require a problematic dualism and a corresponding prioritization of the realm of the ideal or the conceptual. Leopold usefully highlights Marx’s critique of Hegel’s “transformation of the empirical into the speculative and the speculative into the empirical” (KHS 241/98; Leopold 2007, 48ff.). The first of these transformations concerns what Marx sees as Hegel’s lack of acknowledgment of the real, empirical basis of his philosophical abstractions; and the second refers to Marx’s concern about the “actualisation of [Hegel’s] categorical framework in the natural and social worlds . . . Marx rejects Hegel’s claim that the idea creates and governs the finite, insisting instead that speculative philosophy simply provides an imaginative redescription of the existing empirical world (as the embodiment of the absolute)” (Leopold 2007, 49). Marx argues that the deficiency in Hegel’s approach is characteristic of its speculative, *philosophical* form, which must be corrected with a more properly *scientific* one.

Two of the primary consequences of Hegel’s commitment to philosophy are its ideological implications as a justification for the empirically existing, and, relatedly, its lack of a “true” level of comprehension of the world. Hegel’s philosophical approach entails that “empirical reality is accepted as it is; it is even declared to be rational. However, it is not rational by virtue of its own reason, but because the empirical fact in



its empirical existence has a meaning other than itself. The fact which serves as a starting-point is not seen as such but as a mystical result. The real becomes a mere phenomenon, but the Idea has no content over and above this phenomenon” (KHS 207-8/63). Marx declares that this articulates the “whole mystery” of not just Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie*, but of his philosophy in its entirety, and he suggests that Hegel’s dichotomous approach constitutes a problematic dualism because he cannot properly bridge the spheres of the speculative (philosophical) and the empirical. Instead, he is left with the “mystified” conversion of one into the other. For example, Marx complains that Hegel’s analysis of the constitution as an organism according to the structure of the concept, in §269, relies not upon a proper logical demonstration of the claim, but merely upon his own definition of the idea, and an irrational leap to the identification of the state as such a thing (KHS 212f./68f.). Hegel moves from speaking of *the* idea, to *this particular* constitution without any proper justification. “The statement that ‘these different members of the state are its various powers’ is an empirical proposition and cannot be passed off as a philosophical discovery; nor is it in any sense the result of a logical argument” (KHS 212/69). Clearly Marx is alluding here to a systematic failure on Hegel’s part to properly understand the requirements of logical, scientific reasoning. Marx suggests a new relationship between the “empirical facts” and the rational logic of investigation, a *non-philosophical* relationship. To truly comprehend the state, we must begin empirically, not *a priori* with the idea. Marx actually goes even further than this, claiming that, in his confusion, Hegel has “failed to construct a bridge *leading from the general idea of the organism to the particular idea of the organism of the state or the*

*political constitution*. Moreover, even if we wait until the end of time it will never be possible to construct such a bridge” (KHS 212-3/69).

Marx’s migration from philosophy to science, thus stems from this reading of Hegel, in which the German idealist philosopher is viewed as being inattentive to the abstractions involved in thought. It is striking that Marx critiques Hegel here on the grounds of a dualist foundation of his thought; while we could turn the claim on Marx himself, the aspect that I would like to emphasize here is this idea of a failure to connect the speculative and the empirical. With his tenuous grip on the concept of speculation, Marx argues correctly that, for Hegel, the Logic has priority; but he infers this to be an ontological priority. Marx’s “translation” of Hegelian philosophy into its “method,” requires a denial of its properly speculative aspect, which attempts to grasp the totality through the concept. The move to science, as the prioritization of the empirical, of the object over the subject, demands a reinstating of the dichotomies that Hegel tried to overcome.

Marx’s other primary critique of Hegel in these unpublished writings has to do with the understanding of the concept of mediation; and it is here that the difficulties with the materialist appropriation of Hegel become more evident. The root lies in the critique discussed above: Marx believes that Hegel has simply translated a conception of mediation from the logical sphere into his account of mediation in the formation of *Sittlichkeit*. According to his logical point of origin, Hegel’s analysis of the state relies upon the presupposition of the “organic unity” of its “powers” (PR §299R). Marx complains that this is a movement of “taking refuge” in something “imaginary,” because he has not logically demonstrated how this conceptual model applies to the situation of

the state's powers (KHS 261/121). Accordingly, the substance of Marx's critique here is that the estates cannot possibly serve the mediating function that Hegel attributes to them.

In his introduction of the estates, Hegel claims that their role is "to bring the universal interest [*allgemeine Angelegenheit*] into existence not only *in itself* but also *for itself*, i.e. to bring into existence the moment of subjective *formal freedom*, the public consciousness as the *empirical universality* of the views and thoughts of the *many*" (PR §301). In less Hegelian language, this means that the estates (legislative bodies comprised of representatives from professional groups) are to represent the particular and private interests of individuals. This is due to their origin within the sphere of civil society. Accordingly, they add substance to the conception of the "universal interest" within the state: while the executive branch serves the universal interest by its "nature," the estates serve as a type of bridge between the spheres of civil society and government. Hegel characteristically describes this *philosophically*, as the estates serving to help the state develop the universal interest from "in itself" to "for itself." "The proper conceptual definition of the Estates should therefore be sought in the fact that, in them, the subjective moment of universal freedom — the personal insight and personal will of that sphere which has been described in this work as civil society — comes *into existence in relation to the state*" (§301A). The effect of this is that, through the estates, "the state enters into the subjective consciousness of the people" (§301A).

Marx takes issue with this very point. Examining this relationship between the "in itself" and "for itself" status of the universal interest, he notes that its (i.e., the universal interest's) coming into the consciousness of the people represents no more than a

“*symbolic* achievement of reality. The ‘formal’ or ‘empirical’ existence of matters of universal [interest] is separate from their *substantive existence*. The truth of the matter is that the *implicit* ‘universal interest’ is not *really universal*, and the real, *empirical* universal interest is purely *formal*” (KHS 264/125; translation modified). Marx criticizes Hegel here for maintaining a purely formal conception of subjective freedom, in which the estates are just “the *political illusion of civil society*” (KHS 265/126). Marx views the estates as consisting of “mere form” because of Hegel’s claim that they are grounded in the particular interests of civil society, while the other moments of the state directly handle the universal interests of society, being born of that sphere. The estates are then “superfluous.” In Marx’s estimation, Hegel has derived the *form* of the universal interest, but not the content. In the state, the general or the universal interest is only present as a formal entity, and cannot become more than this. Marx claims that Hegel characterizes the estates “as the *reflection of civil society upon the state*, a relationship that does not modify the *essence* of the state. A relationship of reflection is also the highest identity between essentially different things” (KHS 277/139).<sup>103</sup>

In his nascent theorization of class, heavily influenced by Feuerbach, Marx rejects the Hegelian conception of a tripartite mediation and speaks instead of the irreconcilable contradiction between the “real private position” of the individual within civil society, and her existence as a “social being” within the universal sphere of the state (KHS 285/147). This division represents a form of contradiction that cannot be overcome

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<sup>103</sup> One can see here the formulation of Marx’s argument in “On the Jewish Question,” written later the same year. In the later essay, Marx excoriates Bauer for his understanding of the relationship between the political being of the citizen, and his basis in the sphere of civil society. He is speaking of the split between the spheres of universality and particularity within the modern state, although he does briefly relate this to the situation for the individual, who must “*divide up his own essence*.” In order to exist in the political sphere, the estates must abandon their origins in civil society (KHS 281/143).

through Hegel's ideological, idealist form of organic unity in the state. He then argues more specifically that Hegel fails to understand that the contradictions of the private sphere of civil society cannot be canceled or transformed in the incorporation of the estates into the legislature. In essence, Marx explicitly rejects the dialectical motion identified by Hegel. For Marx, the reality of the distinction between the spheres of civil society and the state entails that the classes must achieve a different meaning in each. This is a trick on Hegel's part, an "illusory identity" (KHS 286/149). We have the fundamental shift in perspective here. Marx claims that "There is here an apparent identity, *the same subject*, but it has *essentially different* determinations, i.e. in reality there is a *double subject*" (KHS 287/149). For Marx, the "real subject" is man, meaning "empirical" man. Man as subject can be given any arbitrary predicates, or meanings, but this does not make them adequate to their subject; they are just arbitrary abstractions. In this way, Marx claims that Hegel is merely uncritically interpreting "an old view of the world in terms of a new one," and that "the consequence must inevitably be a wretched hybrid in which the form falsifies the meaning and the meaning falsifies the form, and neither the form nor the meaning can ever become real form and real meaning" (KHS 287/149). With this analysis, Marx claims that he has found the key both to modern constitutions and to the Hegelian philosophy.<sup>104</sup>

Marx understands Hegelian mediation to be a form of "middle" which resolves the contradiction between extremes, and he correspondingly undertakes to show that it instead remains riven with "real" forms of contradiction.

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<sup>104</sup> Marx claims that in order to get past this illusion, we have to "take the meaning for what it is . . . authentic determination." Subject and predicate have to be related in a necessary way; we must determine whether the predicate "represents its essence and true realization" (KHS 287/149-50).

We have already seen that the Estates in common with the executive form [*bilden*] the middle term [*die Mitte*] between . . . *empirical individuality* and *empirical universality*. Since he defined [*bestimmen*] the will of civil society as *empirical universality*, Hegel had to define the will of the monarch as *empirical individuality*; but he does not allow the *antithesis* to emerge in all its clarity [*er spricht den Gegensatz nicht in seiner ganzen Schärfe aus*] . . . Thus this “middle term” [*Vermittlung*] stands in great need of “coming into existence”, as Hegel so rightly infers. Far from accomplishing a mediation, it is the embodiment of contradiction (KHS 287-90/150-2).

The estates have an “extreme” position, as an “empirical universality” — the “many.” This is counterposed to the position of the monarch as “empirical individuality” — the “one.” Thus the stage is set for the movements of the Hegelian dialectic. Hegel claims that a *moment* of the estates must become a “moment of mediation,” and this will allow the estates to move from an “abstract position” to a “rational relation.” However, according to Marx, this does not capture the true antithesis of the situation, because the estates are already an abstraction from the real “empirical universality,” the “people.” The mediation is performed by the legislature, which contains the moments of the executive (monarch) and the Estates (the people). The legislature is the “middle term” in the syllogism, what Marx derisively calls *potpourri*. “The middle term is the wooden sword, the concealed antithesis between the particular and the universal” (KHS 288/151).

Marx’s point about the impossible status of mediation in Hegel is that the movement from “abstract position” to “rational relation” occurs only through the submission to the *concept*. “It is a construction of concern [*Konstruktion der Rücksicht*]. The legislative power is developed primarily in consideration of a third thing” (KHS 288/151; translation modified). For Marx, this claim leads to the recognition of the Hegelian state as “no *true* state,” simply because “its determinations . . . have no theoretical standing in and for themselves”(KHS 289/151).<sup>105</sup> According to Marx’s understanding, the *antithesis* on which Hegel’s theory is relying stems from its derivation from the moments of the

<sup>105</sup> Note that this is explicitly the perspective that Hegel argued against in §272.

concept, and not from “concrete” reality. In reality the estates are not a “universality” but another particularity, since they cannot embody the whole of civil society. The estates are hence unable to move from their “abstract position” because they have been derived in abstraction; they are so divorced from empirical reality that their nature must remain purely formal and abstract, and their development will stem from their relationship to the Idea rather than from any “real” relationship they might be in vis-à-vis other powers.<sup>106</sup> Even in Hegel’s own terms, Marx argues that the relationship between the crown and civil society, as they both exist within the legislature, are still in a relation of “irreconcilable conflict,” rather than one of mediation (KHS 290/152). The legislature is supposed to mediate, but it needs mediation itself (KHS 297/160).

Marx’s claim appears to be that we cannot understand the state in terms of the concept of “mediation” unless we adequately judge its empirical, determinate components accordingly, rather than becoming caught up in the requirements of the concept itself. The larger point is based upon his version of materialist realism, in which the “irrationality” of “reality” cannot be reconciled by philosophical reason. “Hegel should not be blamed for describing the essence of the modern state as it is, but for identifying [*ausgeben*] what is with the *essence of the state*. That the rational is actual is *contradicted* [*Widerspruch*] by *the irrational reality* [*Wirklichkeit*] which at every point shows itself to be the opposite of what it asserts, and to assert the opposite of what it is” (KHS 266/127; translation modified). But Marx’s point is a logical one as well. In his

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<sup>106</sup> Note that Marx in these passages clearly recognizes Hegel’s empirical acumen. In fact, his criticism stems from a judgment of Hegel as being in a way *too* reliant on the reality of the modern state. He makes the claim that Hegel’s understanding of the legislature is a product of the way that this body is derived in the modern state. Hegel’s “abstract,” “formal,” “dualistic” theory “follows from the *false*, illusory, pre-eminently political role of the legislature in the modern state (whose interpreter Hegel is)” (KHS 289/151).

opinion, the Hegelian conception of mediation is basically inadequate because it cannot be used to describe reality. Hegel's dialectical contortions may appear to work within his own system of the logic, but they do not play out in reality, because elements cannot be both extremes and mediating factors at the same time (KHS 291-2/154). "Real extremes cannot be mediated precisely because they are real extremes. Nor do they require mediation, for their natures are wholly opposed" (KHS 292/155).<sup>107</sup>

In the Left Hegelian idiom, Marx notes that "a truly philosophical criticism" must not just show contradictions, but explain them. This is done through "the discovery of the particular logic of the particular object," as opposed to the "general" or "universal" logic that Hegel has proposed (KHS 296/159). This criticism is a corollary of Marx's idea that Hegel has begun in the abstract world of the ideal, and has moved from there to empirical reality. Marx believes that Hegel's logic cannot recognize "real" contradiction, and so it cannot capture the reality of the current political situation. Hegel cannot see this, he cannot see the "particular" logic of the modern state. But the criticism here is confused, as Marx slips between two very different complaints: 1) that Hegel's understanding of contradiction does not allow for what he calls "real contradiction;" and 2) that Hegel has only *shown* the contradictions in modern society, but has not *explained* them. It is in reference to the second criticism that Marx speaks of finding the "particular logic" of the object. To understand the "necessity" of a particular contradiction, one has to see where it has come from, which must begin with an analysis

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<sup>107</sup> The passage continues: "They have nothing in common with one another, they have no need for one another, they do not complement one another. The one does not bear within its womb a longing, a need, an anticipation of the other. (However, when Hegel treats universality and individuality, the abstract moments of the logical inference, as real antitheses, he reveals the fundamental dualism of his logic. This point needs to be developed further in a critique of Hegel's *Logic*.)"



of its empirical setting. Hegel, on the other hand, does not show us the *origins* of the contradictions of the state, because, Marx believes, in fact they originate within his system itself. For example, in §304 Hegel claimed that one of the moments of the estates must “be given the function of existing essentially as a moment of mediation.” But Marx complains that “What is required here is not a “*function*”, but something more *specific*” (KHS 297/159; translation modified). What this specific something is is left undetermined; however the critique is that Hegel’s conception of the estates stems from his conception of the logic, of the concept, rather than being based upon the particular, existent reality.

### 3.2 The appropriation of Hegelian idealism

The critique discussed above is one of Marx’s earliest writings, and he famously became disenchanted with Feuerbach’s version of anthropological materialism, emphasizing, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, philosophical idealism’s conception of the *activity* of spirit. Marx famously moved from the critique of philosophy to that of political economy; in this section, I will briefly discuss some of the ways in which Marx’s dialogue with Hegel structured the later practice of his empirical and “scientific” method. While his employment of Hegel’s thought shifted to some extent, in many ways the critique of Hegel’s philosophy that he laid out in his early work shaped his formulation of a *social science*.

Marx very quickly moved beyond the Feuerbachian terms of critique, on which his critique of the *Philosophy of Right* was based. According to Marx, Feuerbach cannot grasp the subject-object relationship in the way that Marx is looking for, the active productivity of critique. The main problem with Feuerbach, for Marx, hinges on this

conception of the grounding of philosophy in the real world of human beings. While Feuerbach believes generally in this “inversion” of materialism, Marx disagrees with his view of “men.” He argues that Feuerbach returns not to man in his sensuousness and practicality, but to an *abstracted* form of man. By viewing human beings only as abstract contemplative subjects (and as practical objects), Feuerbach misses men in their reality, their sensuousness, and their history. He doesn’t see men and women “in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life which have made them what they are” (GI 418). It is in this sense that Marx claims that Feuerbach’s “Man” is an abstraction, and that, as a result, materialism and history completely diverge in his thought (GI 416, 418). This point is highlighted in Marx’s critique of Feuerbach’s views on religion. For Marx, Feuerbach’s procedure of critique by inversion does not go far enough. Though he “inverts” religion by recognizing its human basis, he does not realize that “religious sentiment” is produced by human beings, not according to their “essence” but according to their social conditions.

The process of critique through inversion cannot provide an account of the mediation of subject and object that became significant to Marx. In his writings in the 1844 *Manuscripts*, Marx had developed an account of labour and of alienation which highlighted both the power and constraint of subjectivity under capitalism. These themes also clearly drew on the account of alienation in Hegel’s philosophy. The attempt to incorporate a conception of the *activity* of spirit lead Marx to translate his early account of alienation from the early *Manuscripts* into value theory and the emphasis on commodity fetishism in *Capital*; this is a pivotal turning point in Marx’s work (although not in Althusser’s sense). The significance of this shift lies in the parallel moves from

philosophy to science, and from a focus on more subjective concerns to one on “objective” social structural forms. Throughout the move, Hegel’s philosophy provided the foundation for Marx’s approach. Continuing the themes of his early critique, in the Preface to *Capital*, Marx complains that Hegel transformed “the process of thinking” into “an independent subject, under the name of the idea, the creation of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought” (C 102). Yet he also mentions that Hegel’s *Logic* provided him help in formulating the structure of *Capital* (Marx and Engels 1955, 93).

Marx’s “materialist” transformation of Hegel involves a substitution of concrete human labor for the abstract activity of spirit, but in so doing, Marx himself would lose his connection to the realm of spirit. When it comes to the account of commodity fetishism, Marx becomes trapped in his own materialist logic, forced to discuss dynamics of appearance and essence without reference to any form of subjectivity. Whereas the early account of alienation involved the notion of experience, in this later work, the structural forms of commodity capitalism become a proxy for an account of the activity of spirit. A complex, idealist account of spirit becomes reduced to a form of objectivity. But in doing so, we lose connection to the realm of subjective spirit, which is the critical, negative power of “overreaching.” This cannot be captured by Marx’s conception of labour. The conception of consciousness as a “social product” (GI 44) cannot account for it.

Marxian “science” then, in contrast to a Hegelian version, begins only “where speculation ends, where real life starts” (GI 37). For Marx, of course, a philosophy such

as Hegel's has been *produced* by a divided society, and *reflects* the structure of this society, yet Hegel has crucially not recognized this. No matter what "results" his philosophy might achieve intellectually, these will never be enough to truly *transform* society. Ideology is thus generated by the structure of society, the social relations that constitute it.

Marx essentially has a dual critique of Hegel. On the one hand, Hegel's account of social reality is fundamentally flawed, as it is premised upon the identity of thought and being. On the other hand, Hegel's own procedure of philosophizing is problematic, because, as a result of this identity, it looks to the empirical world simply to find evidence of logic or conceptuality. Based upon his materialist criticism, Marx aims to ground knowledge not in forms of conceptuality, but in social-historical forms. Marx's theory of knowledge then, as evidenced by his conception of ideology, is of process which is inherently tied to the concrete world of being. Knowledge must be related to its origins in the "real" world, and theory must reflect this. In the specifically capitalist world that Marx criticized, knowledge has become ideological, in that it reflects, but does not transcend, the fetishized world of capital. Ideology critique is then a specific procedure which relativizes thought to its historical and social origins. Marx's theory encompasses a social theory of knowledge in that it attributes a connection between the sphere of human interaction (in the economy) and the world of theory and knowledge production. Although, due to the influence of the logic of commodities, thought appears to be separated from our social being, the essential reality behind this is different. In order to foster the true social being that we have lost, we must critically theorize the world we live in with the social ideal in mind. Our thought must not be divorced from empirical reality;

but we should not submit to a crude empiricism. We are also active creators, who use our knowledge to further social change, not just simple reflectors of our social condition. Our thought must stay tied closely enough to our practical concerns so that we continue to recognize that it is only through material change that the contradictions of society can be overcome.<sup>108</sup>

In the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx discusses his critique of Hegel in more methodological terms. He suggests that the method of political economy, of beginning with “the living whole, the population, nation, state, several states, etc.,” and concluding with “a small number of determinant, abstract, general relations such as division of labour, money, value, etc.,” is not “scientifically correct,” because it never reaches the level of the “concrete” (G 100f.). Marx argues that it is necessary to begin, not with an abstract whole, but rather with the “simplest determinations,” and to move from these to the concrete whole. In this analysis, Marx brings forward the distinction between modes of thought (inquiry) and modes of writing (presentation).<sup>109</sup> In starting with the simplest determinations, we acknowledge the more complex structures on which they depend, but we move forward towards them analytically. In fact, the only way to find the “simplest

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<sup>108</sup> “It can be seen how subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and passivity, lose their antithetical character, and hence their existence as such antitheses, only in the social condition; it can be seen how the resolution of the *theoretical* antitheses themselves is possible *only* in a *practical* way, only through the practical energy of man, and how their resolution is for that reason by no means only a problem of knowledge, but a *real* problem of life, a problem which *philosophy* was unable to solve precisely because it treated it as a *purely* theoretical problem” (EPM 542/354).

<sup>109</sup> “Of course the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development and to track down their inner connection. Only after this work has been done can the real moment be appropriately presented. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject-matter is now reflected back in the ideas, then it may appear as if we have before us an *a priori* construction” (C 102).

determination” is to begin with an abstraction and analyze its aspects. This is the mode of investigation.

In claiming that the concrete “appears in the process of thinking,” Marx argues that, theoretically, it is a *result*; but it is also “the point of departure in reality and hence also the point of departure for observation and conception” (G 101). In such a method, Marx appears to be using Hegel’s own phenomenological method, and he praises Hegel for beginning the *Philosophy of Right* with possession, “this being the subject’s simplest juridical relation” (G 102). But the whole approach is premised upon the materialism which Marx poses in stark opposition to Hegel. According to Marx, it is only because of our acknowledgement of the material grounding of the individual subject of consciousness that allows us to make this kind of analytic distinction. Whereas Hegel “fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself,” Marx can avoid this by recognizing the distinction between the material origins of the concrete (concrete as the physical world as it presents itself to us), the “process by which the concrete itself comes into being,” and the reproduction of the concrete (concrete as abstracted and “determined”) in thought (G 102).

This idea would be crucial for Marx’s own method of science/critique in *Capital*. While the details of this method are beyond my scope here, I’d like to emphasize the effort Marx is making to differentiate the concrete as *immediate apparent* and the concrete as *thought*. This is essentially a Kantian distinction between sensory perception and conceptual understanding. In invoking it, Marx roots his own analysis in the dualisms of Kantian philosophy. While he would attempt to overcome these through an account of *praxis*, when it comes to a conception of thought and theorizing, he will not

be able to recover from this move. Although one of Marx's main priorities is to overcome this kind of dualism, and to accentuate the material grounding of subjects and objects in the social-historical world, this move captures some of the problematics that develop.

This distinction is important because it highlights the ways in which the Kantian/Hegelian split recurs through social theory.

Marx famously sought to appropriate Hegel's dialectical method, to make it rational, turn it right-side-up, etc. Much of the appeal of Hegel was his understanding of the dialectical relationship between subject and object, which grounds his account of the relationship between thought and social history. In denying the fundamental "identity" premise of Hegel's philosophy, Marx has closed the door on an adequate account of the subjects and objects of society. While Marx's move from philosophy to an empirical social science was enormously productive, it retains limits. In his discussion of methodology in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, Marx claimed that

The totality as it appears in the head, as a totality of thoughts, is a product of a thinking head, which appropriates the world in the only way it can, a way different from the artistic, religious, practical and mental appropriation of this world. The real subject retains its autonomous existence outside the head just as before; namely as long as the heads conduct is merely speculative, merely theoretical. Hence, in the theoretical method, too, the subject, society, must always be kept in mind as the presupposition" (G 101-2).

With his critique of philosophy as a mode of thought, and in particular his analysis of Hegel's philosophy as conferring logical and ontological priority on the conscious subject, Marx lost a plausible account of the "merely theoretical."

The empirical is the starting place for Marx's version of phenomenology. He starts with the appearance of society, as a collection of commodities, and moves towards uncovering their determinations. "Society" lies behind the scenes here; and, while Marx may be able to "keep it in mind," during his theorizing, as a "presupposition," the

constitution of society will be understood only in terms of labour. While Marx the theorist will be reproducing the concrete in thought, this has no bearing on the constitution of the social itself. The social dynamics of alienation, of exploitation, and totality, all operate on a level external to the thinking consciousness. In his philosophical and sociological work, Adorno would make yet another attempt to overcome these difficulties.

For Marx, science is also a form of critique; his thought is also intended to be a weapon of the proletariat. His “rational” form of dialectic he considers to be “a scandal and an abomination to the bourgeoisie and its doctrinaire spokesmen, because it includes in its positive understanding of what exists a simultaneous recognition of its negation, its inevitable destruction; because it regards every historically developed form as being in a fluid state, in motion, and therefore grasps its transient aspect as well; and because it does not let itself be impressed by anything, being in its very essence critical and revolutionary” (C 103). Knowledge must promote change in the society in which it is situated. Dialectical thought is that which goes beyond mere idealist reflection. This is the moment of *critique*. Marx has not just provided a formal analysis of capitalism, but has created a form of de-fetishizing critique which undermines the dominating reified forms of capital in the social world. Although he speaks of his science sometimes in positivist terms, we should not be fooled into considering his science to be based on positivist ideals. “Where speculation ends, namely in actual life, there real positive science begins as the representation of the practical activity and practical process of the development of men” (GI 415).



Marx's method is clearly inspired by his critique and "inversion" of Hegel. The contradictions which Hegel used to propel his dialectic in the *Phenomenology* were ideal in the sense that they were the movements of the subjective mind as it encountered its world with an initial naiveté. The dialectic in Marx's *Capital*, on the other hand, are material in the sense that they are said to arise from the structure of society itself. One could launch a number of criticisms of Marx's critical effort against Hegel. He has clearly misunderstood Hegel's project in the *Philosophy of Right* and the details of Hegelian mediation. His form of criticism, initially modeled on that of Feuerbach, remains reductive. The turn to materialism is the attempt to secure a *foundation* for knowledge, which, as we've seen, is in opposition to Hegel's approach.

Hegel's philosophy should not be interpreted as a metaphysical form of idealism, as Marx does, because such a form of philosophy would rely on the opposition between thought and reality, namely on its denial or negation. But Hegel's philosophy in fact is premised upon the suspension of this opposition (Maker 1989, 86). In Maker's analysis, Hegel's "rejection of the standpoint of consciousness" for a properly speculative philosophy establishes limits which Marx then crosses. The limit, namely, is the conception of reality from outside, or from the standpoint of consciousness itself. Speculative philosophy "cannot constitute the real — as a category of systematic philosophy — in the manner of consciousness, i.e., as a category given in its determinacy" (Maker 1989, 82). The real may not be conceived as a datum for consciousness. To do so it to *return* to a form of thought which abandons its claims for autonomy.

Marx thus begins with a diagnosis of modernity similar to that of Hegel, but he emphasizes the contradictions of "reality," including the alienated position of

presumably scientific knowledge. Viewing Hegel's own version of philosophical thought as ideological, Marx moves towards an improved *comprehension* through a new form of theoretical, dialectical knowledge. "Dialectics, according to Marx, is a process in and of reality, discoverable by thought; thought, having uncovered the basic workings of dialectic, can then further disclose, through dialectical reasoning, at least the general features of the dialectic's future unfolding in reality" (Maker 1989, 77).<sup>110</sup> In this way, Marx moves towards a science of praxis.

We'll now move to an examination of Adorno's own critique of Hegel's social and political philosophy, and his interpretation and employment of Marx. Marx was concerned above all with the critique of political economy as a form of praxis, and his work was not reflexive in the way that Hegel's way. Adorno, in his quest to recuperate both philosophy and a form of social science, would pay much more attention to the thought processes of both science and philosophy.

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<sup>110</sup> Wilson makes a similar point here:

It is the way that the method of inquiry — empirical rather than speculative in nature — combines with the method of presentation that makes the dialectical analysis which follows it so different from that of Hegel. It is only *after* the specifics of the social formation have been further abstracted, accumulated and studied in detail that "inner connections" can be discerned, and the material *reorganized* and presented in such a way that the internal dynamic through which social phenomena develop and change can be laid bare. From the standpoint of an analysis like Hegel's, based as it is in an *a priori* dialectical logic of categories whose process is independent of, rather than only different from the movement of reality it is imposed upon, Marx's procedure in *Capital* for generating the concrete wholes that emerge from "reflecting" the life of the subject-matter "back in the ideas" can only be called dialectical if the term is carefully qualified. It is an *a posteriori* procedure for analysing materials that have been brought to light as a result (and in the form) of detailed empirical investigations of real phenomena abstracted to the point of the "simplest determinations" (Wilson 1991, 62).

#### ***4. Adorno's critique of Hegel's philosophy of history***

In a previous chapter, I have covered some aspects of Adorno's critique of Hegel. Here I would like to examine his particular critique of Hegel's social and historical philosophy, in the light of his interpretation of Marx. While Hegel and Marx each sought to transform philosophical thinking into a form of *science* (albeit according to very different notions of "science"), Adorno had very different intentions. While he did not want to make philosophy scientific, in either the Hegelian or Marxian conception, he did argue throughout his career for the continued relevance of a certain form of critical philosophical thought. In this sense, Adorno's thought can be characterized as an attempt to reassess the significance of Hegel's work in the post-Marx era.<sup>111</sup>

Adorno produced no systematic writings on particular works of Hegel's philosophy; however, he did frequently criticize Hegel's handling of social, historical and political concerns, and *Negative Dialectics* contains a section on Hegel's philosophy of history.<sup>112</sup> Adorno's critique of Hegel in this section is often opaque. He employs Marx, Benjamin, and Hegel himself in an attempt to reject Hegel's own conceptions of spirit and history. It is not a generous nor a sophisticated reading of Hegel, but rather, typically, a polemical one. In this section, Adorno reads Hegel according to Adorno's own thesis of the social domination of the individual. More specifically, he provides a justification for his conception of the dominant social totality through Hegel's philosophy. In the following discussion I will emphasize specifically the ways in which Adorno's critique

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<sup>111</sup> This is true in a double sense: Adorno's work clearly takes Marx's critique of Hegelian philosophy and political economy as its starting point, and is in that sense post-Marxian. It can also be construed as post-Marxist, in the sense that Adorno's work was responding to a historical situation in which Marxist political models had become discredited, if not obsolete (see, e.g., Hammer 2005).

<sup>112</sup> Part Two, "World Spirit and Natural History: Excursus on Hegel" (ND 295ff./300ff.).

employs that of Marx, with respect to both Hegel's concepts and his methodology of philosophizing. The task here is the identification of Adorno's diagnoses of the failures of Hegel's social and political philosophy, and of the commitments and implications of his "solution."

Before we begin, a brief explication of Hegel's philosophy of history and the concept of the *Weltgeist* is in order. In his attempts at philosophizing history, Hegel emphasizes the difference between the approach taken via historical inquiry, and that taken by philosophy. History is "concerned with what actually happened . . . It gains in veracity the more strictly it confines itself to what is given and . . . The more exclusively it seeks to discover what actually happened" (VPG 25-6). In light of the seeming contradiction between this empirical approach, and what Hegel takes to be the task of philosophy — "conceptual thinking . . . the activity of the concept itself" — Hegel seeks to clarify the way that we should conceive of the relationship between thought and historical events (VPG 26). As in its relationship to other forms of spirit (e.g., subjective spirit or objective spirit), philosophy sets itself at a remove by acknowledging the presence of rationality in the world. It begins with this as its premise, and seeks to discover it within the various "shapes" of history, just as it examined shapes of spirit in the *Phenomenology* (VPG 28).

The *Weltgeist*, with which Adorno was concerned, is the "spirit of the world as it reveals itself through the human consciousness; the relationship of men to it is that of single parts to the whole which is their substance" (VPG 52). Hegel's *Weltgeist* is thus a form which represents a universal, in this case a historical universal. As such, it remains connected to the moments of individuality and particularity. My goal here is not to examine Hegel's philosophy of history according to its own terms, but rather to argue

that the structural similarity between the *Weltgeist* and other forms of *objective spirit* is close enough to warrant my comparison of the critiques of Marx and Adorno. In this sense, I am less interested in Adorno's well-known critique of Hegel's "universalizing" philosophy of history, and more in the explicit and implicit ways in which he critiques Hegel's "totalizing" social philosophy in general. While this distinction, as we'll see, is somewhat artificial, I pose it here in order to highlight the connection to Marx's own critique of Hegel.

The thrust of Adorno's critique in this part of *Negative Dialectics* is that Hegelian philosophy, with its central category of *Geist*, cannot properly grasp the nature of contemporary capitalist society. This is because Hegel's conception of *Geist* was itself modeled upon the social abstraction of the exchange relationship. Consequently, Hegel's philosophy suffers from a similar problem as the social problem of capitalism: a neglect of the rights of the particular. In the following, I will focus on two moments of this critique; the first is this issue of Hegel's alleged dismissal of the particular, which Adorno discusses primarily in terms of the individual social subject; the second is the related theme of Hegel's "deification" of spirit, through an unrecognized hypostatization.

#### 4.1 The neglect of the particular

Adorno articulates a complaint with Hegel's form of reasoning through a brief comparison with Benjamin. Both were interested in "immersion in detail;" but for Hegel this always culminated in a totalizing absolute spirit. Adorno credits Benjamin, on the other hand, with an attempt to "save inductive reasoning" with the *Trauerspiel* study (Benjamin 1977). Benjamin started small, but, ignoring the "great philosophical issues" of the time, he retained a distance from the whole and thereby achieved some form of

*authenticity*. Such a condition is to be measured by its relation to the present state of the world. Benjamin's "aphorism, that the smallest cell of observed reality offsets the remainder of the left over world, soon attests to the self-consciousness of the contemporary state of experience" (ND 298/303; my translation). The implication here is that Benjamin remained *true* to the form of modern, withered or reduced spirit which is characteristic of the times. The unstated claim is both that Hegel relies on a form of violence through deductive reasoning — forcing the facts into the theory, as it were — and consequently gives the intimate, micrological, details of phenomenal experience something less than their due. For Adorno, this signifies the "primacy of the totality [*die Totale*] over phenomenality [*die Erscheinung*]" a fact which is obscured by Hegel's own hypostasis or reification of the world spirit.

Referring to Hegel's critique of a concept of *Recht* which neglects an objective component, Adorno responds that the identification of *Recht* with "subjective conviction" must not be so easily dismissed. "What [Hegel] criticizes here as subjective conviction constantly recurs in individuals . . . And is perfectly rational in itself. Thus however isolated an individual may be, if he criticizes a historical trend which he feels powerless to change, this cannot simply be dismissed as the grumbling of the disaffected or the irrational protest of someone who feels pangs of emotion" (VGF 93/63; see also ND 304/310). Referring to Hegel here as a "demagogue" whose critical thinking is "fuzzy," Adorno complains stringently that Hegel has unjustly denied the objectivity, the universality, of the individual. This form of objectivity or universality is accessed by the individual through *thinking*, and Adorno emphasizes that such thought can only occur within the individual. This means, for Adorno, that "the subjective experience of the

negativity of history” cannot be adequately grasped by Hegel. This claim, however, relies upon a reading of the relevant passage as being committed to a form of “collective consciousness.”

The heart of Adorno’s critique is that Hegel does not sufficiently handle the contradiction that he introduces, that he is casting the universal as the enemy of the subjective individual, while also claiming their unity through mediation. When Adorno describes Hegel as being victim to a “subjective bias” (ND 304/309), he means simply that Hegel, by not fully following through on his own dialectical logic of mediation, has produced an account which denies or deforms *both* the significance of the objective state of alienation, and the power of the particular individual.

[I]f, like Hegel, I say that the course of the world and individual conscience are each mediated by the other and that therefore the individual consciousness must discover itself in the course of the world, while *simultaneously* teaching that rightly and “justifiably” it *cannot* discover itself in the universal — then in effect it reverts to dualism, to Kantian dualism, and even hypostasizes this as a kind of positivity . . . Anyone who, like Hegel, insists on mediation should refrain from introducing a *chorismos*, a separation, at a critical juncture; he should refrain from representing the *chorismos* of reason and unreason, chance and necessity, as a positive. The absolute is treated by Hegel . . . as spirit, as a spiritual principle. But if this concept of spirit is not to degenerate into something vacuous it cannot be allowed to break every link with the living spirit, the spirit of individuals (VGF 97/66).

Essentially, the critique here is that Hegel’s analysis is too facile; rather than examining the details of Hegel’s account of the mediation of universal, particular, and individual (either in the *Science of Logic* or in the *Philosophy of Right*), Adorno simply laments the *introduction* of a *chorismos* in the introduction to his primary work on objective spirit. Adorno characterizes this introduction as “positive” because it is a necessary part of the dialectical process of overcoming.

Assessing Adorno’s critique here is difficult; there is an irony in the claim that Hegel has insufficiently handled objective contradiction by introducing it into his system.

Adorno characterizes himself as the philosopher of mediation, and Hegel as the dualist. But to do so, he must make patently false claims, such as that “Hegel simply ignores the element of objectivity, of universality, that lies concealed in the particular” (VGF 94/64). Of course, Adorno’s goal is not an immanent critique, as much as it is his own version of *speculative* thought. His goal is more political than philosophical, at least in these claims.

We might say that there are historical situations in which the interest in the totality, in other words, the objectivity of spirit, can only be found in individuals, namely those who consciously and by design offer resistance to the trend. In contrast, what can be called the semblance of objectivity, the general consensus, is so much the mere reflex of social mechanisms that it actually lacks the objectivity commonly assigned to it, as is really no more than speculative illusion (LGF 95/64).

Parsing this passage through a Hegelian reading of its concepts is exceeding difficult, as Adorno works toward his own “constellations.”<sup>113</sup> Suffice it to say that Adorno wants to emphasize the access of the individual to the realm of objectivity, through thought, and to contrast the collectivity with the truly universal.

Adorno’s critique of the particular proceeds by analogy, rather than by performing an immanent critique. The analysis of capitalist society as being totalized or completely socialized [*totalvergesellschaft*] (ND 309/314) dictates the analysis of Hegel. The social integration of the individual has become more or less completed, and the places where subjectivity may exist have disappeared (PETG 106). Everyone is subordinated to the commodity through the logic of exchange; we become commensurable, identical (ND

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<sup>113</sup> The nature of Adorno’s writing provides some analytical difficulties; the relation of Adorno’s thought to that of Hegel and Marx must always be left underdetermined. As a brief example of the difficulty, take the concept of the “universal” within just this section of *Negative Dialectics*. Some various characterizations are: group opinion (ND 304/308); myth (ND 299/304); the whole (ND 299/304); that which “reproduces the preservation of life” (ND 305-6/311); that which corrupts all individual experience (ND 308/313); that which is contrary to the nature of individuals in themselves (ND 305/311); that which “functionalizes” the particular (ND 309/313); that which “determines” the individual (ND 311/315); that which humans transfigure into spirit, when they come to recognize it (ND 312/316).



149/146). This critique often takes the form of a critique of social roles, rather than of commodities *per se* (PETG 150). Yet the abstract domination of the individual under capitalist exchange does not, *prima facie*, demonstrate Hegel's neglect of the particular, his "siding with the universal." Adorno supports his point with a brief commentary on some passages from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, in which Hegel discusses that the "universal substance" is not "worldly [*weltlich*]" (ND 317f./323f.) In these lectures, Hegel claims that the individual may not differentiate itself from the *Volksgeist*, from the spirit of the people (VPG 60/52). The upshot of Adorno's critique is that Hegel's treatment of individuals vis-a-vis the *Volksgeist* is merely a kind of intellectual game. The real, historical relationship has clearly been one of continuing antagonism, and for Hegel to make a claim to reconcile this contraction theoretically only serves to justify the brutality of history.

But Adorno also connects this critique to Hegel's handling of universality and particularity in the *Logic* (ND 320f./326f.). He quotes a passage from the "Doctrine of the Concept," in which Hegel discusses the "particular concept" as having "no other determinateness than that posited by the universal itself . . . The particular is the universal but it is its difference or reference to an other, its outwardly reflecting shine; but there is no other at hand from which the particular would be differentiated than the universal itself.—The universal determines itself, and so is itself the particular; the determinateness is difference; it is only differentiated from itself" (WL 2:281/534-5). Adorno's conclusion from this passage is that the particular is "nothing" without the universal. Of course, this analysis neglects the larger dynamic that Hegel is discussing in this passage. It comes in the second part of the chapter on "Concept," in the first section

(“Subjectivity”) of the “Doctrine of the Concept.” In the passage cited by Adorno, Hegel is in the middle of his tripartite analysis of the concept as universal, particular, and individual. The dialectical mediation of these three moments is the essence of the concept of Hegel’s “concept,” and would be more fully articulated in the section on “syllogism.” By reducing the proposed dialectic to that simply between the universal and “particular” (Adorno’s “individual”), Adorno claims to show that the particular is “dominated” by the universal.

This position is consistent with that of Marx, in which the tripartite structure also gets reduced to a binary of subject-object, universal-individual, mind-world, etc. Adorno’s critique in this way reflects Marx’s own, in which Hegel’s forms of mediation were reduced to an “inversion” of subject and predicate. Yet Adorno is not a naïve reader of Hegel, and we must inquire into the reasons for this form of critique.<sup>114</sup> Adorno’s very logic of the thought of nonidentity operates through a binary perspective. The priority and recuperation of the object, the rescue of the particular from the domination of the universal, is the imperative of the world which has become “false” due to its social structuring by the commodity form.

The negative, critical task is to uncover this form of ideology, but it may not be done by “merely looking on,” as in Hegel. As we’ve seen, Adorno relies upon a conception of a type of *experience* which can ground critique materially and corporally. There is a “content” to experience, an *Erfahrungsgehalt*, which holds potential. “Even philosophical hypostasis has its experiential content in the heteronomous relationships [*Verhältnisse*], in which human relationships became invisible” (ND 299/304; my translation). Though elusive, the concept of *Erfahrungsgehalt* is a key to the negative

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<sup>114</sup> Bernstein (1997) poses such a question.

character of Adorno's dialectic. While in Hegel's philosophy, thought itself constituted a negation, this is not negative enough for Adorno, who differentiates between the "principle" of the dialectic and "resistance." "Without question, without that principle [of positive negation], the construction would collapse; dialectic has its *Erfahrungsgehalt* not in the principle of the other, but rather in its resistance to identity. Hence its power [*Gewalt*] (ND 163/160-1; my translation).

#### 4.2 Siding with the universal

Adorno's description of the "construction" of the world spirit is reminiscent of Marx's critique of the abstract nature of the universality of the state and of religion in "On the Jewish Question" (Marx [1843] 1975). Although ultimately reliant upon individuals for its very existence, the world spirit becomes "independent" of the individual. While drawing on, and quoting, Marx and Engels, Adorno laments the separation between the world spirit and its foundation in real social relations, "the functional connection of real individual subjects." "It is above their heads and right through them, and in this sense already antagonistic" (ND 299/304; my translation). The critical reasoning here is essentially conducted via an analogy between the world spirit and the Marxian social totality. The totality of spirit is comparable to the social totality: "The world spirit becomes something independent [*ein Selbständiges*] in relation to the particular actions from which — like the real total movement [*reale Gesamtbewegung*] of society — the so-called spiritual [*geistige*] developments synthesize themselves, and in relation to the

living subjects of these actions” (ND 298-9/304; my translation).<sup>115</sup> Adorno thus simply treats the world spirit as a “social totality” throughout his analysis.

However, what often appears to be analogy is in fact intended to be grounded within the process of exchange itself, which, in Adorno’s analysis, is the social locus for the “identity” of the subjective and objective.

[T]he abstract universal of the whole, which exercises coercion, is associated with [*verschwistert*] the universality of thought, of spirit. This allows it — in its bearer — to project itself back on that universality, as if it were realized therein, as if it had its own reality for itself. In spirit, the unanimity of the universal became subject, and universality holds its own [*sich behaupten*] in society only through the medium of spirit, the abstracting operation, which it executes in a most real manner [*höchst real vollzieht*]. Both converge in exchange, at the same time something subjectively thought and objectively valued, in which the objectivity of the universal and the concrete determination of the individual subject oppose one another unreconciled — precisely because they become commensurable (ND 310/316; my translation).

Here Adorno’s claim is that two different processes come together through the mystifying relationship of exchange. These processes are 1) the universal becoming subject, in spirit; and 2) spirit socially mediating universality by executing the exchange abstraction. The first represents the subjectivity of exchange, the process through which the social universal becomes imposed on (determines) the individual subject; in the second the objectivity of exchange is constituted through the value abstraction.

Although he never explicitly theorizes the exchange relationship, it remains at the center of Adorno’s work, and thus implies a fundamental relationship to the later work of Marx. While he was heavily invested in the idea of Marxism as a critical materialist method, he relied upon Marx’s analysis of exchange for his understanding of society, of forms of thought, and the relations between them. In the following passage, Adorno

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<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Adorno elsewhere relates the social “principle” of domination and the nonidentity between the concept and its object: “What society tears apart antagonistically, the principle of domination [*herrschaftliche Prinzip*], is the same as that which, spiritualized [*vergeistert*], produces the difference between the concept and that which is subjected to it” (ND 58/48; my translation).

begins to articulate the relationship between the social process of thought and the logical principle of identification.

The opposition of thought to that which is heterogeneous to it reproduces itself in thought as its immanent contradiction. Reciprocal critique of the universal and particular, identifying acts which judge whether the concept does justice to that with which it concerns itself [*dem Befaßten*], and also whether the particular fulfills its concept, are the medium of the thought of the nonidentity of particular and concept. And not that of thought alone. If humankind is to rid itself of the coercion, which comes in the form of identification, it must at the same time achieve identity with its concept. All relevant categories participate in this. The principle of exchange, the reduction of human labor to the abstract universal concept of average labor time, is thoroughly related [*urverwandt*] with the principle of identification. It has its societal model in exchange, and would be nothing without it. Through it, nonidentical particular beings [*Einzelwesen*] and achievements [*Leistungen*] become commensurable, identical (ND 149/146; my translation).

The connection of subject and object is thus a feature of the society of exchange. This is the basis for Adorno's Marxian-inspired critique of Hegel's philosophy as ideology. It also implies that the very "substantiality" of Hegel's philosophy, which Adorno had at times lauded, comes about through the social action of exchange. Subject and object, form and content, are joined in modern capitalist society. The forms of mediation of subject and object — both objectively social and subjectively cognitive — are then joined in a similar fashion.

In a statement on the requirements of a *geistig* or philosophical form of experience, Adorno expresses the violent potential of exchange, concealed by idealism:

His [Bergson's] generation [e.g., Simmel, Husserl, Scheler] sought in vain a philosophy which, receptive to objects, *substantiated itself*. What tradition surrendered, it then desired. However, that doesn't dispense with the methodical reflection, [on] how the substantive individual analyses stand on the theory of dialectic. The idealist and identitarian philosophical assurances are weak, that [the latter] end up in [the former]. However, *the whole is objective*, not only through the knowing subject, the whole which is expressed in theory, [the whole] which is to contain analyzing individuals. *The mediation of both, through the societal totality, is itself substantive*. It is also, however, formal, by virtue of the abstract lawfulness of the totality itself, of exchange. Idealism, which distilled its absolute spirit from this, simultaneously encodes the truth that that mediation occurs to the phenomena as a mechanism of coercion; this conceals itself behind the so-called constitution problem (ND 57/47).

While continually moving among various senses of his key categories such as subjectivity, objectivity, and mediation, Adorno here emphasizes the priority of the social totality, constructed through exchange. He goes so far as to say that the very notion of absolute spirit is derived from this social reality. Idealist philosophy, such as Hegel's, both recognizes the power of the social universal, and conceals it.<sup>116</sup>

The basis of the critique remains, however, that it is an historical event, the rise of capitalist exchange society, that has ultimately simultaneously validated and invalidated (morally, if not otherwise) the bulk of Hegel's philosophical system. The idealist doctrine of identity, of absolute spirit, of a truncated dialectics, are all adequate descriptions of the false reality of capitalist modernity. Hegel's own mistake was to not see the social origins of his theory of conceptuality or "logicity [*Logizität*]" (EDi 103). It in fact mirrors the social relations of exchange, and is thus an "*index falsi*" — a fetish (ND 311/317). Although successful, such a critique relies upon the regression to reflective categories that we observed in Marx.

Adorno's break with Hegel follows from the diagnosis of the failure of his philosophy. The "contraction" of the universal into the particular occurs both in the logic and in the *Realphilosophie*, and ultimately condemns Hegel's own vision of his philosophical system. Hegel's own "groping" for substance, for particularity, was not to be satisfied in his work. The relationship between the logic and the *Realphilosophie*, which Hegel discusses in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, becomes evidence of

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<sup>116</sup> Adorno goes on here to discuss the capacity of "philosophical experience," to achieve a "double path," recognizing both the universal and the particular: "Philosophical experience does not have this universal immediately as appearance [*Erscheinung*], but rather abstractly, as it is, objectively. It is restrained from the exit of the particular, without forgetting what it knows but does not have. Its path is doubled, like that of Heraclitus, one leading up and one down" (ND 57/47; my translation; emphasis added).

what Adorno characterizes as a “regression to Platonism” (ND 322f./329f.). This claim stems from a rather simplistic reading of the *Doppelsatz*; Adorno views Hegel’s approach as a mere searching for the “rational” or the “eternal” in the “actual;” and hence as an unwitting justification of the state. Hegel’s point is rather, as we’ve seen, that philosophy differentiates itself from more subjective forms of reasoning in its concern with the conceptual, with the idea. However, Adorno characteristically misrepresents the speculative character of the claim.

In Adorno’s analysis, Hegel “sides with” the universal, because, in his analysis of the relationship between the universal and the particular, he lets the claim to identity take precedence. Although he recognizes that each requires the mediation of the other, he “liked to forget [this] on occasion” (ND 322/328). In order to make any claim to identity between the two, requires him to “not deal with the particular as a particular at all” (ND 322/328). For Hegel, all particularity is always already conceptual. Adorno’s critique thus strikes at the heart of Hegel’s philosophical system; he is against any notion of the identity of thought and being, because such a claim denies the social realities of the postwar world.

Adorno’s own reliance upon Marx is most evident in his conception of “natural history.” Although Hegel has some understanding of the historical component of reason, his commitment to identity entails an understanding of spirit ultimately in terms of “nature.” He accuses Hegel of “mythologizing history,” quoting the following passage from the *Philosophy of Right*:

Whatever is by nature contingent is subject to contingencies, and this fate is therefore itself a necessity — just as, in all such cases, philosophy and the concept overcome the point of view of mere contingency and recognize it as a *semblance* whose essence is necessity. It is necessary that the finite — such as property and life — should be posited as contingent, because contingency is the concept of the finite. This necessity has, on the one

hand, the shape of natural power, and everything finite is mortal and transient” (PR §324).

The realm of nature and necessity has been given too much power by Hegel; he “glorifies” the natural element in second nature. Adorno himself, though claiming that the “antithesis of nature and history is both true and false,” sees only the conservative implications of Hegel’s conception. Hegel’s account of the rise of spirit from nature remains unconvincing in the face of Marx’s own claim that “as long as men exist, natural and human history will continue to qualify each other” (quoted in ND 351/358).

Spirit itself has a tendency, according to Adorno, to become alienated from its material base, from its origins in nature and in history. The *Weltgeist*, the *Volksgeist*, and the objective spirit of the *Philosophy of Right*, all suffer from a form of hypostatization. The collective comes to reign over the individual (ND 335/342). Hegel’s own analysis of spirit, in his later work, simply foisted on people a form of positivity. Spirit thus becomes ideological, having lost its own negativity (ND 350/356).

#### 4.3 Adorno with and beyond Marx

Adorno is committed to the nonidentity of thought and being; he perhaps most accurately captures his relationship to Hegel’s social and political philosophy when he claims that the “tenor” of the *Philosophy of Right* is to “dispute away the contradiction between idea and reality” (ND 329/335-6). For all of his appreciation of the dialectical method, Adorno remains committed to reading Hegel as a conservative when it comes to philosophizing about the real world. The changes that Western society has undergone, most significantly analyzed by Marx, have left Hegelian philosophy in an uncomfortable ideological position. Marx’s analyses of exchange provide the foundation for Adorno’s



critique, while Marx's critique of Hegel's political philosophy, in terms of its inability to grasp the empirical on its own terms, remains more of an inspiration.

In Hegel's analysis, the will is comprehended by showing that it has the structure of the concept. Clearly, Adorno believes that the third, positive moment of the dialectic is utopian idealism. The course of the modern world has clearly shown that the rupture between the subjective and objective aspects of the will persists: we continue to be dominated by our own institutions, both social and economic. The complaint is clearly addressing the "scientific," speculative character of Hegel's political thought, which constitutes its very status as philosophy, in Hegel's estimation. While Adorno believes that the spirit of the German Idealists' foundational criticism of scientific reason must be rescued and maintained, he can tolerate absolutely no degree of affirmation or reconciliation.

When Adorno refers to society as "concept," he is couching his Marxian analysis in Hegelian language (H 267/20). To the extent that the logic of the concept is a way of comprehending the determinations of a complex system, it would appear to apply. Yet, in Hegel's analysis, what is comprehended through the concept is *Sittlichkeit* rather than "society." Adorno appears to want to appropriate the Hegelian language without its specificity. The Hegelian absolute, as a concrete universality, contains internal differentiations; it is not a simple prospect of domination by abstract universals. With his eye on the analysis of capitalist exchange in *Capital*, Adorno appears to transpose the critique of domination through exchange back onto Hegel's philosophical system, by misreading its speculative character. His critique of Hegel posits a close relationship between the systematic, absolute form of Hegel's philosophy and the development of

modern society as a system structured by exchange. But the argument is more that Hegel had given us an insight into a contemporary social form, and that by resisting both we can undermine forms of intellectual and social domination.

Hegel's own speculative procedure through syllogism and mediation necessarily rejects any form of *causal* analysis of actuality (Henrich 2004, 245). The foundationless nature of the dialectical structure of the concept is important for Adorno's own understanding of society, but theoretical coherence is lost. Society as both first and result, as that which always already mediates both subjects and objects, cannot be made sense of in these terms, except perhaps as relationships of capitalist exchange. Adorno wants to avoid discussing what comes first, either in philosophical foundational terms or in social causal ones, but his analogy to the concept is not explicit enough. It is Hegel's own refusal of causal logic which eliminates any chance to speak in terms of social causes and social effects. This is due to his very understanding of actuality, which cannot be reduced to "social reality." Adorno's social critique is premised on notions of causality and function. The individual is subjected to domination by becoming functional within society.

However, Adorno's style of writing, especially regarding the relationship between forms of thought and forms of social being, takes its cue from Hegel. Adorno praised Hegel's historical acumen in the *Phenomenology*, without going into much analytical detail, and Adorno's own writing often moves between philosophical or "speculative" analysis, and historical claims. This may be the best characterization of the ways in which he tries to employ both Marx and Hegel.

In Hegel's philosophy, *Geist* is "the conceptual link between logic and history . . . because it is the actual mediation of subject and object" (Duquette 2007, 88), but, in Adorno's work, *Geist* becomes even more difficult to interpret. In addition to the readings of *Geist* I've discussed above, Adorno also uses the concept to understand *labour* under capitalism. In this case, he emphasizes that spirit is "essentially productive" as is Kantian practical reason. He notes that Hegel appropriates the "Kantian moment of spontaneity," and makes it *total* by having it swallow up both being and thought (H 265/17). Adorno describes the key turning point: "But when Hegel no longer opposes production and deed to matter as subjective accomplishments but rather looks for them in specific objects, in concrete material reality, he comes close to the mystery behind synthetic apperception and takes it out of the mere arbitrary hypothesis of the abstract concept. The mystery, however, is none other than social labor" (H 265/17-18). In other words, according to Adorno, Hegel (almost) discovered the commodity fetish. Kant's act of synthesis, the apperception, is the *productive* capacity of the subject. The individual, empirical subject stands in some problematic relationship to the transcendental subject, with its apperception. Adorno makes an analogy between the relationship of the transcendental subject to the empirical subject, and the relationship between logical propositions and "individual acts of thought" (H 265/18).

According to Adorno, Hegel's concept of spirit is "akin [*verwandt*]" to the principle of labour because it derives self-consciousness out of a labour relation, in the master-slave dialectic (ND 198/198). In labour, the "I" adapts itself both to its own goal, and to "heterogeneous material" (ND 199/198). This material and ontological origin dooms what Adorno believes is Hegel's desired "hypostatization" of spirit. Hegel wants spirit

precisely to become total, but its very *differentia specifica* is based in the fact that it is *subject*, and not a *whole* (ND 199/199). Here once again we see Adorno's denial of any kind of speculative philosophical procedure. But does this equal a lack of understanding of Hegel's project, or a politically driven neglect? What is the function of this argument for Adorno's thought? For Adorno, the conception of spirit as totality denies the "other" of spirit, denies nonidentity. Spirit is no longer a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* (*metabasis eis alo genos*: transformation to a different genus). Adorno here uses the thesis of nonidentity to disrupt Hegel's "idealist" philosophy. He claims that Hegel's fundamental concept, the concept on which his entire philosophy is based, is a fraud: a totality which actually needs something "external" to it.

The second claim is that '[t]he idealist concept of spirit exploits the transition to societal labour: it is easily capable of transfiguring the universal activity [*Tätigkeit*], which absorbs individual actions [*Tuenden*], into the In-itself, while disregarding them' (ND 199/199). Hegel's concept of spirit performs this function of the fetish, of the Marxian theory of value. The alliance with Marx's theory of value allows Adorno a dual critique of both Kant and Hegel. Kant's transcendental subject ignores the social component; while Hegel's concept of spirit, which he developed out of the transcendental subject, ultimately ignores the individual-material aspect.

The transition of philosophy from spirit to its other is immanently compelled by its determination as activity. Since Kant, idealism cannot pry it loose, not even Hegel. Through activity, however, spirit has a part in the genesis, which irritates idealism as something that contaminates it. Spirit as activity is, as the philosophers repeat, a becoming; therefore not *χωρίς* (*choris*: separate) from history, on which it places almost greater value. According to its basic concept, its activity is intra-temporal, historical; becoming as well as that which has become, in which becoming accumulates. Like time, whose universal representation requires something temporal, no activity is without substrate, without something active, and without that which it acts [*üben*] upon. In the idea of absolute activity conceals only what should act; the pure *νόησις νοήσεως* (*nóesis noéseos*: knowledge of knowledge) is the bashful, metaphysically-neutralized belief in God the creator (ND 201/200-1).

Adorno here provides the basis for his critique of philosophical idealism as a whole. Spirit is both *activity* and *labour*. What is Adorno's understanding of spirit? What is the significance of his use of the concept? Adorno sets up two dichotomies here. On the one hand, we have *mind* and *body*, and on the other we have *subject* and *object*. The significance of *Tätigkeit* (activity) is that it defines *Geist* (ND 201/200). Adorno reasons here as did the early Marx in his critique of Hegel. But he takes it ultimately in a different direction, reasoning that spirit must not be a totality; it must have something other than it, just as labour must work on an object.

It is the opposition or resistance to the "other" which is the experiential content of dialectics. This is present within Hegel's philosophy, but not through Hegel's own conception of dialectical experience; rather, the experiential content is inherent in the "intellectual atmosphere" of post-Kantian idealist philosophy itself (H 301/61). In his discussion, Adorno refers to the concept as a "spirit" of these forms of philosophy, which were not "strictly individuated" nor "fully articulated." He lauds these philosophies because they "do not operate with fixed concepts in the manner of a later philosophy modeled on the science the idealist generation opposed" (H 301/60). It is ultimately the critique of reflective reason, which encompasses the reason of "institutionalized science," which Adorno values in these philosophers. As individuals, but more importantly as part of an intellectual movement, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel were driven by a particular experience, that of the "resistance to dead knowledge." This is perhaps most of all captured by the "pathos of the word 'spirit'" (H 301/61-2). One can begin to see here the implications for Adorno's conception of critical theory; it must retain the spirit of the idealist conception of spirit, without reproducing its ultimate doctrine.

In the theoretical sphere, idealism represented the insight that the sum total of specific knowledge was not a whole, that the best of both knowledge and human potential slipped through the meshes of the division of labor . . . In a total society, totality becomes radical evil. What resonates in Hegel along with the need for a progressive integration is the need for a reconciliation — a reconciliation the totality has prevented ever since it achieved the reality Hegel enthusiastically anticipated for it in the concept (H 302-3/62).

Adorno's negative dialectic does justice to the experiential content of idealist philosophy by remaining committed to the object, to the particular. This requires a move beyond idealism, to a negative, materialist dialectic. Otherwise it ends up repressing that which it seeks to understand (ND 323/330).

My argument has been that Adorno has performed his own kind of reduction of Hegel's thought, which in some ways parallels, and in some ways employs, Marx's own work. However, Marx uses his critique of Hegel as a means of moving beyond philosophy (or perhaps realizing it) and solidifying his own conceptualization of a scientific method; while Adorno remains committed to the pursuit of a critical form of philosophy. Adorno employs a version of Hegel which allows him to argue for his own version of negative dialectics or nonidentity thinking, which is a form of thought which bears an indeterminate relationship to empirical social science. Adorno employs some of the empirical results of Marx's own work, but he does so in haphazard fashion. While I'm not suggesting that Adorno should have been a more rigorous empirical thinker, it is significant that his own sociological works play such a small role in his philosophy.

The problems that I've posed in this chapter concern the Hegelian model of philosophy, and its relationship to the empirical social world. I've demonstrated aspects of Marx's and Adorno's critique of Hegel approach to social and political philosophy; but the results are inconclusive. I would argue that neither thinking fully engaged with Hegel's philosophy in this area. Each was intent on articulating their own perspective.

## **5. Conclusion**

Both Marx and Adorno took the philosophy of Hegel very seriously. While they each reject and appropriate Hegel's work in their own ways, each is committed to the significance of the role of critical reason in understanding the contemporary social world. In this chapter, I have sought to articulate some of the conceptual inheritances and subsequent issues in the line of thought from Hegel through Marx to Adorno. I have examined Marx and Adorno's critiques of Hegel's social and political philosophy, and interpreted these in terms of the critique of idealist philosophy, and the determination of a mode of procedure (whether philosophical or scientific) which attempts to utilize aspects of Hegel's thought, while being more "adequate" to contemporary capitalist society and its modes of domination and exploitation.

In the move from philosophy to social science, according to either model here, we refine our method of investigating empirical reality, we reconceptualize the relationship of thought to reality, and think about the social subject and object within its material social historical context. Hegel's philosophical system allowed him to move relatively seamlessly between subjective spirit and objective spirit, but the articulation of these spheres becomes more difficult for Marx and Adorno. They have each rejected Hegel's own conception of philosophizing; however, they may not have fully grasped the implications of this. For Hegel, "understanding and deepening the presence of mind within its actuality is the mode by which philosophy becomes adequate to its real-life materials" (Kelly 1978, 21). In their own ways, Marx and Adorno's commitments to materialism meant that they end up struggling to re-connect thought to social reality.

Maker (1989) has argued persuasively that Marx's critique of Hegel involved a "fundamental conceptual error," in that he attempted to improve Hegel's dialectic by transgressing the necessary limits to the dialectic that Hegel had argued for. Marx argued that Hegel's own philosophy had to be critiqued and inverted, by examining it in its connection to the "real world." In Maker's analysis, the basis of Hegel's claim for the scientific character of his systematic philosophy lies in its ability to articulate "what is rationally universal and necessary in a manner that is both unconditional and complete. Furthermore, this philosophy can lay claim to such unconditional universality and necessity, and to completeness for what it articulates, only insofar as this philosophy is fully and exclusively self-grounding" (1989, 78). In other words, Hegel stakes his claim on the fact that his philosophy constitutes pure and autonomous reason. In order to be such, it must not rely on anything external to it; it must be self-determining.<sup>117</sup>

Any attempt to take Hegel's approach to this form of scientific reason, and relate it back to the "real world," has necessarily to invalidate Hegel's own approach. To take this path is to retreat to a form of reflective thought, which Hegel sought to overcome through the move to the concept, to the absolute. "For the *thinking* that goes on in this way [Kantian reflective thought], even when it reaches its highest point, *determinacy* remains something *external*; what is still meant by 'reason' is then just a radically *abstract thinking*. It follows as a result that this 'reason' provides nothing but the *formal unity* for the simplification and systematization of experiences; it is a *canon*, not an

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<sup>117</sup> The philosophical approach is then that which goes beyond the subject-object dichotomy: "These views on the relation of subject and object to each other express the determinations that constitute the nature of our ordinary, phenomenal consciousness. However, when these prejudices are carried over to reason, as if in reason the same relation obtained, as if this relation had any truth in and for itself, then they are errors, and the refutation of them in every part of the spiritual and natural universe is what philosophy is; or rather, since they block the entrance to philosophy, they are the errors that must be removed before one can enter it" (WL 1:37-8/25).



*organon of truth*; it cannot provide a *doctrine* of the infinite, but only a *critique* of cognition” (EL §52). Here we see how, in Hegel’s own terms, Marx moves from philosophical science to the critique of thought. He does this with a move back to the perspective of consciousness, to the relation between consciousness and what is external to it, its object. “[I]f reason can be identified with consciousness, then reason cannot be autonomous, for whatever it might come to establish or claim will always be ineluctably other-determined: it will be in some way founded in that whose determinate character is, as a ‘given,’ pre-determined” (Maker 1989, 80).

While Maker’s point in his article is that Marx’s “materialist dialectic” cannot be considered to be scientific in Hegel’s terms, and that Marx’s own procedure is actually a form of *idealism* masquerading as a materialism (in the sense that, having derived his approach from Hegel’s systematic philosophy, he then reads these categories into social and historical reality), my point primarily concerns Adorno’s rendering of Hegel and Marx into his own conception of negative dialectics. While it is true that both Marx and Adorno attempt to provide a critique of thought, by relating Hegel’s philosophical system to material, social-historical reality, Adorno does more work to try and overcome this problem. While Marx attempted to substitute a form of critical praxis for Hegel’s philosophical approach, Adorno continually argued for the relevance of philosophy, given historical events such as the rise of fascism, bureaucratic socialism, and commodity capitalism. With his much more thorough engagement with the work of Hegel and Kant, Adorno attempted to derive a form of dialectics “at a standstill,” one insulated from the progressivism of both the Marxian and Hegelian versions. In doing

so, he not only employed Marx's own materialist critique of Hegel, but also attempted to impose a new set of limits on legitimate thought.

Adorno's model of nonidentity thinking is a way of accounting for the social-historical *foundations* of thinking, and is a critique of thought in this sense; but it also aspires to be more than this, in its attempts to use Hegelian concepts to understand the relationship of thought and reality. In claims such as that "[t]he only way to pass philosophically into social categories is to decipher the truth content of philosophical categories," Adorno does his best to make his project sound like a Hegelian path to a Marxian conclusion (ND 198/198). But his work relies upon a notion of society as a form of absolute in which subject and object become identified.<sup>118</sup> In the conclusion to this work, I will discuss the implications of this attempt.<sup>119</sup>

Before I do so, however, I want to first examine Adorno's relationship to another structural social scientific thinking, Durkheim. Due to his mere pointers to a theory of the society of exchange, as well as his tendency to reduce domination to a category of society rather than economy, Adorno's position appears at times to come closer to Durkheim than to Marx.<sup>120</sup> Certainly Adorno himself would deny the affinity. But the use

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<sup>118</sup> Adorno makes use of exchange less as a social relation and more as a way to bridge the mental and the social-material within his work. It is in exchange where the subjective and the objective come together, as "something subjectively thought and at the same time objectively valid" (ND 310/316).

<sup>119</sup> The other important unexplored issue leads us back to Hegel's conception of *Realphilosophie*, and its relationship to the autonomy of the *Logic*. We have examined, to some extent, the relationship between Hegelian philosophical science, and forms of reflective thought. Hegel clarifies this relationship in the *Encyclopedia*: "[T]he relationship of a speculative science to the other sciences is simply the following: speculative science does not leave the empirical content of the other sciences aside, but recognizes and uses it, and in the same way recognizes and employs what is universal in these sciences, the laws, classifications, etc., for its own content" (EL §9). In addition to the clarification of this conception, there is the additional question of how different parts of Hegel's systematic philosophy relate to others. These discussions are beyond the scope of the present work.

<sup>120</sup> For a very different analysis, see Backhaus (1992).

of the theme of coercion stems from social relations themselves, rather than from capitalist labor relations. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of Adorno's own critique of Durkheim's sociological thought, and its implications for his conception of knowledge, and of the relationship between sociology and philosophy.

## Chapter 5

### Experiencing social objectivity: Adorno's critique of Durkheim

Sociology today would need to understand the incomprehensible, the entry of humanity into inhumanity (G 12/147).

Durkheim's sociology is neither true nor merely false, but rather a crooked projection of truth on a framework that has itself fallen into a societal context of delusion [*Verblendungszusammenhang*]. (EDu 279).

#### 1. Introduction

In the last chapter I examined the ways in which Marx and Adorno used their critiques of Hegelian philosophy as a means of “going beyond” idealist philosophy. While this provided a valuable perspective on the influence of Hegelian thought on the origins of social science, and on Adorno's own characterization of the relationship between sociology and philosophy, in this chapter I will broaden this perspective by examining Adorno's critique of Durkheim's sociological thought.

Adorno's understanding of sociology, and the concept of society itself on which the discipline is based, stemmed in part from his engagement with the “classical” authors of the sociological canon: Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. It is undeniable that these three figures dominate Adorno's thinking about sociological thought.<sup>121</sup> Adorno was fond of opposing the thought of Weber and Durkheim, as something of dialectical poles of an intellectual perspective on “society.” In his encyclopedia article on the concept of “society,” he explained that

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<sup>121</sup> I argue this despite Adorno's significance in the “positivism dispute” in sociology in the 1960s, where he engaged with Popper, or, more accurately, a caricature of Popper's position on the social sciences. His arguments here were formulated against a form of positivism which Adorno argued characterized mainstream sociology, and followed upon his previous critique of Mannheim's positivist perspective (see P and Adorno GS 20.1, 13-45). My rationale here is that Adorno's sustained polemic against “positivist” forms of sociological reason has very close ties to his general critique of identity thinking as “instrumental reason,” while his engagement with the more “canonical” figures of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim demonstrates a more nuanced and respectful perspective.

the theory of society entrenches itself behind . . . subjectivity . . . Yet we must point out that society is both known and not known from the inside. Inasmuch as society remains a product of human activity, its living subjects are still able to recognize themselves in it, as from across a great distance, in a manner that is radically different than is the case for the objects of chemistry and physics. It is a fact that in middle-class society, rational action is objectively as “comprehensible” as it is motivated. This was the great lesson of the generation of Max Weber and Dilthey. Yet their ideal of comprehension remained one-sided, insofar as it precluded everything in society that resisted identification by the observer. This was the sense of Durkheim’s rule that one should treat social facts like objects, should first and foremost renounce any effort to “understand” them. He was firmly persuaded that society meets each individual primarily as that which is alien and threatening, as constraint. Insofar as that is true, genuine reflection on the nature of society would begin precisely where “comprehension” ceased. The scientific method which Durkheim stands for thus registers that Hegelian “second nature” which society comes to form, against its living members. This antithesis to Max Weber remains just as partial as the latter’s thesis, in that it cannot transcend the idea of society’s basic incomprehensibility any more than Weber can transcend that of society’s basic comprehensibility. Yet this resistance of society to rational comprehension first and foremost is the sign of relationships between men which have grown increasingly independent of them, opaque, now standing off against human beings like some different substance. It ought to be the task of sociology today to comprehend the incomprehensible, the advance of human beings into the inhuman (G 11-12/146-7).

According to the reified character of capitalist society, Adorno finds that both Weber and Durkheim have each identified a piece of the puzzle of sociological thought. Adorno sets the theoretical viewpoints of Weber and Durkheim into a dialectic which cannot be positively resolved, a negative dialectic. Each understands a necessary feature of modern, capitalist society, but each lacks a complete picture. Adorno’s point is that these irreconcilable alternatives are reflections of a society that is founded upon contradiction: the process of exchange.

In opposition to the work of Durkheim and Weber as sociologists, Adorno aims for a critical, non-dogmatic form of sociology. Yet there is more to the story. Adorno’s engagement with the thought of Weber and Durkheim sought to come to terms with both its correctness as well as its dogmatism. The importance of Durkheim for Adorno’s thought is primarily based upon his [Durkheim’s] conception of the “objective” status of sociology, as it was evidenced particularly in two related forms: the *coerciveness* of the

social fact, and the corresponding *impenetrability* of society as object to its subjects. Both stem ultimately from Durkheim's collective realism. Adorno's analysis of Durkheim's sociological work as fundamentally anti-dialectical or reified reflected the problematic conception of the individual-collective relationship in his theory. The dualism of this foundation captures the "objectivity" of his work, in terms of its pretensions to a "scientificity." Although Adorno frequently characterized Durkheim simplistically as merely a "positivist," it is his conception of social collectivity as objectivity which gives him his foundational role in classical sociology, both for Adorno and for the field as a whole.

I would like to take some steps towards a better understanding of these issues by examining Adorno's critique of Durkheim in the light of his engagement with Kant and Hegel. In his struggles with German Idealism, as we have seen, Adorno wanted not only to move beyond idealism altogether, but he crucially adapted parts of each philosopher's work. In his reading of Durkheim, this heritage is still evident. I believe that it fundamentally structures his reading of Durkheim. In this chapter, I will discuss this theme in two moments: (1) Durkheim's attempt to rethink Kant's transcendental grounding of knowledge; and (2) What Adorno refers to as Durkheim's "Hegelianism" that is, his affinity with Hegel due to his conception of the collective or the universal, and in terms of the relationship between sociality and morality. This discussion will then involve two essentials of Durkheim's theory, in the context of his classical status within the sociological canon: the "scientific" status of his approach (what Adorno would refer to as his "positivism"), which will be seen through Adorno's eyes as of Kantian heritage, and his "holistic" approach to society, which Adorno assimilates to his prior critique of

Hegel. The end result is that it is the relationship between sociology and philosophy that is at stake, a conception which follows from his German Idealist heritage.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by discussing Durkheim's attempt to ground the Kantian categories sociologically. This will allow an examination of Adorno's critique of Durkheim, which plays on Adorno's understanding of the Kant-Hegel relationship.

## ***2. Durkheim's sociological project***

The perspective of Durkheim, within the social sciences, moves forward in many ways from Kant's philosophy. In terms of the Kantian or neo-Kantian origins of social science, Durkheim provides an interesting case study because of his explicit articulations of the methodology of sociology, and because of his belief that philosophical thought (and all thought) must be grounded sociologically. Durkheim's attempt to move the new science of sociology beyond the philosophy of Kant is perhaps seen most clearly in his recasting of the transcendental deduction of the categories as a sociology of knowledge in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. By examining this aspect of Durkheim's work, we can get a fuller perspective on just how unsatisfying Durkheim's (and all "scientific") sociology is from Adorno's perspective, and further understand the significance of the heritage of German Idealism for Adorno. Just as he argued that Kant discovered a key insight in the retention of "ontological difference," Adorno wants to appropriate some aspects of Durkheim's "sociological shift" for his own philosophy and social theory. The movement to the perspective of the social is an essential one, but there are fundamental problems with the way that Durkheim performs it, which, according to Adorno, are ultimately destructive for his form of sociology.

There is a tension within Durkheim's work which reflects that which we observed in Kantian philosophy. This tension remains evident today in the reception of Durkheim's work, for example in the lack of consensus regarding its philosophical status. The questions over whether Durkheim is a "realist" or an "idealist," whether he is a naïve positivist thinker who implored his colleagues to consider social facts as "things," or a nuanced idealist philosopher, who believed that social life is made entirely of representations, have yet to be settled. The basis of this problem can be seen, through Adorno, to be ultimately rooted in Kantian philosophy. It connects centrally to foundational problems in the sociology of knowledge and thus to sociology generally. The notion of the "independence" of our thoughts or representations from "reality" lies at the root here; but the thesis of the "social construction" of reality constitutes an attempt at overcoming it. If we shift our perspective to consider the natural world an inherently social world, then the issue of idealism or realism, representation or reality, begins to blur. Kant's thought does not lend itself to an easy positioning here, since he did not theorize the universal as "collective" in any sense, and also, importantly, did not recognize nor theorize the relationship between thought and *social reality*. Durkheim's thought was also problematic in another way, in that, while it understood correctly the "realism" of our collective representations — i.e., understood the universal as a collective totality — he still did not recognize the implications of this for his form of sociological science.

Durkheim's ambitious efforts in this regard entailed the subsumption of epistemology beneath a theory of sociality. In the following, I will discuss this attempt, along with Adorno's analysis of it, and go on to discuss their relationship more broadly.



Adorno's own engagement with Kant and Hegel here is central, as it provides a framework for understanding not only his analysis of Durkheim's work, but also the problematics and possibilities for social theory in general. Adorno understood this well. In his discussion of Adorno's "complex and lifelong engagement with Kant," Simon Jarvis notes that this engagement attests to Adorno's recognition that the turn towards the social and sociology can provide no shield from the problems of epistemology (Jarvis 1998, 148). Adorno would remain concerned with epistemology throughout his life; and it is in this context that his assessment of Durkheim is significant. Adorno wanted at all costs to avoid the transcendental method of Kant.<sup>122</sup> As Jarvis also notes, Adorno's long concern was to develop a philosophical *materialism*, however difficult this may be to define. The problem of *idealism* for Adorno is essentially the problem of the *given*, of something irreducible, beyond which thought cannot go. In such moments, our thought is conceived of as passive (Jarvis 1998, 149; see Hegel PG §578). "When thinking comes to a halt with an *abstract* appeal to history, or society, or 'socio-historical material specificity,' or any other form of givenness, it might as well stop with God" (Jarvis 1998: 149). We cannot presume access to such an immediacy. Adorno's quest is to move

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<sup>122</sup> This claim is from Jarvis (1998, 148ff.). O'Connor (2004) in fact claims the opposite, that Adorno employs a modified version of Kant's transcendental critique. The argument is roughly this: In O'Connor's analysis (2004: 25f.; 54f.), Adorno combines a transcendental critical method with a version of antinomy that differs from that of Kant, in that it is *internal* rather than *external*. These may both be called transcendental critique because they are both concerned with the contradictions that arise when a philosophy fails to properly account for the conditions of possibility of experience. O'Connor considers Adorno's thesis of the priority of the object to stem from an implicit argument about its necessity as a "feature of experience . . . that must be assumed in any intelligible discussion of experience." Jarvis, on the other hand, focuses his analysis on Adorno's practice of *metacritique*, in the sense that it conducts a further critique on the Kantian version. This *metacritique* emphasizes that Kant's understanding of experience is already impoverished, in that it does not understand its own social-historical genesis. Although this could be considered to be an examination of the conditions of possibility of experience, it is rather of a *particular kind* of (reduced) experience. O'Connor wants to claim that Adorno is looking for the conditions of possibility of *unreduced* experience.

beyond such an *abstract* appeal, which ultimately reduces to a metaphysical claim. Adorno's critique of, and occasional recourse to, Durkheim typically focuses on Durkheim's attempt to give Kantian philosophy a social turn.

### 2.1 Durkheim on the individual and the collective

For Durkheim, as opposed to the philosophers who preceded him, the basic reality of the world is a *social* reality in a fundamental way. He is famous for suggesting that there are such things as "social facts," which can be investigated in a positive, empirical manner, as in the natural sciences. Durkheim was very involved in furthering the autonomization of the academic discipline of sociology. Trained as a philosopher, he argued throughout his career for the type of shift in thinking that he saw as necessary for the modern world. His conception of the discipline of sociology was founded on this notion of the social fact; and the "holistic" conception of the social field, as well as the "objective" scientific status of his sociology constitute the foundation of Durkheim's sociological thought. These are of course closely related, and can be viewed, in a Kantian light, as two *forms* of objectivity: the "objectivity" of the collective and the "objectivity" of scientific thought. This formulation highlights the significance of the relationship between knowledge forms, and the individual/collective dynamic, which is at the center of both Durkheim's and Adorno's work.

According to Durkheim, the *sui generis* nature of societies must be the starting point for anyone who wants to conduct a scientific, sociological investigation. Working from an explicitly holistic perspective, Durkheim postulates "social facts" which pertain only to

the *totality* of society, not its individual parts.<sup>123</sup> The first chapter of his methodological work, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, is concerned with the explication of the concept of the social fact; nevertheless, the concept still creates some puzzlement today (Gilbert 1994, 86). Lukes notes that the French term, *fait*, “has a somewhat different meaning from ‘fact,’ signifying ‘that which exists or occurs or is real’ rather than ‘that which is the case’” (1973, 9, n. 39). Durkheim is in this way concerned to specify, more rigorously than had been done previously, the sense of the “social” which designates certain unique types of phenomena. “When I fulfil [*sic*] my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my contracts, I perform duties which are defined, *externally* to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still *objective*, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them through my education” (RSM 1; emphasis added). After he notes some examples such as the systems of money and language, Durkheim refers to these social facts as “ways of acting, thinking, and feeling” (RSM 2).

His well-known definition is that a “social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations” (RSM 13). This definition, as Gilbert (1994) has noted, is really two separate definitions; I will adopt her language and refer to the terms of the first definition as those of “external constraint” and the of the second as “generality-plus-independence.”<sup>124</sup> In the first definition, a “fact” (something

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<sup>123</sup> Based upon his notion of the *sui generis* status of the social, Durkheim has a conceptual problem linking the individual to society, the part to the whole. For an extensive treatment of Durkheim’s conception of the part/whole relationship, see Nielsen (1999).

<sup>124</sup> See also Lukes (1973, 11-15).

that “occurs or is real”) is *social* when it has some power over the individual, a power which is located *outside of* that individual. “These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will. [This is] an intrinsic characteristic of these facts, the proof thereof being that it asserts itself as soon as I attempt to resist it” (RSM 2). The second definition claims that the social behaviour be “general,” although Durkheim elsewhere states that “sociological phenomena cannot be defined by their universality” (RSM 6). The inclusion of generality appears to be a slip, as a phenomena which is general need not necessarily be social. In other words, a belief may be held by each individual within a society or a social group, and still not be “collective;” as Durkheim clarified, diffusion among a group is a characteristic of a social fact, but to this we must “add as a second and essential characteristic that its own existence is independent of the individual forms it assumes in its diffusion” (RSM 10).

The criterion of externality clearly sets up a dichotomy between individual and social in Durkheim’s work; however, he never made the nature of this relationship explicit. One gets a different understanding of it from the *Division of Labor* than from the *Elementary Forms*. Durkheim wanted to consider social facts *in themselves*, and for this reason he stated that they exist in themselves, but his language was vague as to the exact meaning of this internal/external relationship. Clearly social facts are not “external” in the same way as is the natural world, the study of which was a model for Durkheim’s conception of method, but rather begin as external to any particular individual. He often uses a metaphor of levels when discussing the relationship between the part and the

whole, and between the individual and society. The social is an order of a “higher” level, which cannot be reduced to, or deduced from, the properties of the lower, individual, order.<sup>125</sup> As individuals come to associate with each other, a new social order is created, which has its own properties and characteristics.

Such a stance creates problems for a conception of the relationship between the individual and the social system, which must be handled by a social theory. The problems with this form of dualism become obvious when translated into Durkheim’s theory of human nature. Within the human individual, according to Durkheim, there are “states of consciousness” which correspond to both the individual and social orders of being.

One class merely expresses our organisms and the objects to which they are most directly related. Strictly individual, the states of consciousness of this class connect us only with ourselves, and we can no more detach them from us than we can detach ourselves from our bodies. The states of consciousness of the other class, on the contrary, come to us from society; they transfer society into us and connect us with something that surpasses us. Being collective, they are impersonal; they turn us toward ends that we hold in common with other men; it is through them and them alone that we can communicate with others (DHN 337).

Here Durkheim discusses the relationship explicitly in terms of a dualism, claiming that the individual and social states of the individual constitute different “classes,” and that it is the social state of consciousness which connects us with others.

The conception of the social is, for Durkheim, essentially linked to his holistic perspective. His version of sociological explanation, as opposed to both philosophical

<sup>125</sup> For example: “as the association is formed it gives birth to phenomena which do not derive directly from the nature of the associated elements, and the more elements involved and the more powerful their synthesis, then the more marked is this partial independence. No doubt it is this that accounts for the flexibility, freedom and contingency that the superior forms of reality show in comparison with the lower forms in which they are rooted” (ICR 30). Lukes (1973, 58) postulates that Durkheim was influenced in this view by his mentor Émile Boutroux, a neo-Kantian philosopher who “maintained that there were different orders of reality, and that each was contingent with respect to the one below it: thus, physico-chemical phenomena formed the basis of life, but they did not of themselves produce biological phenomena, which were, therefore, contingent with respect to them.”

argument and psychological explanation, requires a specific attention to the “social milieu.” (Stedman Jones 2001, 15off.). However, the characterization of the social changed over the course of his career, as did, consequently, the nature of the relationship between the individual and society. The distinction that is important here is between a concept of the social totality, the social “substance,” as a “homogeneous mass in which all the units are identical . . . Structured at the beginning of all organized society in the form of clan based society,” and which undergo change at the level of the whole (Nielsen 1999, 68; DL 20off.), and the idea of the social implicit in his theory of collective representations (RSM, 34; ICR). I discuss this distinction briefly here, as it is crucial to my analysis.

### 2.2 Durkheim’s epistemological argument: rethinking Kant

The theory of collective representations is developed by Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to make a sociological argument against the Kantian philosophical conception of epistemology and the knowing subject. For Durkheim, this critique constitutes an essential aspect of the argument for the autonomy of sociology in relation to philosophy. His argument attempts to remove the Kantian categories of the understanding from their transcendental sphere, and to re-ground them in social practices, arguing that “the study of [social] religious phenomena provides a means of revisiting problems that until now have been debated only among philosophers” (EF 8). According to Durkheim, philosophers have not appreciated the contribution of religion, and hence of the essentially social practices which ground it, to the formation of the human intellect; and he is clear that his own work is intended to transcend the unreconciled philosophical dichotomy of empiricism and rationalism, or “apriorism.”

“[T]he rationalism that is immanent in the sociological theory of knowledge stands between empiricism and classical apriorism. For the first, the categories are purely artificial constructs; for the second, on the other hand, they are naturally given . . .” (EF 17, n. 22). Durkheim here refers to Kant’s transcendental idealist (apriorist) argument that the categories are “pure,” i.e. prior to experience, as well as to an empirical account such as Hume’s (to which Kant was in part responding), in which the categories are considered to have been derived from experience; he boldly claims a sociological resolution to the philosophical debate.

By attempting to work out a *social* theory of the origins of the categories, Durkheim makes up for what he feels is the failure of the philosophers to adequately explain them. By remaining trapped within their internalist, reflective methods, philosophers were not able to transcend an *individual* perspective, and consequently stopped short of an adequate *scientific* explanation. The empiricist account remains unable to properly account for the *universality* and the *necessity* of the categories. As Durkheim puts it, “to reduce reason to experience is to make reason disappear,” which eventually leads us into “irrationalism” (EF 13). The trouble with empiricism, Durkheim argues, is its inherent individualism; it holds that the forms of thought stem solely from our individual experience, and hence cannot capture the universality and the necessity which they present. The empiricist thesis thus denies “all objective reality;” that is, since it bases the forms on individual experience and ultimately on sensation, then they are “fundamentally individual and subjective” (EF 13). We have no way of getting from this starting point to any kind of “objectivity.” The philosophical approach of a rationalist such as Kant, on the other hand, accommodates the power of the intellect to “transcend

experience,” but comes at the cost of a “scientific” rationality. The Kantian account can “offer neither explanation nor warrant” to this power of the intellect. “Merely to say it is inherent in the nature of human intellect is not to *explain* that power . . . To confine oneself to saying that experience is possible only on that condition is to shift the problem, perhaps, but not to solve it. The point is to know how it happens that experience is not enough, but presupposes conditions that are external to and prior to experience. . .” (EF 14). A key to his claim is that it is the *scientific* nature of sociology which allows it to overcome the philosophical standpoint.

From Durkheim’s perspective, Kant’s appeal to a *transcendental* realm for the grounding of the categories makes little sense; if they cannot be simply claimed as an essential part of human nature, then their origin *must* be social and historical (EF 10-11). Since the categories are “held in common,” they must be of common, social origin. The Kantian solution to the opposition of rationalism and empiricism is thus rejected by Durkheim. However, to say that the categories are social does not resolve any Kantian antinomies. In his move away from Kantianism, Durkheim wants to retain its dualism of form and content, which he refers to as its “fundamental thesis.” This thesis states that “knowledge is formed from two sets of elements that are irreducible one to the other—two distinct, superimposed layers” (EF 14). He clarifies that he understands the condition of *innateness* to ultimately reduce to this criterion of duality, since there must be an element or form of cognition that is distinct from empirical knowledge. Thus, Durkheim’s theory retains a form of dualism, in which knowledge is divided not between form and content, but rather according to an individual, empirical part, and a collective, categorical part. Empirical knowledge corresponds to an “individual” state, and is



“wholly explained by the psychic nature of the individual” (EF 15). The categories, on the other hand, are “essentially collective representations,” each of which “translates states of the collectivity, first and foremost. They depend upon the way in which the collectivity is organized, upon its morphology, its religious, moral, and economic institutions, and so on.”<sup>126</sup> The hiatus between these two forms, or levels, of knowledge, is then directly analogous to that between the individual and the social, in that neither one may be derived from the other.

With this analysis, Durkheim essentially grounds the transcendental in the social, and translates the Kantian notion of objectivity from a philosophical to a sociological idiom. For Durkheim, a category should be considered “objective” in the sense that it does not just structure my own experience, but that of everyone (within my “civilization”). Durkheim here wants to explicitly move away from a Kantian notion of “objectivity,” which relates precisely to the transcendental “I” in that it ‘is grounded in the “order and regularity in the appearances” which “we ourselves introduce”’ (Caygill 1995, 379; see CPR A 89/B 122). The semantic shift made here by Durkheim takes the objectivity of the sphere of the transcendental and replaces it with the requirement of *generality*. Something is objective to the extent that it is shared by those in my society or my “civilization.” As I’ll emphasize below, this shift is precisely what Adorno designated in his critique of the Kantian transcendental, when he criticized Kant for leaving his use of “we” unanalyzed, but which he would also criticize Durkheim for (KK 258/170).

By designating the categories as collective representations, Durkheim reduces the Kantian notions of “universality” and “necessity,” which comprise “objectivity,” to a

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<sup>126</sup> In a footnote, Durkheim clarifies that, although he clearly differentiates the two types of knowledge, “there probably is no case in which those two sorts of elements are not found closely bound up together” (EF 15, n. 17).

social and sociological framework; but these both reduce to commonality among a collective. He asserts that the units by which our conception of time is organized, the divisions of days, weeks, etc., correspond to concrete social events. “[T]he category of time expresses a time common to the group . . . This category itself is a true social institution” (EF 10; EF 10, n. 6).<sup>127</sup> The distinction of the category is thus made according to its collectivity; consequently, such categories serve as indices for the relationship between the individual and the social. In other words, categories provide a record of the social structure, and serve to connect us to both the collective, and, through it, to ourselves.

The category of time is not simply a partial or complete commemoration of our lived life. It is an abstract and impersonal framework that contains not only our individual existence but also that of humanity. It is like an endless canvas on which all duration is spread out before the mind’s eye and on which all possible events are located in relation to points of reference that are fixed and specified. It is not *my time* that is organized in this way; it is time that is conceived objectively by all men [*sic*] of the same civilization. This by itself is enough to make us begin to see that any such organization would have to be collective. And indeed, observation establishes that these indispensable points, in reference to which all things are arranged temporally, are taken from social life. The division into days, weeks, months, years, etc., corresponds to the recurrence of rites, festivals, and public ceremonies at regular intervals. A calendar expresses the rhythm of collective activity while ensuring that regularity (EF 10).

Via their social origination, these mental constructs retain a “collective” character, and serve as a kind of internal connection between the individual social being (as a possessor and user of the categories) and the group. Durkheim refers to these “collective representations” as “the product of an immense cooperation;” they contain a “very

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<sup>127</sup> Following Hamelin, Durkheim discusses time as a *concept*, rather than as an *intuition* as Kant had done, “because there is no difference between the role these notions [time and space] play in intellectual life and that which falls to notions of kind and cause” (EF 8, n. 4). This criticism of the difference appears unsatisfying on the face of it (though see Rawls 2004, 50f. for an account in terms of Durkheim’s distinction between perception and emotion); however the distinction is less important for my argument here than the claim that time is obviously social, according to Durkheim, because it may not be separated from the social practices by which we “divide, measure, and express it with objective signs” (EF 9).

special intellectuality that is infinitely richer and more complex than that of the individual” (EF 15).<sup>128</sup>

In his conception of the categories as collective representations, which “translate states of the collectivity” (EF 15), Durkheim shows his affinity with the rationalists, and turns the rationalist epistemologist understanding of “collective” into a *social* conception of *necessity*. If the categories are necessary and universal, by virtue of their social origin, then they must be *coercive*. Durkheim’s conceptual translation of Kantian objectivity turns universality into commonality, and logical necessity into coercion.

They [the categories] are the *most general* concepts that exist, because they are applied to all that is real; and just as they are not attached to any particular object, they are independent of any individual subject. They are the common ground where all minds meet. What is more, minds meet there of necessity: Reason, which is none other than the fundamental categories taken together, is vested with an authority that we cannot escape at will. When we try to resist it, to free ourselves from some of these fundamental notions, we meet sharp resistance. Hence, far from merely depending upon us, they impose themselves upon us (EF 13).

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<sup>128</sup> Recent research has broadened understanding of the “eclectic spiritualist” philosophical origins of Durkheim’s concept of “representation,” which underlies his understanding of the categories (see, e.g., Brooks (1998); Schmaus (2004); and Stedman Jones (2000; 2001). Susan Stedman Jones has done the most extensive work on Renouvier, in English, and provides a gloss on his conception of representation, which formed the basis for Durkheim’s own. “[R]epresentation is neither a projection, nor a reflection, nor an intermediary between a subject and an object. Representation is sufficient unto itself” (Hamelin, *Le Système de Renouvier*, p. 49; quoted in Jones 2001, 68). The implications of such an understanding are significant, not least for the type of criticism that Adorno launched against Durkheim. Jones’s reading of Renouvier allows an interpretation of Durkheim’s “externalism” — i.e., his apparent focus on the *objective* and *social*, through neglect of the subjective and individual — and she clarifies that Durkheim’s emphasis on both “external reality” *and* representations should be seen in light of Renouvier. Durkheim “sees both [things and persons] as aspects of general social relations: the person as part of, and constituted through, a system of social relations, and material things as the repository of cultural and economic values” (2001, 69). Brooks notes that the notions of “moral fact” and “social fact” both stemmed from eclectic philosophy (1998, 215). Schmaus (2004) similarly notes that Durkheim’s explication and critique of the categories was based upon the way that they were understood in the eclectic spiritualist tradition, as “psychologically necessary conditions, which led to the subjectivist reading of the critical philosophy according to which it was unable to explain or justify the application of the categories to our experience of the external world” (137). On this conception, the theory of the categories was thus the property of the discipline of psychology, and Durkheim’s attempted appropriation of it for sociology was based upon this premise.

The categories now, in Durkheim's terms, are a "common ground," which, precisely by this virtue, gain an authority over individuals. Here is where the dependency relation becomes inverted: once constituted as "common," the categories of our reason serve to rule us.<sup>129</sup>

Some further difficulties of this account become clear once Durkheim attempts to clarify the nature of the individual/collective dichotomy *within the individual*. If thought is to be split between an empirical/individual and a rational/collective moment, then social subjects must have direct intellectual access to the collective. Durkheim handles this problem with a conception of human nature.

[W]e understand how reason has gained the power to go beyond the range of empirical cognition. It owes this power not to some mysterious virtue but simply to the fact that, as the well-known formula has it, man is double. In him are two beings: an individual being that has its basis in the body and whose sphere of action is strictly limited by this fact, and a social being that represents within us the highest reality in the intellectual and moral realm that is knowable through observation: I mean society. In the realm of practice, the consequence of this duality in our nature is the irreducibility of the moral ideal to the utilitarian motive; in the realm of thought, it is the irreducibility of reason to individual experience. As part of society, the individual naturally transcends himself, both when he thinks and when he acts (EF 15-6).

There are significant epistemological implications of such a move. According to Durkheim's account, Kant made an advance when he performed his Copernican turn toward the subject, since he thus located rationality within the human individual, but he did not take it far enough (DHN 334). For Durkheim, the fundamental duality of "human nature" consists, in the first place, in the distinction between sensation and cognition,

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<sup>129</sup> At points Durkheim relies upon a functional account of necessity, arguing that it is essential for individuals because they enable social life. This leads to awkward constructions like "society cannot leave the categories up to the free choice of individuals" and "in order to prevent dissidence, society weighs down on its members with all its authority," But the important question here is just what this form of social necessity can mean for Durkheim. He claims that there is a "very special authority that is inherent in reason and that makes us trustingly accept its promptings" (EF 16). This turns out not to be a feature particular to reason itself, but rather one deriving from the social component of reason, from its social-ness. It is simply "the authority of society, passing into certain ways of thinking that are the indispensable conditions of all common action" (EF 16-17).

intuition and concept. But he translates this distinction into that between the individual (sensation) and the collective (cognition). Sensations, for Durkheim, only pertain to the human individual, while concepts are “distinguished by the fact that the rules of conduct to which they conform can be universalized” (DHN 327). This translation of the Kantian duality of concept and intuition stems directly from Durkheim’s understanding of the social basis of the categories (concepts). He isolates the external, collective influence into one “side” of the human being, claiming that its nature is fundamentally split. “Far from being simple, our inner life has something that is like a double center of gravity. On the one hand is our individuality—and, more particularly, our body in which it is based; on the other is everything in us that expresses something other than ourselves” (DHN 328). The duality reflects a Cartesian duality of mind and body.

Durkheim’s engagement with Kantian epistemology retains its dualism while attempting to ground it empirically and scientifically. The categories must not be placed outside of the realm of nature and of science, which is exactly where the transcendental realm lies, according to Durkheim. Although the rationale here is based solely upon Durkheim’s theory of science and his faith in its capabilities, this is a presupposition. The sociological key is to retain the focus on the individual subject, but not to take it as a given, to recognize that it has come into being historically, and that *therefore* we can provide an account of its origins and development.<sup>130</sup>

Through his interpretation of Kant, Durkheim’s sociological account of knowledge merges with his attempt at a science of morality, while his refusal to strictly differentiate

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<sup>130</sup> “[T]he important thing to determine from our consideration of the fact that we have aptitudes for living both a personal and an impersonal life, is not what name it is proper to give to these contradictory aptitudes, but how it is that in spite of their opposition, they exist in a single and identical being” (DHN 334).

between theoretical and practical reason shows some affinity with Hegel. Is Hegel's critique of Kant then relevant to a full understanding of Durkheim's work? To explore this question, I turn to Adorno's commentary on and critique of Durkheim. While often polemical in tone, and ungenerous in its interpretation, Adorno's reading of Durkheim is designed to uncover its potential for a transformed sociological reason.

### **3. Adorno's critique of Durkheim**

In this section, I aim to accomplish the following objectives. Given my introduction to Durkheim's work, I want to use Adorno's reading of Durkheim to show that: (1) Adorno's own reading of Durkheim was structured by his interpretation of the philosophies of Kant and Hegel; and that (2) this fact can help us understand both the significance of these philosophers for sociological reason, and Adorno's own conception of the relationship between philosophy and sociology. Adorno's most sustained commentary on Durkheim is in his introduction to the German translation of *Philosophy and Sociology* (EDu).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Adorno's complex relationship to Durkheim's sociology was prefigured in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There Adorno used Durkheim's work on classification to bolster his case that "take on the expression of the fetish" (DE 16).

Even the deductive form of science mirrors hierarchy and compulsion. Just as the first categories represented the organized tribe and its power over the individual, the entire logical order, with its chains of inference and dependence, the superordination and coordination of concepts, is founded on the corresponding conditions in social reality, that is, on the division of labor'. Adorno continues: Of course, this social character is not, as Durkheim argues, an expression of social solidarity but evidence of the impenetrable unity of society and power. Power confers increased cohesion and strength on the social whole in which it is established. The division of labor, through which power manifests itself socially, serves the self-preservation of the dominated whole. . . Power confronts the individual as the universal, as the reason which informs reality. The power of all the members of society, to whom as individuals no other way is open, is constantly summated, through the division of labor imposed on them, in the realization of the whole, whose rationality is thereby multiplied over again. What is done to all by the few always takes the form of the subduing of individuals by the many: the oppression of society always bears the features of oppression by a collective. It is this unity of collectivity and power, and not the immediate social universal,

### 3.1 Adorno and the Kantian Durkheim

#### 3.1.1 The Epistemological Subject

As we saw in Chapter 3, Adorno's criticism of Kant's theory of subjectivity emphasized its problematic constitution through abstraction; the Kantian transcendental subject dropped any trace of its origins in the concrete, human individual. Despite, or rather because, of this, the Kantian subject itself served as the *ground* of objectivity. In its pure abstraction as the transcendental, Kant believed that his subject could *constitute* its reality as appearance or phenomena. The subject as the unity of apperception is the guarantor of objectivity, i.e., of necessity and universality. However, such "objectivity," in Adorno's opinion, remains fundamentally subjective. It relies upon "the universality of *subjective reason*, a universality generated simply by the constitution of a human subject that comprehends things in this way and no other. It stands in stark contrast to the *objective concept of reason* such as can be found with exemplary force in traditional philosophy in the thought of Plato" (KK 216/143). As opposed to Plato, who considered rationality to be an aspect of the things themselves, Kant locates it within the human mind. The idea that this form of subjectivity can provide an Archimedean point is a "transcendental illusion [*Schein*]" (ND 182/181).

Adorno in fact acknowledges the contribution of Durkheim to the attempted "de-transcendalization" of Kantian subjectivity (H 303/63; KK 255f./168f.; ME 83/76 ; SO 757/257). In Durkheim's attempt to rethink the Kantian categories, and consequently the Kantian subject, Adorno notes the ambiguity in the concept of universality, which he

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solidarity, which is precipitated in intellectual forms . . . Enlightenment finally devoured not only symbols but also their successors, universal concepts, and left nothing of metaphysics behind except the abstract fear of the collective form from which it had sprung (DE 16-17).

claims was not admitted by Kant. The criterion of universality implies that something (a concept, a judgment) must be valid for all experience, including all future experience; but it also implies “something that comes very close to the concept of consensus, the agreement of all human beings” (KK 217/143). Following Adorno’s interpretation, we can say that universality contains an abstract, transcendental moment, as well as an empirical moment.

The entire question of this universality . . . would lack substance unless all subjects endowed with reason, *all human beings* — as Kant would insist at this point — must think in this way, and unless there is a connection between the empirical nature of their minds and the mechanism of universality that is supposed to be grounded in reason. Only if human beings must think in this way will a proposition be truly universal. What we might call this anthropological element is therefore implicit here (KK 218/144).

We can read Adorno’s anthropological argument here as being akin to, if not rooted in, Durkheim’s critique of Kant. Contra Kant, universality is precisely a social category; given this anthropological element of the concept of universality, we should say that the empirical subject is in actuality also a *social* subject.

Adorno links this critique explicitly to the concept of necessity, and argues that there is a clear analogy to be made between the two dichotomies of individual/universal and contingent/necessary. The forms of consciousness “have their universality in the fact that they are the forms of all conscious persons . . . and that compared to them the *individual consciousness stands opposed to the social consciousness in the same ratio as the relatively accidental and particular stands opposed to necessity and its laws*, to the universal which operates in accordance with rules . . .” (KK 218-9/144; emphasis added). Here again the connection to Adorno’s reading of Durkheim is apparent.

The interpretation of Durkheim which Adorno frequently articulated emphasized the ideological character of his work. He effectively applauds Durkheim for the



inspiration of providing a sociological critique of Kantian epistemology, while simultaneously taking him to task for his execution. Characteristically, the balance sheet is somewhat difficult to draw up, as Adorno often merely gives brief reference to Durkheim's work, rather than engaging with it significantly. The key to understanding Durkheim, according to Adorno, is in recognizing the reflection of social contradictions within his work. Put differently, Durkheim's sociology clearly expresses these contradictions in theoretical form. Ultimately, "Durkheim's account is just as antinomic as Kant's" (KK 255/168).

The critiques of Kant and Durkheim often run parallel. According to Adorno, the ultimate resting place of the Kantian philosophy on the foundational status of the transcendental subject is implicit in the sociological work of Durkheim. Although Durkheim fundamentally incorporates society into his conception of knowledge, he does so in an abstract and ultimately *idealist* fashion. Adorno believes that Durkheim conceives of society as an abstract given; it is an abstract "something," which is conceived exactly as *immediate*, i.e., *unmediated*. Durkheim "endorses that which has become [Gewordenes], despite the insight into its become-ness [Gewordenheit], for the sake of its exact development [*um seines so und nicht anders Gewordenseins willen*]," (EDu 273). Due to this conception, Durkheim refrains from sufficiently questioning the status of the social as given. (EDu 252).

The issue is interesting to Adorno in part because, from his perspective, he can characterize Durkheim as actually recognizing the "double character of *Geist*," but nevertheless misunderstanding or mischaracterizing the relationship of its two moments. It is significant that Adorno here employs the language of post-Kantian

idealism to describe Durkheim's shortcomings. According to Adorno, Durkheim's understanding was "that it [*Geist*]*—societally arisen and an internal moment of the societal life-process—confronted being [*Dasein*] as something new, and developed according to its own lawful regularity. He moreover reduced spirit to being" (EDu 274). Adorno's critique here is familiar; he sees Durkheim as having articulated a fundamental dichotomy of modern society, in that the social is both inter-subjectively constituted, and reified as objective. He is, like Kant, "pushed to the dialectic." Durkheim in some sense recognized the nature of mediation, but he did not *theorize* it.*

Adorno refers to Durkheim as the unacknowledged founder of the tradition of the sociology of knowledge, "probably" influencing Scheler and Mannheim (EDu 274). As we've seen, this is the problem of attempts to get beyond idealism: they end up positing an "immediacy" which should not be conceived as such. In Durkheim's case this went so far as to enable him to "ground" the categories of knowledge sociologically. However, for Adorno this is merely a substitution of metaphysics for metaphysics, idealism for idealism. Instead of positing a transcendental realm which is to explain the forms of our knowledge, Durkheim posits a social one. But this only amounts to something like a transcendentalization of the social. This leads to logical difficulties which Adorno claims can be seen in Durkheim's attempted social and sociological grounding of the categories: his reasoning is circular, in that, in attempting to explain the social origins of the categories, he must employ them (EDu 275). However, this critique, which may be modeled on Hegel's critique of Kant in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*, is only powerful if we assume that Durkheim was engaged in a transcendental deduction of the categories. The point is that, in Adorno's analysis, Durkheim follows an ultimately

unproductive path in his attempted sociological reformulation of Kant. According to Adorno's conception, society as spirit must encompass both subjectivity and objectivity; and although Durkheim recognizes this to some extent, he cannot link the two theoretically, dialectically. He ends up with a conception of objectivity which is *collective* or *social*—as opposed to Kant's individually-grounded conception of objectivity—but which nevertheless is philosophically and epistemologically problematic.

Adorno's complaint that Durkheim's theory leads to the door of speculation, but that he could not cross it, translates into a concern with mediation. "In the most advanced places of his speculation, however, flash the possibility that the truth may be societally mediated, without truth dissolving" (EDu 275). Durkheim's notion of objectivity here simply reduces to collectivity, but it still lacks an essential mediation with the individual. Adorno's frequent claim that "mediation is involved in everything" (KK 224/147) is itself necessarily ambiguous. Roughly speaking, it may refer to *social* mediation, or to the mediation between consciousness and the world. In the discussion of Durkheim's epistemology, then, we must differentiate between 1) the social mediation which gives rise to certain forms of knowledge; and 2) the individual mediation of this form of knowledge by consciousness. As we've seen, Adorno's critique of idealism holds that the transcendental (the "beyond" or the "given") must not be characterized as such; it is rather only "quasi-transcendental" (ND 64/54). This is the reality of reification, or the state of being un-mediated. The nature of "social mediation," the passing of everything through social relation, leads up to the moment of knowledge, which then must be characterized. So, on the one hand, we have social mediation, and on the other, knowledge of such social mediation.

For Adorno, Durkheim’s “sociologism” falls just as short as Kant’s transcendentalism did. In his lectures on Kant, after a long discussion of the relationship of the *constituens* and the *constitutum*, Adorno emphasizes its importance for sociological knowledge. However, there is no question of discovering the “origin” or the “foundation” of the categories, as Durkheim attempted to do with his epistemological claims in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The whole “question of which comes first — actual existence or formal category — is misguided” (KK 258/170). They are rather parts of the same whole, and the notion of them as being independent, of one as capable of being first, is only a product of our reflective thought. This is the first important point to be learned from Kant in the philosophical realm, and from Durkheim in the sociological.

### 3.1.2 The moral subject

Adorno’s critique of Kant’s moral philosophy proceeds analogously to his critique of Kantian theoretical philosophy.<sup>132</sup> Just as the Kantian theoretical subject cannot be considered to synthesize heterogeneous concept and intuition, the Kantian will cannot unproblematically join together reason and desire. Yet, just as with his valorization of the Kantian thing-in-itself, Adorno believes that something of the Kantian will’s autonomy must, against Durkheim, be preserved. In Adorno’s analysis, Durkheim’s conception of morality follows closely that of sociality: “All morality appears to us as a system of rules of conduct” (DMF 35). “The positivist Durkheim only deduced without hesitation, what the transcendental idealist, who would rather accept the contradiction, refused to ignore: the intelligible, for Durkheim, is leveled [*einebnen*] to the empirical, by virtue of its

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<sup>132</sup> My analysis here is indebted to Jütten (2010), who clearly demonstrates the parallels.

character of ‘facticity’ . . .” (EDu 272). What is lost in this reduction of the intelligible to the empirical is the nonidentical. In these terms, Durkheim has transgressed the Kantian block between the intelligible and the empirical, between the noumenal and the phenomenal worlds. The implications of such a move are, for Adorno, ideological. But the distinction between Durkheim and Kant on this issue is instructive. Their similarity, Adorno recognizes, is only “descriptive;” Kant’s central concept of “autonomy” becomes, for Durkheim, a social category of sanction. “Contrary to Kant, the moral rule and . . . the ethical laws themselves are prescribed to the reason of individual consciousnesses from outside — not their own, but heteronomously” (EDu 273).<sup>133</sup>

What he reads as Durkheim’s attention to the fundamental experience of *unfreedom* for the individual in capitalist modernity, is a corrective to Kant’s thesis of the autonomy of the intelligible sphere; but yet still doesn’t go far enough. Kant’s theory “removes freedom from the empirical world and locates it in the intelligible world, where its existence remains unaffected by empirical unfreedom” (Jütten 2010, 6). However, rather than recognizing the nonidentity in the relationship between reason and desire, Durkheim collapsed the distinction. For Durkheim, morality becomes *purely* social, according to Adorno; whereas for Kant, it remains the will’s own. This analysis follows closely Adorno’s critique of Kant’s theory of knowledge. According to Adorno, reason, whether practical or theoretical, is both identical and nonidentical with nature (ND 285/289), and therefore stands in a necessary dialectical (“natural historical”) relationship with both the body and the object. Where Kant had concerned himself with the validity of reason, over its genesis (Jütten 2010, 7), Durkheim, admitting the strict dichotomy, sought only its genesis. Adorno wants to rethink the relationship.

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<sup>133</sup> For a thorough, alternative view on Durkheim’s notion of autonomy, see Miller (1996).

Freedom towards the object, in the entire tradition of the enlightenment, Hegel included, means: detachment from desire [*Wunsch*] as the father of thought. At the same time, however, that behavior is constitutively already embedded in the simple logical judgment, its claim to truth and to the rejection [*Verwerfung*] of untruth, which the cliché of valuations [*Wertungen*], split off from their ground of knowledge, apports. Thought, which the alleged value judgment demonizes, provided that it is not precipitated without a context of justification, quietly positions the immanent critical moment of cognition (EDu 259).

For Durkheim, in his equation of the social and the moral, ethics becomes “leveled merely to a positive science,” but “it wanted to strongly separate itself from the antithesis of the Is and the Is-Ought” (EDu 272). Although Durkheim recognizes the antinomial character of such an attempt, “[h]e holds on to the normative structure of the moral, despite its empirical origin.” Here is Durkheim’s primary contradiction: the moral and the social both have an autonomy, which parallels that of the social science which pursues them. But for Adorno, “The concept of the moral fact is itself a paradox: something becomes the given – for Durkheim the social fact – that according to its own aspiration would like to be more than merely given, and that, as soon as it becomes nothing other than this, it forfeits its emphatic claim” (EDu 272). How could sociology presume to understand morality?

It is here that, in Adorno’s analysis, Durkheim shows his affinity with Kant’s practical reason. “We shall show that moral rules are invested with a special authority by virtue of which they are obeyed simply because they command. We shall reaffirm, as a result of a purely empirical analysis, the notion of duty and nevertheless give a definition of it closely resembling that already given by Kant. Obligation is, then, one of the primary characteristics of the moral rule” (DMF 35-6). It is the slippage between the notions of coercion and obligation that so bothers Adorno here. In his evaluation, Durkheim “derives [it] without hesitation from what the transcendental idealist — who

would rather accept contradiction — refused to overlook: for Durkheim, the intelligible is leveled to empiricism, on account of the character of his ‘facticity,’ which to a certain extent Kant also concedes. According to him, every moral rule originates in the social” (EDu 272). But, Adorno is quick to point out, this account, despite its “descriptive” similarity to Kant, omits entirely the central Kantian concept of autonomy. Adorno’s Durkheim reduces morality to the social sanction, and relegates it to a social heteronomy.

### 3.1.3 Durkheim’s subject

The Durkheimian conception of the social *object* has implications as well for his understanding of the subject and subjectivity. We have seen above that Durkheim relies explicitly upon a dualistic conception of the human individual. He relates the realm of sensory intuition with the individual, physical, material body, and the realm of the understanding with the social, spiritual, immaterial. Both of these aspects appear to be present within the concrete, human individual. Although he did not write a direct critique of Kant on these grounds, Durkheim’s conception of the individual subject is a far cry from Kant’s. Following on Durkheim’s understanding of social or collective phenomena, he cannot understand the subject in any kind of transcendental fashion. As was also discussed above, Adorno’s critique of Kantian philosophy was focused in part on the conception of the subject. Against the Kantian notion of a transcendental subject, a *constitutive* subject, Adorno posed an “anthropological-materialist” subject (H 263/16 ; See O’Connor 2004: 117ff.). Adorno complained that the link between the empirical and the transcendental subjects was too vague, and that consequently, the transcendental subject becomes a meaningless abstraction. Against the constitutive subject, Adorno

argued for a necessary account of the mediation of subject and object, which would solve the problem of this abstraction, by recognizing the essential link between subjectivity and objectivity, and that would properly prioritize the realm of the object. Objectivity must not be grounded in the subject; in fact, there can be no “grounding” of this sort at all.

The implicit critique of the Kantian subject in Durkheim’s work is, as far as it goes, premised on the same sorts of claims. For Durkheim, the “synthesis” of knowledge is performed collectively, not by an individual subject, be it transcendental or empirical. Durkheim throws away the Kantian “I think” for an essentially social subject, in the sense of one that it is formed through the social process (as opposed to a “collective subjectivity”). The limits that exist in its forms of knowledge stem not from the transcendental sphere, but rather from the sphere of the “social.” Yet when formulated this way, we can see that the Durkheimian shift retains the structure of the Kantian subject. Although he has postulated a mode of sociality which in part “constructs” the subject socially, the lack of specificity in his theory concerning this relation means that the social sphere functions, theoretically, as a transcendental phenomenon. Adorno uses this critique to claim that the very notion of the transcendental *presupposes* a concrete sociality. In this sense, he critiques Kant’s theory of the subject, and Durkheim’s conception of the social, simultaneously.

Relatedly, Adorno takes issue with the inherent duality in the subject which exists in the theories of both Kant and Durkheim. Although Durkheim does not want any universal or abstract conception of the subject to ground his work, he transposes the Kantian duality of the subject into his theory. According to Kant, the world can either be



considered from the point of view of the way that it appears, or as it is “in itself” (Carr 2003, 182). The subject, likewise, can be seen in such dichotomous perspective: either as an object of the world, or as a subject perceiving the world, as something constituted or constituting. The self, then is both a phenomenal object, something that exists in the world as other objects do, but it is also an *experiencing* self, it constitutes its own subjective realm. In an analysis of the transcendental subject, Carr asks:

If experiences, thoughts, ideas are conceived as properties of the self, how do they relate to the objects and the world they are about? The answer is usually a confused mixture of causality and resemblance, which come together in the problematic notion of representation. Posing the questions in this way sets up a barrier between the self and world that cannot be bridged, and the result is either a skepticism that gives up on knowledge altogether, or an idealism that reduces the rest of the world to the ideas we have of it. The first denies the openness to the world that is constitutive of our being as subjects; the second denies the transcendence of the world which is an ineradicable feature of its sense (2003, 183-4).

This encapsulates the problem that leads to the differentiation, in both Kant and, later, Husserl, of the transcendental and the empirical subject. As Carr (2003, 185) also makes clear, the “subjective’ conception of the subject, or the self, has priority for Kant because it simply cannot be considered an object without first being *thought*, and therefore is always presupposed. (Adorno will use similar reasoning to argue for the priority of the object.) This implies the necessity of the subject, its transcendental status. The transcendental subject came into being when Kant shifted the way of looking. “Instead of looking for everything in experience, we should ask after the conditions of possibility of experience. Of course, the ‘I think’ will not turn up in experience . . . because it belongs to those conditions of experience. In fact, it is chief among them” (Carr 2003, 188).

Such issues are not tangential to my interests here, but rather inhabit a central place where the distinction between the “empirical” or “real,” and the “ideal” is to worked out.

Carr's analysis makes clear that the so-called "subjective" idealism of Kant stemmed from his particular *philosophical* perspective, the shift in his theoretical position to a transcendental, critical viewpoint. Durkheim's later arguments against both empiricism and rationalism are directly related here. The problem, as it has been posed, is the turning point in the creation of the dichotomy to begin with. Subject versus object, the self versus the world. How do the two relate? Are we to base our work on an empiricism, in which the autonomy of the self is denigrated, or on a rationalism, where the world is essentially devalued? Adorno pointed out that these two problems really have a common origin. The attempt to remove everything "objective," to get down to the "pure" self of reason, is fundamentally misguided. We do not make our reason "objective" by doing so, but rather "subjective."

Adorno's reading of Durkheim then emphasizes the limits that its commitment to a Kantian form of subjectivity require. According to the interpretation that I have been developing here, I'd like to move to a discussion of Adorno's critique from a different angle: from the ways in which it handles "objectivity." For Adorno, these are best understood through a sustained comparison with Hegel.

### 3.3 Durkheim as Hegelian

In this section, I use Adorno's discussion and critique of Durkheim to highlight and explore both the nature of Adorno's own project, as well as some of the philosophical problems with which both he and Durkheim struggled. I will make the claim that Adorno's own thought isn't as far from Durkheim's as he himself appeared to believe. I will also point to some issues with Adorno's reading of Durkheim, which is quite schematic; however, since the goal of this study is not to critique the veracity or cogency

of Adorno's interpretation, but rather to explore what it reveals about Adorno's own project, and the project of social science in general, I will not spend much time discussing these questions.

The discussion above brought out the issues of a theory of knowledge which attempts to ground the structure of thought in the social sphere, rather than in the transcendental. In this section, I focus on the concept of "objectivity," which stems from Adorno's reading of Durkheim and his understanding of contemporary (capitalist) society. His consistent praise for Durkheim's grasp of the objectivity of society was always attenuated with the concern that the phenomenon itself was exacerbated by Durkheim's approach to science. Adorno sought to critique Durkheim's process of thought and theorizing here, and to show how Durkheim's own *experience* of society lay at the root of his theory.

### 3.3.1 The objectivity of society

According to Adorno's interpretation, Durkheim had, in his analysis of society, discovered one of its fundamental characteristics. Adorno believes that Durkheim understands the inherent objectivism of society, its "hardened" character, but also that he misunderstands it fundamentally by conceiving of it as an "ideal" and undialectical phenomenon. Durkheim "hit on a very central moment of socialization: that something originally made by human beings becomes institutionally autonomous in relation to human beings" (ES 140/81; see also PS 74f.). Durkheim discovered the social reality of reification, but he did not recognize it as such. This is a critique of Durkheim that Adorno repeats throughout his work. Durkheim's error of hypostatization stems from his conceiving the social along emergentist lines. Here, the undialectical character of

Durkheim's analysis is emphasized in terms of the relationship between the individual and the social. If that which is specifically social is related to its "substrate," the individual, as an *emergent* phenomenon — as with consciousness in the brain, or life to matter — then *history* is denied. The moment of emergence in Durkheim is for Adorno the moment of "reification," the moment in which the true basis — the individual moment — gets lost.

This mistake leads to an "identification with the collective," which of course for Adorno is a real social tendency, as well as a unexamined ideology of Durkheim's theory. With this criticism, Adorno brings together Durkheim's conception of the objectivity of society with his understanding of the Hegelian conception of *Geist*. Through this connection to Hegel, Adorno proposes a dual critique: in terms of his *collectivism* or holism, and in terms of a sociological form of *idealism*. While these points are connected, as the critique of Hegel showed, they also each have their own logic, which helps to demonstrate the difficulties of Adorno's project. The difficulty here is that, on Adorno's reading, the ideal and the collective in Durkheim's thought are identical. Claiming that Hegel and Durkheim both have a "contempt for individuality" (ND 337/344), Adorno uses his conception of the object as both material and particular, to ground his analysis.

In his critique of Hegelian world spirit, Adorno emphasized that Hegel had misunderstood the fundamental nature of spirit "[t]he world spirit is, but is not, is not spirit, but precisely the negative, which Hegel shifted from it to those who must obey it" (ND 298/304; my translation). Hegel had in this way improperly "spiritualized" spirit, and had fundamentally misconstrued history, the history of human beings, as history of

another order.<sup>134</sup> The result for Hegel, as for Durkheim, is a conception of society and spirit (world spirit or objective spirit) as necessity, as “fate”<sup>135</sup> “In the concept of the world spirit, the principle of divine omnipotence was secularized into the principle that posits unity, and the world plan was secularized into the relentlessness of what happens” (ND 300/305). The conception of society as *Geist* is basically problematic in this way, but as we’ll see that the potential is there for a more radical analysis; society is spirit in more than one way.

On this reading, the relationship between the individual and the whole, or the universal, determines and is determined by the degree of “collectivity” of society. When the collective realm has been “hypostatized” from the individuals who constitute it, it then faces them in domination. Durkheim’s social theory is, equally to Hegel’s philosophy, the defense of a “power from an allegedly higher order” [*der Macht auf angeblich höherer Warte sich hergeben*] (ND 302/307-8).<sup>136</sup> The *Zwang des*

<sup>134</sup> As we saw earlier, Adorno’s reading of Hegel involves the attribution of a conservative turn, after the *Phenomenology*, and represented most starkly in the philosophies of right and history. According to Adorno, Hegel lost touch with his analysis of philosophy as “the science of the experience of consciousness” that had grounded the earlier work, and as a result, the later Hegel was insensitive to the *experience of the individual* (See ND 302f./307f.).

<sup>135</sup> In his critique of the Hegelian *Weltgeist*, Adorno likens the abstract nature of its concept to Durkheim’s own “doctrine of collective spirit” (ND 320/326), claiming that, in Durkheim’s conception, there is no room for *either* determinateness *or* dialectical negation. According to Adorno, Durkheim’s conception of collective objectivity is thus in a sense even more impoverished than Hegel’s. “In the sociology of primitive religions, Durkheim made the substantial discovery that qualities, the things the particular is boasting of, have been imposed upon it by the universal. He designated to the universal both the delusion of the particular, as a mere mimesis, and the power that makes a particular of it in the first place” (ND 320n/326n).

<sup>136</sup> In a related critique, in his discussion headed “Group Spirit and Domination,” Adorno offers a brief critique of the formal sociology of Simmel, asserting that the substance of Simmel’s discussions of the the power of the group over the individual

does not lie in socialization pure and simple, in empty categories such as that of the group. Instead — which formal sociology dislikes reflecting upon, in line with its definition — they are impressions of a social content; their invariance is a pure memento of how little the power of the universal has changed in history, how very much it always remains prehistoric. The formal group spirit is a reflective movement on material dominance. Formal sociology gets its right to exist from the formalization of the social mechanisms, the equivalent of the dominance that progresses through the *ratio* . . . Compared with the class relationship,

*Allgemeinen* (coercive power of the universal) lives on unimpeded in Durkheim's version of sociology.<sup>137</sup> For example, Adorno likens Hegel's employment of the concept of the *Volksgeist* in his philosophy of history to Durkheim's "collective norms," complaining that neither one is truly a mediated, concrete universal, but rather only "an individuation higher in grade, but independent as such [*Individuation höheren Grades, doch als solche selbständig*]" (ND 331/338). Here, it is the strict "independence" of these "higher" categories that Adorno finds so problematic. As I've discussed above, Hegel's attempt, in the *Philosophy of History*, to mediate the individual and the particular through the *Volksgeist* claims both an "independent" status for it, as well as one of the "concrete universal." However, it is only through its "independence" that Hegel "legalizes" the "tyranny [*Gewaltherrschaft*]" over individuals. The "failure" of Hegel's mediation of particular and universal, within his *Realphilosophie*, demonstrates the ultimate futility of his systematic philosophy.

Precisely the thesis of the autonomy of the *Volksgeister* legalizes [*legalisiert*] for Hegel tyranny [*Gewaltherrschaft*] over individual people, just like Durkheim's collective norms and Spengler's *Kulturseelen* would later. The more abundantly a universal is equipped with the insignia of the collective subject, the more completely the subjects disappear in it. However, that category of mediation — which incidentally is not explicitly called mediation, but only fulfills its function — stays back behind Hegel's own concept of mediation. It does not prevail in the matter [*Sache*] itself, does not immanently

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formalization is not more neutral. It is reproduced by abstraction, by the logical hierarchy of the stages of universality — and that the more bluntly, the more conditions of rule are made to disguise themselves as democratic procedures (ND 303/308).

<sup>137</sup> Given this correspondence, Adorno's refusal to acknowledge a version of speculative identity in Hegel — which structures his thought about both the logical form and the social form of the relationship between universal and particular — prejudices his understanding of Durkheim. By relying on the strictly *non-identical* relationship of these two terms, in, as we've seen, a Kantian fashion, Adorno in effect merely *imitates* a speculative reading, while denying its cogency. In other words, Adorno's work shifts back and forth seemingly so easily between the philosophical and the social realms, because it attempts to understand their relationship in a *speculative* way, and rejects for instance, any idea of social, or conversely mental, causality. Ultimately Adorno backs this up merely with references to the fact that "everything is mediated," and a pointer to Hegel. But Hegelian mediation and Adornian mediation are very different species.

determine its other, but serves as a bridging concept, a hypostatized intermediary between the world spirit and the individuals (ND 331-2/338).

Adorno discusses Hegel here as allowing his need for philosophical system to dictate his approach to historical reality. His category of the *Volksgeist* reaches back into empirical history, and remains there, beyond the point when it should have passed away; by remaining theoretically unmediated, the category of the *Volksgeist*, becomes stagnant, an “undialectical constant,” and, in Adorno’s opinion, “reactionary.”

Another way to view this, through Adorno’s eyes, is that Durkheim has “spiritualized” the *specifically social* (EDu 247). In this critique Adorno typically neglects Durkheim’s analysis of the social, in for instance the *Division of Labour*, as being comprised by a form of solidarity; but even this would not help Durkheim’s cause, since Adorno is also interested in Durkheim’s neglect of the material and economic aspects of the collective spirit in his analysis of religion and knowledge. Durkheim’s central theory “shifts from the objectivity of the supporting, societal life processes to the objectivity of the *conscience collective*. If its spirit is raised to the substance of a society, something only derived from itself, so the distinction between true and false consciousness dissolves . . .” (EDu 247). Without undertaking any kind of analysis of the concept of the *conscience collective*, Adorno simply declares it to be a “spiritual” phenomenon, something which is not grounded enough in the process of social reproduction to adequately serve as the “substance of society.”

A part of this process of “spiritualization” is the refusal to reason historically and concretely. Adorno believes that Hegel’s category of the nation is not historically concrete; it is essentially an idealism, and he views the collective concepts of Durkheim along these lines as well. For Adorno, Durkheim’s “obsession” with primitive forms of

sociality constitutes an anachronism, and belies his mischaracterization of modernity (EDu 252).<sup>138</sup> Durkheim's reliance on primitive forms of sociality to understand the collective consciousness demonstrates to Adorno that he is operating ideally, rather than historical-materially. By employing *Urphänomenen* in this way, Durkheim understands collective phenomena not through their dialectical constitution, but rather through a collective-level morphology (EDu 252; see also Neilsen 1999, 68).

The "objectivity" of the social, which Adorno claims Durkheim has accurately perceived but mis-theorized, is then based on the *sui generis* nature of the social in Durkheim's thought. Adorno's complaint that Durkheim cannot theorize the mediation of the individual and the social forces Durkheim to reproduce reification by only partially understanding the nature of society.

The ostensible irreducibility of the specifically social suits him [Durkheim] exactly: it helps him to create ever more being-in-itself, to fully autonomize [it] not only with respect to the knower [*Erkennenden*], but also to the individuals, who are integrated into the collective. The impossibility of mediating the *principium individuationis* with that which seems social, according to his desire for the autonomy of the sciences of society and their methods, compels him to the speculative act of violence [*Gewaltsreich*] of the hypostasis of the collective consciousness (EDu 250).<sup>139</sup>

Adorno points to the origins of Durkheim's mistake here: his commitment to the scientific autonomy of the new field of sociology, which Adorno views as a form of Enlightenment or identity thought.

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<sup>138</sup> Although, as I've mentioned, Adorno significantly leaves out a discussion of Durkheim's own theory of modernity.

<sup>139</sup> Along the same lines, Adorno reasons that

[t]he principle of individualization, the law of particularity to which the universal reason in the individuals is tied, tends to insulate them from the encompassing contexts and thereby strengthens their flattering confidence in the subject's autarky. Under the name of freedom, their totality is contrasted with the totality of whatever restricts individuality. Yet the *principium individuationis* is by no means the metaphysically ultimate and unalterable, and thus it is not freedom either. Freedom is a moment, rather, in a twofold sense: it is entwined, not to be isolated; and for the time being it is never more than an instant of spontaneity, a historical node, the road to which is blocked under present conditions (ND 218/219).



### 3.3.2 Knowledge of objectivity

The commitment to a “positive” scientific procedure and the appearance of the social as autonomous and irreducible go hand in hand. According to Adorno, Durkheim’s attachment to a scientific method led necessarily to the “certification” of religion as a “godliness,” rather than being understood as a “societal projection” (EDu 252). This understanding, which goes against many interpretations of Durkheim’s theory of religion as precisely *grounded in* the social, accords with Adorno’s overall perspective. Religion becomes a “godliness,” in Adorno’s opinion, because it is coterminous with the social, which has been removed from connection with its mediated moments, and hence has become impenetrable to understanding and explanation. Durkheim has in this way “regressed behind the left-Hegelians,” who famously understood religion as a projection of society (EDu 252).<sup>140</sup> This conception is the basis for his conception of society as an “objective” phenomenon, as well as his belief in the possibility of a scientific objective knowledge about it. Durkheim takes his mischaracterization of the totality of society and turns it into a “method.” Adorno argues that “Durkheim’s concept of *faits sociaux* is thoroughly aporetic. He transposes negativity, the opacity [*Undurchsichtigkeit*] and painful foreignness of the social for individuals, into the methodical maxim: you shall not understand” (NSO 240). The social fact, which is the so-called symbolic instantiation of the social, is at the center of Durkheim’s method, but he has misunderstood its nature, according to Adorno. For Durkheim, it is merely a *postulate* of his sociological methodology; but for Adorno it reflects a “central aspect of society as object” (NSO 240).

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<sup>140</sup> The question can be restated as the question of the priority of religion versus that of society, which has been an area of debate in Durkheim scholarship. See, e.g., Pickering (1984).

According to Adorno, Durkheim understands society as “impenetrable (EP 308/27). Full recognition of this fact would force a further reflection on his conception of sociology as a science. Instead, Durkheim takes the social facts as immediate unproblematic reality. “Durkheim’s rule that one should treat social facts as things [renounces] in principle understanding them. He was convinced that society meets each individual primarily as that which is not identical, as ‘coercion’. To that extent reflection on society would begin where intelligibility [comprehensibility, *Verstehbarkeit*] ends. The method of natural science defended by Durkheim registers the . . . ‘second nature’ into which society congeals against its living members” (S 12/147).<sup>141</sup> Even more than this, Durkheim understands the social fact as a norm, as a “moral fact,” and thereby forfeits a critical conception of morality. For him, the “impenetrability of the norm and the inexorability of the sanction” are simply features deriving from their social status, whereas Adorno wants to locate them within the capitalist form of society. He instead equates societal alienation with sociation [*Vergesellschaftung*] itself. “The pre-given structure which does not merely stem from classification—Durkheim’s impenetrable—is essentially negative and is incompatible with its own goal, namely the preservation and satisfaction of mankind. Without such a goal the concept of society, seen in concrete terms, would indeed be what the Viennese positivists used to term devoid of meaning” (EP 308-9/27). Durkheim’s positive science cannot capture this negativity.

The following quote from Durkheim’s essay on the “Determination of Moral Facts,” cited by Adorno in his Introduction to Durkheim’s *Sociology and Philosophy*, shows an aspect of Durkheim’s understanding of the “appearance” of the facts:

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<sup>141</sup> Translation by Rose (1978, 82-83).

But in order that moral facts may be beyond comparison it is necessary that the sentiments that determine their value should have the same character. It is necessary that they also should be above comparison with other human desires. They must have a prestige and an energy that distinguishes them from among the other movements of our sensibility. The collective sentiments fulfill this condition. Precisely because they are the echo within us of the great voice of the collective, they speak in our consciences with a tone quite different from that of purely individual sentiments. They speak to us from a higher level and by reason of their origin they have a force and an ascendancy peculiarly their own. One can see how it is that the objects to which these sentiments attach themselves participate in the same prestige. They are set apart and elevated above other things by all the distance that separates the two different states of mind (DMF 58).

Adorno criticizes Durkheim here for a “sociological” conception of individual “sentiments” which is merely that of the collective. The social and moral facts that are present for sociological reason have a “prestige” and an “energy” according to their collective status. Durkheim’s “one-sidedness” consists in this. Durkheim allows the social to be so severely imposed from the one side of the dialectical relationship, that he loses a perspective on the side of the individual, which would allow it to be seen precisely in its sociality. This is a “glorification” of the individual, as cut off from the collective, which directly contradicts Durkheim’s own understanding of the individual as a social category (EDu 255). The problematic implications of such an interpretation of the social are clear to Adorno, and parallel the problems with Hegel’s own (late) conception of the universal. The collective consciousness, collective representations, cannot be subjected to a critique in this scheme, because, without a conception of the dialectical relationship between the individual and society, Durkheim can posit no other role for the collective other than a positive one. The social is the immediate, and the socially sanctioned; the only visible problem with this is that some individuals will be “insufficiently integrated” (EDu 262).

It is in this context that Adorno refers to Durkheim as the “empirical descendant” of Hegel, in part because he discovered the contradictory, dialectical nature of society, but ultimately turned away from it (ED 275f.). Durkheim interprets critique of society as

immanent, and thereby “suspends critique in the spirit of such immanence . . . The Durkheimian version of the immanence of critique becomes a sabotage of judgment, in which a too willing state (condition; *Zustand*) differs from dubious being [*seienden*], although, that which moves in immanent critique is envisaged in the difference, urged by Durkheim, between the reality of society and of that of consciousness, that it has of itself: the difference between the object and its concept” (EDu 275-6). The main point here is of course that Durkheim did not come to discover the negative dialectic, although according to Adorno it was right there in front of him. The details are more interesting. Previously in this passage Adorno had isolated a point where Durkheim admitted to resorting to dialectical argument when scientific demonstration was impossible. Durkheim attempts a form of dialectical thought, which he misconceives, and ends up merely sabotaging the judgment which may differentiate between the object and its consciousness. This occurs despite Durkheim’s recognition of the gap which exists between society and consciousness of society.<sup>142</sup> The understanding of holism that is central to the doctrine of the social fact is responsible in large part for what Adorno refers to as Durkheim’s “positivism.” With that holistic perspective, Durkheim took an enormous step forward, scientifically speaking, but in the end he could not situate this advancement properly. Durkheim’s commitment to science reproduces all of its problems in the social sphere. Science merely reproduces, it cannot find the “new.” It prioritizes method over content,

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<sup>142</sup> As mentioned earlier, Adorno’s critique of collective forms as forms of spirit blends various types of spirit together. Adorno criticizes the *Volksgeist*, the *Weltgeist*, and the Hegelian state together under one concept, just as he fails to differentiate between different forms of collectivism in Durkheim’s work. The characterization of the collective consciousness, and all forms of totality in Durkheim, as Hegelian *Geist* implies, according to Adorno, their reactionary, undialectical status. They become independent entities, opposed to the social processes through which they are supposedly constituted. And for Adorno, of course, this crucially leaves out the non-identical, leaving the constitution of history, or the state, or the collective consciousness merely a product of a (false) formal rationality.

for purposes of control. “Under the mechanisms of the conformity of scientific thought, the coercion of method may rank in the first position at the cost of the content” (EDu 263). The criticism of Durkheim as a positivist, as a “victim” of the division of labour, suggests that a key for Adorno is the removal of the restriction between philosophy, or more specifically speculation, and sociology (EDu 267; PS Lecture 1). This is essentially an argument *against* the autonomy of sociology. Sociology is meaningless on its own; actually, more than this, it is ideological. As a form of science, it has to be combined with the self-reflection of philosophy (EDu 271). Science for Adorno represents the attempted “pacification” of uncertainty and insecurity (EDu 263). Adorno notes that Durkheim confessed to a form of rationalism, which Adorno excoriates him for, claiming that “his texts read like parodies of the Cartesian *Discours de la methode*” (EDu 265). He takes completeness and consistency as goals, without asking whether they are warranted in this instance. He thereby “defeats” the object, in “typical scientific fashion.”

In Adorno’s view, Durkheim’s commitment to the establishment of sociology as a science of society proved too detrimental to the retention of significant elements of Hegelian thought. “To attribute spirit or reason to some entity, which would not have been itself directly sensible, a kind of subject, he would have rejected as fantasy” (EDu 253; see also 275-6). Reification here is represented by the undialectical relationship between the universal and the particular, a problem which is evident in the scientific understanding of society. It is crucial for the Durkheimian “positivist” conception of the social, that it become “registered . . . in the immediacy, in which it appears to the descriptive observer” (EDu 253). This is what it means for sociology to become autonomous as a science.

### 3.3.3 The experience of objectivity

However, the recognition of this gap or “block” between society and the individual was Durkheim’s primary insight, according to Adorno. He made some positive steps towards a critical theory of society through an emphasis on the *coercive* nature of the social. Adorno reads Durkheim’s collective “realism” precisely in terms of its conflict with the societal individual. The notion of constraint, of the individual experiencing the social only in what limits her, or in Adorno’s words, what causes pain, is the very definition of the “social fact” (EDu 250). Adorno postulates a link between the *experience* of society as “other,” and the subsequent *understanding* of it. The conflict between the individual and the collective structures both moments. In other words, the individual experiences society as “coercion,” and consequently views society as “impenetrable.” “The concept of the factual, in which an anti-subjective moment is in itself inherent . . . collides for Durkheim abruptly with any individuality” (EDu 250). The social is by definition that which constrains the individual externally. This “irreducibility” of the social allows Durkheim to make society into a being-in-itself, which is autonomous from both perceiving subjects and collectively-integrated individuals (EDu 250). But, secondly, the social as social constraint is also the social *fact*. The dual character of objectivity gets to the heart of the matter: it constitutes the relationship between the individual and society. “The reason to read Durkheim is [the] entanglement of the provocatively speculative with positivism. His self-critique implicitly announces itself therein . . . Durkheim’s concept of the social fact and its thing-like character can be traced back to his own experience of society” (EDu 248).

Society, as spirit, is a complex reality; it is not a fact, but rather is “something extremely real” (ES 89/50). This is a paradox, as “precisely that which is non-factual, not directly convertible into sense perceptions, has a higher, not a lower, degree of reality, in that it determines the lives of people more than the so-called ‘concreta’ which directly confront us” (ES 89/50). For Adorno this paradox between society as fact and society as experience is of paramount importance. Durkheim’s critical realization of the social in terms of resistance recognizes, on some level, this paradox. It is the recognition that society is in fact “real;” and we therefore cannot dismiss society as a metaphysical concept. “The phenomena I have mentioned to you, and a great many others which belong to the same category, can be described as experiential phenomena” (ES 89-90/50). “Genuine experience,” Adorno continues here, is the “experience of something new which has not existed before.” This type of experience is prevented by both our world and by science. “I would not hesitate to define the idea of a dialectical theory of society as something like the restoration of, or — to put it more modestly — the effort to restore, the experience which is denied us both by the social system and by the rules of science.” The danger of science is that it will “conjure away this experience” of authenticity, of the new (ES 91/51). It is this combination of a commitment to the experience of the social, with the scientific understanding of it, that condemns Durkheim to failure. Or rather, like Kant with his conception of the block, Durkheim’s theory has identified a central contradiction of modern life but without doing anything with it.

But how can we understand the process through which scientific thought “conjures away” genuine experience? In the context of a social science, does Adorno’s critical, philosophical (negative dialectical) approach change character? The question gets to the

heart of Adorno's conception of the relationship between philosophy and sociology; but it is difficult to answer without a full elaboration of his concepts of "configuration," "constellation," "mimesis," "expression," etc. In lieu of that here, and in preparation for the conclusion to the present chapter, I will briefly discuss the relationship between experience and the social, as it relates to Adorno's critique of Durkheim.

Experience in Adorno is *individual* experience; in claiming that Durkheim has somehow not been true to his own experience of society, Adorno bemoans the situation of the individual in the totalized society, the "withering" of experience. But at the heart of this critique is a social process of exchange and the way in which it has reconfigured (mentally, physically) the conscious individual subjects of society. "The experience of that which is prior to the individual and its consciousness, is that of the unity of the totally socialized society [*total vergesellschafteten Gesellschaft*]" (ND 309/314; my translation). Due to the fact that, in the society of exchange, everything is always already socially mediated, that which the individual experiences as immediate is therefore *false*. "That which is realized through the one and the many [*durchs Einzelne und Viele*] is the singular matter [*eigene Sache*] of the many, and it is also not [this]: they can do less and less about it. Their incarnation [epitome; *Inbegriff*] is at the same time their other; from this dialectic the Hegelian [one] deliberately looked away" (ND 309-10/315; my translation).

For Adorno, it is a false universality through which the individual is determined; the perception of society as a universal is based upon illusion, on a fetish. The priority of the universal forces the individual into submission to it; but it is not *their* universality, it is something essentially other. The individual experiences a form of self alienation (Tichy).



“When people are informed about the power [*Vormacht*] of the universal, it is nearly inevitable that that transfigure it into spirit as something higher that they must appease. Coercion becomes meaningful to them” (ND 310/316; my translation). Adorno describes experience here as a learning process, through which individuals may begin to understand the coercion to which they are subjected. They develop in essence a learned helplessness. Here Adorno relates this story to those thinkers and critics, like Hegel and Durkheim, who, having recognized the priority of the universal in social life, fall victim to it by not recognizing the true contradiction inherent in the experience, the conflict between the individual and the universal. They attempt to describe what cannot be described.

“To experience the *Weltgeist* as a whole, however, means to *experience its negativity* (ND 300/305; my translation and emphasis). The totality remains negative (ND 305/311). The articulation of a “negative totality” is not possible within Durkheim’s (positive) thought, but he comes close. Durkheim recognizes the essential objectivity of society, but it is for him, in a sense, *too* objective. The sphere, the whole of society is alienated from the individual to such an extent, that recognition or reconciliation is no longer possible. And not only this, but the fact of reification has blinded Durkheim to its existence. Adorno understands Durkheim’s social objectivity as forcing an *experience* in the individual.

Adorno wants to believe in the fundamental experience of contradiction by the subjects of modern society. Yet he famously appears to waver on this. At times his writing reflects a belief that “the individual has no experience, nor any so-called empirical material, that the universal has not predigested and supplied” (ND 307/312-3).

And at other times, the possibility of a radical critique is present. But my point here is that this ambiguity runs through his reading of Durkheim, and most likely all thinkers. Adorno finds value in Durkheim's thought precisely because it reflects this ambiguity of modern society—the simultaneous reality and illusion of fetishism. Durkheim's account of the dualism of human nature for instance, Adorno understands as both *reflective* of the state of alienation, and as a crucial foil to the experience of totalized (societalized) society. This “ideological” reading holds for Hegel just as much as for Durkheim.

#### ***4. Conclusion: the immanent critique of Durkheim***

I have presented Durkheim's work as engaging in an effort to reconceptualize philosophical problems from the standpoint of the new investigatory method of sociology. He attempted this in two primary ways: through the social grounding of the categories of thought, and through his understanding of morality as a *fait social*. In this way, he sought to stake sociology's claim to some of the basic problems of theoretical and practical philosophy. Through his critique of Durkheim's work, Adorno effectively sought to undermine the significance of these attempts, claiming that Durkheim's own commitment to a scientific procedure resulted not in enlightenment but merely in ideology. In Adorno's analysis, the establishment of sociology as the science of the social/moral fact only served to translate the problems of philosophy into an intellectual idiom which simply hid their conservative character with other language. Although not addressing Durkheim's relationship to philosophy directly, Adorno's critique serves as a critique of the general method of subsuming philosophical reason to its social basis.

But yet, Adorno is also fond of referring to the *fait social* as a signifier of the foundational experience of modernity. Durkheim's *chosisme* is itself a result of the

objectified appearance of the social, of a social world in which subjects face an impenetrability, an *Undurchdringlichkeit*. The world is impenetrable, unintelligible. If Durkheim's ongoing reliance on a *chosisme* is, on some level, a recognition of the "fallacy of constitutive subjectivity" (ND 10/xx), Adorno's complaint is that Durkheim has not fully committed to this fact. He has flagged the alienation of subject and object, but has not *accounted* for it. This means that he remains within the scope of the Kantian "block," while not recognizing that this position commits him to a thesis of unintelligibility. This essentially Kantian reading of Durkheim perhaps shows less insight into Durkheim's work than it does Adorno's own commitment to the interpretation of society as a Kantian "block."

Adorno further points to a contradiction in Durkheim's sociological account of knowledge: although the roots of our thinking are socially constituted, they are necessarily presupposed for any particular investigation.

The subject's reflection upon its own formalism is reflection upon society, with the paradox that, following the intention of the later Durkheim, on the one hand the formative constituents originate in society, while on the other hand, as current epistemology can boast, they are objectively valid; in Durkheim's arguments they are already presupposed in every proposition that demonstrates their conditionedness. (SO 757/257).

The result is a chicken-and-egg scenario in which each requires the other for its existence. Adorno's attempt to go beyond first philosophy or foundationalism is inspired by Hegel; but here he expects it to function as it would within Hegel's own philosophy. As we've seen for Hegel spirit was a means of getting beyond the *causa sui*; but it is only within his system of the absolute that spirit is a structure of self-reflection in which "producer and product are equated" (Hegel [1802] 1985; quoted in Hinchman 1984, 84). Adorno, however, is primarily interested in the contradiction between Durkheim's own

experience, which, in his opinion, led to the theory of *chosisme*, and his subsequent attempts at scientifically grasping the social. Durkheim's own insight into the impenetrability of the social implies its fundamental unintelligibility, and grounds his subsequent claims to social scientific success.

For Adorno, the key distinction between the versions of collectivism in Hegel and Durkheim was their understanding of its constitution. Roughly, Hegel retained a central notion of contradiction and mediation, while Durkheim could not "ground theoretically" the mediation between individual and collective (EP 76). Adorno implies that Durkheim could not stomach the Hegelian option — which in his opinion necessitated a commitment to a collective subjectivity — and was consequently driven to even "greater absurdities, the collective spirit as a social fact" (EDu 253).

In his critical introduction to the essays collected in *Sociology and Philosophy*, Adorno attempted to simultaneously recuperate and dialectically transcend Durkheim's social thought. The essay appears at times to be merely a notch in Adorno's critical belt, the critical destruction of another of modern social theory's "founders." After noting that Durkheim's thought retains a contemporary significance, due to its concern with questions of the "independence of societal tendencies vis-à-vis individual-psychological ones," Adorno immediately reveals the contradictions inherent in it, leading to the "revenge of subjectivism in [his] spiritualization of objectivity" (EDu 246-7). Adorno praised Durkheim for conceptualizing the society as primarily *social constraint*, as a "moment of coercion [*Zwangsmoment*], in which society confronts us as something alien [*fremd*], objective, reified, over which we have no power" (PETG 151). This was in "express opposition to any idea of understanding societal motivations," and hence to any

form of psychology. He simultaneously lambasted him for failing to recognize the contradictions that his theory required.

There is a distinct psychoanalytical moment of this critique. Reminiscent of the Freudian aspects of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno frames Durkheim's attachment to a scientific theory in terms of a primal fear of uncertainty. Here the *coercive* impact of the totality obtains its weight from the "social disaster," which has always already deformed the individual psyche, Durkheim's included:

Under the mechanisms of conformity of scientific thought, the coercion [*Zwang*] of method may come first, at the cost of the content. The feeling of insecurity, in which real individual fear of existence and the nakedness of unregimented spiritual experience are connected with the preconscious knowledge of the *sich schürzenden* societal disaster, becomes in the whole pacified through the exaggerated and idolized unequivocal certainty of Descartes. Because experience cannot destroy it, pure logical forms and methods in all their bleakness are affectively and exceedingly beset, without consideration of the fact that absolute certainty is thereby reduced to something vacuous [*zum Nichtssagendes zusammenschrumpfen*] (EDu 263-4).

The societal experience that is the starting point of Durkheim's theory is "reduced" by the imposition of "method," as a means of management. It loses the connection to its object, to the content. This framing is familiar; it poses the question of an alternative form of thought-behavior which will not *reduce* the negative social experience of the individual. Adorno reads this precisely as the move beyond the methodological dictum that sociology may be nothing else other than sociology. "Method, by becoming indifferent to societal experience . . . becomes merged with the spectre of the utter independence of the collective" (EDu 265). However, this reading only serves to highlight the attempted integration of epistemological and ethical-political concerns. For Adorno, science, and identity thinking in general, are a refuge for those who cannot face the realities of the modern world. Instead, Adorno proposes what Rose calls a "morality of method."

But is this reading too simplistic? Adorno's critique of both Durkheim and Hegel conflates the realms of ethics and epistemology, and of philosophy and sociology; and, in doing so, it fails (to use one of Adorno's favorite tropes) to "follow through" with the critique. The critiques remain "suspended" by virtue of their inability to analytically separate the substance of the thought of both Durkheim and Hegel.

To explain my critique here, let me review the findings of my analysis. Durkheim's specifically sociological approach claims the ability to overcome the dilemmas of philosophy, most particularly of the debates about knowledge between the rationalists and the empiricists. Durkheim's vision of philosophy has it serving a foundational role for other social science disciplines, such as law, economics, politics, etc. However, he also believes, similarly to Comte, that the discipline of sociology was itself the future of philosophy. Addressing the philosophers, Durkheim claims that they have not sufficiently recognized the significance of the social, and hence remained locked in the polar binaries of empiricism and rationalism. Acknowledgement of the social basis of religion (and hence of philosophy) then allows Durkheim to, in a sense, invert Kant: "religion has not confined itself to enriching the human intellect, formed beforehand, with a certain number of ideas; it has contributed to forming the intellect itself" (EF 21). The collective representations which constitute "primitive" forms of religion, have arisen from the nature, and practice, of forms of society. He thus argues that the philosophical dilemma has been overcome through the grounding of the categories of thought in the *sui generis* realm of the social.

Adorno argues that, due to his understanding of collectivity, and his commitment to scientific procedure, Durkheim's work remains riven with contradiction and dualism,

and consequently cannot provide an understanding of contemporary society which exposes the phenomenon of reification for what it is: a human creation. Adorno's critique of the non-dialectical, or "positivist" nature of Durkheim's sociological work parallels his critique of Kant, but in a different register. The dialectical operation which needs to exist between the subject and the object, between the *constituens* and the *constitutum*, shifts explicitly to a relationship between the individual and society. For Durkheim, the autonomy of sociology is predicated on the *sui generis* status of social facts. While both study modes of behaviour and thought, social facts have a "different substratum" from "individual," psychological facts. Each deals with a different order of representations. In this way, Adorno seemingly employs a version of Hegel's critique of Kantian epistemology for his critique of Durkheim. The classical sociologist is seen to have remained caught in the antinomies of his own thought, much like Kant did. Looking at it in this way, however, places Adorno's own relationship to Hegel in question. That is, in using a Hegelian critique here, Adorno seems to imply something like a Hegelian solution as well. Adorno wants to move to a foundationless stance, one of "mediation," but he is not moving toward the absolute here, but rather towards the priority, in some sense, of society.

Adorno relies upon a conception of "objective spirit" which his own negative perspective cannot support. Although he is consistent in arguing about the negativity of the totality, in reality his discussions make no room for the kinds of contradictions that arise in Hegel's own account. This is part of the danger of abstracting from the Hegelian system. While Adorno explicitly does not want to give credence to the idea of objective spirit as a "given," and he criticizes the way that this leads to a problematic positivity in

Durkheim's work, his alternative is to rely on a Marxian conception of value/fetish, in which the given is both what it appears to be, and what it is in essence. How does this change things? It is a question of determinateness. Within Hegel's speculative and systematic perspective, we explicitly see the contradiction within a "shape of spirit." For example, Redding comments on Hegel's account of recognition and the development of self-consciousness in the "master-slave dialectic:"

The contradictoriness and self-transcendence of this specific form of recognition that emerges in the discussion of "self-consciousness" in Chapter 4 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is typical of the way that Hegel treats all finite "shapes" of consciousness, self-consciousness and spirit in that work, and such a gap between the overt form of a recognitive relation and its underlying character must be problematic for any Diltheian . . . conception of "objective spirit" which accepts particular forms of life as "givens" and as intelligible in their own terms (Redding 2011, 216).

This account of normative roles here relies upon a notion of recognition and self-consciousness, in which what it means to be a "master" or a "slave" stems from being recognized as such, and adopting this recognition for oneself. In Adorno's own discussions of the domination of the individual through social integration (a theme which he argues runs through Durkheim's entire *oeuvre*, and which Durkheim's work actively and ideologically reinforces), he has to fall back on a notion of the individual *experience* of such a social location as painful, an account of suffering. But his account of the experience of objectivity cannot substitute for a Hegelian speculative version, because it cannot generate its own internal contradiction. Its negation comes only through the bodily experience of the suffering individual, and the recognition of the *theorist/observer*. If my interpretation here is correct, then Adorno's criticism of the ideal collectivism of Hegel and Durkheim, in favor of a nonidentical materialism, falls flat. Or rather, it fails to differentiate the very different accounts given by Durkheim and



Hegel on this issue, and, in doing so, it neglects its own Durkheimian account of social integration and domination.

In seeking to resolve the antinomies of philosophy sociologically, Durkheim has, according to Adorno, merely reproduced them in the social realm. What is needed in sociology is self-reflection, which the scientific path eschews, in favor of clarity of definition, stability of its objects, and mitigation of uncertainty. “Such lack of reflection terminates in a prohibition of thought” (EDu 271). To avoid this prohibition, consciousness must obtain a different relationship to experience. I will return to the theme of “experience” in the following concluding chapter, and just note here Adorno’s characterization of it as a shield against the arrogance of enlightenment reason:

Elitest arrogance would be the last thing to become philosophical experience. It must account for how much it is, according to its contingency in that which exists [*ihrer Möglichkeit im Bestehenden*], contaminated by that existent and ultimately by the class relationship. In it, the chances [*Chancen*] that the universal grants individuals turn against the universal that sabotages the universality of such experience. Were this universality established, the experience of all individuals would thereby change, and would discard much of the contingency, which until then irredeemably distorts it, even as it still moves. Hegel’s doctrine, that the object reflects itself in itself, outlasts its idealist version, because, in a changed dialectic, the subject, divested of its sovereignty, becomes even more the reflection-form [*Reflexionsform*] of objectivity (ND 52/42).

If the duty of experience is to recognize that it is always already contaminated, this is a high bar for the practicing sociologist. The recognition that universality has been compromised, sabotaged, appears to imply its reestablishment in a changed form. The new subject, as the *Reflexionsform* of objectivity, cannot, however, reestablish this universality.

Paradoxically, the reason that Durkheim could not properly express his experience of objective society was that he misunderstood the subjective component. Following his penchant for a scientific analysis, Durkheim made the mistake of believing he could

remove the subject from consideration. But Adorno's well-known claim that objectivity is achieved by the exertion of the subject, rather than through its elimination by abstraction, applies easily to Durkheim here. The subject is responsible for going beyond the object as immediately apparent, as given, and revealing its history, its "become-ness." Tichy calls this the object's "immanent universality." Durkheim's own reconceptualization of the Kantian transcendental subject certainly could not arrive at this point, because it remains an abstract subject; it is not the subject which experiences, which reflects, and theorizes. The necessity of turning to experience and its "expression" stems from this account of objectivity.

**Chapter 6****From Adorno to Hegel: the sociological and the philosophical**

In a living relation, insofar as it is free, the indeterminate is nothing but the possible, it is neither something actual made dominant, nor a concept which commands (D 145).

Hegel's philosophy has no social import if the absolute cannot be thought (HCS 204).

I have posited an account here in which the turn away from philosophy, towards a form of social science that was either more materialist, in the case of Marx, or more collectivist, in the case of Durkheim, should be seen neither as an overcoming of philosophy, nor as its realization. Both of these directions can be understood, in part through Adorno, as a response to Hegel; and doing so allows us to see some of the limitations that persist. While it is quite possible to look at the German idealist origins in Marx and Durkheim more directly (as others have done), I have tried to give a broader perspective here, one that incorporates Adorno's own struggles to make sense of (and to practice) both philosophy and sociology. My claim that Adorno's own understanding of sociology and social theory cannot be understood without grasping his relationship to Kant and Hegel is straightforward. The further claims — that Adorno helps us to see the “translation” difficulties involved in the development of sociology out of the critique of philosophy, and that Adorno remains mired to some extent in a position he was trying to overcome — are perhaps less clear. Here I will summarize my argument, and give some pointers to potential problems.

### ***1. The Hegelian heritage***

As opposed to interpretations of Hegel that claim that his value lies solely within his social theory, and against those who would separate his “method” from its systematic, idealist “context,” I have in the foregoing explored some of the deeper connections between his “speculative” form of philosophizing and the thought of some representatives of classical social theory. The topic has been neglected in large part due to the relative inaccessibility of the relevant philosophical texts, as well as the continuing stringency of disciplinary borders. However, the relevance of epistemological and philosophical concerns to social theory, combined with the enormously broad influence of the work of Kant and Hegel within philosophy, as well as “continental thought” in general, signals the importance and timeliness of such an investigation.

The heritage of German idealism is most significant for its complex understanding of subjectivity and its “objects.” The Copernican revolution instituted by Kant soon came under criticism for its reliance on a transcendental ground, and Hegel sought to solve this problem with his turn to the absolute. His complicated account, which in some sense merges ontology, logic, and history, has been vastly influential, yet remains deeply contested in philosophical circles. Although the rejection of the formal Kantian subject in favor of a “conceptual” *Geist* involves both intersubjective and social-historical aspects, attempts to appropriate this content for social theory have — from Marx forward — been fraught with difficulty.

I have argued here that Adorno’s understanding of the nature and tasks of philosophy was deeply influenced by his engagement with the philosophy of Kant and Hegel. In particular, his understanding of “nonidentity” derives from his negation of the

concept of “identity” developed among some post-Kantian philosophers. The nonidentity of subject and object, or alternatively the priority of the object, is Adorno’s attempt to reorient philosophy in a materialist and critical direction, in response to the catastrophe of capitalist modernity. Although he took his cue largely from his view of the – mostly unrealized – critical potential of Hegel’s work, his commitment to the “Kantian block” prescribed limits to thought that clashed fundamentally with Hegel’s perspective. The result is contradiction; but more importantly it helps us to identify some of the problems of and limits to canonical forms of “classical” social theory. Here I have discussed just two examples: Durkheim’s commitment to social science and the requirements it sets for thinking subject and object, and Marx’s own attempt to forge a mode of social scientific investigation through an “inversion” of Hegel.<sup>143</sup>

## **2. From Geist to society**

The significance of the issue of the philosophical origins of sociology can be grasped by asking what may have been lost in translation. I’ve argued that Hegel’s concept of *Geist* served as a model of sorts for thinking about society, and brought along some attendant problems. For Adorno, one of the appeals of sociology is its seemingly direct engagement with the primary structuring force of contemporary society. The priority of “mediation” for Adorno stems less from the fundamental nature of diremption and dualism, and more from the structure of exchange society. Simply by virtue of the fact that “there is ‘nothing between heaven and earth that is not “*vermittelt*” [mediated], nothing,

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<sup>143</sup> My discussion has, in multiple ways, led to a position articulated and investigated most thoroughly by Rose (1981): that Hegel’s philosophical efforts have yet to be sufficiently appreciated by sociology, in either its traditional or Marxist varieties. The result is a continued repetition of collective self-misunderstanding, through the refusal, or inability, to think the absolute.

therefore, that does not contain, merely by being defined as something that exists, the reflection of its mere existence, a spiritual moment” (H 298/57) sociology becomes a fundamental part of the task of understanding and critiquing society. “[T]he concept of the mediated . . . is constitutive of sociology” (ES 184/109). However, this should not be taken too far; the “spiritual” moment of society is not constitutive of society. Just as immediacy is always already mediated, the mediated is also always immediate. “That social phenomena are mediated by the spirit, by the consciousness of human beings, should not mislead us into always deriving these phenomena themselves from a spiritual principle” (AS 122-123).

In this way, Adorno appeals to the concept of spirit, but he does so abstractly. His own work reproduces the dualisms that he believes stem from the contradictory nature of the exchange society. And though his negative version of dialectics draws on Hegel’s conception of speculation, in terms of promoting a form of consciousness which reflects upon its experience and thus undermines illusion and immediacy, his commitment to the priority of the nonidentical closes off access to the level of spirit and of the (Hegelian) concept. Adorno is thus confined to an understanding of “society” as a constellation in which spirit plays an indeterminate role, and which cannot reconcile subjective and objective spirit. He refuses “to comprehend the antinomy which he enunciates” (Rose 1993, 62).

Adorno holds on tightly to the idea of the Kantian “block,” the Durkheimian “*chosisme*”. There must remain something fundamentally impenetrable by human reason; and, in this sense, he is clearly opposed to Hegel’s claim that the absolute can be known. But what if Adorno is making a conflation here? What if, by conflating the

subject-object dynamic of conscious knowing with the individual-collective dynamic of society, Adorno has lost the ability to properly explain society? Of course, we must acknowledge that explanation was never Adorno's goal; but his entire philosophy is based upon an interpretation of social reality, which in turn is based upon an individual experience, but also presumably analysis. Adorno wants us to remain aware of the experience of contradiction, or coercion; to remain conscious of the limits of our own knowledge. However, he is also committed to a kind of reconciliation, to a form of *geistig* experience and a mode of *expression* which can (re)connect us to our own universality. This is clearly the kind of reflective capacity whose lack Adorno noted with alarm in Durkheim. By not providing an engaged critique of Hegel and Durkheim, Adorno has shut down the possibility of a fuller account of the relationship between the individual and the spiritual whole.

### ***3 From philosophy to sociology?***

Adorno was fond of giving an account of the historical relationship between philosophy and science. From his early account of the "liquidation" of philosophy at the hands of science, and the danger of it being turned into merely art (AP 29), to his broad critique of instrumental reason and positivism, Adorno's work sought to recuperate a mode of thought that went beyond mere repetition. But he also characterizes philosophical work as operating on the results of the sciences (AP 32). "Philosophy is nothing other than the self-consciousness of facticity, or the consistent reflection on what [one] meets in [one's] *wissenschaftliche* experience" (PS 57). Science eliminates quality, and subjects the empirical world to ultimately subjective reason, and philosophy attempts a correction with a devoted attention to the "object," the "nuance," the "infinitesimal" (ND

53ff./43ff.). It does so by providing a renewed access to “experience,” to the “mimetic element of knowledge” (ND 55/45).

Sociology, by virtue of its *Doppelcharakter*, occupies a unique position. Its mission is to directly handle the source of our experience and our world. The reification of the world simply cannot be avoided (ES 214f./128f.). “Sociology is no unified *Wissenschaft* but rather an agglomerate of different disciplines. It comes to philosophy, on the one hand — like any *Einzelwissenschaft* — through the reflection on the distinctive [*eigene*] object and the distinctive method, on the other hand, through the fact that it grasps philosophies in their dependence on societal moments and [also grasps] that the distinctive content of philosophy has to do essentially with society” (PS 388, n200). As a result, Adorno calls on sociology to incorporate elements from both the empirical sciences and critical philosophy; for sociology to renounce the “anti-philosophical impulse” which lies at its origins (PS 25). In this regard, Adorno’s conception of sociology clearly places it in a privileged position, where it seemingly has a duty to simultaneously perform both empirical research and reflective critique. In this sense, Adorno draws on Hegel’s own critique of empiricism; however, while Hegel’s critique of empiricism was intended to educate consciousness, to help it progress along the path to absolute knowledge, Adorno’s version has a different aim. An examination of the differences here will help set up some final reflections on Adorno’s concept of experience, and its relationship to philosophy and sociology.

### 3.1 The empirical

It is easy to discount the attention to empirical reality that both Hegel and Adorno demonstrated. While both were obviously concerned with articulating a notion of reason



which is situated within the social-historical world, the complexity of their philosophical thought, their attention to dialectical concerns, and their critiques of other forms of science and philosophy often lead to an understatement on the role that empirical content play in their work. Here I do not wish to provide a detailed discussion of this issue, but rather merely to signal that the idea of sociology as simply providing more emphasis on empirical data than previous philosophy simplifies the matter. The further issue is the relationship of the empirical to thought and experience. Adorno's own characterization of sociology presents it as a hybrid or combination of two modes; but there seems to be more to be said here.

For Hegel, the empiricist philosophers rely upon sense perception as a "firm ground" for knowledge; they seek truth in experience rather than merely in thought (EL §37); however, it does so in a naive, unreflective manner. So, while it is admirably concerned with "what is," over what merely "ought to be," empiricism does so by falsely "elevating" perceptual content into concepts (see also EL §12). By trying to isolate the particular, this form of thought imports abstractions through the back door, creating an illusion of concreteness. Scientific empiricism "is unaware that it itself contains and engages in metaphysics and makes use of those categories and their combinations in an utterly uncritical and unconscious manner" (EL §38).

Hegel claims famously that this type of knowledge leads dialectically beyond itself; by reflecting upon its own procedure it takes on a Kantian perspective, in which it examines its own concepts for validity. The effort is still rooted in the attempt to find a solid ground on which true knowledge can stand, but it seeks such ground in the transcendental rather than the empirical sphere. As we've seen above, Hegel's critique of

Kant's solution here formed the basis of his attempt to recoup a perspective which can understand the whole. The goal here for Hegel is not to dismiss these forms of rationality, but to progressively find their truth. In doing so, he acknowledges the necessary advancements of each stage.

Is this, then, where philosophy and science part ways? Science wants to work with its concepts unimpeded, while philosophy insists that we cannot find universality and necessity "out there." In order to truly understand what is happening when we are knowing, we must take into account the work of the "I," but we must also pay attention to empirical content. In the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's discusses what happens when "observation" turns its eye on itself (PG §298-308).<sup>144</sup> What it finds, first and foremost, is the "*Laws of Thought*," which present themselves as given. In its analysis, observation is "led towards" the truth, which is that the "actuality" of these laws is "active consciousness." Hegel refers to this stage as psychology, in which spirit both "conform[s] to the habits, customs, and way of thinking already to hand," and "knows itself as spontaneously active in face of them" (PG §302). In these two modes, spirit begins to see the contradiction, in that it observes a collection of "heterogeneous beings" which are merely collected haphazardly together in the mind, "like things in a bag" (PG §303). It finds its own law, because it brings to it the form of universality. Hegel then clarifies the moments which constitute this law: on the one hand, individuality, and on the other, "universal inorganic nature, viz. the given circumstances, situation, habits, customs religion, and so on" (PG §305). Observation is seen to be a false "shape of spirit," because it is based upon an internal-external differentiation which cannot be sustained. In the

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<sup>144</sup> My discussion here owes much to Hinchman's account (1984, 88-92).

case of psychology and sociology, the external is composed of laws, mores, customs, etc., while the internal is the thought processes of consciousness.

Empirical science prepares the ground for philosophical speculation; it contains the “invitation for thinking, to advance to . . . concrete determinations” (EL §12R). But here is where Hegel specifies the complex nature of this emergence of philosophy, its “coming into being.” The process isn’t simply one of taking up content, but it *also* constitutes the process of giving this content a new “shape” as freedom and necessity. Philosophy gives its content the “validation of necessity” which transforms the scientific fact into “the presentation and imitation of the activity of thinking that is original and completely independent” (EL §12R). While such language of Hegel’s is often read as expressing his fundamental conservatism and preservation of what is, the point is rather that philosophy comes on the scene in this way that goes fundamentally beyond the “understanding.” To move with Hegel to this level is to leave science behind, in the sense that we are now beyond all notions of causality, and beyond Adorno’s “problems of constitution.” Consciousness gives its content a new shape of freedom; it takes the contingency of the given and discovers its necessity. It is the “activity of thinking” that becomes primary, original. The “I” becomes the *causa sui* in which “producer and product are equated (Hegel [1802] 1985; quoted in Hinchman 1984, 84).

The self-reflective structure of the concept, and of the “I,” in Hegel’s thought has no correlate in Adorno’s work, nor in sociology. The crude sociologisms that Adorno criticized in the work of Durkheim, Mannheim, and others attempt to view knowledge through the lens of empirical science. This route is obviously closed to Adorno; instead he wants to move through philosophy to social categories, to out the social mediation

which lies hidden within consciousness itself. But the commitment to the priority of the object entails for Adorno a valuation of the immediate, non-conceptual character of experience. He is committed to opposing a form immediate experience to thought, which is always already mediate.

### 3.2 The universal and the objective

If empirical and reflective thought are both forms of merely subjective reason, and if Hegel's version of a path to the concrete universality of the absolute is ruled out, what is the alternative? While Hegel's own move to spirit involves a turn towards the intersubjective process of recognition, Adorno's lack of attention to intersubjective relationships means an overemphasis on that between the individual and the object, whether particular object or abstract totality. Adorno understands the universal as that which dominates the particular. The universality that characterizes social relations in contemporary exchange society does not stem from concepts or from the Hegelian Concept; rather, it has its origins in the universality of exchange itself, which structures all social relations. It will then not be obtained through empirical research, which only ever tries to subsume the particular under a concept. The totality of society cannot be represented in such a fashion, for even more reasons than we've encountered with the priority of the object (AS 118-9). Adorno views this situation as the imperative for sociology to go beyond empirical research towards a *theory* of society. This is what Adorno often characterizes as the role of "speculation" or philosophy within sociology itself (AS 119). If everything is always already socially mediated, but this reality is hidden from perception through reification, then theory is the tool for its recognition (ES 104/59 EDi 138; Benzer 2011b, 92f.).

But in what way exactly does this correct the inversion of science, its prioritization of the universal concept over the particular object (EDi 138)? If we are fooled into believing that we see the particular, missing its hidden universality through social mediation, then a theory or society will help us see it. But this is a very different program for seeing through the illusion of immediacy than that proposed by Hegel. While Hegel relies upon contradiction to lead consciousness toward the next step in its education, the nature of the contradiction in this case stems from the dissatisfaction that consciousness experiences as it tries to articulate what it knows. Knowing that he has dismissed the dialectical progressiveness of the Hegelian dialectic, Adorno is forced to rely on a concept of experience which seems to be more primal, and which bears an uncertain relationship to knowledge. Adorno's individual *suffers* in its existence within the network of social roles and relations which constitute its world, it experiences the pain of domination by an abstract objectivity, but he cannot convincingly connect this experience to the drive to speculatively re-cognize its situation. Above, in my discussion of Adorno's "anthropological-materialist" reading of Kant's transcendental subject, I emphasized his claim that Kantian universality ultimately reduces to social universality, or, essentially, commonality. While Adorno resists the conclusion that the Kantian transcendental subject actually is society, he emphasizes what they have in common: the "character of universality, of all-encompassing totality" (KK 261/172). There is a tension here in Adorno's understanding of universality, which he seems to see both as the common or communal, and as a characteristic feature of the exchange relationship; but in either case, universality can be reduced to domination, to the attempted elimination of the particular (VGF 19/13).

It is therefore difficult for Adorno to make a case for a form of universality that goes beyond this. He can identify it negatively, as in the statement that “in its present form, the universal is no true universal,” but has difficulty with anything more (VGF 33/21). The universal, as social universal, is that from which the individual is abstracted, alienated; the individual sees and experiences it only as a form of oppression, coercion. Adorno’s claim that individual experience is “more than merely individual” entails that it can “reach the universal,” but he also clarifies that the only way to grasp the universal is “through the movement of individual experience” (ND 6/46). Through the concept of philosophical or *geistig* experience, we can glimpse Adorno’s version of reconciliation, for the individual reaching a “true” universal (ND 50f./40f.).

If our “most immediate experience is that we are all harnessed to an objective trend” (VGF 28/17), how is it that we can approach a true universal? It begins with the experience itself, and the reflection on it. “For Adorno the universality of the knowing subject can never be posited as an absolute over against the individual subjects themselves. The possibility of moving from individual experience to universal cognition, therefore, lies not in subsuming experience under universal laws of thought, but in discovering a universal moment within individual experience itself” (Tichy 1977). A final discussion of the concept of experience in Adorno’s work will help to clarify its own contradictions.

#### ***4. From speculation to experience***

Although he uses the term freely, Adorno has no place for *Hegelian* “speculation” in his work. The key to the negative dialectic is rather the concept of “experience.” As with his other key concepts, it is not a question of providing a definition, but of attempting to get

a handle on its meaning via constellation. I've discussed this constellation to some extent above, emphasizing Adorno's idea of the withering of experience within contemporary society, the loss of the experience of contradiction or diremption. Adorno conceives of a philosophical, or *geistige* experience as something which cannot be adequately described, and he emphasizes, especially in his reading of Hegel, the ways in which experience is *encoded* within texts. Adorno's interpretive project of reading involves uncovering this hidden experience. In other words, it is not the concept of experience in a particular philosopher, or sociologist, that Adorno is concerned with, but the way in which their writing expresses a contradiction between the attempted description and the experience which lies at its origin. "Dialectical cognition must not . . . construct contradictions from above . . . Instead, it is up to it to pursue the inadequacy of thought and thing, to experience it in the thing" (ND 156/153; my translation).

An adequate account of experience in Adorno would require an analysis of his notion of constellation and the way that it structures his writing. That is beyond my scope here; but I do want to bring up a few of the complexities. For Hegel, that which presents itself immediately to consciousness represents only the starting point for true knowledge. For Adorno, this is true as well, but in a very different sense. While Hegel shows how consciousness comes to see the illusory concreteness of these objects, Adorno, presupposing the universal mediation of exchange society, seeks to show how any attempt to grasp the object must fail, because of two factors: the essence of the object as socially mediated is theoretically complex, and the subjective, individual experience which underlies our engagement with the object cannot be simply subsumed under universal concepts. But in this way, Adorno shows that he still relies upon a conception

of knowledge which should be adequate to its object. Hegel's version of complete knowledge is offensive to Adorno because of the fundamental irrationality and evil of the world. The contemporary social world can only be understood in fragments now. Concrete objects are not false in Hegel's sense, but in the sense that reason itself has been humbled. While the improper (and unethical) move from philosophical reflection to science can actually forestall experience, Adorno's suggestion of an articulation between sociological and philosophical thought remains just that — a suggestion.



## References

### *Abbreviations*

#### Adorno

- AP “Die Aktualität der Philosophie,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 1, pp. 325-344 / “The Actuality of Philosophy”
- AS *Aspects of Sociology*
- AT *Ästhetische Theorie, Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 / Aesthetic Theory
- CM *Critical Models*
- EDi *Einführung in die Dialektik, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.2
- EDu “Einleitung zu Emile Durkheim, ‘Soziologie und Philosophie,’” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8.1, pp. 245-279.
- EaF “Der Essay als Form,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 11, pp. 9-33 / “The Essay as Form,” *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, pp. 3-23.
- EP “Einleitung zum ‘Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie,’” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8, pp. 280-353 / “Introduction,” *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, pp. 1-67.
- ES *Einleitung in der Soziologie, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.15 / *Introduction to Sociology*
- G “Gesellschaft,” *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8, pp. 9-19 / “Society”
- GS *Gesammelte Schriften*
- H *Drei Studien zu Hegel, Gesammelte Schriften*, 5, pp. 247-381 / *Hegel: Three Studies*
- LGF *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.13 / *History and Freedom*
- KK *Kants »Kritik der Reinen Vernunft,« Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.4 / *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*
- ME *Metakritik der Epistemologie, Gesammelte Schriften*, 5, 1-246 / *Against Epistemology*
- MM *Minima Moralia, Gesammelte Schriften*, 4 / *Minima Moralia*

- ND *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften*, 6, pp. 7-412 / *Negative Dialectics*
- NSO "Notiz über sozialwissenschaftliche Objectivität," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 8, pp. 238-244.
- P *Prismen, Gesammelte Schriften*, 10.2, pp. 9-287 / *Prisms*
- PETG *Philosophische Elemente einer Theorie der Gesellschaft, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.12.
- PS *Philosophie und Soziologie, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.6
- PT *Philosophische Terminologie*, vols. 1 and 2
- SO "Zu Subjekt und Objekt," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 10.2, pp. 741-758 / "On Subject and Object," *Critical Models*, pp. 245-258.
- VND *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik, Nachgelassene Schriften*, Volume IV.16 / *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*

#### Durkheim

- DHN "Dualism of Human Nature," in *Sociology and Philosophy*, pp.
- DMF "Determination of Moral Facts," in *Sociology and Philosophy*, pp.
- EF *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
- ICR "Individual and Collective Representations," in *Sociology and Philosophy*, pp.
- MEd *Moral Education*
- RSM *Rules of Sociological Method*

#### Hegel

- D *Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie, Werke*, 2, pp. 7-138 / *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*
- EG *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften III, Werke*, 10 / *Encyclopedia Spirit*
- EL *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften I, Werke*, 8 / *Encyclopedia Logic*
- GW *Glauben und Wissen*, in *Werke*, 2, pp. 287-433 / *Faith and Knowledge*
- ILHP *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

- NL      *Natural Law*
- PR      *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke, 7 / Elements of the Philosophy of Right*
- VG      *Vernunft in die Geschichte / Reason in History*
- VGP3    *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 3*
- VPG     *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*
- PG      *Phänomenologie des Geistes, Werke, 3 / Phenomenology of Spirit*
- WL      *Wissenschaft der Logik, Werke, 5, 6 / Science of Logic*

Kant

- CPR     *Critique of Pure Reason*

Marx

- C        *Capital, Volume 1*
- KHS     *Kritik der Hegelschen Staatswissenschaft, Werke, Volume 1, pp. 201-333 / "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State," in Early Writings, pp. 57-198.*
- EPM     *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte, Werke, Ergänzungsband, Volume 1, pp. 465-588 / Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, in Early Writings, pp. 279-400*
- GI       *German Ideology*

Rose

- HCS     *Hegel Contra Sociology*

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