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# Is Wrong Life All That Is Possible? Adorno and Aquinas on Ethics

Benjamin Hampshire

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IS WRONG LIFE ALL THAT IS POSSIBLE?  
ADORNO AND AQUINAS ON ETHICS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Benjamin L. Hampshire

December 2014

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Benjamin L. Hampshire

2014

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ADORNO AND AQUINAS ON ETHICS

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Approved December 4, 2014.

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## ABSTRACT

IS WRONG LIFE ALL THAT IS POSSIBLE?

ADORNO AND AQUINAS ON ETHICS

By

Benjamin L. Hampshire

December 2014

Dissertation supervised by Dr. James Swindal.

Theodor Adorno's ethical thought is encapsulated in his famous aphorism "Wrong life cannot be lived rightly." This dissertation explicates this alarming declaration, revealing the metaphysical, epistemological, and anthropological analyses that place Adorno's ethical thought into this intractable predicament. I argue that Adorno's ethical thought, while of absolute importance and worthy of consideration, can be moved forward through an engagement with the ethical thought of Thomas Aquinas, toward the possibility of right life.

DEDICATION

For Jill

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to first acknowledge and thank God, Who somehow worked through this broken vessel to bring this dissertation to a completion. To Jill, my wife, please know that I am forever grateful for your undeserved support, patience, and love. To my children, Marie, Leo, Clare, and Cecilia, I thank you for your love and prayers through these years. I especially thank Dr. James Swindal for sharing with me his intellect, knowledge, wisdom, guidance, support, and patience, without which this dissertation would have been completely impossible. I also thank Dr. Thérèse Bonin and Dr. Lambert Zuidervaart for their critical and valuable evaluations that significantly improved this dissertation.

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## Introduction

The post-World War II world of late capitalism presents unique ethical challenges: from genocide and weapons of mass destruction to consumerism and escapism. As such, the ethical landscape is different than those encountered by previous generations.

Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), the preeminent member of the first generation of the Critical Theorists of the Frankfurt School, engaged the contemporary ethical situation on a scale and with a potency few other contemporary theorists have attempted. Though only a handful of Adorno's works are explicitly ethical, as noted Adorno scholar J.M. Bernstein has stated, those who read Adorno "are inevitably struck by how everything he wrote was infused with a stringent and commanding ethical intensity."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in the search for the philosophical and ethical tools to confront and address this new situation, Theodor Adorno is a crucial philosopher to engage.

Adorno has a particular, and perhaps idiosyncratic, take on the unique ethical landscape of late capitalist society. As one who thinks dialectically, his interpretations and approaches to problems can be just as complicated, varied, and paradoxical as the problems themselves. This is a strength in that it does not pretend to any simple analysis of complex conditions and speaks to an honesty in Adorno's thought often lacking in many critiques of capitalism, the Enlightenment, and Modernity.

In Adorno's attempts to theorize the innumerable developments of contemporary capitalist society and ethically attend to them, Adorno employs his own materialist

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<sup>1</sup> J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xi.

critique<sup>2</sup> (inspired by Karl Marx) of society and ethics, engages various historical ethical theories, and indicates an ethical vision of his own. Chapters 1-3 will expound on these three themes in Adorno's thought.

Chapter 1 elucidates Adorno's assessment of the ethical situation and the ethical problem(s) of his contemporary European/North American society. Adorno's statement that "wrong life cannot be lived rightly" encapsulates his position on the possibility of moral living under contemporary conditions and Chapter 1 explores and explicates how and why Adorno comes to this conclusion with regard to these conditions. Among the paths Adorno takes to this conclusion are his critique of the Enlightenment and Modernity and their relation to domination, the practical antinomies encountered under current social conditions, and the vacuous and heteronomous character of contemporary "living."<sup>3</sup> This lack of autonomy is developed further in Adorno's theory of nature, that both first nature and second nature are influenced, formed, and transformed by social and historical factors, such as the capitalist exchange principle, to the degree that they often become ideological. Adorno concludes that the contemporary social context is so totalizing in its wrongness that it is inescapable and unable to be transcended either theoretically or practically. As such, within this contemporary social context we cannot live ethically, for anything we do implicates ourselves in the affirmation and maintaining of society as presently constituted.

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<sup>2</sup> Adorno's method is variously termed immanent critique, constellations, and negative dialectics. The similarities and differences between these become apparent as they are expounded in the subsequent chapters.

<sup>3</sup> The epigraph for *Minima Moralia* is "Life does not live." Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, (London: Verso, 1974), 19.

Faced with this intractable problem, and due to his materialist commitments, Adorno, as Chapter 2 explains, develops a moral and ethical philosophy of critique instead of constructing a full-blown ethical system like those of previous German (and other) thinkers. In order to attempt to formulate an ethics capable of addressing the contemporary situation, Adorno turns to a critique of traditional moral theories, particularly that of Immanuel Kant. Through immanent critique and exposing the historically mediated character of Kant's moral thought, Adorno exposes its inadequacies and ideological character. Though Adorno does make some critical remarks about virtue theory, they do not make a significant contribution to his overall ethical project.

With his pessimistic assessment of the contemporary ethical situation and the inadequacy of Kant's moral thought and virtue theory, Adorno is compelled to develop a moral theory able to address contemporary ethical problems that avoids the defects of Kantian moral theory and virtue theory and is consistent with his materialism and dialectical method. Accordingly, as Chapter 3 depicts, Adorno's ethical theory emerges as negative, diffuse, and fragmented. As such, it is able to avoid the pitfalls of other moral conceptions and participation in and perpetuating the wrongness of late capitalist society. However, Adorno's ethical thought reveals that steering a course that avoids these and also remains relevant and retains moral force and resonance proves problematic and precarious, if not impossible. The question to be posed to Adorno, and which Thomas Aquinas will help answer, is if the attempt to live wrong life less wrongly is all that is truly possible.

Adorno's critique of moral theory and negative imperatives may indeed be all that can be proposed under contemporary social conditions. However, because he is too

quickly dismissive of the ethical thought of Thomas Aquinas, virtue theory, and the eudaemonist ethical tradition, it is necessary to engage Adorno with it to discover if it can throw any new light on, or perhaps even solve, the problems to which Adorno calls attention. I argue that the ethical thought of Thomas Aquinas more adequately addresses some of the apparently irresolvable dilemmas Adorno's ethical thought gets bogged down in. Adorno's project can be moved forward from the seemingly intractable problems he contends with by drawing on what I argue is the more accurate and more meaningful theory of human nature and natural teleology, articulated within a eudaemonistic framework, of Thomas Aquinas.

The challenge Adorno poses is to take serious his ethical analysis, but not accept his conclusion that we cannot live ethically under current conditions. Instead, his ethical thought must somehow advance beyond the negative and morally impotent position he describes. To this end, through the ethical thought of Thomas Aquinas, Chapter 4 challenges Adorno's thought in an attempt to push it forward in order to show that an ethics sensitive to the material can describe and propose ethical principles that can be lived out here and now. Chapter 4 first lays out the element of Aquinas' ethical thought that is most apt for dialogue with the materialist thought of Adorno: Aquinas' philosophy of human nature found in questions 75-88 in the First Part of the *Summa Theologiae*. I argue that in order for Adorno's project to not just advance, but to be more intelligible, a more comprehensive theory of human nature must be worked out. Aquinas provides such a theory and one that is conducive to Adorno's materialism. Aquinas' analysis of the relation of the body and the soul and the powers and appetites of the soul will be shown to be suitable for the further development of a materialist ethics that Adorno offers. This

is largely accomplished by emphasizing Aquinas' teleological view of nature in comparison to Adorno's rejection of teleology. Furthermore, I argue that Aquinas' elaboration of virtue theory and happiness are appropriate and beneficial supplements to Adorno's thought toward greater intelligibility and actual ethical practice.

The ethics of Thomas Aquinas is not only the most suitable for moving Adorno's project forward. Aquinas' ethics also is the "perennial" Catholic view, largely because he offers the most comprehensive and complex Catholic view. Because of these and his persuasiveness and conviction, my philosophical sympathies lie with his. Thus, this project also pays homage to this tradition while engaging it with the more contemporary thought of Adorno.

At first glance, this project may appear as one between two schools of thought that are incongruous and unable to be reconciled: on the one hand, Thomistic ethics with its focus on eudaemonism, natural law, and a teleological view of nature understood through inclinations, virtues, and powers of the soul and, on the other, Adorno's guerilla warfare ethics of immanent critique that produces an *ethica negativa*. Nevertheless, Adorno himself indicates the possibility of convergence in the Dedication of *Minima Moralia*:

The melancholy science from which I make this offering to my friend [Max Horkheimer] relates to a region that from time immemorial was regarded as the true field of philosophy, but which, since the latter's conversion into method, has lapsed into intellectual neglect, sententious whimsy and finally oblivion: the teaching of the good life.<sup>4</sup>

Adorno and Aquinas agree that ethics is not a narrow focus on obligation as much modern moral philosophy argues, but instead concerns human flourishing. Both thinkers have different ideas of what human flourishing means: Aquinas believes it is achieved

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<sup>4</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, (London: Verso, 1974), 15.

only in a limited way in this life<sup>5</sup> within a mostly Aristotelian framework, and Adorno can either only negatively affirm what this could mean or deny its possibility (“wrong life cannot be lived rightly”<sup>6</sup>) within a materialist and quasi-Marxist framework. One further point of agreement that will help to facilitate this dialogue is these two thinkers’ realist epistemological orientation. The priority of the object for Adorno and Aquinas’ emphasis on sensible objects as what are known will help bring together, but also contrast, their respective analyses of desire and inclination. And this points to the center of the dialogue between Adorno and Aquinas—their respective readings of nature. That they both take nature to be an issue of the utmost philosophical importance and their distinctive interpretations of it determines much of both the divergence and convergence between them.

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<sup>5</sup> See Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica* I-II Q.5 A.3, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1947), 610.

<sup>6</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, (London: Verso, 1974), 39.

## Chapter 1: Wrong Life

Theodor Adorno's overarching ethical thesis is that wrong life cannot be lived rightly. What he means by this can be expounded by looking at three themes. First, Adorno contends that enlightened and Enlightenment reason has an intimate relation to domination. This theme is developed primarily in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (co-authored with Max Horkheimer) from 1947 and *Negative Dialectics* (1966). In these works Adorno works out a thesis that the nature of Western reason has been and continues to be one of domination and suppression of nature, others, and individuality. Second, Adorno describes the practical antinomies that we face under current objective social conditions and the vacuous and heteronomous character of contemporary life.<sup>7</sup> Third, and connected with the previous two, Adorno claims the lost ethical autonomy of contemporary life is wrapped up in the ideological and heteronomous character of second nature.

### Enlightenment and Domination

Adorno's claim that one cannot live rightly under current social and historical conditions has its initial roots in his and Horkheimer's reading of the Enlightenment and its historical development. Westerners, as heirs and witnesses to the enlightenment, are bound to its history, its present, and its future. To Horkheimer and Adorno, as expressed in the famous first two sentences of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment aimed

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<sup>7</sup> The epigraph for *Minima Moralia* is "Life does not live." Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, (London: Verso, 1974), 19.

at liberating humanity from nature (fear), but ends in catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> Enlightened reason promised (and in many ways delivered) to liberate humans from disease, ignorance, brutality, and subjugation to nature. But enlightened reason has also led to genocide, mindless work, belief in ideology (e.g. fascism, scientism) and the development and deployment of weapons of mass destruction. Somehow reason has become its opposite and Horkheimer and Adorno seek to know why and how. The story they tell is not a simplistic one, but the overall tone of their stance toward the Enlightenment remains largely pessimistic.

This pessimism is grounded in Horkheimer and Adorno's claim that there is in enlightenment a tendency toward domination. For Horkheimer and Adorno, enlightenment reason has sought to dominate nature, and through this domination, has liberated humanity from much suffering and fear. However, this freedom has been paid for by the dominance of a totalizing reason that reduces individuality to abstract generalities and nature to an object from which to extract utility:

What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. [. . .] Bourgeois society is ruled by equivalence. It makes dissimilar things comparable by reducing them to abstract quantities. For the Enlightenment, anything which cannot be resolved into numbers, and ultimately into one, is illusion.<sup>9</sup>

This domination is characterized by three modes: dominating outer nature, dominating inner nature, and dominating other humans.

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<sup>8</sup> *Dialectic of Enlightenment* begins: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity." Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 2, 4.

According to Horkheimer and Adorno, two types of nature are dominated: outer nature and inner nature. Enlightenment is entangled with dominating outer nature in the process of demythologization and disenchantment of the world. The historical periods referred to as the scientific revolution and the Enlightenment are the most obvious examples of the type of rationality and application of reason to nature that Horkheimer and Adorno are describing. However, for them the entire history of reason in the West, not just reason in the Modern period, is tied to domination. Indeed, their central claim in the first essay of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is twofold: “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.”<sup>10</sup>

Their historical account in Chapter 1 of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* traces the development of reason from myth to enlightenment. Myth is the expression of the mimetic relation of humans to nature where humans, viewed as nature themselves, desire to integrate themselves with nature in order to overcome fear and uncertainty. This mythic stage is marked by rituals of assimilation and imitation to this end. But, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the distinction between myth and enlightenment is not one of two completely different ways of thinking. Though the Enlightenment envisions itself as liberating humanity from fear and irrational myth, for Horkheimer and Adorno, myth is also the attempt to control, classify, and order the world to the same end. In this sense, nothing has changed in the move from myth to enlightened reason; domination of nature remains the end.

However, in another sense, much has changed. Under enlightenment reason, the world as disenchanting and demythologized becomes objectified and transformed into an

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xviii.

abstract entity from which to project the extraction of maximal utility for human purposes. What counts as knowledge, according to the now dominant scientific enlightened rationality, of which positivism is the exemplar, is determined by its applicability to the manipulable material of nature. What is termed instrumental reason has become the hallmark of modernity. As such, humanity's relationship to nature is now one of complete separation, i.e. alienation, where humans do not imitate or assimilate with nature, but attempt to dominate a matter which is devoid of meaning and telos.

The situation is more complex than this account appears, for Horkheimer and Adorno believe that the relationships between humans and nature and enlightenment and myth must be understood dialectically. As shown above, enlightenment is in some ways a development of myth and myth functions much as enlightenment. The relation between the two is so entangled that enlightenment reverts to myth. Modernity's almost exclusive belief in instrumental rationality for the extraction of utility that excludes any teleology in nature, where every phenomenon fits in a repeatable pattern, is held just as "blindly" as any myth from past ages. Horkheimer and Adorno declare:

The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination, is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces in the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation—this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be different is made the same. This is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience.<sup>11</sup>

So too, humanity's domination of nature through instrumental reason, when looked at dialectically, reveals another paradox. Instrumental reason allows for the human

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 8.

domination of nature toward freedom from disease, scarcity, and much of the unknown, for example. However, as Horkheimer and Adorno highlight, as humanity increases and perfects its domination of nature, freedom recedes and oppression and violence ascend. The domination of nature through scientific reason and its attendant methods of instrumentality, organization, and efficiency have turned against human freedom. The most obvious and extreme example, and the most meaningful and instructive one to Horkheimer and Adorno, is the rise of fascism. One can also think of the fear of weapons of mass destruction and the domination of the market over individual humans. It cannot be understated what this dialectical reversal means to Horkheimer and Adorno. It reveals that there is something within enlightened reason, going back through its whole history from the ancient period on, which is destructive of enlightenment itself.<sup>12</sup>

We can see how enlightenment, broadly understood as the advancement of thought “aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters,”<sup>13</sup> has advanced from dominating nature to dominating other humans. But there is another component to dominating nature: dominating inner nature. It, too, is tied to dominating outer nature and dominating other humans. Horkheimer and Adorno address this domination first in their interpretation of Odysseus and the Sirens.<sup>14</sup> In order to save himself, his crew, and his ship from the deadly, but beautiful and seductive song of the Sirens, Odysseus takes radical and peculiar measures. He stuffs the crew’s ears with wax so that they will not hear the Sirens’ song. He has the crew tie him to the mast, yet not

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 25ff.

plug his ears, and instructs them to not untie him no matter what he orders them to do, and then to row with all their strength.

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the tale of Odysseus and the Sirens is layered with multiple meanings. For one, it is a tale of the emergence of the self, in particular the bourgeois self, and the price paid for it. Odysseus, by his cunning (instrumental reason), devises a way to counter outer nature (the Sirens). However, he does not actually conquer outer nature, since he is tied to the mast. At the same time, he must renounce his instincts (inner nature) and experience only limited enjoyment (he allows himself to listen to the Sirens, but not surrender himself to them), thus denying himself complete happiness.<sup>15</sup> Freud is in the background here as Horkheimer and Adorno insinuate that giving ourselves over to our natural instincts is what we want to do and would bring us happiness. However, knowing that this will bring destruction to the self and society, civilization (society) must demand repression of the instincts.<sup>16</sup> The ego, acting in accord with the reality principle cunningly checks the instincts (the id). Here in this domination of inner nature by suppressing and degrading natural instincts emerges the enlightened self. “Humanity had to inflict terrible injuries on itself before the self—the identical, purpose-directed, masculine character of human beings—was created, and something of this process is repeated in every childhood.”<sup>17</sup> If the self can, just as Odysseus does, keep instinctual impulses at arm’s length, allowing them some gratification, she can emerge on the other side, herself and society preserved and freer from, and sovereign over, nature. This is the enlightened and bourgeois ideal.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>16</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 26.

The emergence of the self is accomplished by denying and suppressing the inner nature of instinctual drives through reason. The civilizing rationalization of inner nature that successfully diminishes the efficacy and value of instinct must be paid for with the alienation of the self from nature. Odysseus' victory over inner nature in tying himself to the mast establishes his sovereignty over nature, though now he can no longer consider himself as nature. For Horkheimer and Adorno, one consequence of this is that humans do not have access to a kind of happiness that would be realized in the satisfaction of instinctual drives. Just as Odysseus allowed himself to hear the song of the sirens, but not give himself over to them as was his desire, today bourgeois symphony audiences remain "immobilized," refusing to give themselves over to the pleasure the music is calling them to.<sup>18</sup>

So too, this enlightenment rationality in dominating inner nature estranges us from that inner nature, from who we are, so that we no longer consider ourselves to be natural. So much so, that Horkheimer and Adorno claim that dominating inner nature is the:

annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.<sup>19</sup>

This is the origin of confusion about the purposes of the domination of outer nature and an individual's life, for the means have become the end, this being particularly evident in the operations of late capitalism and in the lives of those who live under it.<sup>20</sup> The ultimate goal of enlightenment is this self-preservation that is a near impossibility. We deny our instinct for bodily pleasure in the name of preserving a self that is

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

fundamentally embodied, i.e. natural. This loss of self in the name of the self is characteristic of enlightenment and its enthronement of instrumental reason.

There is a social component to this analysis as well. The relation of self-preservation, repression, labor, and domination of other humans and Odysseus as proto-bourgeois is most salient in the consideration of the relationship of Odysseus to his crew. In order to repress inner nature in the name of self-preservation, Odysseus must employ the help of his crew, and thus dominate them. He cannot succeed on his own. Through bourgeois self-interested instrumental reason, he devises a scheme that will ensure his self-preservation and limited enjoyment, while denying enjoyment to his crew (laborers); they must simply work. He must plug the ears of these laborers, thus denying them pleasure and enjoyment while he enjoys some pleasure in allowing himself at least to listen to the Sirens' song. He gets to listen and escape. All through the *Odyssey*, Odysseus preserves himself in this way.<sup>21</sup> He forgoes his immediate needs, represses his instincts, and forces his crew to labor while denying them any pleasure and enjoyment. He is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the bourgeois individual that many, if not most, of us are. The relationship between him and his crew, the workers, characterizes civilization itself:

The fear of losing the self, and suspending with the boundary between oneself and other life, the aversion to death and destruction, is twinned with a promise of joy which has threatened civilization at every moment. The way of civilization has been that of obedience and work, over which fulfillment shines everlastingly as mere illusion, as beauty deprived of power. . . . Odysseus is represented in the sphere of work. Just as he cannot give way to the lure of self-abandonment, as owner he also forfeits participation in work and finally even control over it, while his companions, despite their closeness to things, cannot enjoy their work because it is performed under compulsion, in despair, with their senses forcibly stopped. The servant is subjugated in body and soul, the master regresses. No system of domination has so far been able to escape this price, and the circularity of history in its progress is explained in part by this debilitation, which is concomitant of

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<sup>21</sup> Consider Odysseus' encounters with the Lotus eaters, the Cattle of Hyperion, and Circe, where Odysseus represses his inner nature and denies enjoyment to his crew.

power.<sup>22</sup>

In this way, the treatment of other humans as objects is justified in that it is understood by enlightened reason to be necessary for survival. “The Sirens episode symbolizes the mode in which crews, servants, and labourers produce their oppressor’s life together with their own.”<sup>23</sup> Other humans as means to other ends is then built into the structure of enlightenment and civilization; it is the condition for their possibility.

All this domination is accomplished by discovering, observing and then thereby consciously obeying nature’s laws; for knowledge of the previously unknown is power to those who possess it. Odysseus and, by extension, the bourgeois individual must, with enlightened instrumental reason, pay close attention to nature to discover its laws. By the strict conscious obedience to those laws, nature’s power over humans is diminished. But this is a strange twist on mimesis. The former imitation of nature in myth and magic gives way to an imitation through instrumental reason that disenchant nature to the degree that nature is transformed into the inanimate neutral material available for human manipulation toward self-preservation. Nevertheless, sacrifice remains as a holdover from the old order. Under enlightenment humans find themselves in the strange position where they must give themselves over to nature through renunciation and repression and be “dominated” by nature in order to dominate nature and others. In this way, the individual must sacrifice herself and her complete happiness. Horkheimer and Adorno state:

The nimble-witted man survives only at the cost of his own dream, which he forfeits by disintegrating his own magic along with that of the powers outside him. He can never have the whole, he must always be able to wait, to be patient, to

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>23</sup> David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 404.

renounce. . .<sup>24</sup>

Modern humans under the spell of instrumental reason do dominate nature, their own impulses, and others for their own self-preservation, but at the cost of unjust, tiresome, and often miserable objective social conditions and the giving up of any hope for a reconciliation with nature or the fulfillment and enjoyment of bodily drives.

The seeds of instrumental reason and its tendency towards domination can be traced to the ancient world, but reached its fullness in the historical period referred to as the Enlightenment and has brought humanity to this moment of late capitalist society. For Critical Theorists, this enlightenment rationality thoroughly characterizes late capitalism. This is no more obvious than in the Holocaust. The extreme violence of the first half of the twentieth century that culminated in the attempted extermination of European Jews was not a relapse into barbarism or an historical aberration amongst an unyielding advance of enlightenment progress. It was, according to Adorno, the outcome of the enthronement of instrumental reason. The culture and objective social conditions that have arisen out of this bourgeois instrumental reason all share in responsibility for the atrocities of late capitalist society. In order to come to terms with this sinister side of enlightenment we must be willing to address Western rationality and its history of domination. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is one attempt to do just that. But, as will be shown in the following sections, Adorno proceeds to critique Western rationality further in other works, especially *Negative Dialectics*. In these works he claims that the very apparatus of Western reason tends toward domination and the denial, violation, and

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<sup>24</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 45.

elimination of all individuation and difference. This, in turn, has grave consequences for ethics.

### **Epistemology: Concepts and Remainder**

In his inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt entitled “The Actuality of Philosophy,” Adorno proclaims the failure of totalizing philosophical systems and endorses a new program of philosophy as interpretation. Philosophical attempts (e.g. Hegel) to comprehend and explicate the rational structure of all of reality have failed. One reason for this is the irrational and disordered nature of the object, i.e. reality, and the apparent inability of reason to capture it.<sup>25</sup> Adorno is very interested in why this is and articulates a number of different ways of explanation of the nature of the problem. In its most purely philosophically developed form the problem is laid out as the failure of concepts to contain fully their objects. Concepts do not epistemologically fully capture or exhaust their objects:

If I subsume a series of characteristics, a series of elements, under a concept, what normally happens is that I abstract a particular characteristic from these elements, one that they have in common: and this characteristic will then be the concept, it will represent the unity of all the elements that possess this characteristic. Thus by subsuming them all under this concept, by saying that A is everything that is comprehended in this unity, I necessarily include countless characteristics that are *not* integrated into the individual elements contained in this concept. The concept is always less than what is subsumed under it. When a B is defined as an A, it is always also *different from* and *more than* the A, the concept under which it is subsumed by way of a predicative judgement (sic). On the other hand, however, in a sense every concept is at the same time more than the characteristics that are subsumed under it.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 24.

<sup>26</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, ed. Ralph Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 7. Regrettably, this is probably Adorno’s clearest statement of his view of the inadequacy of concepts relative to their objects.

Though thinking must employ concepts, it must also always be aware of their inadequacies, it must remain vigilant in resisting claims to any absolute and exhaustive knowledge. Now, as Adorno admits, concepts are indispensable for philosophy and inescapable for thinking as such, yet they are simultaneously inadequate to the task assigned to them, regardless of what idealists claim:

Necessity entails philosophy to operate with concepts, but this necessity must not be turned into the virtue of their priority—no more than, conversely, criticism of that virtue can be turned into a summary verdict against philosophy. On the other hand, the insight that philosophy’s conceptual knowledge is not the absolute of philosophy—this insight, for all its inescapability, is again due to the nature of the concept.<sup>27</sup>

There is no escape for philosophy (or for that matter, thinking) from concepts. However, a proper understanding and awareness of their limits is needed as a bulwark against doing violence to objects.

This is one way in which to understand Adorno’s claim that wrong life cannot be lived rightly. All thinking, takes place under severe constraints that we are not always, if ever, aware of or willing to admit and reveals the problematic nature of the relationship of subject to object.<sup>28</sup> If objects can never be fully subsumed under concepts, then in any attempts to do just that (Adorno terms this identity-thinking), the object, in its uniqueness escapes us, is violated. All thinking then does violence to objects. Any theory, any thinking we engage in that informs praxis can never be complete and violates the uniqueness of the objects of action, and thus the objects remain unknown. But, in order to act in an ethical way, we must know what to do, which means knowing the objects we are acting on. Therefore, praxis is always an act of untruth. As objects of action remain

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<sup>27</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton, (New York: Continuum, 1973), 11-12.

<sup>28</sup> The consequences of this analysis for moral philosophy as such will be taken up in the next chapter.

underdetermined so does praxis. Attempts to act in accord with taxonomic thought are bound to produce unforeseen dilemmas and often catastrophes. The unawareness of or unwillingness to admit this is characteristic of the Western ethical situation.

Yet, leaving the problem here is unsatisfactory in that it fails to adequately account for and explain the epistemological and ethical implications of the failure of concepts to capture their objects. To obtain a more detailed and robust account of Adorno's theory of the concept and its implications it is advantageous to engage J. M. Bernstein's *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*. Bernstein reads Adorno's analysis of the concept of the concept as making a distinction between "the simple concept" and "the complex concept." Concepts as such consist of two axes: a logical axis and a material axis. Bernstein claims that enlightenment thought, which he terms "rationalization," employs the simple concept that is one-sided, that utilizes only one axis: the logical axis, which corresponds to identity-thinking.<sup>29</sup>

Bernstein uses this distinction to explicate what Adorno means by concepts not fully containing their objects. One way to look at this is to note that the hegemony of the logical axis in the simple concept separates the concept from the object in a way that renders the concept completely independent of the object despite its actual dependence on it:

Rationalization proceeds through abstraction; hence abstraction *becomes* the nonrecognition of dependence as its results are systematized and reified into the rule of reason, the priority of the general over the particular. . . [. . .] However, when the results of abstraction are systematically detached from what they have been abstracted from, and thereby what is the same thing, reified as independent, then the forms of knowing and reasoning that result are themselves a mastering of the object, approaching the object as nothing other than what the concept *determines* it to be, hence as *merely* a token or case or example of what is already

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<sup>29</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 274.

known.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, through identity-thinking we come to perceive of objects as completely separated off from us and misrecognize our dependence on objects. This process turns thought away from that which cannot be classified, identified in the objects, in Adorno's words their remainders, and towards its own concepts, thus making thought (appear) autonomous.

The conception of ourselves and objects as radically independent entails that the simple concept omits the sensuous particularity of objects. In turning to the logical axis, and abstraction, the sensible, particular qualities of objects are ignored. Thought that works through the simple concept alone abstracts from the sensible, material aspects of the object and "our bodily response to things in seeing, hearing, feeling, touching them," leaving the sensuously particular, concrete "thing" behind."<sup>31</sup> Thus, our "[k]nowing and its objects become deformed and distorted."<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, in line with the domination thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Bernstein argues that through the simple concept "dominated nature becomes nonidentity."<sup>33</sup> Enlightenment reason, in turning away from objects and toward its own concepts, is the denial of humans as a part of nature. This entails, according to Bernstein, that nature, "whose constitutive role in thought and practice has been dominated or repressed to the point of cognitive disappearance" through enlightenment is the exclusion of "anthropomorphic nature."<sup>34</sup> We can then say that this exclusion is "the critical

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 202-203.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 191. Bernstein mentions natural practices such as perceiving things as colored, eating, reproducing our kind, being speaking animals.

negation of projections of the indelibly human onto the world.”<sup>35</sup> In this separation of humans from nature the object is cut off from having substantive meaning for us, that is, “no state of affairs is *objective*.”<sup>36</sup>

For the simple concept and enlightenment thought there can be no “nature” that cannot be subsumed under abstract concepts and law-like principles. Yet, this forgets that humans are part of nature, thus eliminating us from nature so that both human and non-human nature are cut off from each other, rendering both human and non-human nature bereft of substantive meaning for humans. Furthermore, this ultimately means, for Bernstein, that the nature that systematically is excluded in the simple concept of enlightenment thought is *living nature*:

[T]he displacement of objects’ sensuous particularity, necessarily “removed” life from living things as well since life belongs essentially to the individual organism; *individuals* live, die, decompose, return to the inorganic material world. Life cannot be an accidental property of an individual since were it to lose its life, it would no longer be “it.” The mechanisms of abstraction, subsumption, and cognitive ascent necessarily discount from the individual the one feature that defines it as the organism it is; *its* life; its life is not a property had by an individual in the way in which its size or color is, it is the condition of its being an individual as opposed to stuff.<sup>37</sup>

The exclusion of anthropomorphic nature is the forgetting of our animal nature, which in turn, is in the conflation of all nature, living and non-living, into mere objects of instrumental rationality, into dead nature.

Putting these together, the implications for Adorno’s ethical thought comes sharply into focus. The dominance of the simple concept in modernity, through its consecrating of independence over dependence, abstraction over particularity, non-living over living,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 191.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 192.

and the denaturalization of the human subject, negates “our modes of cognitive interaction with objects” that can allow for objects to be “objects of ethical esteem.”<sup>38</sup>

What Bernstein is claiming is that for Adorno, our concept of the concept is inadequate to the task of ethics because it cannot know nor experience its objects in a way that is ethically motivating. Enlightenment and the simple concept have extinguished “our *modes* of cognitive interaction with objects”<sup>39</sup> that allow for ethical responses to states of affairs.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the objects are not cognized as ethical objects; they do not motivate us to act. In their logically classified and abstract state objects can make no ethical claims on us.

The enthronement of enlightenment reason and the simple concept has cast aside knowledge and experience of others as unique, sensuous, particular, and in the case of humans and other animals, as living, vulnerable individuals that is required for an ethical response, replacing it with an ethics of abstract and universal norms and rules. And, for Bernstein, this poverty of experience and knowledge opens up a gap between our motivation to act ethically and the normative ethical principles established by the thinner understanding of reason and the concept under enlightenment and the simple concept. For Bernstein, what has been lost in enlightenment has been our ability to think about the materiality of nature (including our own) and our nature as animals, thus modern reason leaves us without sufficient motivation to act ethically relative to material, living states of affairs.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>40</sup> One way Bernstein describes this problem is to claim that the simple concept lacks the ability to make material inferences. See Chapter 3 of *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*.

Bernstein also describes the ethical implications of the simple concept in a wider sense. The rational process that negates knowledge and experience of objects and states of affairs required for ethics, taking a cue from Max Weber, Bernstein describes as disenchantment.<sup>41</sup> Enlightenment's reliance on the simple concept leaves objects empty of dependence, sensuous particularity, and animality, and therefore, for Bernstein, anthropomorphic nature is surmounted. Accordingly, reason no longer experiences the materiality, the sensuous, the particularity, the dependence, and the life of objects due to the merely logical classifications and abstractions of the simple concept. We simply no longer experience the world as meaningful for humans, but as an inanimate reality devoid of materiality and particularity, i.e. as disenchanted. Thus, humans find themselves with no reasons to act other than in instrumental ways toward this disenchanted world.

Bernstein argues that Adorno's solution to this problem involves thinking not with the simple concept, but to think instead with what Bernstein calls "the complex concept" that is "*dependent* upon, and hence not detachable from, what [it is] about."<sup>42</sup> Bernstein maintains that this is what Adorno means by the "priority of the object." Bernstein contends that the priority of the object is accomplished through thinking with the dual axes of the complex concept that includes both the logical axis of the simple concept and the material axis that generates thinking that is "object-dependent" and "object-involving" in its taking account of the materiality of nature and our animal nature.<sup>43</sup> According to Bernstein, Adorno's aim then is to recover the material axis in order to employ the complex concept. This will, Bernstein declares, re-motivate ethical action by

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<sup>41</sup> See pp.3-21 of *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

“[resurrecting] legitimate anthropomorphism, and anthropomorphic nature”<sup>44</sup> and “reactivating relations of material inference,” that result in the “re-enchantment” of the world.<sup>45</sup>

While Bernstein gives a well-argued and plausible account of the role of conceptuality in Adorno’s ethics, it also raises a number of questions and contains some shortcomings. The first and most significant defect in Bernstein’s account is the virtual exclusion of Adorno’s more Marx-influenced thought. Bernstein instead reads Adorno more through Hegel and Weber which means he downplays the role of material social conditions and processes of late capitalist society in modern conceptuality and the modern ethical situation. Instead, Bernstein’s Hegelian reading seems to make Adorno an idealist (contra the materialist Adorno proclaims to be) in making ethical problems look like problems of individuals not thinking in the proper way. Bernstein declares: “Conceptual problems and ruined lives rise and fall together. Damaged lives are the consequence of irrational practices.”<sup>46</sup> This is itself true, but only if one takes into account the social conditions of capitalist society that mediate our conceptuality and that have led to reification, the domination of second nature, and so on. Bernstein mostly ignores these because he neglects Marx in favor of Hegel and Weber. Bernstein falls to the temptation of over-emphasizing thinking, conceptuality, and attenuating material social conditions and the way they mediate thinking and the possibility of morality.

As will be shown in the following sections, Adorno does not accept the possibility of a morality reinstated by thinking differently. Morality can be possible only when the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 197.

social conditions and their attendant contradictions and antinomies are made rational. Adorno, as will be explained in subsequent sections, wonders how we can know or experience objects in a meaningful or ethical way under objective social conditions ruled by instrumental reason and capitalist exchange. Bernstein appears to think this is possible, but does not provide a forceful nor detailed enough account of exactly what the knowledge and experience would entail to necessarily produce the correct object relations and material inferences, other than to think with the complex concept, which by itself is precluded by Adorno's materialist commitments.

Having said this, Bernstein makes a considerable contribution to a thicker understanding of what identity-thinking means. The detailed content he provides in the analysis of the simple concept enriches our understanding of what exactly it means to engage in identity-thinking and its ethical implications. Bernstein's analysis highlights what goes wrong in our thinking about morality when we limit thinking to the simple concept. However, one cannot then conclude that Adorno calls solely for a different form of thinking and that this will change the ethical landscape.<sup>47</sup> The landscape of late capitalist society must somehow also change before our thinking can change. And that is a thought Adorno is indebted to Marx for, to the exclusion of Hegel.

### **Epistemology: Exchange Principle**

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<sup>47</sup> Bernstein does, at times, engage and appear to endorse the more materialist thought of Adorno, e.g. the priority of the object and the *addendum*, but overall tends to over-emphasize conceptuality, even appearing to subsume the priority of the object and the addendum to conceptuality, hence the appearance that, for Bernstein, ethical problems lie primarily with individual humans and their conceptual inadequacies, thus forgoing a more dialectical understanding of Adorno's ethics that also would take into account material social conditions.

The contemporary impetus for identity-thinking according to Adorno, and which Bernstein understates, is the dominance of the exchange principle that equates through exchange value the qualitatively singular. The dominance of the exchange principle in contemporary European and North American society identifies everything with everything else under capitalist exchange, brushing aside and ignoring the non-identical. To pay any heed to the non-identical leaves one standing outside the totality of capitalist society and can result in economic hardship and isolation for that individual. As modern instrumental reason proffers identity-thinking in privileging general concepts over particulars, so too does society as the universal subsume individuals under abstract exchange relations. Just as epistemological particulars must be brought under concepts, individual persons must assimilate to capitalist exchange. This assimilation is total in that involves and affects every facet of an individual's life: employment, buying and selling, relations to others and society, self-understanding. Any deviation from this, if possible, has serious consequences—starving to death. In the 1966 essay “Society” Adorno writes:

The first, objective abstraction takes place, not so much in scientific thought, as in the universal development of the exchange system itself; which happens independently of the qualitative attitudes of producer and consumer, of the mode of production, even of need, which the social mechanism tends to satisfy as a secondary by-product. Profit comes first. A humanity fashioned into a vast network of consumers, the human beings who actually have the needs, have been socially pre-formed beyond anything which one might naively imagine, and this not only by the level of industrial development but also by the economic relationships themselves into which they enter, even though this is far more difficult to observe empirically. Above and beyond all specific forms of social differentiation, the abstraction implicit in the market system represents the domination of the general over the particular, of society over its captive membership. It is not at all a socially neutral phenomenon, as the logistics of reduction, of uniformity of work time might suggest. Behind the reduction of men to agents and bearers of exchange value lies the domination of men over men. This remains the basic fact, in spite of the difficulties with which from time to time

many of the categories of political science are confronted. The form of the total system requires everyone to respect the law of exchange if he does not wish to be destroyed, irrespective of whether profit is his subjective motivation or not.<sup>48</sup>

If Adorno's assessment is correct, then the individual finds herself implicated in the totalizing whole of capitalist society in every act. Purchasing an item, whose need for it has been formed by mass advertising and marketing, implicates her in the leveling and conformity of capitalist society that violates and suppresses individuality, and ultimately individuals themselves. The same goes for obtaining employment, which assimilates her into the totality of production and consumption of capitalist society that does not account for nor concern itself with her individuality, indeed it (practically) destroys it. Instead individuals must somehow acrobatically contort themselves, at high cost to their individuality, to conform to the needs of capitalism and society, whose needs are actually identical for all. Again in "Society," Adorno keenly observes:

Almost everyone knows from his own personal experience that his social existence can scarcely be said to have resulted from his own personal initiative; rather he has had to search for gaps, 'openings,' jobs from which to make a living, irrespective of what seem to him his own human possibilities or talents should he indeed still have any kind of vague inkling of the latter. The profoundly social-darwinistic notion of adaptation, borrowed from biology and applied to the so-called sciences of man in a normative manner, expresses this and is indeed its ideology.<sup>49</sup>

The individual finds herself to be a particular that is always being forced under a universal concept; she is forced under a totality, i.e. under society. And, as always for Adorno, prevailing social conditions under late-capitalism are defended epiphenomenally in its dominant ideas. In this case, Darwinism applied to social existence is one way in which the present situation is described and often is even employed by its own victims as,

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<sup>48</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Society," in *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, edited by David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1992), 64-65.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

for example, when we blame ourselves for not possessing the requisite skills and drive to find that “opening,” for not adapting to the ever changing conditions of capitalism.

### **Constellations: Practical and Theoretical Antinomies**

Adorno believes that we live our lives entangled in social antinomies, that is, we face and live within irresolvable conflicts under current social conditions. Due to current social conditions in late capitalist society, Adorno observes that we encounter these irresolvable conflicts in the ethical sphere. Persons find themselves in a situation where right life cannot be lived due to social conditions. Society is structured in such a way that one, even when appearing to act justly, actually participates in and promotes injustice. It is important to note that this is not merely a moral denouncement of contemporary society for Adorno, but also simply a description of a condition that all are caught up in and which is impossible to transcend, regardless of what many moral philosophies claim.

As an example of this condition, in a series of lectures given in 1963, published under the title *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno examines the concept of compassion. He notes that our concept of compassion does not take into account the social conditions that create a need for compassion in the first place. No account is taken of any attempt to change the circumstances that have caused suffering, but instead these conditions are “hypostasized and treated as if they were immutable.”<sup>50</sup> However, we know that these conditions are and were created by humans, that they have a history that is contingent. Accordingly, the compassion one has for someone who is suffering “always contains an element of injustice towards that person; he experiences not just our pity but also the

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<sup>50</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schröder, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 173.

impotence and the specious character of the compassionate act.”<sup>51</sup> Simultaneously, on the other hand, we do not want to dismiss compassion, for to do so cultivates in us a detached coldness characteristic of the bourgeois individual.<sup>52</sup>

This kind of practical antinomy where individuals face irreconcilable conditions illustrates that anything we do short of radically altering the social structure (the possibility of which Adorno is very skeptical) most likely implicates us indirectly in sustaining current conditions or even actively advances depraved practices and conditions. For Adorno, it appears that all we can hope for is not to participate in defending or promoting wrong life and social conditions.

The example of the concept of compassion is just one small example that points to the larger issue of what Adorno believes is the impossibility of right action in a wrong world. If social conditions are constituted by and thoroughly dominated by instrumental reason and identity thinking, then to what degree is the individual who is largely determined by society responsible for these wrong actions and for the wrong society itself? These issues will be taken up in a thematic way in Chapter 2, particularly in Adorno’s criticism and explication of Kant’s moral thought with regard to the antinomy of causality and freedom.

It is of utmost importance to understand why and how Adorno analyzes various phenomena to reveal their ideological character. What he does is demonstrate that the irreconcilability of two linked phenomena imbedded in social conditions, i.e. social antinomies, is revealed when exposed to dialectical analysis. In order to comprehend

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

<sup>52</sup> This does not address the separate issue of the tradition of rejecting compassion as desirable as such, cf. Nietzsche, Spinoza, Kant, de Sade. Horkheimer and Adorno address this in Excursus II of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

what Adorno is doing, how his method achieves its results, one must remember that Adorno's dialectics is not idealist (as was Hegel's), but is instead materialist.

Therefore, in order to enter into Adorno's view of the conditions of society and the possibility of their detection in bourgeois phenomena, one must first accept his materialist premise. That is, one must accept the Marxian thesis (contra Hegel) that the base (material conditions) determines the superstructure (ideas). Material conditions of a particular age are expressed in the particular thought of that age. It is worth quoting Marx at length to understanding Adorno's methodology.

We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness.

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions.<sup>53</sup>

Adorno accepts this thesis and sets out to expose, through immanent critique of bourgeois philosophy, the material social contradictions that lay at the root of the contradictions in bourgeois thought. This immanent critique not only exposes the contradictions of bourgeois capitalist society, i.e. it is not only ideology critique, but is for Adorno also the

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<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited by C.J. Arthur, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), 47-48.

means to discovering truth.<sup>54</sup> Very helpful in understanding this is the work of Susan Buck-Morss who explains that in contrast to Horkheimer's more morally indignant criticism of bourgeois society, the usual method of ideology critique, Adorno was also and primarily concerned with the truth of theory. Adorno's project is "to make the structure of bourgeois society visible within the very words of the bourgeois texts" through critical interpretation.<sup>55</sup>

Adorno does not only interpret texts, but applies his method in a two pronged fashion. It employs dialectical immanent critique to reveal social contradictions in mediated form within (1) social phenomena, figures, and objects and (2) within philosophy itself.<sup>56</sup> Adorno's method involves for the first (1) a varied, diffuse, and intricately layered analysis. Instead of a Hegelian dialectics that results in identity, Adorno employs a dialectics that does not result in identity. Because social reality is irrational, contradictory, and full of antinomies, it cannot be grasped by a philosophy of identity. The way in which to attempt to discover its truth then is, according to Adorno, to construct "constellations" (a term and method taken from Walter Benjamin). Adorno's aim is that by the constructing of a constellation out of the elements of a phenomenon "the socio-historical reality which constitutes its truth becomes physically visible within it."<sup>57</sup> By breaking open phenomena and dialectically spilling out the social and historical content contained within them, their mediated nature, their unintentional truth<sup>58</sup>, is

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<sup>54</sup> Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 67.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>56</sup> Buck-Morss' *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, see Chapters 6 and 7 on this distinction.

<sup>57</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 96.

<sup>58</sup> "Unintentional truth" is a term Adorno takes from Walter Benjamin's *Trauerspiel*. Buck-Morss explains that the term denotes what objects say "despite their creator's intent." For Benjamin and Adorno what is unintentionally expressed is (through Marxist theory) the socio-economic structure that mediates all "production and hence expresse[s] itself within cultural artifacts alongside (and often in contradiction to) the subjective intention of their creators." Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 78-79.

revealed. Adorno's objective is truth, the "truth of the social totality (which could never be experienced itself) as it quite literally *appeared* within the object in a particular configuration."<sup>59</sup>

To accomplish this revelation of truth, Adorno takes up a material social phenomenon, figure or object and subjects it to the dialectical construction of a constellation. The constellation presumes a contingent, but overarching social totality. Constellations are formed by employing various and sometimes contradictory concepts, arranging and juxtaposing them in such a way that they are in tension with one another, though not resolving or completely conceptually capturing any phenomenon, instead keeping it in a negative dialectical perpetuity. This dialectical image, i.e. the constellation, lights up the historical within, revealing what are often considered first nature as contingent historically and socially constituted second nature. This exposes what is not apparent in the daily experience of such phenomena: the contradictions and antinomies that lie at their core. "The [dialectical image] illuminates the elements of the riddle, providing a frame in which its fundamental contradictions can be seen in a flash."<sup>60</sup>

Adorno employs this method on a number of phenomena throughout his works. One of the most famous of these is his critique of jazz. While jazz enjoys a reputation for an anti-bourgeois aesthetic, particularly in its valorization of improvisation, this reputation is exactly where Adorno locates the mediated social totality. Constructing a constellation of the contradictory concepts associated with the material itself, Adorno's critique reveals jazz music's unintended truth. Jazz's reputation is one of arbitrariness and improvisation, yet the market determines the format and content of jazz music, which includes

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 96

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 119.

improvisation and arbitrariness.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, Adorno asserts “[t]he insurmountable character of a phenomenon which is inherently contingent and arbitrary reflects something of the arbitrary nature of present social controls” that promote not actual arbitrariness, but the planned improvisation that “seems to purge the life-process of all that is uncontrollable, unpredictable, incalculable, in advance and thus to deprive it of what is genuinely new.”<sup>62</sup> Adorno has shown that actual jazz music reflects the antinomies and tensions in material social reality, but so does the performer of jazz music.

The figure of the jazz musician, when scrutinized under Adorno’s dialectical gaze reveals itself as another expression of bourgeois material social reality. The jazz performer, who is regarded by many as an anti-bourgeois figure is, according to Adorno, the opposite. The jazz performer’s seemingly improvised breaks from the repetitions of the music appear to be a model and instantiation of the resistance of the unique and individual to sameness and repetition of bourgeois capitalist reality. Yet, the jazz performer eventually returns to the repetitious. For Adorno, this dialectically reveals the social reality where the subject is ultimately constrained by the totality, i.e. bourgeois capitalist society. The jazz subject:

falls out of the collective just as syncopation does from the regular beat; it does not want to be engulfed in the prescribed majority, which existed before the subject and is independent of it, whether out of protest or ineptitude or both at once—until it finally is received into, or, better, subordinated to the collective as it was predestined to be; until the music indicates, in a subsequently ironic manner as the measures grow rounder, that it was a part of it from the very beginning; that, itself a part of this society, it can never really break away from it; indeed, that its

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<sup>61</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Perennial Fashion – Jazz,” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 271-272.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

seeming ineptitude is really a virtuosity of adaptation [ . . . ]<sup>63</sup>

The jazz performer, while appearing to be one who resists the capitalist order is actually quite at home in it. But, this is not the fault of the subject; it is the reality of the subject under the current totalization of social conditions, of bourgeois capitalist society.

One does not need to look to the somewhat esoteric world of jazz to find this dynamic at work. Adorno also reveals the antinomies of material social conditions contained with other phenomena and figures. Perhaps most despairing is Adorno's assessment of those of us who attempt to identify with the oppressed, i.e those infused with the "egalitarian spirit."<sup>64</sup> As a thinker with Marxist leanings, Adorno himself presumably falls under this dialectical criticism. We can cognitively and verbally identify with the oppressed and act in an egalitarian manner and we can even materially conform to the life of the oppressed (both of which many, Marxists and other, egalitarian spirits have). However, these contain within them an unintentional truth revealed when thought through dialectically. Voluntarily identifying with the oppressed and surrendering power and material wealth pre-supposes that power. It requires the acquisition of certain characteristics that are actually identified with those who are dominant and actually leaves wrong oppressive social conditions unchanged:

To adapt to the weakness of the oppressed is to affirm in it the pre-condition of power, and to develop in oneself the coarseness, insensibility and violence needed to exert domination. If, in the latest phase, the condescending gesture has been dropped and only the adaptation remains visible, this perfect screening of power only allows the class-relationship it denies to triumph more implacably.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On Jazz," in *Essays on Music*, edited by Richard Leppert, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 489.

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Admittedly, it appears as if solidarity with the oppressed is precluded by social conditions. That is, it appears that social conditions are so total that there is nothing one can do, not only to change them, but even minimally to resist them.

The intellectual is thus also a figure where truth is dialectically revealed. The intellectual is a figure detached from society is also in a dialectical bind. Even apart from this bind the intellectual who separates himself from society “runs the risk of believing himself better than others and misusing his critique of society as an ideology for his private interest.”<sup>66</sup> The intellectual must be aware of the tension between the formation of his own life, which is a “frail image of a true existence,” and that he is “as much entangled as the active participant; the only advantage [being] insight into his entanglement, and the infinitesimal freedom that lies in knowledge as such.”<sup>67</sup> Again, as with those of the “egalitarian spirit,” certain traits of those the intellectual wishes to resist and negate are taken on to resist and negate, and social conditions that he wishes to resist and negate are affirmed:

His own distance from business at large is a luxury which only that business confers. This is why the very movement of withdrawal bears features of what it negates. It is forced to develop a coldness indistinguishable from the bourgeois. Even where it protests, the monadological principle conceals the dominant universal.<sup>68</sup>

The complete and absolute domination of the universal, i.e. of late capitalist society, forces each individual to conform and assimilate to the production process that imposes the isolation “we are tempted to regard as resulting from our own superior choice,” and also “into calculations that are by humane standards barbaric . . .”<sup>69</sup> Adorno interprets

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 27.

this as lingering bourgeois ideology: the individual considers himself superior in his particular individual interest, but simultaneously regards others more as customers.<sup>70</sup>

Adorno concludes: “Since the demise of the old bourgeois class, both ideas have led an after-life in the minds of intellectuals, who are at once the last enemies of the bourgeois and the last bourgeois.”<sup>71</sup>

Adorno comes to a similar conclusion about the relationship of a person to property. The proliferation of consumer goods has diminished, if not completely eliminated, reasons to refrain from accumulation or practice self-denial of these goods or deny them of others.<sup>72</sup> The overabundance of goods means that they do not possess special significance or uniqueness and therefore, one ought to be detached from them.<sup>73</sup>

However, “one must nevertheless have possessions, if one is not to sink into that dependence and need which serves the blind perpetuation of property relations.”<sup>74</sup> And paradoxically, the antithesis of this is problematic as well; an ideology that justifies a clinging to possessions, i.e. that justifies the status quo of current social conditions.<sup>75</sup>

The constellation employed here where detachment from consumer goods is juxtaposed with the simultaneous concept of owning and cleaving to consumer goods dialectically reveals an unintentional truth. It reveals that material social conditions are structured in such a way that the good life, right life, is blocked. Both detachment and embracing reveal themselves to be essentially the same; they affirm the contradictions of

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 27

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 39.

society and mark the reality of the problem more distinctly. Here Adorno concludes: “Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.”<sup>76</sup>

These examples of Adorno’s method of revealing antinomies under late capitalist material social conditions clearly summarize his position. Under current material social conditions, the individual is so thoroughly entangled and enmeshed that she cannot escape in any way. Even the privileged intellectual, armed with dialectical knowledge and insight, falls victim to the universal in the present social totality. Indeed, dialectics not only exposes the antinomies of late capitalist society, but also reveals its total character all the more, triggering further despair and desperation.

Ethics needs knowledge and as knowledge for Adorno is constellational, then ethics will fail. That knowledge is constellational means that we can always employ more concepts, contexts, relations, and so on. This first entails that we cannot propose any ethical action. It also suggests that knowledge that the world is unethical and ascribing moral responsibility to ourselves is nearly impossible.<sup>77</sup> Hence, Adorno endorses a minimal and negative ethics (see *Minima Moralia*) where, as will be evidenced in Chapter 3, you do the best you can. This is a grim assessment of the antinomies we face, the possibility of their resolution, and the inadequacies of our knowledge. This melancholy only intensifies in the consideration of Adorno’s views of first and second nature which are addressed in the next section.

Before the discussion of nature, we must also examine the way in which Adorno applies his dialectical method to philosophy itself, particularly bourgeois philosophy. Though not a critique of a particular text or thinker, we have explored in part this kind of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>77</sup> This was also mentioned above and will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

critique in Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of enlightenment and instrumental reason in the first section of this chapter. There, enlightenment reason was seen dialectically as both vanquisher of myth and itself becoming myth; from dominating nature in the name of freedom from it and turning back on humans to dominate them and their own nature. In Adorno's other works (particularly the later works) that take up bourgeois philosophy and subject it to dialectical analysis, Adorno employs a similar method as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but one that is more consciously aware of its employment of constellation, or what Adorno also terms "models" [Modelle].

There is more at stake in Adorno's critique of bourgeois thought than in the dialectical critique of social phenomena like the jazz performer or commodities or the cinema. For one, Adorno is himself a philosopher. Any critique of philosophy as such presents a danger that the very task Adorno is engaged in will be undermined or even destroyed. Adorno will need to be careful and walk a tightrope if he is not to fall off and into the oblivion of radical skepticism on the one side or render his work weak and almost meaningless at best, or irrelevant at worst, on the other side. It is one thing to expose through dialectical analysis the antinomies and contradiction of society in the phenomena of that society, but is much more radical to claim to expose thought and philosophy as containing the contradictions of society. If he can pull this off, he will have shown not only that the material social conditions and phenomena that we inhabit and experience contain unnoticed contradictions, but that the very thought by which we understand ourselves, society, and nature is so contaminated with the contradictions of capitalist society that we are and have been walking around in a wakeful sleep, believing we understand and experience ourselves and the world a certain way, but in actuality do not.

For the purposes of this project, Adorno's critiques of bourgeois moral philosophy obviously will be of principal importance. In the next chapter, Adorno's critiques of bourgeois moral philosophy, particularly of Kant, will be examined. There the critiques will involve more than just the exposition of the latent historical and social conditions and their attendant contradictions and antinomies contained within, but also the ethical implications from these as well.

Adorno subjects a number of bourgeois philosophical texts to his dialectical critique to reveal their mediated social content. Recall that Adorno announced in his inaugural address at Frankfurt that philosophy can no longer be understood as the construction of totalizing systems, but must now be an enterprise of riddle-solving. This project shares some features with its sister project of critiquing through constellations cultural phenomena of bourgeois society. Susan Buck-Morss explains:

When constellations were constructed in order to solve the riddles of idealist philosophy, the phenomena, the "objects," were philosophical texts, and their "elements" were the disparate, fragmentary, seemingly insignificant details: thought particles, turns of phrase, specific words and images. The "riddles" were located in the antinomies, the logical breaks of the texts, because here, where the subjective intention of the philosopher faltered, where, faced with contradiction, he himself thought he had failed, he succeeded, unintentionally, in making social truth visible.<sup>78</sup>

In the inaugural address he sketches what this critique entails and what its conclusions would be in an abbreviated analysis of Kant's thing-in-itself.

Confronted with the ascendant, yet incommensurate philosophies of empiricism and rationalism, Kant, wishing to preserve reason, but simultaneously convinced of the criticisms of empiricism, sought to synthesize the two. The result was to assert the "thing-in-itself" (*Ding an sich*) as an ultimately unknowable, yet extant, reality. A quick

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<sup>78</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 112.

general sketch of Kant's theory of knowledge will help to understand how the thing-in-itself is part of Kant's solution to the problem of rationalism and empiricism.

The *Critique of Pure Reason* is Kant's most systematic and comprehensive treatment of his epistemology. In the Introduction, Kant states that objects "stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience."<sup>79</sup> In this Kant is articulating a kind of causal theory of perception; objects affect our senses, give sensory input to us. We simultaneously and spontaneously perceive through sensory intuition this raw sensible material, given in what Kant calls the sensory manifold, under the *a priori* intuitions of time and space. Then together with the *a priori* categories of understanding form appearances, or phenomena, and are worked up into what Kant refers to as objects of experience and knowledge.

For Kant, there is no reason to claim that what is given to us by the object in sense experience and worked up by the categories in any way can be shown to be the same as the object (really) is. For Kant, because we construct objects of knowledge with the categories it is we who are applying cause, unity, reality, and modality to the appearance of the object, to what is given, and cannot apply these traits to the thing as it is, as it is apart from us, the knowing subject. Kant calls this thing as it is, this something the appearance is of, a noumenon or thing-in-itself.

The rational is then preserved in the spontaneous activity of the understanding, populated by the transcendental categories, organizing the diffuse and differentiated

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<sup>79</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, eds. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 136.

manifold via the schematism. The manifold thus organized and synthesized comprises our experience of the world. In this way, our experience of reality is limited to the spontaneous activity of the categories of the understanding. As such, we cannot make claims about reality other than to infer its unifying power from the nature of experience, as the origin of the manifold. Therefore, we do not know objects in themselves (the thing-in-itself), but only as they are experienced, as worked up and schematized by the transcendental categories of the understanding. The Kantian problem of the thing-in-itself has an instructive and rich tradition of engagement by various thinkers. Approaches have varied from keeping Kant's transcendental framework basically intact except for eliminating the thing-in-itself (Fichte) to strengthening the concept of the thing-in-itself (McDowell).

Adorno does not participate in this tradition and weigh in on the problem of the thing-in-itself by proposing his own solution. What Adorno wants to suggest is the possibility of constructing a constellation around "the commodity structure" to illuminate the unintentional truth contained within the concept of the thing-in-itself. Inspired by the analysis of Marxist theorist György Lukács, Adorno proposes that the problem of the thing-in-itself vanishes once it is subjected to dialectical interpretation:

Like a source of light, the historical figure of commodity exchange and of exchange value may free the form of a reality, the hidden meaning of which remained closed to investigation of the thing-in-itself problem, because there is no hidden meaning which could be redeemable from its one-time and first-time historical appearance.<sup>80</sup>

This fragment contains more than it appears to. Adorno is essentially claiming that Kant's thing-in-itself contains within it the burgeoning bourgeois economic structure of

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<sup>80</sup> Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy," 33.

Kant's time and place. Kant's historical and social circumstances were, unwittingly to Kant himself, smuggled into his philosophy. The thing-in-itself contains the material economic conditions of bourgeois capitalism in mediated form. Adorno need not appeal to some other conception of epistemology or metaphysics, but through immanent criticism reveals, not only the contradictions and antinomies of society and its dependence on contingent historical conditions, but also the flawed and erroneous nature of Kant's premises and conclusions themselves. Buck-Morss incisively unpacks Adorno's intent:

Kant's premise of the duality of thought and reality was absolutely wrong, that subject and object were inextricably bound, reflecting one another, and that the problematic elements of bourgeois commodity production were precisely the problematic elements of Kant's idealism: the "indifferent" relationship between Kant's subject and object was the reified relationship between worker and product; the abstractness of Kant's formalism was the abstractness of exchange value; the irrationality of the thing-in-itself was the resulting opacity of commodities; the acceptance of the "given" world of experience was the acceptance of class relations as second nature.<sup>81</sup>

Furthermore, as Buck-Morss states, the rational autonomy of the Kantian subject that is radically independent of objects is undermined by Adorno's criticism.<sup>82</sup> The Kantian subject appears because the bourgeois commodity structure radically separates workers from their products and estranges everyone from the use value of objects through the abstraction of exchange value. Adorno's thesis here is not put into practice to its fullest extent, but the aim is clear—to expose the ideological character of bourgeois philosophy. Specific content can be added over time as the program he has set forth is put into

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<sup>81</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 112. Perhaps Buck-Morss overstates Adorno's critique of Kant's dualism. Adorno certainly promotes a confrontation with the given in its givenness, e.g. arguing for the preponderance of the object in *Negative Dialectics*.

<sup>82</sup> Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 112.

practice. In Chapter 2 we will analyze how he employs his method for bourgeois moral philosophy.

Adorno does not give a positive answer to the problem of the thing-in-itself. Instead, dialectical analysis negates the universal, rational, autonomous, ahistorical subject from which the problem sprung in the first place. In this way, Adorno achieves exactly what he asserts in his inaugural lecture:

[T]he answer stands in strict antithesis to the riddle, needs to be constructed out of the riddle's elements, and destroys the riddle, which is not meaningful, but meaningless, as soon as the answer is decisively given to it.<sup>83</sup>

The aim of the early Adorno is not to discover and propose some positive answer to bourgeois philosophical problems, but to dissolve the problems themselves by rendering them meaningless through exposing their material historical and social relativity thus dismissing their universal and transcendental claims. The later Adorno, for example in *Negative Dialectics*, takes such claims and their validity more seriously on their own terms and does not attempt to relativize them in this way.<sup>84</sup>

Adorno then rejects both of the dominant philosophical methods of his time: positivism and phenomenology. Positivism and its fascination with empirical “facts” is too narrow for Adorno as it leaves out interpretation (or so it believes) and excludes the social, thus hypostasizing and legitimizing the current social order. Phenomenology, on the other hand, tends to do the same, but in a different way. Phenomenology is content to contemplate things as they are experienced in consciousness from the first-person point of view, but not the things themselves, despite Husserl's famous exhortation. For

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<sup>83</sup> Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” 34.

<sup>84</sup> See the “Against Relativism” section of *Negative Dialectics*, 35-37. I prefer the later Adorno who always gives an argument or theory its due. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the given problem or phenomenon and affords an opportunity to acknowledge any truth it may contain.

Adorno, phenomenology is another manifestation of idealism; it takes up its objects for study not as they are materially, but as they appear in consciousness. To interpret them historically or socially is precluded from the method. Phenomenology cannot construct a constellation that lights up the historical and social character of phenomena to reveal their unintentional truth. Phenomenology remains within the ideal and as such cannot be a critical science. It can only accept things as they are and cannot question how things could possibly have been otherwise. Phenomenologists are just as bound to and constrained by the “things themselves” as positivists are to “facts,” accepting and affirmative of current social conditions and unable to critique them either positively or negatively (toward emancipation).

### **First Nature**

Now we turn to the role of first nature in the inability to live right life. What is termed first nature is to be understood as what is given. This would include what is referred to in ordinary language as the “natural world” and also human nature. Adorno explains that what he means by nature is comparable to what philosophy often refers to as myth: “what has always been, what as fatefully arranged predetermined being underlies history and appears in history; it is substance in history.”<sup>85</sup> In common usage these are supposed to be given without mediation, i.e. they are immediate. Adorno does not consider this immediacy a possibility. In addition, though outer (the world) nature and inner nature can be distinguished analytically for Adorno, the critique of them is often dialectically intertwined.

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<sup>85</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” *Telos* 60 (Summer 1984): 111.

Admittedly, Adorno does not present any systematic treatment of nature or human nature. To do so would be problematic in two senses. One, it would violate his project of negative dialectics, that is, it would contradict his view that reason can be only critical and not totalizing and affirmative of positive ontological claims. Second, and related to the first, any presentation of a theory of human nature would not be compatible with Adorno's aesthetic commitment to fragmentary presentation that he sees as necessary to avoid systematization and identity-thinking. In fact, Adorno does make some claims regarding human nature, but they are often negative and difficult to classify—by design. Adorno is always wary of essentializing any phenomena, especially something as important as a human being. Classifying and making pronouncements about human nature runs the risk of hypostasizing human nature and placing it in some ahistorical category where it can be manipulated for various undesirable purposes. Of course, Adorno first has in mind fascism and the Holocaust where identity-thinking about humans led to catastrophe. However, the same conditions under which fascism and the Holocaust took place are, for Adorno, still with us today. We must then be extremely careful when making any claim at all, but especially about human nature.

Nevertheless, we must still examine Adorno's thin and dispersed "negative anthropology,"<sup>86</sup> or dialectical anthropology.<sup>87</sup> Possibly, Adorno would not approve of attempting to piece together even a skeletal version of philosophical anthropology from his thought. Nevertheless, it can be done and is essential in order for Adorno's thought to engage with Aquinas'. Adorno's anthropology, as minimal as it may be, has to be

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<sup>86</sup> Adorno uses this term in section 107 of *Minima Moralia*. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 167.

<sup>87</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno use this term in the 1944 and 1947 Preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, xix.

unpacked in order to compare it to that of Aquinas and more significantly, to have something on which Aquinas' analysis can build. Philosophical anthropology is one area where there can be explicit and significant engagement between the two thinkers.

Recall that Horkheimer and Adorno problematized the relationship of humans and nature in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. There, enlightenment reason, a thread running through the entire history of the West, seeks to dominate "nature" and become master over it for human purposes. This dialectic of enlightenment reverts to myth, but also to its mimetic tension with nature. The dialectic of enlightenment separates humans from nature where they are no longer parts *of* nature. Yet, as we also see in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* humans still are parts of nature as they have an inner nature, something Odysseus has to repress in order to survive the Sirens.

According to enlightenment, both outer and inner nature must be dominated in the name of self-preservation. Exactly what this inner nature consists of for Adorno is somewhat difficult to expound. Yet, Horkheimer and Adorno make it clear that enlightenment's attempt to distance and separate humans from nature through domination is actually prompted by a natural impulse to self-preservation. Horkheimer and Adorno contend:

Precisely by virtue of its irresistible logic, thought, in whose compulsive mechanism nature is reflected and perpetuated, also reflects itself as a nature oblivious to itself, as a mechanism of compulsion.<sup>88</sup>

Even though enlightenment has divided and estranged us from nature, we also remain nature in our drives, in our impulses, though they are not always obvious or immediately present to our mind (self-preservation)-and often are repressed.

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<sup>88</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 31.

A dialectical analysis can point out the contradictions and oppositions hidden within. The natural impulse toward self-preservation must repress nature, i.e. instincts, in order to survive; nature, while denying that it is nature, must repress nature. Horkheimer and Adorno declare:

This very denial, the core of all civilizing rationality, is the germ cell of proliferating mythical irrationality: with the denial of nature in human beings, not only the *telos* of the external mastery of nature but also the *telos* of one's own life becomes confused and opaque. At the moment when human beings cut themselves off from the consciousness of themselves as nature, all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive—social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed, consciousness itself—become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end, which in late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness, is already detectable in the earliest history of subjectivity. The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than the living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions—in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved.<sup>89</sup>

Furthermore, one also can describe this repression in Freudian terms as the repression of instinct. This is explained in Freudian psychoanalysis in terms of the id, ego, and superego—the ego, with aid from the superego, repressing the id, i.e. instincts. In many works Adorno largely accepts Freudian theory, using its categories to reflect on and analyze cultural phenomena and philosophical problems.<sup>90</sup> Adorno notes that this repression of instinct theory is formulated in Freudian theory, but also has a long tradition in the history of philosophy.<sup>91</sup> The renunciation of instinct, typified by bourgeois enlightenment, has been justified not only by the preservation of the individual, but also that of society. The contradictions that this renunciation produce, expressed by

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<sup>89</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42-43.

<sup>90</sup> Examples are "The Stars Down to Earth," *The Authoritarian Personality, Problems of Moral Philosophy*.

<sup>91</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 137-138. Adorno mentions philosophers Aristotle, the Stoics, Descartes, Bacon, Nietzsche, Kant and Spinoza.

Horkheimer and Adorno above, are also revealed in Freud's ambivalence toward this renunciation, both denouncing it as repression and affirming it in the name of culture and society.<sup>92</sup>

Adorno's Freudian leanings with regard to human nature are evident in a number of works. The introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality* from 1950 stresses that individuals are characterized by varying forces entailing needs, wishes, and impulses that integrate and conflict with one another.<sup>93</sup> The personality structure organizes these needs and desires, but is not to be enshrined as a static human nature.<sup>94</sup> Instead, this *structure* is to be understood to be historical, as shaped by social conditions, e.g. familial, political, economic, and cultural conditions.<sup>95</sup> However, understood dialectically, this structure is not solely a pure object of social conditions, but in each individual is "something which is capable of self-initiated action upon the social environment and of selection with respect to varied impinging stimuli, something which though always modifiable is frequently very resistant to fundamental change."<sup>96</sup> Subsequently, "the hypothesis may be ventured that various historical situations and social settings favor various psychological syndromes and 'bring out' and accentuate distinct types of possibilities ever present in human beings."<sup>97</sup> Here, Adorno clearly refers to a human nature that gets expressed in various ways within the concrete historical social conditions of late capitalism. The

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<sup>92</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 137 and Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 60-61.

Adorno is critical of the affirmation of the renunciation of instinct in the name of the preservation of society, an issue that will be taken up in chapter two in the examination of Adorno's criticisms of bourgeois moral philosophy.

<sup>93</sup> Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 5.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "The Stars Down To Earth," *Telos* 19, (Spring 1974): 89. This study is an excellent example of Adorno's Freudian commitments and their implications for his critique of specific cultural forms of late capitalism.

specific content of this nature is not stated here, though a reasonable candidate is Freudian drives. These natural drives are ever present though they may be thwarted or distorted<sup>98</sup> under current social conditions. Adorno stresses that we must not lose sight of the mutability and individuality of personality, but that under current conditions distinguishing “character types” is also justifiable. The society of late capitalism, under the sway of the exchange principle and production models, through “standardized, opaque and overpowering social processes which leave to the ‘individual’ but little freedom for action and true individuation” has rendered individuality virtually obsolete.<sup>99</sup> Adorno writes in his own section of *The Authoritarian Personality*: “There is a reason to look for psychological types because the world in which we live is typed and ‘produces’ different ‘types’ of persons.”<sup>100</sup>

A more forceful argument for Adorno’s Freudian commitments is presented by Yvonne Sherratt in *Adorno’s Positive Dialectic*. Sherratt claims that Adorno accepts Freud’s structure of the subject, but draws out conclusions that are at some variance with Freud’s. (For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on what Sherratt claims are Adorno’s conclusions.)<sup>101</sup> Essentially, Adorno’s appropriation of Freud results in a deeper penetration into human nature as an explanation for enlightenment and its attendant problems described above, and thus throws light on the ethical situation we find ourselves in.

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<sup>98</sup> i.e., develop into neuroses and pathologies.

<sup>99</sup> Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, 747.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 747.

<sup>101</sup> The details of the differences are not essential to this project, only that Adorno employs and accepts the Freudian framework.

In enlightenment, Sherratt explains, the denial of the instincts, the drives of the id, in response to objects in reality, sets in motion the regression of the self's instinctual relationship to objects.<sup>102</sup> As the enlightened subject continues to withdraw from objects which are the aims of the instincts, the subject mistakes the ego's objects as external objects (reality) and thus projects its concepts onto reality.<sup>103</sup> The ego as the bearer of the reality principle is populated with instrumental concepts and these are what are projected onto objects. As Sherratt explains, this projection, distinctly different from Freud's understanding of it,<sup>104</sup> amounts to the "loss of the capacity to discriminate between the internal and the external which thus entails the loss of the first capacity to discriminate," which "leads to a loss of the second capacity to discriminate, that is between external objects themselves."<sup>105</sup> Under these conditions, according to Sherratt, Adorno believes the subject essentially becomes the ego with the id either completely negated or significantly atrophied.<sup>106</sup> The projection of the ego's concepts onto reality means that reality is not confronted; what actually is experienced, referred to, and made claims about is the conceptual system. Thus instrumentality is projected onto the world and all things

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<sup>102</sup> Yvonne Sherratt, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 105. It is not necessary for my purposes to explain the four stages of what Sherratt calls the "decline of enlightenment."

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-107.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-108.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 107. Essentially, for Adorno, myth is the projection of the id onto reality and enlightenment the projection of the ego onto reality. See 107-109.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. Problematically, Sherratt provides no reference to any Adorno text for this claim. (a problem that plagues the entire monograph.) Nevertheless, this claim is consistent with her other claims about Adorno's Freudian appropriation. However, the question remains to what extent Adorno (and/or Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the text she refers to most) actually had Freud in mind when laying out his account of the dialectic of enlightenment and myth, identity thinking, negative dialectics, etc. . . More explicit textual reference would be needed for a more convincing account of Freud's influence on Adorno.

become the same.<sup>107</sup> The substantive meaning linked to the instincts and their objects is supplanted by instrumental significance alone.

Here then is a psychological explanation of enlightenment's enthronement of instrumental reason, the ethical consequences of which have been discussed above. Another significant contribution to the understanding of the contemporary ethical condition according to Adorno is presented here as well. If the self, at this point the ego alone, cannot discriminate between external real objects, nor between the internal and external, it finds itself cut off from reality and pathologically turned inward (narcissism). As the self cannot discriminate between internal and external objects and between external objects, it cannot acquire the knowledge of objects in reality nor respond adequately to objects. The subject then loses its ethical capacities because without the capacity to discriminate, acquire knowledge of external objects, and properly respond to them, the subject cannot act in accord with those objects as they are, as individuated and unique. Thus, any act will most likely violate the individuality of the object, forcing it into the conceptual scheme of the ego toward self-preservation. That is, the self acts in accord with its fantasies and projections produced by the ego; one acts only instrumentally with regard to nature (in accord with the reality principle). All the while, the id, which is linked to substantive meaning and happiness, is denied pursuing and acquiring its objects. The self then is solely living within the instrumental scheme it has projected onto the external world. The self (the ego) is living not ethically, but is living idealism, i.e. conforming the world to its concepts, no longer able to recognize external

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 108.

objects as such, nor discriminate between internal and external.<sup>108</sup> The possibility of the subject breaking out of this will be taken up in Chapter 3.

Despite the peril involved with enlightenment, Adorno remains committed to it, though not to its manifestation in instrumental reason and the totalizing character of capitalism. Sherratt argues that Adorno's commitment to enlightenment—understood in Kantian terms as the pursuit of reason, freedom, peace, stability, and progress—means that he must explicate a way in which his Freudian view of human nature can be redeemed.<sup>109</sup> That is, he must find a way that the ego and id, reason and drives can propel us to live out authentic enlightenment and defend against the regression to myth or false enlightenment. According to Sherratt, the way in which Adorno achieves this aim is by appending Freud's psychological structure with a capacity, a drive for aesthetic experience.<sup>110</sup> This will be taken up in Chapter 3 as a positive prescription by Adorno for the described ethical ailments, as the primary manifestation of his utopianism. Here, I just want to point to this capacity as a feature of human nature for Adorno, one that has redemptive potential (if Sherratt is correct), but is mostly ignored or marginalized in enlightenment thought and thus in life in late capitalist society.

The other major work on Adorno's Freudian influence is *Perversion and Utopia*, by Joel Whitebook. Somewhat conversely to Sherratt, Whitebook makes the case that Adorno is insufficiently Freudian and therefore, ends up in an untenable and aporetic position between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, rationality and irrationality, ego and id. At the core of this problem is Adorno's refusal to abandon the enlightenment

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<sup>108</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno discuss this "false projection" in relation to anti-Semitism in the "Elements of Anti-Semitism" Section of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-7, 26.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

standpoint of the ego and reason, despite his piercing critiques of enlightenment. For Adorno, as Whitebook highlights, the ego and reason remain, even though they are portrayed as violent as they attempt to master and unify diffuse external and inner nature in the name of self-preservation.<sup>111</sup> The turn from control and mastery of external nature to control and mastery of inner nature is the move from myth to enlightenment, represented, for Horkheimer and Adorno, by Odysseus. It is the movement from outer to inner sacrifice where the diverse and diffuse id is violently repressed by the unifying and calculating ego. Thus, the modern bourgeois individual dominated by the ego is born through violence and repressive sacrifice. The renunciation of inner nature ensures survival, but is inimical to happiness. Odysseus' cunning and bourgeois science both renounce nature though the subject remains nature and thus "becomes incapable of enjoying the material fruits of the conquest of nature"; the renunciation of inner nature "deprives the entire process of any intrinsic end, except self-preservation."<sup>112</sup>

This ought to prompt Adorno (and Horkheimer) to advocate for some return to an unmediated inner nature in order to achieve happiness and to close down the dialectic of enlightenment that is set in motion with the renunciation and repression of inner nature. However, this thesis, though logically consistent, cannot be and was not proposed by Adorno since he cannot accept an idealization of inner nature unmediated by the social and historical. Nevertheless, according to Whitebook, this was implicitly endorsed by Adorno.<sup>113</sup> If this is the case, then Adorno can himself be accused of essentialism, of promoting some return to an idealized natural state. Furthermore, for Adorno, as

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<sup>111</sup> Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 146.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

Whitebook mentions, the violent posture of the ego must be perpetual since it is continuously under threat from diffuse nature that promises happiness, but that the ego knows leads to its own destruction.<sup>114</sup> However, Whitebook points out that for Adorno (and Horkheimer) there is a built in assumption at play in this claim:

that no achievement of ego integration—no sublimation—can assume relative stability over time, which is to say, no form of identity can possess the character of the relatively unforced naturalness of second nature, but must always involve the exertion of will: the central and continuous threat, against which the ego must constantly struggle, is disintegration.<sup>115</sup>

The two-fold problem with Adorno is that he either is (implicitly) or must argue for a return to an immediate nature—a claim that runs counter to his epistemological and metaphysical commitments—and results in the perpetual violent synthesis of the ego.

Conversely, to confront this dilemma, Whitebook wants to advocate for sublimation, the theory that id drives can be expressed in ways that are not threats to the preservation of the self or to society.<sup>116</sup> What Whitebook misses is that Adorno always pulls back at the last second before he would affirm some kind of immediate nature in itself. As all enlightenment identity thinkers are prone to do, Whitebook has to take one side or the other in any binary opposition. Adorno, conversely, remains true to the dialectic, never allowing it to end. This permanent repression Whitebook assigns to the id through sublimation effectively ends the dialectic, thus enthroning ego to carry out its program of identity-thinking and mastery of inner and external nature without impediments. Adorno rejects enlightenment understood in this way. His cause is to re-conceptualize enlightenment in hopes of fostering emancipation. In this case, a dialectics between ego

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 150.

and id must be restored by re-introducing the id and restoring its mediating role in interpreting the ego. By putting the id back into the discourse of human nature, not to then overthrow the ego, but to affirm the material in psychology and human nature, Adorno seeks to establish a dialectic where both determine each other and that will point toward the freedom he and enlightenment seek.<sup>117</sup> To claim otherwise would be to make an epistemological claim about the id and about nature that we are not entitled to, that is, we would engage in identity-thinking.

In the end, Adorno is at least partly a Freudian in that he understands humans to have drives and desires and needs, though his relationship to Freudian thought is a fragile one as it always remains tempted to posit itself as the bearer of the ultimate truth of humans, which as a dialectician steeped in Hegelian-Marxist historicism and due to his epistemological commitments, he cannot accept.<sup>118</sup> Any such claims are not only epistemologically impossible, but also ultimately promote some kind of unfreedom by presupposing free social conditions that are not present. Adorno is led to declare that “[e]very ‘image of man’ is ideology except the negative one.”<sup>119</sup> For Adorno, though drives and impulses remain however distorted they may be, society also has come to constitute us and also to dominate us. Inasmuch as the sociological is anthropological it is negative as humans find at every turn a society that presses in on them affecting suffering and negating autonomy. This leaves us with a philosophical anthropology, a

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<sup>117</sup> What this dialectic might look like or result in will be addressed in Chapter 3.

<sup>118</sup> Adorno refers to the true “image of man” as a utopian ideal, one among several that had developed in the psychoanalytic tradition. See Theodor W. Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology” (Part II), *New Left Review* 47 (1968): 84.

<sup>119</sup> Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology” (Part II), 84.

negative one to be sure, that is both psychological and sociological: characterized by both Freudian drives and impulses and the domination of society.

### **Second Nature**

What Adorno calls second nature also is a block to right life. Whereas for Adorno inner nature is the nature within the subject consisting of impulses and desires, second nature is objective, stands outside the subject (but is not to be confused with outer nature, i.e. the natural world). However, second nature is not actually natural; it is human made, i.e. it is historical. Though it is human made, it appears to be and is treated as nature.

The second nature thesis has its roots in Marx's (following Hegel) analysis of the commodity in Chapter 1 of Volume I of *Capital*. Marx's account of what he terms commodity fetishism reveals the commodity as more than a physical object endowed with use value.<sup>120</sup> A commodity possesses exchange-value, i.e. the quantity of commodities it can be exchanged for on the market, expressible in monetary terms.

However, exchange-value is not tied up with the physical nature of the commodity:

Not an atom of matter enters into the objectivity of commodities as [exchange] values; in this it is the direct opposite of the coarsely sensuous objectivity of commodities of physical objects. We may twist and turn a single commodity as we wish; it remains impossible to grasp it as a thing possessing [exchange] value. However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as [exchange] values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as [exchange] values is therefore purely social.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> For Marx, the use-value is "conditioned by the physical properties of the commodity, and has no existence apart from the latter." Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 1990), 126.

<sup>121</sup> Marx, *Capital* Volume I, 126.

For Marx, under capitalism the human labour and human relations that determine exchange-value are embodied in the things produced. Subsequently, exchange-values appear as objective, as natural, immutable properties of the commodities. That is, the human labour and interaction that is exchange value's true source remains hidden and instead appears as a second nature on top of the physical nature of a commodity. This process of making human labour and human interaction static and thing-like has been taken up and extended in later Marxism as "reification" (notably in the thought of Lukács). Things and properties that are actually products of human labor and interaction appear as utter givens, as natural qualities that are immutable and immune to human manipulation, though they are in fact products of human labor. This way they appear as natural, as a second nature and as such we do not perceive that institutions, social practices, and so forth could be otherwise, that they must not necessarily be as they are. Under the spell of second nature the social conditions of late-capitalism appear as fixed and eternal facts of nature.

When Adorno surveys the contemporary ethical scene he focuses on this aspect of second nature. Unable to be pictured by the freedom promised by liberal bourgeois ideology, individuals find themselves in social conditions where freedom is blocked by what appears to be a stagnant and immutable social condition. The very possibilities of acting toward emancipation appear intrinsically blocked when every social institution and practice appears as natural as the subject's bodily composition. Furthermore, and really the thrust of Adorno's concerns about second nature, is their effect on individual consciousness of society. For when social conditions are accepted in a way that "nature"

is accepted, individuals recognize they must conform in order to survive and even to “thrive.” In this reified world of second nature freedom is no longer a possibility.

Kant set up the antinomy between causality and freedom: ethics presupposes freedom on the one hand, yet science has demonstrated the ubiquity of laws of causality. Here Kant placed freedom in the noumenal realm leaving untouched the causally determined phenomenal world that is governed by immutable laws. Adorno perceives in this the perfect example of the effects of a completely reified society. It is not only the phenomenal world given in sense experience that is static and law governed, i.e. natural, but also a reified society:

But what appears in Kant as the intertwining of man and nature is also the intertwining of man and society. For in that second nature, in our universal state of dependency, there is no freedom. And for that reason there is no ethics in the administered world. It follows that the premise of ethics is the critique of the administered world.<sup>122</sup>

The crux of the problem is that faced with a society that is a second nature, individuals are completely dependent on that nature in a way that an animal is dependent on “first nature” for survival. Yet, this second nature is not nature, but instead could be otherwise. As presently constituted, reified society is completely given over to production and consumption and ruled by the dictatorship of exchange value. Individuals must conform and adapt to this second nature, even though it may oppose human interests, both individual and collective. The completely administered society leaves little, if any, room for the freedom that is a prerequisite for moral action and right living, thus the beginning of morality is the critique of society, of second nature.

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<sup>122</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 176.

## Nature and History

For all of Adorno's discussion of nature, nature can never be understood as pure, as a nature in itself. History, as is clearly the case with second nature, plays a substantive role whenever nature is invoked. Adorno states that history is "that mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence[sic] of the qualitatively new."<sup>123</sup> Adorno must place both nature and history in dialectical relation with one another, not letting either nature or history become the ground to which to reduce the other. A reduction to nature makes a claim we are not entitled to; we have no epistemological access where we could permanently grasp it in order to make claims regarding it and what ought to be accordingly. In strict adherence to dialectics, Adorno cannot only not posit a nature in itself, but there can also be no history in itself (something Heidegger posits as the being of Dasein, as *historicity*) as its concept is mediated by nature.<sup>124</sup>

The difficulty in the imperative simultaneous disentangling of nature and history and their dialectical surmounting may tempt us to give up nature in favor of history made by humans. Thus our access to it can be justifiably claimed. (This is Hegel's position.) However, Adorno, while remaining Hegelian in method, denies the Hegelian metaphysics.<sup>125</sup> The reconciliation of subject and object, of identity and non-identity, of nature and history in a supremely sublimated Absolute is again the crux of the problem of enlightenment thinking that has led to catastrophe. To succumb to the temptation to

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<sup>123</sup> Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," 111.

<sup>124</sup> See Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," 114-115.

<sup>125</sup> See for example, Adorno, *Lecture on Negative Dialectics*, 27-28.

subsume nature under history in the name of logical purity and metaphysical tidiness<sup>126</sup> is to abstract from and ignore real material social conditions tied to the suffering of individuals, or at least to write them off as mere growing pains of the Absolute.

Instead of capitulating to idealism, we must vigilantly maintain the dialectical method when considering nature and history in order to redeem suffering nature, to not forget the suffering of individuals. No, a nature in itself cannot be posited, but that does not mean we fall back into idealism and allow nature to be dissolved into history. Only when nature and history are understood dialectically can nature be expressed negatively.

Adorno explicates the polarity of nature and history without succumbing to identity in a number of ways throughout his *oeuvre*. One instance is his comparison of the concept of nature to the mythic. Just as myth, nature involves that which is transcendent to humans and that which they cannot change. But, just as myth, nature is actually the product of humans.<sup>127</sup> The mythic view of nature as static, external to humans and without history, fails to be aware that this view is rooted in the historical development of enlightenment that has sought to dominate nature and manipulate it for self-preservation. This makes it falsely appear that nature and history are ontologically opposed and irreducible to one another. Therefore, Adorno's intention is to dissolve the distinction between the two dialectically, "pushing these concepts to a point where they are mediated

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<sup>126</sup> This is arguably what Steven Vogel does in *Against Nature*, an otherwise helpful and insightful book. Vogel is insufficiently dialectic in claiming that the nonidentical is contained within human practice, not the object. (This also leaves him unable to account for the "resistance" of the world to change). Perhaps Vogel is not articulating the traditional idealism he criticizes, but it remains idealism in that it only affirms a dialectic of theory and practice that does not take into account any kind of objectivity ontologically distinct from the subject, something Adorno sees as indispensable to breaking free of the prison of subjectivity. See Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 96-97.

<sup>127</sup> Adorno, "The Idea of Natural History," 111.

in their apparent difference.”<sup>128</sup> Adorno argues that nature too has a history. Our image of nature as static and external to us is grounded in a historical process of enlightenment and in the contemporary economic conditions of capitalism where the impulse for self-preservation is expressed in the pursuit of money via extracted utility from nature.

Nature and history coupled as the concept of natural history is, for Adorno, a critical concept. Disclosing that nature and history are intertwined sheds light on the unfreedom of contemporary society. Historicized nature subsumes nature without remainder under concepts, which in turn are employed for the domination of nature for human survival, thus doing violence to nature. Conversely, naturalized history renders society immutable in its semblance to first nature.

An additional variation is introduced in the consideration of inner nature. Unfreedom is located in the blind following of instinct, and though many instincts and impulses remain repressed as the payment for civilized society, the survival instinct, as Adorno emphasizes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, remains unfettered. Adorno asserts that this has been characteristic of the project of enlightenment all along:

It is natural as the psychological force split off for purposes of self-preservation; once split off and contrasted with nature, it also becomes nature’s otherness. But if that dialects irrepressibly turns reason into the absolute antithesis of nature, if the nature in reason is itself forgotten, reason will be self-preservation running wild and will regress to nature.<sup>129</sup>

Reason as spun off from nature is history, though history grounded in nature. In late capitalism this nature rendered history lives as the principle of exchange, which is for Adorno identity-thinking where objects are identified with their concepts. Exchange is

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>129</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 289.

the expression of the survival instinct unaware of itself. Thus, history is nature unrecognized as such just as nature is historical unrecognized as such.

It must be noted that, as tempting as it may be given his materialism, Adorno will not reduce reason to nature. He will always keep them in a dialectical tension where they determine each other. Once reason is split off from nature there is no utopian reunion of the two; that would be to give up on enlightenment and retreat to some sort of romanticism, something Adorno is disinclined to do.

### *Conclusion*

As the preceding has shown from various analyses, Adorno believes we find ourselves in an ethical situation that is unable to be adequately theorized, epistemologically or practically, cutting us off from living the good life. Truly, wrong life cannot be lived rightly.

Though also liberating, the dominating tendency of enlightenment has been enthroned to the extent that reason is equated with domination, i.e. instrumental reason is the only viable and valid understanding of reason. Enlightenment reason, in its domination of inner nature, outer nature, and other humans cuts off the ethical agent from meaning and teleology that could have been grounded in the objective. Furthermore, the domination of outer nature through science and capitalism has turned the objective back against us in its domination of us through weapons of mass destruction, the market over the individual, and totalitarian ideologies, to name a few.

The domination of inner nature is also attendant to enlightenment reason. As with the domination of outer nature, the domination of inner nature is a means to self-

preservation, but in being cut off from inner nature, we end up alienated from ourselves. In turn, this alienation precludes our own happiness which is grounded in the natural instincts and drives of inner nature; we forgo happiness to survive, though what is preserved is no longer what it was.

Coupled together, the domination of outer and inner nature also involves the domination of other humans. The bourgeois self that emerges from the domination of inner nature must also dominate others in the name of self-preservation, as exemplified in the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens. Our civilization, our society itself, from unjust objective social conditions to the impossibility of the fulfillment of the promise of happiness, is built on this framework.

Epistemologically, our concepts cannot capture absolutely the nature of the object whether the object is an individual entity, other persons, or society. This deficiency negatively affects our ability to think and act ethically. Indeed, the very possibility of thinking and or acting in any way close to a completely ethical way seems out of reach.

The dominance of the exchange principle in contemporary European and North American society reinforces the epistemological problem of subsuming everything under its equivalence while negating what is non-identical. Once again, taking account of the individual and the qualitative necessary for ethical actions and ethical life disappears within the totality of capitalist exchange. Furthermore, subsuming everything under the exchange principle, contemporary society assimilates individual humans and individual acts, rendering everyone complicit in the total domination of society in the name of self-preservation. The human person is rendered a moment in the social totality: constituent of it, dependent on it for survival, and sustaining of it.

These problems place the ethical agent squarely within both the practical and theoretical antinomies that characterize current social conditions. To uncover these antinomies, to become conscious of them, one must subject them to dialectic analysis. This method reveals both their untruth and their unintended truth. The formation of constellations and employment of dialectical analysis reveals that the ethical agent is always subject to the compulsion of the totality. Even those who believe they undermine the social totality are ultimately constrained by it—particularly in the acts they believe resist it. As ethical agents we are so entangled in the social totality that we cannot act in a way that does not implicate us in its promotion and preservation. The same is true of philosophy itself. The dialectical analysis of philosophical concepts reveals their socially and historically mediated nature, thus undermining their claim to universality and ahistorical truth.

Just as right life is epistemologically blocked, so too is it blocked by first nature, both inner and outer. Adorno's view of human nature, even though diffused and unsystematically articulated, is to a large extent commensurate with Freudian drive theory. As such, the repression of inner nature is the price paid for the birth and preservation of the bourgeois self, civilization, and promised happiness. Though repressed, these impulses remain situated within with an individuated personality structure whose development and expression is largely, though not completely, determined by current social conditions, most notably, the exchange principle and production models that void the individuality of persons, shape them into types, and inhibit their autonomy.

Looked at from another angle, Adorno's Freudian anthropology and its repression of instincts tells the story of the contemporary ethical subject's withdrawal from the objects that are the aims of the instincts to the extent that the subject essentially is the ego alone. This bourgeois subject is thus separated from reality and left alone with its concepts that apply only instrumental reason to that reality. In its narcissistic turn inward in which it cannot discriminate between subject and object, the ethical subject cannot acquire the necessary knowledge of objective reality required for ethical living.

This situation puts the subject in a particularly grave predicament, one from which Adorno never clearly extracts himself: to reject enlightenment or continue to embrace it despite its instrumental pathologies, in the hope of its redemption. However, one can conclude that solving this predicament on one side or the other would essentially preclude dialectically thinking the problem through, something Adorno appears to be unwilling to do.

Additionally, second nature is as serious of a block to right living. Social conditions appear to the ethical agent as immutable and as such unalterable, just as nature. Thus, unjust, heteronomous, and miserable social conditions are accepted without thought that they could be otherwise. The individual must conform to this reified society for self-preservation. The ethical subject must then surrender its autonomy that is a pre-condition for moral action.

Lastly, for Adorno, the most salient way our ethical situation can be expressed is in the natural history thesis. In placing nature and history in dialectical relation to one another neither can be reduced to the other. This means that we cannot grasp a nature in itself, nor ignore nature in favor of an unmediated idealism. Ethically, the entwinement

of nature and history places us in a difficult and untenable position. We cannot appeal to an unmediated nature in itself devoid of historical and social concepts to determine ethical acts, principles and guidance, nor can we appeal to unmediated ideal principles that lack historical and social content. Both choices are epistemologically impossible and as such affirm current conditions and the ominous character of our ethical situation.

What is left for Adorno is to adopt a melancholy mood. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin had theorized that the baroque tragic dramas were melancholy in allegorically expressing the unrecoverable loss of classical world values and convictions. Deeply influenced by Benjamin, Adorno's melancholy ethical thought is expressed against a tacit background of a similar sense of mourning for unrealized possibilities of a world where the moral life is possible, a world that does not identify subject and object, freedom and necessity, and nature and history. Chapter 3 will explore the ways Adorno indicates possible redemption in attempts to locate the traces left of a possible right life in a wrong world.

## **Chapter 2: Adorno's Critiques of Ethical Theory**

Having described the contemporary ethical scene, we must now ask how Adorno philosophically approaches this dismal state of affairs. Can any moral theory offer an escape hatch from Adorno's claim that wrong life cannot be lived rightly? The answer is mixed. Adorno, consistent with his materialist and epistemological commitments, cannot and will not produce a full-blown moral philosophy of his own. On the other hand, also consistent is a materialist critique and engagement with the past and the history of philosophy (for Adorno, that largely means German philosophy). Adorno takes up an immanent critique of Kant's practical philosophy, both rejecting and appropriating aspects of it. The following will describe how Adorno finds Kantian practical philosophy immanently problematic and largely inadequate to resolve the contemporary dilemma of the impossibility of right living. Finally, Adorno's extremely limited engagement with and criticisms of virtue theory will be examined. What emerges is that Adorno's moral philosophy is a moral philosophy of critique largely unable and unwilling to construct positive moral claims and guidance, yet negatively affirms what a moral philosophy and moral living might look like by explicating what it cannot be.

### **Adorno's Critique of Kant's Moral Philosophy**

Kant's moral philosophy is both well-articulated and the most influential of modern and German thinkers. Though criticized from numerous sides, it remains the standard for moral philosophy as such for many philosophers, either as a springboard for further development (e.g. Habermas) or as a foil (e.g. Nietzsche, Marx). Adorno's relationship

with Kant's moral philosophy is more ambivalent. He recognizes it as both the best available approach to moral questions and deeply problematic. This coupled with the fact that Adorno's engagement with Kantian moral thought is arguably his most developed demands it be given priority and examined in some detail for this project.

Adorno's ambivalent relationship to Kant's moral philosophy lies in Adorno's own diagnosis that wrong life cannot be lived rightly. For Adorno, Kant's moral thought best reflects this dilemma (though Kant would vigorously deny such a claim) in that the antinomies that Kant thematized and the contradictions that he believes he resolves all point to the deeply problematic nature and impossibility of moral philosophy under current material social conditions and the epistemological blocks described in Chapter 1. For Adorno, as it is for Kant, the question of freedom is the locus of moral philosophy, and as such Kant's expression of the problematic nature of this problem compares to Adorno's own concerns for the possibility of freedom, i.e the possibility of moral living under current conditions.

As in his epistemological critique, Adorno's method is two-fold. Initially, he employs philosophical critique, that is, immanent critique that highlights contradictions and blind spots in a thinker's moral philosophy. Supplementing this, Adorno exposes the socially and historically mediated content within the theory, their influence and implications. Together, they reveal both the strengths and shortcomings of each moral philosophy.

## I. Freedom and Reason

For Kant, freedom, the very crux of moral philosophy, is grounded in his epistemology and extends into his moral philosophy where freedom is a postulate.

However, as moral philosophy has to do with human actions, and for Kant morality is grounded in reason, an antinomy is set up from the very beginning. Action is empirical, performed by empirical subjects, and as such subject to natural causation and thus, unfree.<sup>130</sup> Accordingly, for Kant, the problem of ethics becomes one of freedom, to make a space for freedom in a world determined by natural causality, for “a form of behavior that is not ruled by the causality of nature.”<sup>131</sup> Consequently, Adorno dialectically explores the problem of freedom in Kant’s moral philosophy and finds it laden with contradictions, antinomies, and delusion. Nevertheless, and consistent with dialectics, Adorno also finds that freedom is that which ought to be affirmed in Kant’s moral thought.

Kant theorizes the problem of freedom in the “Third Antinomy” in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.<sup>132</sup> Here our employment of theoretical reason, in light of seeking an unconditioned, leads to one of two irreconcilable conclusions: there is something beyond natural causality and hence, there is freedom or everything is subject to causality and hence, there is no freedom. For Kant, if there is a contradiction of this sort there must be some mistake in the employment of reason, and thus the contradiction must be resolved. We must then discover how reason has been misused or misapplied and go back and correct the mistake.

Kant cannot deny natural causality, so that in order to solve the contradiction, but also retain freedom, he must establish freedom as a causality.<sup>133</sup> In articulating the first thesis of the antinomy (that natural causality is not the only causality, there is also freedom)

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<sup>130</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 52.

<sup>131</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 484-485, A444/B472-A447/B475.

<sup>133</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 39.

Kant states: “It is also necessary to assume another causality through freedom . . .”<sup>134</sup>

Here, obviously causality’s scope has been expanded outside the domain of scientific causation. This solution allows Kant to hold fast to some kind of freedom, without which there is no morality, and provides a bulwark for reason against the chaos of “amorphous, unformed nature.”<sup>135</sup> Adorno concludes that this knotty predicament where humans “can exist neither in absolute conformity to law, nor in absolute freedom, is the true and profound reason why Kant finds himself forced into this paradoxical construct of a causality born of freedom.”<sup>136</sup>

Adorno regards the way of thinking where contradictions must be resolved, and thus eliminated, as misguided. Adorno affirms instead that Kant’s explication of these contradictions and their necessity reveals truth; they are not problems that must be solved.<sup>137</sup> This is to say that Kant is unable to think about this problem dialectically, to affirm its necessity:

[. . .] only when this contradiction is seen as necessary can we understand the actual problem of moral philosophy, namely the problem of freedom or unfreedom as a genuine problem, that is to say, as something arising from the matter itself, and no mere deception that can easily be removed.<sup>138</sup>

Kant’s failure and refusal to thematize or accept the contradiction of freedom and necessity (practical reason and nature) and think them through dialectically led him to solve the problem with freedom as a causality, to splitting reality into the noumenal and phenomenal realms, and to his effective collusion with bourgeois society.<sup>139</sup> On

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<sup>134</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 484, A444/B472.

<sup>135</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 54.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

epistemological grounds, the phenomenal (empirical) world must be determined by causation, be subject to the laws of causality as discerned and expounded by natural science. Thus, freedom—the antithesis of subjection to laws—must be located in the noumenal (intelligible) realm. In this way, freedom is associated with the intelligible and necessity with the empirical.

As previously mentioned, a problem arises as to how to tie the two realms together so that any supposedly free act is also necessary in that it is empirical and subject to the laws of natural causality. These two worlds appear to be completely and absolutely separate and unable to be bridged. Consequently, for Adorno, Kant's valorization of intelligible freedom ends up not considering empirical, material freedom, and metaphysically justifies the domination that characterizes the experience of the empirical individual.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, the splitting of the noumenal and the phenomenal relegates freedom to the intelligible, to the subjective and abstract, leaving the empirical, where freedom is most in need and most salient to individuals, to the realm of science. This combination of "libertarian doctrine" and "repressive practice" has the devastating effect of removing "philosophy further and further from the genuine insight into the freedom and unfreedom of the living."<sup>141</sup> Kant's bifurcation of the world stacks the deck against empirical freedom<sup>142</sup>—both putting it out of play in the noumenal realm, but also leaving it to science which is unable to address such problems. Consequently, these riddles of

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<sup>140</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 214-215.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>142</sup> Empirical freedom denotes freedom in what Kant would term the phenomenal world which for him is subject to the necessary laws of causality. For Adorno, that world is where freedom is most in need—in the material social conditions of human existence.

freedom and determinism are left to “arbitrary irrationality that wavers between dogmatic generalities and inconclusive, more or less single empirical determinations.”<sup>143</sup>

Though Kant would deny it, Adorno shows that Kantian moral philosophy and parallel bourgeois moral philosophies provide no way in which to approach contemporary moral problems and could be said actually to involuntarily and ideologically express exactly the moral problem we face—that we cannot find a way to live rightly in wrong life, or we cannot live freely in an unfree world. In the end, the result is that the choices one makes and the positions one takes regarding this problem are arbitrarily determined by an individual’s “political creed, or upon the power he happens to recognize at the moment,” thus the question and idea of freedom, turned purely subjective and abstract, cannot truly be addressed and is easily brushed aside and suppressed by unfree objective conditions.<sup>144</sup>

Kant’s moral theory creates a space for this freedom, but it creates new difficulties for him as well, particularly in providing content to the concept of freedom. Adorno wonders how noumenal freedom can be freedom to act empirically in the phenomenal world that is temporal without it then being temporal itself and subject to causality and thus, not free.<sup>145</sup> This explains why Kant does not provide content for what freedom looks like, but instead, as Adorno notes, is left to make paradoxical statements that simultaneously affirm the law-like causally determined actions of humans and their absolute moral freedom.<sup>146</sup> Again, these paradoxes are, for Adorno, expressions of the material conditions of capitalist society. And Adorno concedes that these statements

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 215-216.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 255.

appear to be nonsensical, yet it is Kant's conception of reason that has led him to these paradoxes. Reason as the core of the subject is the ground of moral freedom, yet reason is a law-making power. Therefore, freedom must be assigned a 'special sort of causality.'<sup>147</sup> Consequently, even the realm of freedom that is carved out by Kant is not free in the sense of not being absolutely subject to laws. This means that the freedom granted by Kant is simultaneously retracted; freedom that is subject to causal laws is not, for Adorno, freedom.<sup>148</sup>

## II. Freedom and Nature

Kant's freedom also presents several other problems for Adorno. One is the relation of freedom to nature. For Adorno, we do not need two worlds to resolve the antinomy of freedom and necessity: "what transcends nature is nature that has become conscious of itself."<sup>149</sup> That is, in self-reflection we become conscious that freedom and necessity, or freedom and nature, mediate each other and each "necessarily implies the other."<sup>150</sup> Self-reflection discloses that we are natural beings, but also that we can be aware of ourselves as natural and thus go beyond it in this moment of self-reflection. For Adorno, freedom cannot be untethered from our natural, embodied existence, but is the natural self with drives and impulses (usually toward self-preservation) become aware of itself in self-reflection. Therefore, in order to act morally, we need not act in complete independence

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 255. Adorno quotes Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 309.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>149</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 104.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 105.

from nature and natural causality, for freedom is not the antithesis of nature, but is this “nature becoming conscious of itself.”<sup>151</sup>

Kant, according to Adorno, is ambivalent on this point, seemingly aware of it, but too tied to his conception of reason as the means of the domination of nature as “something absolute and self-evident.”<sup>152</sup> This means that Kant’s ethics is effectively an ethics of domination to the extent that “the categorical imperative itself is nothing but the principle for achieving the domination of nature, raised to a norm, elevated into an absolute.”<sup>153</sup> As this is the case for Kant, in order to act morally one must act independently of internal and external heteronomous nature. For Adorno, Kant’s identity of freedom and the dominating principle of reason toward purity in action actually means unfreedom for the individual. One experiences this type of freedom as a “restriction of its own impulses” and as repressive, “eliminating from the subject whatever does not conform with its pure concept,” hence the rigorous and abstract character of Kant’s ethics.<sup>154</sup> This means that happiness, as Kant conceives it, is abolished from morality.<sup>155</sup> Adorno too believes that Kant dismisses happiness from morality, though Adorno’s concept of happiness is more influenced by the Freudian language of the id drives. However, Adorno’s view is not always clear and one could say his own relation to happiness is ambivalent.

Nevertheless, to prohibit natural impulses and external nature from morality is, for Adorno, a serious flaw in Kant’s moral philosophy. Kantian freedom means disregarding

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>154</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 256.

<sup>155</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. T. K. Albott, (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 35. “a rational being’s consciousness of the pleasantness of life uninterruptedly accompanying his whole existence is happiness . . .” Perhaps Adorno overstates this; for Kant one must be worthy to be happy.

anything imposed upon from the outside or inside and giving myself over only to the universal and rational law I give myself. This idea of freedom as the suppression of internal nature, Adorno argues, “contains the potential for an extraordinarily damaging dialectic” because “the gratification of the instincts and, in general, happiness of every kind falls victim to a kind of taboo and is banished from philosophy.”<sup>156</sup> Kantian freedom is, to Adorno’s dismay, separated from the material, from nature, transforming freedom into unfreedom as nature becomes heteronomous in its denial being forced upon us and we are unable to “recover what we have renounced.”<sup>157</sup>

To confine morality to acting independently of internal and external nature in accord with the laws of reason is the total domination of nature, which for Kant is freedom, elevated to an absolute that then precludes the possible solution of “reflection or freedom as nature becoming conscious of itself.”<sup>158</sup> Adorno declares that “[t]his explains why the concept of self-reflection has no place in [Kant’s] thought and why in all theories of this kind the concept of self-reflection is avoided like the plague.”<sup>159</sup> Self-reflection is required for Adorno for the subject to be able to break free from the subject and subjectivity, from idealism. Thought must be able to think against itself to resist identity-thinking and the temptation to absorb objectivity into a subjective system. Lacking the concept of mediation where opposites are in reciprocal relation to one another, Kant is unable to recognize the dialectical quality of “spirit and nature,” thus transforming the

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<sup>156</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 119.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

domination of nature into an absolute and the expression of morality itself and leaving intact the “dualism of spirit and nature.”<sup>160</sup>

### **Virtue Theory**

Though Adorno criticizes Kant’s moral theory almost to the point of dismissal, he simultaneously remains greatly influenced by it. Even though Kant’s moral theory is highly problematic, for Adorno it remains the reference point for any thought about morality and is the only moral theory he engages with in a comprehensive fashion. Nevertheless, Adorno does, at times, glance at other moral theories, though never granting them the significance of Kant’s. For the purposes of this project, another moral theory that Adorno addresses, in this manner, is virtue theory.

Concisely, in the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition, virtue ethics is the theory that moral behavior is mediated by habits of character developed by agents through practice. Adorno’s assessment of virtue theory is brief and largely dismissive. Given his general interest in psychology and his conviction that mediation is essential to all thought, it is surprising perhaps that he so easily disregards the mediation of virtue. Nevertheless, this rebuff is consistent on other grounds. For Adorno, virtue ethics and the attendant concept of “character” refer to our nature, “the way you are, the way you are made,” therefore the inherent fault of virtue theory is its near total neglect of the relation of the universal and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 105.

Ultimately, Kant’s ethics is at its best for Adorno when its non-instrumental basis is emphasized, but it must be aware, because of its metaphysical structure and formality, that it is susceptible to misinterpretation, e.g. scientism, Nazism.

the particular, the relation between society and the individual.<sup>161</sup> This reduces morality to:

the idea that if I live in accordance [. . .] with my own nature [. . .], then this will be enough to bring about the good life. And this is nothing but pure illusion and ideology. An ideology, moreover, that goes hand in hand with a second ideology, namely the illusion that culture and the adaptation of the individual to culture brings about refinement and self-cultivation of the individual, whereas culture stands opposed to moral philosophy and is actually open to criticism from that quarter.<sup>162</sup>

Virtue ethics runs the risk of promoting the attainment of virtues that actually are vices. Becoming virtuous presupposes a virtuous society within which to witness the virtues in action in order to imitate them. In a society such as our present one, attaining the qualities that are presented as virtues (e.g. greed, individualism, indifference to suffering) only reinforces the wrong society and wrong life itself.

Furthermore, virtue ethics shares an inadequacy with Kantian morality. Not only does a virtue ethic overlook society and social mediation of concepts, but the very nature of contemporary society obviates the possibility of virtue ethics, rendering it obsolete:

[M]oral philosophy or virtue are only possible in a circumscribed universe, in contrast to the immeasurably expanding universe of today which is incommensurate with our experience. This is because it is only where our universe is limited that something like Kant's celebrated freedom can survive. In the immeasurably expanded world of experience and the infinitely numerous ramifications of the processes of socialization that this world of experience imposes on us, the possibility of freedom has sunk to such a minimal level that we can or must ask ourselves very seriously whether any scope is left for our moral categories.<sup>163</sup>

Life in contemporary society, and thus human action, is too complex and too open-ended to be approached and understood with the simplicity of virtue ethics (or the "Categorical

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

Imperative”). The possibility of acquiring the virtues, for example, of justice, temperance, and generosity, is called into question when society is unjust, when individuals are self-indulgent and avaricious as demanded by prevailing material conditions.

### *Conclusion*

True to his dialectical method, Adorno remains of two minds in his relationship with any particular moral philosophy. He both affirms and denounces parts of both Kant’s moral theory and virtue theory. To the end, Kant is the most important figure for Adorno, and it is his assessment of his moral theory that is most crucial for understanding Adorno’s own ethical thought.

The problem of freedom for Kant is also the principal ethical problem for Adorno. Unlike Kant, Adorno does not confront the contradiction of freedom as a problem to be solved, but, looked at dialectically, as an expression of truth; the antinomies and contradictions of freedom expressed by Kant are grounded in social and material conditions. Thus, Adorno cannot ignore empirical freedom as does Kant. Morality must not lock itself inside subjectivity, but attend to objective conditions. Consequently, Kant’s understanding of reason as a dominating and law-giving power must be recast to dialectically reflect on subject and object to reveal their truth—their social mediation.

As reason is the core of the subject for Kant, and freedom is tied to reason, freedom turns out to be the domination of nature. For Adorno, this view of a pure morality devoid of the empirical and independent of inner and outer nature in effect means less freedom for the individual as the moral agent must exclude anything impure, notably inner nature

in its impulses and their gratification. Instead, Adorno proposes the solution of self-reflection that leads to “freedom as nature becoming conscious of itself.” The compatibility of this concept and Aquinas’ moral theory will be taken up in the chapter on Aquinas.

Unfortunately, Adorno never extensively addresses virtue theory. The thrust of Adorno’s critique of virtue theory (and one to be taken seriously) is its blindness to the social and social mediation to the extent that a virtuous society is presupposed. Virtue theory thus either absorbs the conventions of wrong society or is anachronistically unable to be lived out in contemporary social conditions. Responses to these critiques will be explored in the later chapters on Aquinas.

Adorno’s assessment of moral philosophy is a bleak one in the end. There appear to be no alternatives to escape the problems he diagnoses in moral philosophy, particularly the rational morality of Kant. As he proclaims to his students in his lectures on the problems of moral philosophy:

To act in accordance with reason would be abstract self-preservation freed from the self, and it would degenerate into the evil that is the way of the world in which the stronger emerges as the victor. For this reason, then, there is no good life in the bad one, for a formal ethics cannot underwrite it . . . <sup>164</sup>

Of paramount importance then is “how it [moral philosophy] should react to this dilemma.”<sup>165</sup> Perhaps true to dialectics, he does entertain some possible prescriptions for right life, some reactions to the dilemma, which will be explored in Chapter 3.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 166.

### Chapter 3: Adorno's Ethical Theory

Though Adorno proclaims the impossibility of ethical living and the inadequacies of moral thought, he does propose his own ethical theory, albeit a negative one. Although Adorno cannot make positive moral claims nor offer ethical norms, he does dialectically reflect on what it would mean to live rightly. In examining Adorno's thought on theory and practice, impulse, thinking as practice, and aesthetic experience, a tangible yet negative ethics emerges, one which, for practical purposes, can be described as positive.

#### Theory and Practice

The first aspect of Adorno's positive ethical thought that must be made clear is that he makes a strong distinction between theory and practice. This distinction between theory and practice has a long history, but with Marx the distinction was at the least blurred and at most completely abolished as in, arguably, the Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach. Adorno, as he claims in the first line of *Negative Dialectics*, believes that this is a time for philosophy to critique itself, as the possibility of its realization was missed.<sup>166</sup> Though Adorno does make some positive moral claims and suggestions,<sup>167</sup> he is largely committed to moral theory critique over any practice.

In the final analysis, objective social conditions are the primary influence on Adorno's moral thought. This is born out in two ways. Right living is everywhere blocked because of the unknowable character of what a right action is or would be under contemporary social conditions. And even if we could untangle the moral antinomies in thought, the

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<sup>166</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 3.

<sup>167</sup> Even these are mostly ways or modes of thinking.

objective social conditions remain and block right action. Therefore, Adorno concludes, as has been shown, morality can no longer prescribe actions under these objective circumstances of heteronomous second nature, nor can it prescribe moral rules and norms. Consequently, Adorno is left to regard moral philosophy as primarily a theoretical science.<sup>168</sup> Indeed, for Adorno, there remains only one way in which to approach moral philosophy:

On the question of whether moral philosophy is possible today, the only thing I would be able to say is that essentially it would consist in the attempt to make conscious the critique of moral philosophy, the critique of its options and an awareness of its antinomies.<sup>169</sup>

Adorno believes that the tendency of many to privilege practice over theory is dangerous. The unremitting calls for action from so many (particularly the youth of the 1960s) short circuit thinking and thus often lead to the complete denigration of thinking in favor of action. But, giving up thinking and theory would and has more often than not led to practices that, originally performed in the name of freedom and autonomy, actually do violence to them. One need only to think of Leninism, Stalinism, and Fascism as examples of practice that promised liberation and simultaneously engaged in the “shackling of theory” that ultimately precludes the critique of practices that create and perpetuate misery, suffering, and death.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> For example, Adorno declares: “Moral philosophy in this sense means making a sustained effort—without anxieties or reservations—to achieve a true, conscious understanding of the categories of morality and of the questions that relate to the good life and practice in that higher sense, instead of continuing to imagine that this entire complex of issues must be excluded from the realm of theory on the grounds that it is practical.” Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 5.

<sup>169</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 167.

<sup>170</sup> Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, 47-49.

Adorno goes so far as to admonish intellectuals to eschew “[a]ll collaboration, all the human worth of social mixing and participation” because it “merely masks a tacit acceptance of inhumanity.” To engage with others is to affirm that all is right with the world; it is to assume objects and persons are not marred by the contemporary unjust and violent social condition. Consequently, intellectuals who want to show “some measure of solidarity” with suffering humanity ought to share their sufferings by opting for “inviolable isolation.” Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 26.

Yet, Adorno must approach the two poles of theory and practice dialectically. Therefore, practice cannot be completely discarded as too threatening to freedom and thought. Practice must be thought through, and thought through dialectically. Adorno abandons those who interpret the Eleventh Thesis, and Marx in general, as dispensing with thinking and proceeding to the more important work of political practice (Adorno surmises that Marx probably thought so as well).<sup>171</sup>

The contradiction that practice is desired, but blocked, and in need of thought, that in turn is blocked by objective conditions, for Adorno, describes the state of contemporary morality. However, the contradiction is grounded in “the objective antagonism, not from inconsistent thought,”<sup>172</sup> thus supporting the privileging of theory over practice. The problem of whether to execute or acquit the perpetrators of Auschwitz-the choice between “a just atonement [. . .] infested with the principle of brute force” and “barefaced injustice”-is emblematic of the “moral dialectics” of our day.<sup>173</sup> “Nothing but resistance to that,” Adorno declares, “is humanity.”<sup>174</sup>

Contradictions such as these reveal that identity thinking and its emphasis on logical consistency cannot determine morality. The very idea of equality, the pinnacle of moral philosophy, is tied up with the ruling exchange principle, with identitarian thought. This moral philosophy has failed, most strikingly in the genocides and destructive events of the recent past. However, Adorno does not promote the negation of equality, which one would think would be his next move. Instead, Adorno argues that in this critique of “the barter principle as the identifying principle of thought, we want to realize the ideal of free

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>172</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 286.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 286.

and just barter. [. . .] Its realization would transcend barter.”<sup>175</sup> The critique of morality makes salient the contradictions and submits them to dialectical reflection, and thus this critique “comes to be moral.”<sup>176</sup> To put it more succinctly, moral philosophy is the critique of moral philosophy, as described in Chapter 2. However, Adorno also appears to believe that we can go beyond simply the critique of moral philosophy.

### Impulse

Adorno does not wish to reject moral philosophy and the moral principle of equality, but to supplement morality through impulse, thus extending morality beyond critique. Though Adorno claims moral philosophy is a theoretical science, paradoxically, he also declares that moral principles ought not be thought, but tied to human impulses. Indeed, Adorno introduces impulse as a necessary supplement to the theoretical, as a corrective to the violent tendencies of modern moral thought. Adorno’s analysis of moral impulse<sup>177</sup> is thus a bridge between theory and practice.

Moral principles such as:

no man should be tortured; there should not be concentration camps [. . .] are true as an impulse, as a reaction to the news that torture is going on somewhere. They must not be rationalized; as an abstract principle they would fall into the bad infinities of derivation and validity. We criticize morality by criticizing the extension of the logic of consistency to the conduct of men; this is where the stringent logic of consistency becomes an organ of unfreedom. The impulse—naked physical fear, and the sense of solidarity with what Brecht called “tormentable bodies”—is imminent in moral conduct and would be denied in attempts at ruthless rationalization. What is most urgent would become contemplative again, mocking its own urgency.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>177</sup> Adorno also refers to this impulse as the “additional factor” or “the addendum” [*das Hinzutretende*].

<sup>178</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 285-286.

Theory alone (and thus much of the history of moral philosophy, exemplified in Kant) results in abstraction and formalism absent of material content, missing and covering over the objective, resulting in contemplation and inaction in the face of suffering. Ultimately, this gets expressed in various universal prescriptions of conduct in various moral philosophies, and reinforced by identity-thinking and the principle of exchange. With materialist and Freudian allegiances, Adorno believes that a material element must be introduced into morality as a supplement to the exclusively universal and formal proclamations of moral philosophy and its principle of equality.

Adorno thus introduces somatic impulse, the addendum, to fulfill this role, as that which makes us recoil in the face of or at the mention of evil acts and as an impetus to action.

True practice, the totality of acts that would satisfy the idea of freedom, does indeed require full theoretical consciousness. [. . .] But practice also needs something else, something physical which consciousness does not exhaust, something conveyed to reason and qualitatively different from it.<sup>179</sup>

For Kant freedom is bound up with rational autonomy *and* the unfreedom of inclination and anything bodily. True freedom would mean, contra Kant, to take account of material, physical impulses and inclinations. Nature, the given of impulse, would be brought into to a dialectic with reason. This dialectic will prevent either impulse or reason from developing pathologies that undermine freedom and lead to violence and the domination of inner and outer nature and other humans.

The moral impulse, the addendum, is an especially difficult concept to grasp as is how exactly it can enter into dialectic relation to reason and how it augments rational morality.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 229.

J.M Bernstein's *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* can help elucidate and develop the addendum thesis.

As stated above, for Adorno, the chief function of the moral impulse is to generate solidarity and impel requisite action through bodily feeling in the face of the individualism of heteronomous second nature. Contra rationalized morality, the impulse is a bodily feeling that generates physical solidarity with the physical suffering of others, something rational morality has failed to do. However, Adorno does not want to introduce a duality of reason and feeling. Instead, he proposes that even though impulses are material and distinct from thought, they are at the same time “intramental and somatic in one” and “the rudiment of a phase in which the dualism of extramental and intramental was not thoroughly consolidated yet, neither volitively bridgeable nor an ontological ultimate.”<sup>180</sup> Moral agents, unlike Kant's “rational beings,” cannot separate themselves from their bodily nature, nor should they. To do so severs the agents from the ground of morality—physical suffering and the impulses to solidarity with the suffering of individuals that impel agents to act morally. Consequently, morality is a call “to try to live so that one may believe himself to have been a good animal.”<sup>181</sup>

Bernstein throws much light on this by arguing that the addendum has two modes: “as an emblem of anthropomorphic nature that is conceived as both a necessary supplement to the idea of pure will and as a figure reconciling mind and nature.”<sup>182</sup> The addendum then fulfills part of the requirements of the complex concept Bernstein argues for, as explained in Chapter 1. Bernstein conjectures that this could be a hypothesis about how

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 299

<sup>182</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 254.

humans have “emerged from a state in which ‘voluntary’ actions were just ‘responses’ to external stimuli and bodily drives” where there was little to no distinction between thought and bodily feeling.<sup>183</sup> This is one way one could read the addendum, but this would be to dissolve the philosophical problem of the duality of mind and body. As Bernstein explains, this is something Adorno does routinely, but also at the same time withdraws the “solution” through dissolving, showing it to be “more like a memory or anticipation (hope),” therefore rendering the dissolving of the problem difficult.<sup>184</sup> This keeps the idea of the addendum dialectical in that it “refers back to a point when the duality between mind and body had yet to get a grip, [ . . . ] while simultaneously acknowledging that we do not inhabit that point.”<sup>185</sup> This is why, as Bernstein explains, the moral impulse is an addendum, something added on:

[W]ithout some notion like this the will in relation to consciousness would be unintelligible, but that for now the connection between body and consciousness [is] so eviscerated, actually and conceptually, that the connection [can] only be thought of as an addendum.<sup>186</sup>

In this way, the addendum is to “offer and withdraw relief from the dualism at the same time.”<sup>187</sup> Accordingly, Adorno can describe the addendum only as “a flash of light between the poles of something long past, something grown all but unrecognizable, and that which some day might come to be.”<sup>188</sup>

Following up on Bernstein’s contention that the addendum is an emblem of anthropomorphic nature, we can see that the bodily, animal nature of humans plays an

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>184</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 256 fn21.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 386.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>188</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 229.

important role in understanding the addendum. That humans are animals, that they have bodily impulses then must be accounted for in any morality. Yet, we must be careful not to fall into a reductionism into a pure nature that awaits our discovery. Humans also are not nature by virtue of their self-consciousness, though it is itself bound to their nature. Against the background of Kantian metaphysics and morality, Adorno thinks this through dialectically and expresses it in terms of a:

projecting element, this little piece of our nature that is not nature, is in actuality identical with consciousness of self. It thus stands in contrast to delusion [*Verblendung*], which is the category that designates the state of being utterly in thrall to nature. The truth is that we are no longer simply a piece of nature from the moment we recognize that we are a piece of nature.<sup>189</sup>

Recall that Adorno claims that awareness of ourselves of nature transcends nature. This moves us beyond the domination of nature that has been so disastrous for modernity, for if we recognize external nature only as nature then we allow instrumental reason to merely render that nature as objects for control and manipulation. Moral philosophy's failure, most evident for Adorno in the Holocaust, must be subjected to relentless critique, a critique that "moves in the direction of what is unlike the mind, in the direction of that which eludes the rule of the mind and yet manifests that rule as absolute evil."<sup>190</sup> That is, the critique is to be grounded in "[t]he somatic, unmeaningful stratum of life [. . .] the stage of suffering, of the suffering which in the camps, without any consolation, burned every soothing feature out of the mind, and out of culture, the mind's objectification."<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 103.

<sup>190</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

Thus, the addendum is an emblem of anthropomorphic nature and a figure of reconciliation between mind and nature, but as a strictly moral concept it is, as Bernstein states, “our practical *abhorrence*, *Abscheu*, at physical agony.”<sup>192</sup> Bernstein reasons:

What we find abhorrent is the suffering occasioned by the lapse of the body being a vehicle for individuality; but that lapse is the point at which the body as the constitutive medium of individuality becomes moral.

Impulse is to rectify the individuality, grounded in the bodily, which is covered over through the identity-thinking of purely rational morality. In this way, the addendum through physical abhorrence is the principle that sets reason and natural, bodily impulses in dialectical relation. Bernstein concludes: “This is an addendum in both directions: a somatic addition to conscious understanding.”<sup>193</sup>

Any moral insight or act is to be informed by this dialectic. Bernstein describes the moral import this way:

[T]he addendum as connecting physical response with rational action becomes a moral addendum [. . .] belonging to neither to the system of bodily reactions nor the self-moving terrain of autonomous reason, but a lightning flash connecting the two. In connecting the two, morality becomes material.<sup>194</sup>

This becomes a “reorientation, a mode or way of proceeding and thinking that will govern ‘all our reactions.’”<sup>195</sup> So, this is the moral stance one is called to think and to live. Adorno expresses this in what he terms “a new categorical imperative” for “unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.”<sup>196</sup> That is, through both critical reflective thinking and attunement to our bodily impulses that recoil at our own suffering and the suffering of

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<sup>192</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 386.

<sup>193</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, 386.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

<sup>196</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

others, we are to think and act in a way that prevents the physical, bodily suffering of others. However, we must also think of the new categorical imperative in terms of the transformation of objective social conditions, which requires more than an individual “reorientation,” something Bernstein tends not to consider.<sup>197</sup>

Moreover, for Adorno, this awareness of ourselves as nature and of bodily impulse, an attunement to the somatic and suffering, is an attempt at a remedy, perhaps at redemption, for the guilt we incur through identity-thinking that subsumes particulars under general concepts and that negates individuality. This guilt (*Schuld*) is a non-conceptual intuitive feeling, yet a metaphysical reality, of being responsible without recourse to be actually responsible, of “necessary error and futile correction.”<sup>198</sup> The guilt carries over into self-preservation as this “bourgeois subjectivity, without which there could have been no Auschwitz,” is also the source of one’s continued survival.<sup>199</sup> This is why we must continue to philosophize and engage in thinking that is not self-referential, but is self-reflective, that realizes the primacy of the object, takes account of the somatic, and can think against thought<sup>200</sup>: to keep vigilant watch over thought that it not lapse back into identity thinking and its catastrophic consequences. At stake is whether a natural compassion through physical impulse that has been lost through the dominance of instrumental reason of modern society and the detachment and coldness it creates can be recaptured. Adorno hopes that through attunement to ourselves as nature

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<sup>197</sup> This will be taken up further in the next section on theory and practice.

<sup>198</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Metacritique of Epistemology,” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 131.

<sup>199</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 363.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

we can recover what has been lost in Enlightenment, “what we used to feel before the dog catcher’s van.”<sup>201</sup>

However, it must be emphasized that impulse, or the “addendum,” is not teleological and cannot be fashioned into a positive moral philosophy (a view that later will be contrasted with Aquinas). It is an impulse, but not an impulse toward a determinate end outside of itself, but is immanent in generating the “negative” goal of relieving suffering, a sort of “negative *eudaemonism*.” In that this impulse is both somatic and mental, we actually experience freedom in the impulsive act. This is what Adorno is pointing to when he speaks of transcendence. His ethics is not rooted in a non-transcendent viewpoint that simply denies transcendence and looks to cultural conventions or death (Heidegger), but is a negation of non-transcendence. For Adorno, the path to freedom, the correlative of transcendence, is found in impulse where the split between thought and action is overcome:

The sense of being divided, of being between inner and outer, is overcome as in a flash. Thus we believe that as long as we obey our impulses we shall find ourselves once again in the realm of objects from which we had withdrawn by an absolute necessity, albeit perhaps only in appearance. Thus the phantasm of freedom may be said to be something like a reconciliation of spirit, the union of reason and nature as it survives in this impulse.<sup>202</sup>

As previously stated, Adorno does not appear to want to abolish rational morality completely. Rational morality expresses the legitimate claims of the general interest of society, yet tends to promote the general interest at the expense of, and often with

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 365.

Whether for Adorno this is a regulative ideal or a description of an ideal remains an open question. Regardless, what Adorno seems to hope for is a recapturing of the influence of bodily impulse to solidarity such as children experience in the presence of suffering animals, a feeling lost along the way to a more “rational” approach to life where stray animals pose a threat to health, comfort, convenience, and well-being.

<sup>202</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 237.

complete disregard for, the individual. For Adorno, a more adequate moral philosophy is one that continually expresses this antinomy of individual interests and the general interest, and does not attempt any reconciliation of them.<sup>203</sup> The introduction of bodily impulse, an impulse to solidarity with suffering others, in dialectical relation with the rational critique of morality is the attempt to establish a framework for a more satisfactory moral philosophy, a truly rational moral philosophy.

### **Thinking and Reflection as Practice**

Even though contemporary social conditions do not allow for the living of a moral life and the living out of solidarity appears impossible, Adorno, within the framework established above, provides several practical negative ethical prescriptions toward living not right life, but a less wrong life.

The ones he emphasizes most center on thinking and reflection. One such negative prescription is resistance:

The only thing that can perhaps be said is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds. [ . . . ] So what I have in mind is the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through, and thus the ability to focus upon the power of resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us to a vastly greater degree.<sup>204</sup>

This resistance primarily takes the form of consciousness raising, to become explicitly aware of the antinomies of morality and society.<sup>205</sup> We must engage in non-identity thinking. Thinking in this way itself becomes a mode of resistance and thus, a negative

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<sup>203</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 144.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 167-168.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

autonomy.<sup>206</sup> Adorno goes so far as to declare that resisting demands by others to overcome the antinomies, to resolve them is “an instance of a right action in a wrong world.”<sup>207</sup> In the name of thought, we are to resist the ever present impatient demand that we “do” something to enact change, even in the face of injustice:

The situation may well demand instead that we resist the call of practicality with all our might in order ruthlessly to follow through an idea and its logical implications so as to see where it may lead. I would even say that this ruthlessness, the power of resistance that is inherent in the idea itself and that prevents it from letting itself be directly manipulated for any instrumental purposes whatsoever, this theoretical ruthlessness contains – if you will allow me this paradox – a practical element within itself.<sup>208</sup>

One reason Adorno says this is due to his belief that the possibility of right life is blocked. Yet, the call to think an idea through is not only a way to resist wrong practice, but is itself also practice. Thinking is a practice, one that is too often ignored, according to Adorno. The current impatient tendency to leap into action (especially evident among the youth of the last years of Adorno’s life) is dangerous in its propensity for identity-thinking and is susceptible to being commandeered for instrumental purposes detached from emancipatory purposes.

Ideas and reflection perhaps are the last places free from the grasp of capitalist appropriation; they provide a refuge from the dominating objectivity of society. To engage in thought, to patiently reflect, for no other reason than to think, is the greatest act

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<sup>206</sup> In various places, Adorno introduces the concept of *Mündigkeit*, which is akin to Kant’s notion of the maturity required for enlightenment. *Mündigkeit* encompasses maturity, self-reflection, and autonomy. Adorno describes one who possesses *Mündigkeit* as one “who speaks for himself, because he has thought for himself and does not merely repeat what others said. . . That proves itself as the strength for the resistance against preconceived opinions and thereby also against institutions and everything else that justify themselves by their mere existence. Such resistance, an ability to distinguish between what you know and the merely conventional or what is forced upon you by authorities, is one with critique, the term derived from the greek word ‘krino’, which means deciding.” (My Translation) Theodor W. Adorno, “Kritik,” *Zeit*, June 27, 1969, <http://www.zeit.de/1969/26/kritik>.

<sup>207</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 175.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

of resistance to the world that demands we instrumentally justify every act, even every thought.

In the realization and thoughtful reflection on the unknowable character of morality and right life and the reality of social and epistemological antinomies, Adorno is promoting modesty as a remedy to the identity-thinking and over-confident contemporary Western scientific and capitalist culture.<sup>209</sup> The way we live must reflect what we know. Modesty is the recognition that we do not know the good or right life, therefore, we cannot make positive claims about them and attempt to live them. What we can do is recognize our lack of knowledge and our impotence and live them out in a negative way. We do not “insist on our own conscience” or assert ourselves, for this not only makes claims we are incapable of making, but also exposes that what we claim to be morality “just camouflages the principle of self-preservation.”<sup>210</sup>

Of course this predicament is created by and imposed on us by the objective totality of social conditions of late capitalism and its mediation of every individual’s thoughts and actions. This is why the new categorical imperative Adorno prescribes addresses both thought and action: “to arrange their [humanity’s] thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.”<sup>211</sup> This imperative discloses that Adorno believes that morality cannot be reduced to physical repulsion to suffering (though it must be a part of it), for this would be completely inadequate for the prevention of an evil such as genocide. Therefore, in light of this new categorical imperative, ethics must also address the unjust and wrong material conditions of society.

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 169-170.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>211</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365.

This challenge is something Lambert Zuidervaart takes up in *Social Philosophy After Adorno*. Zuidervaart is correct to claim:

If we are to take seriously Adorno's new categorical imperative – if, indeed, we understand the moral dilemmas to which he points – then we should recover from Adornian neglect those moral sources and political agencies which would enable people to resist societal evil.<sup>212</sup>

Therefore, as Zuidervaart correctly argues, Adorno's ethics must also, but largely does not, point beyond the individual and somehow determine some universal ethical principles that address collectivity and social institutions that could thus contribute to the transformation of the unjust and unfree social conditions of late capitalism.<sup>213</sup> Adorno's ethics then calls for more than individual resistance and the negative critique of society and morality. It demands, according to Zuidervaart, a "politics of global transformation."<sup>214</sup> However, as Zuidervaart rightly emphasizes, Adorno's ethical philosophy is inadequate to this task. Adorno's principal prescription, albeit a negative one, is the abhorrence of bodily pain and suffering. Zuidervaart finds this inadequate for two reasons:

other culturally informed and ethically inflected feelings arise in the face of unspeakable suffering and, second, because the arrangements needed to prevent a repetition of Auschwitz go far beyond anything one individual or group or country can achieve.<sup>215</sup>

Though, as Zuidervaart notes, and the previous pages have mentioned, Adorno does say some positive things about the universal and principles of solidarity and justice.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Zuidervaart, Lambert. *Social Philosophy After Adorno*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 180.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 178-180.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 179. For example, Zuidervaart says "psychopaths and sociopaths may seldom feel it [abhorrence]" and "his justification does not say why this feeling should have precedence over other feelings that also arise when people confront extreme suffering, such as anger, hatred, fear, despair, or compassion." (p.69).

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 178.

However, his own philosophy cannot justify these statements and cannot nor does provide any content for or significant theory of them. This is true also for the new categorical imperative.

As for the new categorical imperative, the formulated pinnacle of Adorno's moral philosophy, one could say that Adorno should not have said it—he cannot philosophically support it. For it to be realized, he must provide a more adequate theory of the universal, and of principles of justice and solidarity and the like that he does not provide. Yet, Adorno had to say it. To not say it, even if he cannot philosophically support or justify it, would be an omission of the recognition and repulsion we experience in the face of the bodily pain and suffering of those in the camps that is the propellant to moral action. Here we again have another example of the moral antinomies of contemporary society where neither horn can be accepted or denied. We must keep these in dialectical tension and not succumb to reducing the problem to one side or the other.

As Zuidervaart accurately and rightly argues, Adorno can neither justify nor provide the conceptual resources for societal transformation required to prevent the repetition of Auschwitz with negative dialectics (or aesthetic experience, which will be taken up later). But, perhaps Adorno wants something smaller, a *minima moralia*, a preamble of sorts to societal transformation, namely, to resist identity-thinking and attempt to grasp the non-identity of objects. In this way we need not violate the negative quality of Adorno's thought, but follow its logic to think against thought. With no viable ethics or political philosophy to turn to, this is what, according to Adorno, our times calls for and why it is not a time of action, but for thinking. Thus, he turns to a micrology that is oriented to the

traces of the non-identical and not to universal ethical principles that are too liable to cover over and violate particularity.

While I agree with Zuidervaart in principle, that a “social philosophy after Adorno requires the articulation of normative ‘universals’ that are not abstract – societal principles such as justice, resourcefulness, and solidarity,”<sup>217</sup> because Adorno cannot and does not provide them, this project focuses on the individual ethical agent as Adorno does. Thus, what is required and where a fruitful engagement with Adorno’s texts is possible, is a more robust articulation of human nature, and bodily impulses in particular, and happiness and their relation to morality, which I believe Thomas Aquinas provides and which I present in the subsequent chapters. Aquinas’ anthropology and ethical thought, I will argue, can aid in the development of Adorno’s thought and help to move his project forward. Additionally, I wish to leave intact a distinction between moral and political philosophy, one that Aquinas accepts and can be appropriately applied to Adorno.

One last way of thinking Adorno discusses that is a negative prescription toward some semblance of right life points to redemption. Reflecting on past suffering and letting it negatively determine what to avoid is one aspect of ethical thinking. The other aspect is the hope that the reflection on our damaged condition may generate some kind of redemption. This redemption does not look toward a utopian future — that is too abstract, immaterial, and subject to identity-thinking. Instead, this redemption is negative because of its impossibility and that it reveals not what is right, but what is not right with

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 180.

the world. And it looks back to the past in an attempt to grasp the history of human suffering, such as in Auschwitz:

The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised [sic] in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects—this alone is the task of thought.<sup>218</sup>

This too is a negative prescription because it is impossible, yet necessary. It is impossible because:

it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape.<sup>219</sup>

This standpoint is nevertheless necessary for any possibility of compensating for past suffering: "Even its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible."<sup>220</sup>

For Adorno, then, there is hope that the awareness of the epistemological impossibility of redemption and of right life is itself messianic. This awareness and these negative practices can reveal the disfigured world toward perhaps some sliver, albeit negatively grasped, of a better world.

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<sup>218</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

## Aesthetic Experience

Though the preceding are Adorno's ethical prescriptions, such as they are, Adorno is even more convinced that the most promising domain is that of the aesthetic. Having demonstrated through critique, the deficiencies of traditional ethics (along with its attendant epistemology and metaphysics) as possible channels to right life, Adorno turns to aesthetics for some semblance of right life.<sup>221</sup>

The issue of the relation of ethics and aesthetics in Adorno's thought is a controversial one for Adorno scholarship. There generally seem to be two approaches to this topic. The first is the one mentioned above and the one I take. The other, which Lambert Zuidervaart argues for, is that Adorno's insistence on privileging objects that resist the social totality such as authentic artworks "are not an adequate basis for transformative hope," and thus one must seek other avenues of hope for the transformation of society such as:

indications that a nonexploitative economy is historically possible, that viable spaces of organized resistance exist in contemporary society, and that collective interpretations of need provide substantial alternatives to turbocapitalist intensity.<sup>222</sup>

Zuidervaart takes issue with Adorno's objectification of hope for a transformation of society that understands this hope as "something whose basis lies in objects that have resisted the principles of identity and exchange" and "can arise because remnants in subjective experience remain open to things in their non-identity."<sup>223</sup> Now, according to Zuidervaart, artworks are not the only place where one could access the non-identical, for "the priority of the object' implies that all objects in their nonidentity with the subject

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<sup>221</sup> Whether this is a necessary outcome of his analysis or by design is debatable.

<sup>222</sup> Zuidervaart. *Social Philosophy After Adorno*, 161-164.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

have priority, not simply those objects which draw artistic attention to their non-identity.”<sup>224</sup> Zuidervaart’s objection is that Adorno “presupposes that somehow the non-identical is there, *in der Sache*, historically and societally available to be traced by means of self-negating thought” and that it “really does press toward the concept of utopia.”<sup>225</sup> These presuppositions are, for Zuidervaart, “a rather thin basis on which to hope for a fundamental transformation of society.”<sup>226</sup>

This problem in Adorno’s thought is rooted in, argues Zuidervaart, Adorno’s “totalizing of transformation” and “his failure to distinguish sufficiently between societal evil and the violation of societal principles.”<sup>227</sup> By totalizing of transformation, Zuidervaart means:

[. . .] Adorno’s tendency to pit the transformation of society’s entire architecture – society’s deep structure, if you will – against transformations within that architecture – within social institutions, cultural practices, and interpersonal relations, for example [that] results in an all-or-nothing critique that, given the power of the exchange principle, makes ‘nothing’ most likely for the foreseeable future.<sup>228</sup>

Adorno’s critique is insufficient for Zuidervaart because it will not trace “the multiple roots of change that together could generate the architectonic transformation he rightly envisions, and thus “leads to his exaggerating the object in its nonidentity as a basis for transformative hope.”<sup>229</sup>

The other root of this problem, Zuidervaart claims, is that Adorno does not distinguish between societal evil and the violation of societal principles such as “[j]ustice, truth, and

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 70-71.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

solidarity” that results in a tendency to reduce all evil, whether “violations of societal principles, and perhaps even the principles themselves,” to “societal evil that resides in the structure of capitalist society as a whole.”<sup>230</sup> Hence, Adorno does not articulate societal principles or their violation and consequently, “his object of hope becomes a displaced object – displaced into objects in their nonidentity.”<sup>231</sup> However, for Zuidervaart, “societal evil becomes so all-pervasive” that Adorno can no longer distinguish anything that is good, thus “Adorno’s social philosophy “leaves us empty-handed” with only the nonidentity of objects for any hope and “[t]his burden is more than any object or all objects can bear.”<sup>232</sup>

Zuidervaart is right to proclaim that these presuppositions are thin with respect to the transformation of society. Yet, because Adorno has demonstrated the inadequacies and failures of other epistemologies and ethics he has nowhere else to go but to nonidentity. For Adorno, on his own principles, either he turns to the priority of the object and nonidentity through aesthetics, which offers some hope, or he retreats into despair. These are the only options available to him that are consistent with his project of negative dialectics. Whether they are good or right or sufficient is another matter, though, of course, I do not think they are adequate and thus can benefit from dialogue with Thomas Aquinas.

I view Adorno’s project as pushing back against the priority of conceptual systems. Therefore, he must prioritize the object as all other ways of affirming objects have been shown to be idealist. Even Kant, whose thing-in-itself Adorno partially praises, turns

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 75.

objects into something posited by the subject. Therefore, for Adorno, the best way to respond to objects is aesthetically, to attempt to grasp the non-identical in aesthetic experience, particularly, but probably not exclusively, in works of art.<sup>233</sup>

As Zuidervaart objects, the priority of the object through aesthetics may be inadequate for the transformation of society, but given the inadequacies and identity-thinking of other epistemologies and ethics Adorno's critique has revealed, it remains for him the most fertile possibility of an adequate experience of non-identical objects.<sup>234</sup> The following will elucidate five ways art uniquely fills this role: (1) art is based on illusion, (2) the linking of id drives and aesthetic experience, (3) the non-instrumental, mediated, and autonomous character of art, (4) aesthetic experience's connection to intuition and bodily feeling, and (5) the practice of art, at least of music, is a semblance of right life.

One trait that art possesses that other objects do not is that it is illusion. This privileges art as a site of non-identity in that as illusion art does not pretend to be a source of second nature. It is not merely that artworks are illusion, as surely they obviously are. Rather, art is illusion that is aware of itself as illusion. Adorno declares in his major work *Aesthetic Theory* (1970): "The definition of art is not fully encompassed by aesthetic semblance: Art has truth as the semblance of the illusionless."<sup>235</sup> Art points to the nonidentical, its truth content, in its illusoriness. Art as illusion is outside of the objective social reality that presents itself as unchangeable and reified. Aesthetic

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<sup>233</sup> I agree with Zuidervaart that nonidentity, for Adorno, is not restricted to art, but his most theoretically comprehensive articulation of it is found in his aesthetics. See *Social Philosophy After Adorno*, 70.

<sup>234</sup> For an excellent, comprehensive, and critical treatment of the issue of the relation between Adorno's aesthetics and the possibility of social transformation see Lambert Zuidervaart's *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion*.

<sup>235</sup> Adorno, Theodor W., *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York: Continuum, 2002), 132.

experience opens up a pathway, though a negative one, toward nonidentity where the subject can glimpse the negative utopia Adorno avers.

Second is the link Adorno indicates between the id and aesthetic experience. Though largely the case, as a last resort is not the sole reason for Adorno's turn to the aesthetic in hope for insight into right life. It is also an outcome of his Freudian anthropology.

Recall that in Chapter 1 it was explained how Yvonne Sherratt believes Adorno employed the Freudian anthropology to diagnose enlightenment identity-thinking and enthronement of the ego. This means that the id and its drives are repressed, thus cutting off the subject from the objective. What Adorno argues for, as in his employment of impulse and "the addendum," is essentially what Sherratt claims: the re-introduction of the id. According to Sherratt, for Adorno, this means a turn to the aesthetic, which has been largely ignored or marginalized in modern philosophy.<sup>236</sup>

The turn to aesthetic experience is meant to ignite the id and its drives toward pleasurable experience and substantive meaning, i.e. happiness. And the re-introduction of the id therefore helps to break the subject out of its narcissism and inability to differentiate between inner and external objects. Sherratt concludes:

In the positive dialectic, the satisfaction of the id-instincts upon reality negates the ego's possibility of domination. The id-instincts provide an alternative experience of reality to that which was previously only instrumental. In so doing, they reveal dimensions to the Object distinct from those revealed by the ego's instincts. They therefore reveal that the object is not the equivalent of the ego. The ego can not (sic) therefore merely project itself onto the object as its equivalent. For example, an aesthetic engagement with works of art gives the subject a sense of them which differs from that articulated in a socio-economic explanation. The works of art can not (sic) therefore be merely reduced to an instrumental theory.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Sherratt, *Adorno's Positive Dialectic*, 213-219.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-217. Sherratt has recognized and theorized an important part of Adorno's thought, the connection of the id and aesthetic experience. However, she perhaps overstates its emancipatory potential and downplays a "negative" interpretation of this experience. Of course, this correlates with her project to construct a "positive dialectic."

It is not entirely clear that this view is positive as Sherratt claims it is. This dialectic is negative in that it negates the dominance of the ego along with the reality principle and instrumental reason. Whether or not this “positive” dialectic is possible or desirable, Sherratt is right to draw attention to the link between art and the id drives. It is exactly these physical drives that Adorno wants us to pay attention to in order to break free of bourgeois rational morality and the experience of art is a way to accomplish this.<sup>238</sup>

Thus, the privileging of the aesthetic is consistent with Adorno’s whole body of work; turning to the aesthetic is a way to truth—the aim of a philosopher, especially Adorno.

Sherratt points out that aesthetic experience and art are non-instrumental, and as such thus they are emancipatory. Adorno, however, also emphasizes the social mediation of art. The non-instrumental character of art, its uselessness, is the way in which art criticizes society, how art becomes autonomous. In *Aesthetic Theory*, Adorno declares:

By congealing into an entity unto itself – rather than obeying existing social norms and thus proving itself to be ‘socially useful’ – art criticizes society just as being there. Pure and immanently elaborated art is a tacit critique of the debasement of man by a condition that is moving towards a total-exchange society where everything is a for-other. This social deviance of art is the determinate negation of a determinate society. [. . .] If any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function.<sup>239</sup>

Philosophy helps to decode art not to use it for something such as political purposes, but in a stripping away that uncovers its truth. Philosophy points out that though art is autonomous, it is not innocent—it too is socially mediated, “primarily because it stands

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<sup>238</sup> “[A]rt [. . .] can be seen to turn into a historical spokesman for repressed nature. In the last analysis art is critical of the ego principle, the internal agency of repression. The subjective experience of an opposition to the ego is a moment of art’s objective truth.” Theodor W. Adorno, “The Autonomy of Art,” in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O’Connor, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 259.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 242-243.

opposed to society,”<sup>240</sup> but also because it is embedded in a totalized world. As any cultural form (as we saw in the jazz musician in Chapter 1, for example), art contains within its composition the antinomies and contradictions of society from which it arises and thus, is expressive of truth: it reveals its objective social mediation.

Behind the illusion of autonomy lies the totalized society. Hence, the dual essence of art—its autonomy and social mediation—expresses truth. Art is not then positive, but negative. Art does not propose action or depict a better world. Art is humble. Yet, it is in this way that art is utopian; art leads to “no-place,” to “no-where.” Its negativity is its affirmation (perhaps this is the reason for Sherratt’s “positive” dialectic), its truth content a negative pointing to truth and a “rational social order.”<sup>241</sup> However, we cannot let these ideas be turned into positive ethical prescriptions. The aesthetic too is trapped in the same antinomies and contradictions as epistemology, metaphysics and morality, yet this too expresses art’s truth:

In its relation to society art finds itself in a dilemma today. If it lets go of autonomy it sells out to the established order, whereas if it tries to stay strictly within its autonomous confines it becomes equally co-optable, living a harmless life in its appointed niche. This dilemma reflects the larger phenomenon of a social totality capable of ingesting all that comes’ its way.<sup>242</sup>

Despite this, for Adorno there is still perhaps one way out for art. For art to be non-ideological it must remain autonomous, but at the same time convey its truth. It does this through the expression of the suffering of modern humans.<sup>243</sup> Art is expressive of truth when it gives voice to the suffering imposed on humans by a totalized society:

Expression reveals works to be lacerations inflicted by society; expression is the

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 242, 244.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 251-252.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>243</sup> Adorno mentions particular works of Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, and Pablo Picasso. See Adorno, “The Autonomy of Art.”

social ferment that is added to their autonomous shape. [. . .] The socially critical dimensions of art works are those that hurt, those that bring to light (through the medium of expression and in historically determinate ways) what is wrong with present social conditions.<sup>244</sup>

This remains negative as it identifies that which is wrong in our current social conditions without pointing to anything that would instead be right. Art is not a location for political programs or identifiable utopian patterns and structures. Art is the register of the suffering of modern existence. In this way, art alleviates suffering, not in a positive way by inducing pleasure or neutralizing pain, but negatively in exposing ideology—in exposing the impossibility of bourgeois happiness in late capitalist society marked by antinomies and contradictions. Though Adorno eschews practice, art is for him a form of practice. Art and aesthetic experience are ways to practice right life, not in a direct way such as politically committed art (e.g. Brecht, Sartre), but as consciousness raising:

By articulating the otherwise ineffable contradictions of society, figuration takes on features of a praxis which is the opposite of escapism, transforming art into a mode of behavior.<sup>245</sup>

Art engages in the practice of consciousness raising aimed at truth, not always through rational discourse, but in the aesthetic experience that is linked to the instincts. Like aesthetic experience, moral truth, for Adorno, is bound up with intuition; that which is cognitive is stripped away, leaving some kind of sense that detects wrong life.

Attunement to the id, attending to the addendum, dialectically searching for the non-identical are all parallel to the experience of art. If we attend to our instincts and forgo a purely rational way of interpreting experience, as in aesthetic experience, then we move closer to morally right action. For Adorno, we simply cannot explain why some things

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<sup>244</sup> Adorno, “The Autonomy of Art,” 254.

<sup>245</sup> Adorno, “The Autonomy of Art,” 249.

are wrong, we just feel it, as we recoil from the suffering of humanity through autonomous art. For if we attempt to rationally explain exclusively with concepts why something is wrong, then we engage in identity-thinking that cannot capture the truth of phenomena. Adorno proclaims:

Anyone who, drawing on the strength of his precise reaction to a work of art, has ever subjected himself in earnest to its discipline, to its immanent formal law, the compulsion of its structure, will find that objections to the merely subjective quality of his experience vanish like a pitiful illusion: and every step that he takes, by virtue of his highly subjective innervation, towards the heart of the matter, has incomparable greater force than the comprehensive and fully backed-up analyses of such things as 'style', whose claims to scientific status are made at the expense of such experience.<sup>246</sup>

Though one can enter into Adorno's thought on art and aesthetic experience through most any art form (and Adorno discusses several), Adorno overwhelmingly focuses on music.<sup>247</sup> From the perspective of his moral theory and practice, Adorno's focus on music is justified—music is a cipher and most adequately satisfies his requirements for right life. As a cultural form, music represents society and its contradictions and antinomies and it is up to the philosopher to decipher them. Adorno assigns music the same status of all art; both its content and its autonomy express the truth of society:

No matter where music is heard today, it sketches in the clearest possible lines the contradictions and flaws which cut through present-day society; at the same time, music is separated from this same society by the deepest of all flaws produced by this society itself.<sup>248</sup>

The privileging of music over other art forms lies in its distinctive features that favor Adorno's other philosophical commitments.

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<sup>246</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 70.

<sup>247</sup> As reported by Richard Leppert, of the over 10,000 pages of Adorno's collected works, more than 4,000 concern music. Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 13.

<sup>248</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "On the Social Situation of Music," in *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard Leppert, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). 391.

The first of these is that music is non-conceptual—it is material. That music is non-conceptual means that it does not possess the tendency to identity-thinking. Music’s materiality instead points to the particular, to non-identity in its mimetic moment with nature and thus, is an aid to break through the immanent philosophy of the subject in favor of the “preponderance of the object.”

The materiality of music must also be considered dialectically with its logical content. Adorno insists that music has a logic of its own. In this respect he compares it to language, while also stressing music’s temporality and expressive quality:

Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human. The better the music, the more forcefully they say it. The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong. But what has been said cannot be detached from the music. Music creates no semiotic system.<sup>249</sup>

The logic of music is bound to the accurate succession of sounds, but unlike language what is said cannot be detached from the material of its communication: the musical sounds are the language and as they fade so does what is said.

Music’s temporality lies in its experience by both the composer and the listener who hold the past in memory, attend to the present, and anticipate the future in order to compose and experience a musical piece of successive sounds. Moreover, “art’s temporal core” is sociologically explained in that the productive forces of the past are employed in music so that music is a “recollection of transience. . .”<sup>250</sup> In this way music is not transcendent and universal, but “preserves the transient, bringing it before our eyes by changing it.”<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. “Music and Language: A Fragment.” in *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998), 1.

<sup>250</sup> Adorno, “The Autonomy of Art,” 245.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

Music is also historical. The composer is not an artist who creates through his autonomous musical talent and expertise. The musical composer, as any artist, is influenced by (though by no means absolutely determined by) external social forces, even unconsciously, and employs the methods of composition handed on by the musical tradition. Also, though music has been separated off from society under current social conditions, this position itself vis-à-vis society indicates the historical situation of music.

Adorno explains:

It is now necessary to face the hard fact that the social alienation of music [. . .] is itself a matter of social fact and socially produced. For this reason, the situation cannot be corrected within music, but only within society: through the change of society. The question regarding the possible dialectic contribution which music can make toward such change remains open . . . The question is further to what degree music—insofar as it might intervene in the social process—will be in a position to intervene as *art*.<sup>252</sup>

This suggests that we can draw a strange conclusion. If, for Adorno, every other avenue to right life—metaphysics, epistemology, morality—is unavailable, and aesthetics is left as the most promising, and music is the optimal aesthetic expression, then ultimately, though it may at first seem outlandish, the practice of music, that is, primarily the composing of music,<sup>253</sup> is the consummate ethical practice, is a way to live right life. Music is a countermeasure for the totality of bourgeois society.

For Adorno, composing music is a non-conceptual, material, historical, temporal dialectical practice between subject (composer) and object (society). The composer as philosopher deciphers music as simultaneously re-presenting and critiquing society.

Music does this best when it expresses suffering imposed on humans by society:

Music will be better, the more deeply it is able to express—in the antinomies of its

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<sup>252</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “On the Social Situation of Music,” 392-393.

<sup>253</sup> Adorno writes much about *listening* to music as well, though it does not seem to possess the same ethical potential as composing. Curiously, there is little mention of the *performance* of music.

own formal language—the exigency of the social condition and to call for change through the coded language of suffering. It is not for music to stare in helpless horror of society: it fulfills its social function more precisely when it presents social problems through its own material and according to its own formal laws—problems which music contains within itself in the innermost cells of its technique.<sup>254</sup>

Here, in laying bare the antinomies and suffering of contemporary life and society, the composing of music becomes the material and practical corollary of critical theory.

To qualify this unsettling claim, one must be mindful that Adorno made his more forceful statements about music before the Nazi takeover of Germany, and the Holocaust, and the detonation of two atomic bombs on Japan. Composing music, creating any art, nor any aesthetic experience seem capable of fulfilling the requirement of the new categorical imperative: that nothing like Auschwitz will happen again. Yet, I think I must seriously consider his thoughts on music as they relate to the ethical as they comprise a large part of his writings and Adorno continued to write much on aesthetics and music in the post-war period, including his monumental *Aesthetic Theory*. Perhaps we ought not to put all our ethical eggs in the aesthetic basket, but in reading Adorno it seems clear to me that we ought to put many, if not most, of them there, for aesthetic experience is the most efficacious way to approach the nonidentical and the particularity of sensuous materiality, and confront human suffering, and, for Adorno, that is at least one small step toward avoiding something like Auschwitz, though it seems incapable on its own to avoid such.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 393.

## *Conclusion*

Adorno clearly prefers thinking and theory over traditional moral and political activity for mostly epistemological, but also practical, reasons. Conscious awareness of the antinomies and contradictions of moral philosophy and society become the crucible of the moral life and moral philosophy as such. Any other prescriptions or suggestions flow from this awareness.

Though theory is privileged, as a materialist, Adorno must locate some material content for morality that develops morality beyond the critique of morality. To this end, Adorno looks to impulse as the impetus for morality to go beyond the rational morality of equality and universalization and instill a sense of solidarity with the suffering. As both somatic and mental, the addendum leads us to an awareness of ourselves as nature that in turn transcends nature in an attempt at a dialectical reconciliation of reason and impulse. Toward this end, attunement to the somatic frees us from the tyranny of bourgeois subjectivity to experience suffering, solidarity, and compassion, which are to be the ground for the critique of moral philosophy and for the transcendence of moral philosophy in that the divide between thought and action disappears, if only briefly, in the impulsive act. The transcendence is not teleological, but directed toward the negative aim of relieving suffering. This does not negate the general interest claim of rational morality, but is a reminder that genuine moral philosophy must express the antinomies and contradictions between the two. Dialectical reflection on the rational and on impulse will help to establish this. Toward this aim, Adorno provides other ways to exercise thinking (resistance, modesty) and experience impulse (aesthetic experience).

Thinking must be resistant to the conventions of society that perpetuate wrong society and the ideology that masks it. This thinking must resist the incessant calls for action, particularly to solve moral and social antinomies and contradictions. Instead, we are called to maturity, and thinking critically for ourselves (*Mündigkeit*), to think for the sake of thinking and not for mere instrumental purposes.

Owing to the epistemological problems moral thought encounters, the social antinomies moral action becomes entangled in, and in contrast to the epistemological and moral arrogance the West projects despite this condition, Adorno suggests modesty. In this way, Adorno is arguing for a return to philosophy (one could say in the Socratic sense)—the love and pursuit of wisdom that recognizes the limits of human knowledge and action. This way of thinking and acting is an instrument of redemption that exposes damaged life and the damaged world.

Since all other paths to right life are blocked, Adorno turns to the aesthetic. For this reason and due to its connection to impulse and the id, aesthetic experience is for Adorno the preeminent way available to us today under contemporary social conditions in which to possibly live some semblance of right life. The turn to the id and impulse is a way to remedy the repressive and violent rationalization of modern moral thought. Art and aesthetic experience is parallel to the kind of thinking Adorno advocates. Art, too, is socially mediated, yet also autonomous and as such expresses the truth of wrong society. In its uselessness, not usefulness, art becomes a critical practice aimed at the totalized society of instrumentality and production. Just as in thinking, art does this when it reveals the suffering of humans in making us conscious of the social contradictions and antinomies and impossibility of happiness. Consciousness raising about wrong life is not

then only prompted by thinking, but also by impulse and aesthetic experience. The moral is not solely an exercise in rational thinking, but some kind of intuition we have that some things are wrong, like the revulsion we have to the suffering of others, which is often expressed in art.

Problematically, but perhaps fittingly, for Adorno, music is the most suitable art form to uncover truth and attempt to live right life. Music is non-conceptual, material, historical, and temporal, thus providing fertile ground for the philosopher to decipher its social truth and can be understood to be a practice of right life in its critique of society.

The practice of moral philosophy ultimately for Adorno can be understood to be a constellation of the immanent critique of moral philosophy (particularly Kant's), non-identity thinking that reveals suffering and does not cover over the particular, resistance, modesty, a dialectical relationship between reason and impulse, a new categorical imperative, and aesthetic experience. This vision of morality, however, is not without problems and is susceptible to various criticisms. Preeminently, Adorno's thin philosophical anthropology and view of the good must be remedied. Adorno would not paint himself into the aesthetic corner if he had a more nuanced, differentiated, and comprehensive account of human nature, one that accounts for and describes how humans respond to particular objects and the ethical import of these responses. This, along with other criticisms of Adorno's thought in Chapters 1 and 2, will be articulated in the following chapter through a dialogue with the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

## **Chapter 4: Thomas Aquinas and Moving Adorno Forward**

The question to be posed to Adorno, and which Thomas Aquinas will help answer, is if the attempt to live wrong life less wrongly is all that is truly possible. The ethical predicament Adorno finds himself in is delineated by a number of philosophical problems which have been explicated in the previous chapters. It remains a problem itself that these problems appear unable to be solved. This project therefore, turns to the thought of Thomas Aquinas, not necessarily to solve these problems, but as an alternative to help move Adorno's project forward. Though much more of Aquinas' thought could be employed in this capacity, I have chosen to restrict this study to several areas of Aquinas' thought that overlap most with Adorno's ethical thought and the most salient issues raised in the previous chapters. This will include two general areas of enquiry: (1) the (pre-)ethical analysis of the subject of philosophical anthropology, which includes an ontology of the soul and body relation and the powers of the soul that pertain to knowledge of objects and inclinations toward objects, and (2) the proper ethical subjects of virtue and happiness.

### **Human Nature**

An effective way to address the problems brought to light by Adorno is to consider Aquinas' philosophical anthropology. Just as Adorno, Aquinas too takes both the intellectual and bodily nature of humans to be crucial for ethics. It is Aquinas' theory of human nature that allows him to say that ethics is both material and intellectual and also particular and universal. With an eye toward moving Adorno's project forward, the first

part of this chapter will follow Aquinas' methodological order in the *Summa Theologiae* in explicating Aquinas' view of humans as body-soul composites, their sensitive and intellectual powers, their experience and knowledge of objects, and their sensitive and intellectual appetites.

As explained in Chapter 1, Adorno's anthropology is largely Freudian as he accepts the Freudian framework of ego, id, and super-ego. For Adorno, humans have physical drives and impulses (id) and an ego determined by the reality principle. In the face of the domination of the ego and instrumental rationality, Adorno wants to reintroduce the id into a dialectical relationship with ego. Given his materialism, Adorno believes that a material element must be a part of any morality. Though Adorno can employ Freudian concepts to understand this problem, he lacks a comprehensive view of impulse that could supply content to the attunement to the id, to physical impulses, that he wants. If Adorno, as he states, wants us to be good animals, that is, beings aware of and acting on our bodily nature and impulses, then we need a more comprehensive account of these impulses: their structure, their objects, and how to act on them. Therefore, it is beneficial to turn to Aquinas, a certain kind of materialist thinker, one who insists that humans are animals and who provides the content for a more robust understanding of human animality, including impulse. Aquinas' thought can advance Adorno's insights by referring to the relation of the body and soul, enumerating the various powers of the soul, and explicating the teleological character of human nature.

### *Soul and Body*

For Aquinas, humans are a composite of body and soul. Following Aristotle, Aquinas

argues that the intellectual soul is the form of the human body. In the “Treatise on Man” in the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas sees it proper to explicate the human soul first. Though this may appear to be irrelevant to a comparison with Adorno, it is not. For Aquinas, though the distinction between the soul and the body is a real distinction, the distinction is not such that individual humans are two distinct substances—a soul and a body.<sup>255</sup> Instead, the soul is the principle of life. That is, the soul is that which accounts for the kind of life a living being lives. For humans, the soul is an intellectual principle, not an ontologically distinct substance attached to an ontologically distinct body. The soul is simply the source of life for a human.<sup>256</sup> Thus, a human is one composite substance, not two (as Plato and others declare). The soul is the substantial form of the body (matter)—what makes the human exist as a human: “the substantial form gives being simply; therefore by its coming a thing is said to be generated simply, and by its removal to be corrupted simply.”<sup>257</sup> That humans are a unity of body and soul means that both the bodily and intellectual nature of humans are essential for an understanding of what it means to be a human, and thus for the science of human action-ethics.

Aquinas is a materialist along the lines of Adorno in that he views humans essentially as living animals, but animals that live in a certain way. This means first that, as Denys Turner states, “like any animal, I am a being essentially *situated*, set within a complex of relationships with other beings that are alive, at a number of different levels.”<sup>258</sup> In that humans need other persons, other living beings, and a world both natural and social in

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<sup>255</sup> The soul and the body are related as form and matter, which are distinct but do not constitute two distinct things, but one thing. It is true that for Aquinas, the soul and the body will be separated at death, Aquinas argues that the soul separated from the body at death subsists, but is not a substance as it is no longer a complete nature.

<sup>256</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.75, A.2.

<sup>257</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.76, A.4.

<sup>258</sup> Denys Turner, *Thomas Aquinas: A Portrait*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 57.

order to live and flourish, Aquinas is in agreement with Adorno that rationality cannot be the sole ground for morality. A moral theory also must encompass our bodily nature, including its appetites and passions.<sup>259</sup>

Yet, humans are rational and as they are a unity of body and soul, any consideration of our bodily nature must include rationality, for the intellectual soul as the principle of life of a human determines the way a human is alive. Therefore, the nature of a human cannot be described in a dualistic manner as composed of bodily/animal nature and intellectual nature. Humans are animals all the way down. They live their animal life in a rational way. For Aquinas (as for Aristotle) the intellectual soul accounts for all the activities of human life:

For the soul is the primary principle of our nourishment, sensation, and local movement; and likewise our understanding. Therefore, this principle by which we primarily understand, whether it be called the intellect or the intellectual soul, is the form of the body.<sup>260</sup>

But, the intellect “excels corporeal matter in its power by the fact that it has an operation and a power in which corporeal matter has no share whatever.”<sup>261</sup> Though rational thinking and reflection is not in itself dependent on bodily existence, Aquinas does not claim that intellect is then completely detached from our animal life. Intellectual activity is dependent upon and presupposes the activity of bodily sense organs and the images they generate and it reflects on and lives out our material, animal natures and

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<sup>259</sup> Bodily appetites (particularly sensitive appetite) are explored in the subsequent section. The passions, as they are the movements of the sensitive appetite, are fertile ground for engagement with Adorno as well, but not covered in this project. See below.

<sup>260</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.76, A.1.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

inclinations.<sup>262</sup> In this way, Aquinas stresses the unity of the human being as a composite of body and soul.

### *Powers of the Soul*

For Aquinas, the soul, as substantial form of the human, also possesses a number of powers, i.e. abilities that enable humans to perform various activities: both active and passive. Aquinas identifies five classes of powers of which three are relevant to this project: the sensitive, the intellectual, and the appetitive. The powers of the soul in general are suitable to move Adorno's project forward because they are object directed. In fact, as Aquinas states, "the powers of the soul are distinguished generically by their objects."<sup>263</sup> The following will look to these three types of powers to help move Adorno's project forward epistemologically and with respect to human nature.

It follows from the corporeal nature of humans that live in and experience the material world that sensing is the beginning of knowledge. A deficient area of Adorno's thought and one that can help move his thought forward is a theory of the structure of sense experience and its role in epistemology that comprehensively and systematically explains that sensation and knowledge are object directed-perceive the particularity of objects. By explaining the various powers of the human soul, Aquinas' anthropology provides a theory that accounts for sensation and knowledge that incorporates perception of particularity and knowledge of the universal. That is, Aquinas' theory provides both the experience, perception, and knowledge of particular material objects and also moves us beyond them toward the universality that is needed for ethics.

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<sup>262</sup> Reflection on the animal inclinations is part of the natural law.

<sup>263</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.78, A.1.

The first principle we ought to be aware of regarding the powers is that each power, or faculty, and its respective act is ordered to a specific type of object and corresponds to it. Aquinas encapsulates this in the principle “whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the recipient.”<sup>264</sup> Accordingly, as material, physical things are the objects of sense powers, the powers must themselves have a material, physical composition. Hence, the sense powers act through bodily sense organs. The intellectual powers, working from the sensible things, come to know the immaterial aspects (forms) of the material things that communicate them, thus indicating the intellect’s immateriality.

Now, let us turn first to the sense (sensitive) powers. Aquinas distinguishes the five traditional senses, exterior senses, by “the diversity of [the] exterior cause,” determined by the particular materiality of the object: sight by color, sound by hearing, odor by smelling, touch, and taste.<sup>265</sup> The import of this analysis for this project is the attention Aquinas gives to the materiality of this sense act. Aquinas refers to this kind of power as the particular sense. Here the sense powers, ordered to their respective objects, are acted on by those objects physically through the sense organs, and here is where the particularity of objects is perceived. In hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching we perceive and can only perceive particular individual material things; the senses cannot perceive abstractions, universals, or essences. Aquinas states:

Now our soul possesses two cognitive powers; one is the act of a corporeal organ, which naturally knows things existing in individual matter; hence sense knows only the singular. But there is another kind of cognitive power in the soul, called the intellect; and this is not the act of any corporeal organ. Wherefore the intellect naturally knows natures which exist only in individual matter; not as they are in such individual matter, but according as they are abstracted therefrom by the

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<sup>264</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.75, A.5.

<sup>265</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.78, A.3.

considering act of the intellect; hence it follows that through the intellect we can understand these objects as universal; and this is beyond the power of sense.<sup>266</sup>

The intellect will be addressed next. Here it must be noted that Aquinas makes a very clear distinction between what is termed sense cognition and intellectual cognition. It is in the sense act that humans experience and know the particularity of material things. The particular sense and sense acts are directed towards their appropriate objects—material, sensible things. The sense act is not an isolated occurrence, but the material moment of particularity of Aquinas' epistemology. The sense act alone is not enough for knowledge of the universal, nor for the life of an animal, for it to do what it needs to do. We must go beyond mere sensation.

For Aquinas, the first move beyond sensation is located in the internal senses. The first internal sense to be considered is the common sense (also known as the central sense). The common sense performs three tasks. It is the faculty that tells us whether there is sensing taking place or not, distinguishes between sensations, and synthesizes sensations in putting them together and separating them.<sup>267</sup> The soul retains and preserves the sensible forms in the imagination.<sup>268</sup> As storing is a distinct activity from perceiving and distinguishing between sense perceptions, Aquinas designates the imagination as a distinct power. The imagination, according to Aquinas, is a sense

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<sup>266</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.12, A.4.

<sup>267</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.78, A.4: "The proper [particular] sense judges of the proper sensible by discerning it from other things which come under the same sense; for instance, by discerning white from black or green. But neither sight nor taste can discern white from sweet: because what discerns between two things must know both. Wherefore the discerning judgment must be assigned to the common sense; to which as to common term, all apprehensions of the senses must be referred: and by which, again, all the intentions of the senses are perceived; as when someone sees that he sees. For this cannot be done by the proper sense, which only knows the form of the sensible by which it is immuted, in which immutation the action of sight is completed, and from which immutation follows another in the common sense which perceives the act of vision."

<sup>268</sup> Aquinas, *ST I*, Q.78, A.4: "[I]magination is as it were a storehouse for forms received through the senses."

power, though in humans one that also has an intellectual operation. Non-human animals too have imagination. It is the power to make present (re-present) a sense object when the object is absent. In addition, individual, particular sense acts give rise to images of the particular objects. Aquinas calls these images “phantasms,” which are not universal ideas of sensible objects, but images of particular objects produced by the imagination (via the common sense) and that play a role in attaining knowledge of the universal.

As the universal is a distinct object, it requires a distinct act, and thus a distinct power. The imagination stores forms received through the senses and presents them to the intellectual powers. As identity needs the rational, the intellect, here Aquinas moves on from sensible particularity and non-identity toward the universal, but does so with sensation and particularity as the source of knowledge. This is borne out in the relation of the phantasm to the intellect. As bodily beings, the only way to attain knowledge, for Aquinas, is through phantasms:

In the present state of life in which the soul is united to a passible body, it is impossible for our intellect to understand anything actually, except by turning to the phantasm [. . .] Now we apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual.<sup>269</sup>

Not only does knowledge begin with sensation, but all of its content is derived from it. That is, universal knowledge is grounded in and emerges from our sense experience of the particularity of sensible objects. Sensation provides, and the imagination adds through the phantasm, the material for the intellect to attain knowledge of the universal:

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<sup>269</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.84, A.7.

“it cannot be said that sensible knowledge is the total and perfect cause of intellectual knowledge, but rather it is in a way the material cause.”<sup>270</sup>

Now, phantasms in themselves are not intelligible as they are particular, individual, sensible images of objects, just as the sense perceptions of them were. Therefore, they are not something that intellect and reason, whose objects are universal, can grasp as such. The intellect must then somehow render the presentation of the phantasms intelligible. Aquinas explains this by making a distinction between the “active intellect” and the “passive intellect.” The active intellect “causes the phantasms received from the senses to be actually intelligible, by a process of abstraction.”<sup>271</sup> Specifically, the active intellect leaves aside, strips away the particular, individual and therefore, the physical, material features of the phantasm to form an abstract universal concept, what Aquinas terms an “intelligible species,” which is received by the possible intellect. Objects in their particularity are laid aside and a nature emerges that is common to all instances of that species of object.

Perhaps the most crucial power for ethics that Aquinas distinguishes is the passive intellect, otherwise known as the cogitative power, or the particular reason, because it mediates between the particular and the universal. Aquinas contrast this power with the estimative power in non-human animals which apprehends “intentions which are not received through the senses.”<sup>272</sup> This power is identified with natural instinct in that it is the source in non-human animals of the ability:

to seek or to avoid certain things, not only because they are pleasing or otherwise to the senses, but also on account of other advantages and uses, or disadvantages: just as the sheep runs away when it sees a wolf, not on account of its color or

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<sup>270</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.84, A.6.

<sup>271</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.84, A.6.

<sup>272</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.78, A.4.

shape, but as a natural enemy [. . .]<sup>273</sup>

In humans, there is also this “cognitive” instinct, but it is connected to the intellect and thus called the cogitative power (or particular reason). In contrast to an animal, a human, through the cogitative power is not merely subject to natural impulse, but “compares individual intentions, just as the intellectual reason compares universal intentions.”<sup>274</sup>

The cogitative power is then a sensory power that identifies individual things as individual things and thus combines universal concepts with the individual intention to produce a particular judgment. In other words, the cogitative power employs universal concepts to individual things, but not to subsume them under the universal, but to recognize them as individual things that are instances of the universal. For example, the intellect cognizes the universal concept of human being, but the cogitative power cognizes Socrates as this particular human being and can make inferences about Socrates. In this way, the cogitative power is a sense power, but is intimately connected to intellect. This places the cogitative power at the edge of sense and intellect. Aquinas describes the cogitative power as possessing “a certain affinity and proximity to the universal reason, which, so to speak, overflows into [it].”<sup>275</sup>

The cogitative power’s (passive intellect’s) ability to make particular judgments makes it crucial for ethics. Ethics concerns actions and actions concern particular things, but as “the practical intellect directs action” and “action relates to singular [particular] things” a problem arises in that the intellect does not know particular things.<sup>276</sup> For Aquinas, an action to be performed is the conclusion of a practical syllogism where the

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.86, A.1.

universal premise is supplied by the intellect, which only knows the universal.<sup>277</sup> But, the conclusion, the action to be performed, is “a singular [particular] proposition” that “cannot be directly concluded from a universal proposition, except through the medium of a singular [particular] proposition.”<sup>278</sup> It is, for Aquinas, the cogitative power that furnishes the singular [particular] proposition to a practical syllogism. Whereas other animals function by natural instinct with regard to sense perceptions, humans act in response to the cogitative power’s “comparing, adding, and dividing”<sup>279</sup> of particular intentions (sense perceptions of the sense powers) with which it forms the particular premise of a practical syllogism. Therefore, the conclusion of the practical syllogism, that is, the action to be done, is a collaboration of the sense powers, the intellect and the cogitative power.<sup>280</sup>

Epistemologically, this is the point where the universal begins to come into view. Ethically, some kind of universality is needed and something Adorno’s thought lacks. Moreover, Aquinas’ holism emerges here in the collaborative character of the souls’ powers, both sensitive and intellectual. It is not the individual powers that act on their own apart from each other, but they act together in a coordinated and interconnected fashion. Thus, truly it is the whole person that knows and acts. This holism is also evident in Aquinas’ account of how we come to understand the universal and in what way we can know particulars.

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<sup>277</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.86, A.1.

<sup>278</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.86, A.1.

<sup>279</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.78, A.4.

<sup>280</sup> The cogitative power is a sense power, but also is called particular reason due to its comparing, dividing, adding, and inferring resembling the work of universal reason. See Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.78, A.4. In this way, the cogitative power appears to be the bridge between sense and intellect.

Though for Aquinas the intellect is immaterial and knows things in a universal way, he also emphasizes the unity of the soul and body in acquiring knowledge of the universal. The intellect does not encounter universals separate from sensible objects à la Plato, nor apply a priori universal categories to objects à la Kant. Within a union of body and soul, human knowledge of the universal must begin with material, corporeal objects. It is then necessary for the intellect, in an act of reflection, to turn to the sensible image, the phantasm, to apprehend the universal:

Whereas the proper object of the human intellect, which is united to a body, is a quiddity or nature existing in corporeal matter; and through such natures of visible things it rises to a certain knowledge of things invisible. Now it belongs to such a nature to exist in an individual, and this cannot be apart from corporeal matter: for instance, it belongs to the nature of a stone to be in an individual stone, and to the nature of a horse to be in an individual horse, and so forth. Wherefore the nature of a stone or any material thing cannot be known completely and truly, except in as much as it is known as existing in the individual. Now we apprehend the individual through the senses and the imagination. And, therefore, for the intellect to understand actually its proper object, it must of necessity turn to the phantasms in order to perceive the universal nature existing in the individual.<sup>281</sup>

As is evident from the above statement, Aquinas believes we can know particulars, but with qualifications. Because the intellect's proper object is the universal it cannot directly know an object in its materiality. However, the intellect can know the object indirectly in the act of reflection:

Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal. Hence our intellect knows directly the universal only. But indirectly, and as it were by a kind of reflection, it can know the singular, because, [ . . . ] even after abstracting the intelligible species, the intellect, in order to understand, needs to turn to the phantasms in which it understands the species, [ . . . ]. Therefore it understands the universal directly through the intelligible species, and indirectly the singular represented by the phantasm.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.84, A.7.

<sup>282</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.86, A.1.

It is the intellect that knows the universal and the senses that sense particulars. Yet, the universal is abstracted from the particular phantasm formed in the imagination, thus the intellect has an indirect knowledge of the particular. This indirect knowledge of individuals is an imperfect knowledge of the individual; what we know of the individual is that it is an instance of the universal, not as an individual. Such knowledge of the individual would entail an intellectual grasp of materiality itself, the very principle of individuation. Instead, Aquinas stakes a middle claim that we have a limited knowledge, but knowledge nonetheless, of sensible things and that this knowledge is the ground of our knowledge of the universal and vice versa: we know the particular (indirectly) in reflecting on the phantasm.

It would benefit Adorno's thought to engage this way of explaining the way in which we know the universal and the particular. Aquinas' epistemology provides us with a way in which to understand our experience and knowledge of particular individual objects and how that knowledge contributes to our knowledge of the universal. Aquinas' theory is, in the end, a more dialectical theory than Adorno's in that it describes a reciprocal and dialectical relation between sensible particular objects and the universal in which both maintain their integrity and relate to each other. Whereas for Adorno subject and object are always held in dialectical tension, the universal never is able to be viewed as legitimate knowledge relative to particulars as it always does violence to particularity in subsuming them under universal concepts. There is no need to expand conceptuality in the manner of Bernstein's simple and complex concepts. Aquinas meets Adorno's call for a priority of the object, but without sacrificing the universality Adorno's theory cannot allow, by giving an account of how universality emerges from particularity. The

universal need not be rejected; it is grounded in particularity. This is accomplished by Aquinas' theory of the soul's powers (faculty psychology). By differentiating between sense powers and intellectual powers, Aquinas' theory displays a more dynamic and dialectical understanding of our experience and knowledge of objects *and* allows us to acquire the universal concepts required for ethics.

### *Sensitive Appetite*

Another way to move Adorno's project forward is to better grasp our animal nature as expressed in Aquinas' view of the appetitive powers of the soul. As Adorno does in his way, in explicating appetite, and in particular the sensitive appetite, Aquinas situates humans within nature as animals. First, we must understand what appetite in general is for Aquinas, then look at the sensitive and intellectual appetites and their role in Aquinas' anthropology.

In addition to the power of knowing, the human soul also has powers of desire (appetite). Though it may strike us as strange, according to Aquinas, following on Aristotle, all things—animate and inanimate—have what he calls appetite. What this means is that all things have an inclination, are ordered toward what is appropriate to them, toward their appropriate ends, to their good. Things that lack knowledge (inanimate things) are inclined by nature to what is appropriate to them and this inclination is called “natural appetite.”<sup>283</sup> This is observed in nature, for example, “fire, by its form, is inclined to rise, and to generate its like”<sup>284</sup> and heavy bodies such as stones

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<sup>283</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.80, A.1.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

are inclined downward.<sup>285</sup> All things have appetites in this way because all things act in these determinate ways (e.g. fire rises and stones fall down) and not randomly. This principle is grounded in Aquinas' teleology where all things act for an end:

[A]n agent does not move except out of intention for an end. For if the agent were not determinate to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain one, which has the nature of an end.<sup>286</sup>

If things do not act for ends, it is difficult to see why or how they act at all, or could consistently achieve the same end, as natural agents do. For Aquinas, there must be a reason that things act or we cannot make sense of things acting. This indicates that nature is teleological. Therefore, Aquinas emphasizes that all things, animate and inanimate, act for an end.

Even though all things have appetites in this way, Aquinas argues that appetite is a distinct power of the soul in animals and humans, that is, in living things with sense powers. Aquinas argues that even though all things have appetites for what is appropriate to them, there is a difference between the way that which is appropriate is pursued in things that have knowledge and the way it is pursued by those things without knowledge.<sup>287</sup> By knowledge, Aquinas means both sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge so that both sensitive appetite (common to all animals) and intellectual appetite (possessed by humans only) are included. Therefore, depending on whether something is inanimate, possesses sense powers, and/or intellectual powers, determines the way in which something has an appetite for, is inclined to its good.

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<sup>285</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.83, A.1.

<sup>286</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.1, A.2.

<sup>287</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.80, A.1.

Looking at animals which are endowed with sense powers, Aquinas highlights the way in which their sense powers determine their pursuit of their good. Aquinas maintains that animals both apprehend things and also desire them. The sense powers apprehend the thing in its materiality, but as things are also “desired as suitable or good” we must distinguish a power of appetite, the sensitive appetite, in the soul that follows upon the sense-cognition of the sense powers in desiring what is appropriate to it.<sup>288</sup> This power of appetite allows animals not only to pursue their natural appetite, which does not change, but expands their appetite. That is, the sensitive appetite does not receive sensible particularity in the way the sense powers do, but instead utilizes these sensible apprehensions toward the good of the animal as a whole:

[T]he animal [sensitive] appetite follows the apprehension, and by which something is desired not as suitable to this or that power, such as sight for seeing, or sound for hearing; but simply as suitable to the animal.<sup>289</sup>

This points to the sensitive appetite as a distinct power of the soul that separates sense beings, i.e. animals, from those things that do not possess sense powers:

And this superior inclination belongs to the appetitive power of the soul, through which the animal is able to desire what it apprehends, and not only that to which it is inclined by its natural form.<sup>290</sup>

Though the sensitive appetite expands the appetite of an animal compared to inanimate objects and plants, its inclination is limited by its sensible nature to particular sensible goods. Per the previous section’s distinction between sense knowledge and intellectual knowledge, the sensitive appetite is then inclined toward a particular good, whereas, in contrast, the rational appetite (will) is inclined to the universal good. The

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<sup>288</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.80, A.1.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

difference between knowledge and desire is that “a thing is apprehended as something sensible or intelligible, whereas it is desired as suitable or good.”<sup>291</sup> The sensitive appetite is inclined to a particular object that follows on sense knowledge which is particular, not universal knowledge (as rational appetite does). In this way, the sensitive appetite is a power that draws us outside of ourselves toward an object that is apprehended by the sense powers.<sup>292</sup> Through sense powers, we cognize a particular and through sensitive appetite and the cogitative power, are inclined to that particular good or avoid it if it is not appropriate to us.

Adorno does not make these kinds of distinctions regarding desire, but simply traces desire to the id and bodily impulse. Thus, Adorno’s more straightforward account of bodily, physical impulses that are opposed to reason instead can be looked at, via Aquinas, from a multifaceted, more dialectical, account of both particularity and universality, and material (or sensitive) and intellectual principles. Accordingly, whereas Adorno ethically rejects an intellectual and rational appropriation of impulse for fear of identity, Aquinas offers both an intellectual and material account of inclination to and cognition of the material object.

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<sup>291</sup> Ibid.

<sup>292</sup> Aquinas expands his examination of the sensitive appetite in his analysis of the passions (generally what are presently termed emotions) in *ST*, I-II, QQ.22-48 as they are movements of the sensitive appetite (Q.35 A.1). For Aquinas, the passions are potentialities actualized (put in motion) by their respective objects. As movements, their terms are physical and metaphysical, but the metaphysical status of the movement as such is difficult to pin down. (This is one reason this project focuses on the less metaphysically ambiguous sensitive appetite itself). This makes the movements (passions) of the sensitive appetite appear to relate to Adorno’s addendum which he casts as metaphysically obscure, yet as the apparent basis of agency. This role could be comparable in particular to the passion of love in Aquinas’ thought. For Aquinas, the passion of love is primary as it possesses unitive power regarding all three types of human appetites (natural, sensitive, and intellectual) (Q.26 A.1) as love is the “very aptitude or proportion of the appetite to good.” (Q.25 A.2). This again shows that Aquinas’ faculty psychology, particularly with the distinction between sense and intellect, provides a better description and explanation of individual impulse.

The upshot of this kind of account is that human inclination can move toward a particular good and the universal good that ensures both the priority of the object and the universality required for ethical principles and actions. In contrast to Adorno, Aquinas' theory provides a teleology that makes the desires for and tendencies to objects intelligible in a way Adorno's thought does not. For Aquinas, the sense inclinations are understood as desires for a particular object that is good, which ultimately will reference the universal good through the intellectual appetite (taken up in the following section), thus providing a framework for ethics.

Of course, Adorno, as a materialist, objects to any teleology as the ends Aquinas claims agents aim at are non-material and hence cannot be empirically verified. However, the rejection of teleology renders Adorno's analysis inconsequential for ethical action. For Adorno, we simply have impulses that do not positively reference anything beyond themselves, therefore leaving them empty of meaning that would point beyond them and toward positive human actions for right living.

Admittedly, for Adorno, impulse does negatively index suffering. As expounded in the previous chapters, impulse and Adorno's negative dialectic negatively reveal the shortcomings, deprivations, and damaged quality of human existence under contemporary conditions. We have seen how the irrational and dominating conditions of society have inflicted a range of suffering on humans from denying them the opportunities and means to flourish as individuals to physical harm and pain up to and including death. However, a question remains as to how exactly Adorno's negative dialectic determines suffering as suffering without reference to a positive conception that

could then denote suffering as a lack or privation.<sup>293</sup> If suffering is a lack or a privation, then there must be some objective standard by which one can claim contemporary human lives fall short. Yet, Adorno rejects the possibility of knowing any such objective goal. Without a theory of human nature and without a teleology Adorno's account of suffering is unintelligible and metaphysically unjustifiable.

Aquinas' view, conversely, is more metaphysically intelligible because he can say that human suffering is a privation or lack of a good that is appropriate to human existence. Aquinas explains that evil is "a privation of form" and "a privation of order to the proper end," and has no formal existence itself.<sup>294</sup> Accordingly, to the extent that human existence falls short of its nature and its goal (happiness, which will be considered subsequently) humans are said to suffer evil. For example, if a person lacks the ability to hear, which is the proper to the ears, this lack is an evil that is suffered by the deaf person. Likewise, to not flourish as a human, i.e. achieve happiness, is a lack that humans experience as suffering. Without the metaphysical end of the good toward which all things are inclined it is difficult to understand how Adorno can designate these types of suffering as suffering, yet, as has been presented, his writings are full of claims of suffering and damaged life. The negative method Adorno employs, and is strictly dedicated to, leaves him unable to posit any positive principles or recommend any positive actions toward alleviating suffering, a negative goal, not to mention principles or actions for an adequate moral theory that could provide norms and ends by which to

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<sup>293</sup> It is true that the person in pain does not necessarily understand or experience his pain as a lack.

<sup>294</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.49, A.1.

critique current social conditions, contemporary human experience, and human actions that inflict and are shot through with suffering.

### *Intellectual Appetite*

Aquinas' reading of nature as teleological extends to all aspects of reality, including the human will. Humans possess a sensitive appetite through their bodily, animal nature, but also possess an appetitive power connected to their rational capacities, the intellectual appetite, or the will (another name is rational appetite). With sensitive appetite, cognition of an object is followed by inclination toward the object known through sense. What is inclined towards and apprehended by the intellect is the universal which is different from sense knowledge. Since powers are determined by their objects, not their subjects, Aquinas concludes: "Therefore, since what is apprehended by the intellect and what is apprehended by sense are generically different; consequently, the intellectual appetite is distinct from the sensitive."<sup>295</sup>

The intellectual appetite is the power that is drawn toward what is intellectually apprehended. It is not inclined to particular material goods, but to the universal good, to the good in general. It is an inclination to the good in general that is incompletely found in the particular goods we are inclined toward but which can never completely and perfectly contain it. Thus, the intellectual appetite accords humans the ability to transcend, to rise above, the many individual material goods we are inclined to and aim

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<sup>295</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.80, A.2.

for something more perfect, more complete: “the capacity of the will regards the universal and perfect good, its capacity is not subject to any individual good.”<sup>296</sup>

Though the will is free it is inclined by its nature to happiness. In other words, the will is inclined to happiness necessarily. This necessity is not a necessity of coercion, but a necessity of nature in that the will intrinsically is an appetite towards the good and extrinsically is inclined toward its end, its good, namely happiness.<sup>297</sup> This is shown in that the desire for happiness is common to all the acts of the will. Whatever the will does is for its innate goal of happiness. Thus, happiness is “the root and principle of all else appertaining” to the will.<sup>298</sup>

But then we must ask how the will is “free” and this is an important issue vis-à-vis Adorno’s emphasis on freedom for ethics. The nature of the will is to move toward the good and this cannot be otherwise, but under this determination there are various ways to move and we can choose freely among these. As the will is an appetitive power following upon intellect, its activity is informed by knowledge, knowledge of universal good. However, we do not in this life ever encounter the complete universal good, but only individual, finite, particular goods. The freedom of the will is located in the choice, through rational judgment, of particular goods to be pursued or not:

But man acts from judgment, because by his apprehensive power he judges that something should be avoided or sought. But because this judgment, in the case of some particular act, is not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment and retains the power of being

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<sup>296</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.82, A.2. For Aquinas, the “universal good” for humans is the objective standard by which humans measure the achievement or failure to achieve the ends set forth by nature in the rational and animal nature of humans, i.e. the flourishing of human rational and bodily capacities in accord with their natural inclinations. So, the will’s appetite for the universal good is an inclination to the general good of the person, to the realization of its ends and thus flourishing, not to the particular goods that are the means to this last end.

<sup>297</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.82, A.1. Happiness is taken up in a subsequent section.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

inclined to various things.<sup>299</sup>

It is, then, the rational intellectual nature of humans that grounds their freedom. Again

Aquinas argues:

Now the reason why it is possible not to choose, or to choose, may be gathered from a twofold power in man. For man can will and not will, act and not act; again, he can will this or that, and do this or that. The reason of this is seated in the very power of the reason. For the will can tend to whatever the reason can apprehend as good. Now the reason can apprehend as good, not only this, viz. *to will* or *to act*, but also this, viz. *not to will* or *not to act*. Again, in all particular goods, the reason can consider an aspect of some good, and the lack of some good, which has the aspect of evil: and in this respect, it can apprehend any single one of such goods as to be chosen or to be avoided. The perfect good alone, which is Happiness, cannot be apprehended by the reason as an evil, or as lacking in any way. Consequently man wills Happiness of necessity, nor can he will not to be happy, or to be unhappy. Now since choice is not of the end, but of the means, as stated above (Article 3); it is not of the perfect good, which is Happiness, but of other particular goods. Therefore man chooses not of necessity, but freely.<sup>300</sup>

Admittedly, this appears to put Aquinas squarely in the Kantian camp to which Adorno traces the domination of nature. This notion of the will and freedom and the virtue theory attendant to them and to the sensitive appetite<sup>301</sup> are, as previously discussed, too empty of and detached from empirical and social content for Adorno; freedom in the Thomistic sense does not consider the social mediation of heteronomous second nature that shapes subjects and precludes the real possibility of this kind of freedom. Instead, Adorno proposes a freedom of nature becoming conscious of itself.

Though Aquinas does provide some empirical content for freedom of the will in the choice of particular goods, his view cannot satisfy Adorno's criticisms regarding social mediation,<sup>302</sup> but it can meet the challenge of nature being conscious of itself in that the

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<sup>299</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.83, A.1.

<sup>300</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.13, A.6.

<sup>301</sup> Virtue is taken up in the next section.

<sup>302</sup> Aquinas' position that the natural law can develop possibly could satisfy this criticism, but will not be undertaken here.

person knows, is aware of, through intellect,<sup>303</sup> his natural necessity of tending to the universal good through rational appetite, and also of his freedom in choosing the particular individual goods he apprehends under the universal good. In the Thomistic view of the freedom of the will humans are aware of themselves as nature in their animality and their rationality. Humans are conscious of themselves as nature in their bodily existence, sense operations, and their material dependence on the natural world within which they live. This awareness also emerges in the account of the rational powers as both determined to the sensible, and thus dependent on them, but also able to transcend them, all the while mindful that the transcendence only emerges from the dependence on the material, sensible objects apprehended. Human freedom is thus the condition in which rational beings of body and soul pursue the universal good under the conditions within which we exist and live.

### **Virtue**

We must now turn to Aquinas' ethics proper to help move Adorno's project forward, but even more so as a counter claim to his declaration that wrong life cannot be lived rightly. Aquinas' ethics generally can be described as habitually choosing the appropriate actions toward achieving the natural ends of human nature. The habits required are called virtues (good habits), the natural ends are disclosed in the natural law, and the attainment of this is called happiness. The following will consider virtue and happiness because they are the areas that are most relevant to what has been discussed previously, though dialogue with natural law could also yield much fruit.

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<sup>303</sup> Admittedly, it is not exactly clear how this is grasped.

For Aquinas, the totality of human acting, knowing, and desiring, is not only comprised of powers, acts, and ends. Mediating between powers and acts are habits. Aquinas considers habit to be an intrinsic principle of acts in that it is “a disposition in relation to a thing’s nature, and to its operation or end, by reason of which disposition a thing is well or ill disposed thereto.”<sup>304</sup> Their role is a mediating one between powers and acts to habituate powers to act for the good consistently over time. Though there are good habits of the intellect, i.e. intellectual virtues, our concern is the moral virtues, good habits that predispose the sensitive and intellectual appetites to good acts.

For Aquinas, the conditions for the formation of a moral or intellectual habit are both the subject’s passivity or receptivity and an active principle. These conditions are found in the human act:

For the acts of the appetitive power proceed from that same power according as it is moved by the apprehensive power presenting the object: and further, the intellectual power, according as it reasons about conclusions, has, as it were, an active principle in a self-evident proposition.<sup>305</sup>

Hence, for Aquinas when these acts are multiplied, a process that differs with each individual, a habit is formed in relation to that power: the moral virtues in the appetitive powers (sensitive and intellectual), and the intellectual virtues in the intellectual power.<sup>306</sup>

This process differs with each individual as does the resulting various moral virtues and vices in individuals. Human acts are abstractly the same for all: they consist of a power, its proper act, habit, and appropriate end. Virtue individualizes and particularizes human acts relevant to the individual ethical agent. Something Adorno does not consider

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<sup>304</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.49, A.4.

<sup>305</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.51, A.2. For Aquinas, the (passive) intellect by nature grasps, and is thus a habit, first principles (self-evident propositions) such as a whole is larger than its part. See *ST*, I-II, Q.51, A.1.

<sup>306</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.51, A.2.

about virtue, but ought to, is its individualizing role in ethical acts. Acts are performed by particular agents. The particular agent is in potentiality to this act by virtue of possessing certain powers that are in potential to various acts. But if this alone were the case for all, it is difficult to see how individuals act in innumerably various ways with respect to objects. A dynamism and diversity of acts that is more commensurate with our experience is shown in the account of habit, whether virtues or vices. This means that, on the subjective side, each act will differ for each individual due to its unique habits. Objectively, acts are individualized by a particular place, time, set of circumstances, and the various objects which move the appetitive powers.

Indeed, like appetites, powers, and acts, habits are object-directed. As acts differ according to their objects, habits as dispositions to acts also differ according to their respective objects. For example, though the sensitive appetite is inclined to its proper objects necessarily, it is directed by reason to many different things, unlike natural appetite, and as such “there can be habits in them, by which they are well or ill disposed in regard to something,” to their proper objects.<sup>307</sup> Good habits are those disposed to the realization of the subject’s nature.<sup>308</sup> In the case of good moral habits, moral virtues, the proper objects are those that are proper to the nature of a human being. This is the difference between a good habit, virtue, and a bad habit, vice. For a human this means that “a good habit is one which disposes to an act suitable to the agent’s nature, while an evil habit is one which disposes to an act unsuitable to nature.”<sup>309</sup> What then are suitable acts for a human according to his or her nature? Aquinas states:

Thus, acts of virtue are suitable to human nature, since they are according to

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<sup>307</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.50, A.3.

<sup>308</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.54, A.2.

<sup>309</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.54, A.3.

reason, whereas acts of vice are discordant from human nature, since they are against reason.<sup>310</sup>

Reason, for Aquinas, is then not separated off from and opposed to desires and impulses as Adorno paints it. Instead reason, though having (political) power over sense and sensitive appetite, perfects, through virtues, bodily impulses and our desires and inclinations to attain their proper objects.<sup>311</sup> Adorno's criticism of virtue was that the social conditions are such that they are impossible. But, this sets the bar too high. Aquinas' account shows that virtues are a fundamental aspect of human nature, and thus ethics. Moreover, although social conditions can make their attainment more difficult, human nature remains what it is so that they can be attained at least to some degree.<sup>312</sup> Human appetites, both sensitive and intellectual, subject to virtue lead us to the realization of our human nature, to happiness.

### **Happiness**

With the anthropological background and virtue in place, we can now explore the last end, happiness.

As previously explained, humans have sensitive and rational appetites that incline us to our end. However, humans do not attain their end necessarily, but as possessing intellect and will can cooperate or not cooperate freely with nature in reaching our end. For Aquinas, as for Adorno, the pursuit of happiness is an ethical problem because humans often are frustrated in this pursuit and encounter many obstacles to its attainment

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that reason does not have absolute power over sense and the sensitive appetite, but exercises a political power over them where they are capable of obedience, but also of disobedience. See Aquinas *ST*, I, Q.81, A.3.

<sup>312</sup> Aquinas' ahistorical and non-developmental view of human nature could not be accepted by Adorno.

despite the natural inclination toward it. Ethics then is the study of the conditions and powers for attaining happiness, for the fulfillment of the natural tendency toward the last end, our happiness. That is, the human end is the completion of our natural human desires.

Before we explore what exactly the fulfillment of human nature means for Aquinas, it must be shown, contra Adorno, that human acts, both rational and bodily, are ordered to an end. Aquinas argues first that humans, when they act freely and knowingly, act for an end so that properly human action is therefore teleological in the sense that these acts aim for a goal. Accordingly, Aquinas identifies proper human actions as “those actions alone [ . . . ] of which man is master,” which are the “actions through his reason and will.”<sup>313</sup> Both reason and will are ordered to their own proper objects, reason to truth and the will to the universal good. The actions of the will and the intellect must be “caused by that power in accordance with the nature of its object.”<sup>314</sup> As the will’s object is happiness, the universal human good, “all human actions must be for an end.”<sup>315</sup>

Aquinas is claiming that human action is unintelligible without reference to an end. If there is no intended end for every action, then the agent “would not do one thing rather than another,” “for the first of all causes is the final cause.”<sup>316</sup> For Aquinas, if final cause, as the first cause, is removed, then all other successive causes also disappear, for there is no intelligible reason for any human act whatsoever. This is why Aquinas can declare: “Every agent, of necessity, acts for an end.”<sup>317</sup> The necessity to act for an end

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<sup>313</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.1, A.1.

<sup>314</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.1, A.2.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.2, A.1.

applies to “every agent,” both rational and non-rational; all things either by “free choice which is the power of will and reason” or by natural inclination move toward an end.<sup>318</sup>

In contrast, Adorno has an epistemological suspicion of the good or any final end for humans. As previously stated, his view is understandable given his metaphysical and epistemological assumptions, but because he rejects a fully developed theory of human nature or human action, he is unable to sustain a metaphysical critique of the teleology of human action. Aquinas’ theory, on the other hand, metaphysically takes account of what is affirmed by human experience: that human actions are purposeful, they are performed for a reason with an intended end as their primary motive. For Aquinas, if a final end is removed, then human action is unintelligible, which is the case for Adorno. Human acts, for Adorno, as we saw in the previous chapter, are simply understood to be socially, historically, and objectively determined. Any attempt to understand human acts metaphysically and non-empirically will end in theoretical and practical aporia.

Aquinas escapes this aporia with reference to a metaphysics of the last end that transcends the particularity of social and historic objectivity, thus adding another way in which to decipher human acts. Moreover, Aquinas’ teleology that claims that there is a natural teleology for individual things is better understood in light of his claim that there is one single order toward which all these ends are aimed, namely the perfection of the universe. Aquinas sees metaphysical evidence for this in the order of the universe. Looking at nature, Aquinas concludes that everything desires its (perfect) good as the last end “because the beginning of anything is always ordered to its completion, as is clearly the case in effects both of nature and of art.”<sup>319</sup> One way that Aquinas perceives this

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.1, A.6.

order is in the diversity of things in the world. The diversity of individual things is not due to the material causes, the materiality of the things, because the physical matter of a thing is nothing apart from the form it takes; it is by having form that things exist.

Therefore, for Aquinas, as God is the creator of all things and all things are inclined to the good, Aquinas argues that:

[God] brought things into being in order that His goodness might be communicated to creatures, and be represented by them; and because His goodness could not be adequately represented by one creature alone, He produced many and diverse creatures, that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another. For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.<sup>320</sup>

It is impossible that anything done not be ordered to the (complete) perfection of the agent, the last end, otherwise nature would not exhibit the order it does and nor would there be any movement by any agents, since “the last end stands in the same relation in moving the appetite, as the first mover in other [bodily] movements.”<sup>321</sup> Aquinas also asserts that this ordering to the perfection of the universe means that all individual things are subject to divine providence. Each thing in its individuality, not only generally, is subject to divine care and guidance as effects, both immaterial and material, of God’s causation:

[T]he causality of God, Who is the first agent, extends to all being, not only as to constituent principles of species; but also as to the individualizing principles; not only of things incorruptible, but also of things corruptible. Hence all things that exist in whatsoever manner are necessarily directed by God towards some end.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.47, A.1.

<sup>321</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.1, A.6.

<sup>322</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q.22, A.2.

Adorno, of course, rejects any such teleological claim that discloses the good in all things, but the burden is on him to account for the purposefulness of human action and the evident order of nature.<sup>323</sup>

Now that the necessity of the last end of humans, happiness, and its pointing toward the perfection of the universe has been established we can provide content to what happiness consists of. Aquinas' anthropology, which affirms that humans are a composite of body and soul, bears on this question. Happiness is the human good and so then must include those goods which pertain to both the body and the soul. But, the goods of the body, such as wealth, honor, fame, power and related external goods are, Aquinas argues, not ends in themselves, but either means or imperfect ends, e.g. honor which is a sign of virtue, which is a part of happiness.<sup>324</sup> And this highlights a problem of human existence in that all natures are ordered to the final end of the perfection of the universe, but also can be directed to imperfect ends, so that we do not attain the perfect end.

Now, pleasure is thought by many to be what happiness primarily consists in and, because of Adorno's commitment to Freudian anthropology, pleasure demands to be taken special note of. Though Adorno never states that pleasure is happiness, he does, as previously argued, tend to endorse a negative eudaemonism (a negative happiness) characterized by the lack of suffering. While we need not call this lack pleasure, it certainly is not pain. Adorno's notion of happiness is thus rather empty and could be

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<sup>323</sup> Nevertheless, Adorno points to Auschwitz as the evidence of the absence of order. Adorno's interest in the evil of Auschwitz highlights that he is superior to Aquinas in theorizing social evil and attempting to account for the sheer fact of evil and failure, whereas Aquinas is better on describing the positive nature of ends as goods.

<sup>324</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.2, A.1-5.

open to the interpretation of pleasure as happiness. If happiness is pleasure or some state of non-pain, then the rational element Adorno wants to preserve in ethics is in danger of being eclipsed or negated. Either happiness is empty or pleasure is problematic.

Aquinas can both agree and disagree with Adorno's assessment as Aquinas contends that pleasure follows an act that is suitable to our nature, an act which follows on an appetite that is directed toward a determinate end.<sup>325</sup> Ultimately, pleasure is then not related to the essence of happiness, but is a "proper accident" and as such is not happiness per se, but results from happiness, a part of happiness or "some fitting good, either in reality, or in hope, or at least in memory."<sup>326</sup>

In contrast to Adorno's conflation of the somatic and the mental in the impulse, the addendum, Aquinas, as we have seen, distinguishes between sense appetite and intellectual appetite, both of which result in their respective acts toward the good, and both of which can be accompanied by pleasure. Bodily pleasure, which accompanies acts of the sense powers, cannot be happiness since the rational soul's capacity for the universal, and as immaterial has a "certain infinity in regard to the body," surpasses it.<sup>327</sup> This means for Aquinas that intellectual pleasures are superior to bodily ones and that happiness must consist primarily of intellectual activity.

So, in not making a sufficient distinction between sense and intellect, Adorno does not make a sufficient distinction between mental and physical suffering, which in itself would be helpful, but also means he does not sufficiently distinguish between what is proper to them, that which is devoid of suffering and the pleasure that would attend them.

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<sup>325</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.2, A.6.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid*.

Now, Adorno can agree with an emphasis on the intellectual for ethics, but without a harder distinction between sense and intellect he cannot approve of an equation of intellectual activity with happiness nor the characterization of happiness as the terminus of teleologically inclined appetites and acts. Aquinas, on the other hand, can say that Adorno's view can lead to an emphasis on the somatic over the intellectual. Pleasure accompanies acts of both, but in not properly distinguishing between the two in the notion of the addendum, Adorno's thought clouds the issue and can lead to conflating the two types of pleasure, which can result in emphasizing and perhaps acknowledging only one type, the bodily. This, according to Aquinas, is largely due to the senses and sensible reality being more known to us as bodily beings and so "bodily delights are more generally known."<sup>328</sup>

Adorno's simply negative end for ethics accordingly lacks the content necessary for an adequate moral theory, a charge often leveled by him (and others) at Kant's ethics. Of course, this is consistent with his overall "negative" project. Yet, if we want to be able to act morally we must have more than a negative understanding of what that moral life consists in, particularly of what morality aims at. Aquinas provides the content of the end, of happiness, that is consistent with his anthropology and also can be deemed as consistent with much of Adorno's ethical thinking. This is articulated in Aquinas' view of happiness that certainly makes the intellectual primary, but also offers a balance between the intellectual and the bodily.

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid. Aquinas would however appreciate Adorno's attempt to understand humans as a unity, though for Aquinas it is a unity as a composite being of body and soul whereas for Adorno the unity is only in the impulse.

One way this is expressed is that happiness for humans is distinguished between one attainable in this life and one in the next life of beatitude. Philosophy can study only the happiness attainable in this life, though humans cannot, for Aquinas, be completely satisfied by any other good than the complete and perfect good, which is God.<sup>329</sup> If we look to happiness in this life we will have to include both intellectual and the bodily, and this is what Aquinas does and Adorno could look to if he were ever willing to aver positive claims.

In this life of bodily, sensitive, and intellectual appetites Aquinas can give content to happiness in a commensurate way. If happiness is the final, perfect good for humans, then its potentiality (which is imperfect, or incomplete) must be actualized, “for each thing is perfect in so far as it is actual,” hence, happiness must be an act, an operation—“man’s last act.”<sup>330</sup> This act must be the act proper to humans which is intellectual, or contemplative, activity. The contemplation of truth (for Aquinas this ultimately means God) is primarily happiness, but is not perfect because of the disruptions caused by everyday life, so that this imperfect happiness is what is possible in this life.<sup>331</sup> This does not mean that happiness in this life is exclusively intellectual activity. Sense perception and sense-cognition as knowing only the particular cannot be essential happiness as happiness consists of the perfect and universal good. Yet, happiness also includes the sensitive operations, though not essentially, but “antecedently, in respect of imperfect happiness, such as can be had in this life, since the operation of the intellect demands a

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<sup>329</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.2, A.8. “Now the object of the will, *i.e.*, of man’s appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man’s will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone.”

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*

previous operation of the sense.”<sup>332</sup> Likewise, an act of the will cannot be happiness essentially, for the will is directed toward the end—if absent, the will desires it, and if present the will delights and rests in it.<sup>333</sup> Desiring does not make the end present, nor does “the fact that the will delights in it” make it present, therefore the end “must be due to something else than an act of will,” an act of the intellect in which the end is notionally present.<sup>334</sup>

Aquinas also makes a distinction in intellectual activity that Adorno does not appear to consider: the distinction between speculative and practical intellectual activity. For Aquinas, the speculative intellect has the “highest human operation,” because its object is highest—the perfect good (God), thus happiness consists in acts of the speculative intellect.<sup>335</sup> Nevertheless, this happiness is not completely attainable in this life, so the practical intellect plays a part in the happiness attainable in this life in “directing human actions and passions.”<sup>336</sup> In this way, the practical intellect cooperates in the attainment of happiness in this life in regulating the passions and shaping our actions according to virtue toward the perfection of our appetitive powers.

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<sup>332</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.3, A.3. Here Aquinas also argues that sensitive operations can belong to happiness “consequently, in that perfect happiness which we await in heaven; because at the resurrection, *from the very happiness of the soul*, as Augustine says (*Ep. Ad Dioscor.*) *the body and the bodily senses will receive a certain overflow, so as to be perfected in their operations* [ . . .].” Interestingly, Adorno agrees with this theological vision, though with different implications: “At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit. The perspective vanishing point of historic materialism would be its self-sublimation, the spirit’s liberation from the primacy of material needs in their state of fulfillment. Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled and would become that which it only promises while the spell of material conditions will not let it satisfy material needs.” Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 207. This could also serve as a reasonably sufficient statement of Adorno’s negative vision of happiness—a surely utopic vision, albeit a negative one.

<sup>333</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.3, A.4.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.3, A.5.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

Although true happiness is not attainable in this life for Aquinas, the imperfect happiness humans can attain “partakes of some particular likeness of happiness” and “is a certain participation of true and perfect happiness.”<sup>337</sup> And this imperfect happiness, that is ordained toward perfect happiness, requires other things and conditions for its attainment so that goods such as were eliminated as happiness per se before, e.g. wealth, bodily goods, pleasure, power, and others like friendship are considered part of happiness as necessary conditions.<sup>338</sup> Therefore, Aquinas can in some way both agree and disagree with Adorno that “wrong life cannot be lived rightly.” If wrong life means that in this life universal and perfect fulfillment of our human nature is unattainable, then Aquinas can grant Adorno the point. But, if it means that we cannot act in any respect in accord with our nature, that we cannot flourish as humans in any positive respect, then Aquinas cannot concur with Adorno’s thesis.

### *Conclusion*

The preceding has shown that Aquinas’ analysis of several pertinent subjects relevant to the (pre-)ethical and ethics proper and which, to more or less of a degree, overlap with Adorno’s concerns can help to move Adorno’s ethical thought forward and obtain a better grasp on the issues Adorno raises.

Aquinas’ position of the unity of soul and body pushes Adorno’s thought to consider how to understand humans as animals and material beings without sacrificing rationality. The animal and rational nature need not be opposed to one another as proffered in Enlightenment thought. They can instead be analytically distinguished in order to come

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<sup>337</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.3, A.6.

<sup>338</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, Q.4, A.1-8.

to a deeper understanding of them, but a human being remains a unity of the two as one being. As the soul, the principle of life, is rational, the being of the animal is rational so that the animal life of a human is to be lived in a rational way.

Aquinas' faculty psychology shows (Adorno) a way in which to incorporate both the material, sense, the particular, and reason and the universal in an epistemology that preserves the priority of the object and moves his thought toward a method that can make universal claims that are necessary for ethics that do not violate particularity or fall into identity-thinking.

Furthermore, the analytic distinction of the sensitive and intellectual appetitive powers supplements Adorno's thought on impulse. Both powers situate us within the animal and material world in responding to appropriate objects in pursuit of particular goods and the universal good. Thus, Aquinas' approach preserves both the bodily and rational nature of humans without opposing the two. And Aquinas' teleological approach makes the sensitive and intellectual more intelligible than Adorno's thought in explaining their contribution to the unity of the human being as pursuing his or her appropriate goods.

Aquinas' virtue theory aids Adorno's ethical thought by explaining the subjective, though object-directed, mediation of habit between powers and acts that perfect our acts toward the fulfillment of our human nature through the universal good, i.e. happiness. Virtue theory also individualizes these acts in the consideration of the individual habits of individual human agents. Adorno's view of the impossibility of virtue under current objective social conditions does not consider that virtue can be realized in an ahistorical human nature and as such is a perennial, living ethical practice, not a remnant of the ancient and medieval past.

Aquinas' theory of happiness as the last end gives Adorno's thought a goal that helps make his ethical thought, which lacks any teleology, more intelligible. In addition, Aquinas' conception of happiness mitigates the temptation to interpret Adorno as privileging bodily pleasure or the absence of pain/suffering, and simultaneously outlines the content of happiness that is required for a more adequate ethics that takes into account both the bodily and the rational and intellectual, though, as Adorno does too, privileges the intellectual. Moreover, Aquinas, like Adorno, tempers the possibility of happiness, not by claiming we cannot live rightly, but by reasoning that we can attain happiness in a limited way by performing actions appropriate to our character in this life, mindful that this happiness will never be the perfect happiness that is only possible in the next life in heaven.

## Conclusion

Theodor Adorno's critique of enlightenment rationality, inner and outer nature, and objective social conditions that have resulted in domination and unfreedom leads him to largely reject the ethical thought of modernity in particular, exemplified in Kant, but also other ethical models such as virtue theory. Accordingly, Adorno's ethical thought boils down to the (pre-)ethical problem of how to respond to objects under these conditions without engaging in thinking and acting that violates the particularity and individuality of those objects, including human beings.

As a result, Adorno ends up wanting ethics to be the fundamental way in which we respond to objects in our everyday life, but recognizes that once an ethical theory is formed it turns on us in imposing the universal on the particular with disastrous results, particularly evident, for example, in 20<sup>th</sup> century catastrophes such as the holocaust and atomic warfare, but also on the smaller scale of, for example, our daily interactions with objects, approaches to impulse, and cultural forms.

The previous pages have presented the recourses Adorno chooses to attend to these problems. For one, exemplified in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno deliberately has no ethical, epistemological, or metaphysical starting point that is logically and rationally argued and justified, or is a pre-supposition. He simply starts. He turns to Auschwitz and the (appropriate) response to it, formulating a "new categorical imperative," all the while knowing that the dialectician does not go anywhere, does not end up with a moral theory that must then be applied. Adorno instead employs immanent critique that exposes the internal contradictions and socially mediated content of ethical thought,

stopping short of universal claims that would lead to a traditional ethical theory. In this way, Adorno simply strips away what prevents us from “getting to” reality.

Nevertheless, we cannot escape some kind of primacy. History and objective social conditions, Auschwitz included, have formed him (and us), yet what remains for Adorno is dialectics and in this way is somewhat ahistorical, and so can be viewed not as a foundational nor metaphysical starting point, but a material and methodological starting point.<sup>339</sup>

Next, Adorno offers the concept of the addendum as the absolute point of individuation and agency set in tension with objective social conditions. Though Adorno employs dialectical analyses of a number of concepts such as nature and history and subject and object, for ethics the dialectic between the social and the individual comes to the fore. The objective social conditions are so totalizing and dominating that Adorno takes pains to preserve the individual in the face of the totality of society and identity-thinking. The addendum is one way to accomplish this. It is the material, bodily rejoinder to the rational and universal pathologies of enlightenment and modernity. However, it is not to overcome the rational and universal, but to be introduced into dialectical relation with them toward emancipation—the emancipation of impulse and material need, and of particularity for the recovery of a non-dominating non-identitarian reason.

This dialectical, constellational ethics where we reflect and realize these predicaments will not make us more “ethical.” However, this is a kind of discipline that moves us to being ethical in the perception of material things, of the sensuous. The addendum is

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<sup>339</sup> As methodological, it could be argued that it is somewhat foundational.

beyond thought and cannot be captured by thought, but points to the bodily, material in our attending to it. Accordingly, such an ethics has no plan, no means, and no end other than getting back to reality that is obscured by enlightenment reason and its second nature. Consequently, while we as philosophers attempt to organize Adorno's thought into a coherent ethical or social or political theory, Adorno advances no such project, but instead fixes on ostensibly insignificant material objects such as windows and doors.<sup>340</sup>

Lastly, art and aesthetics play a similar role for Adorno. Art has a history and is socially mediated, but also can be interpreted. For Adorno, philosophy is the way to interpret art. Its interpretation draws out the uniqueness, though a uniqueness embedded in society. Again, here the dialectic of individual, in this case an individual artwork, and the social totality plays out. In this way, art calls attention to nonidentity. Therefore, aesthetic experience is Adorno's way to counter identity-thinking and the problematic ethics that emerge from it. In grasping nonidentity through aesthetic experience we come into contact with objects that resist the social totality, stir the senses and impulse, and spawn conscious awareness of the wrongness of current conditions and the impossibility of ethics.

Ultimately, Adorno's ethics is a negative, dialectical attending to both nature and the aesthetic in order to locate traces of non-identity that resist the social totality that dominates nature and humans. However, for Adorno, this is not a positive ethical vision for right living, but a negative practice that holds out hope for, and possibly promotes, the necessary changes in material social conditions required for right living.

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<sup>340</sup> Adorno, *Minimal Moralia*, p.40. This work is full of examples of Adorno's reflections on everyday objects and minutia and the ethical implications of such.

Though Adorno's ethical thought is worthy of consideration in itself, Adorno's claim that we cannot live rightly need not be accepted. I present several areas in which Adorno's thought is deficient and thus places his ethical thought in this predicament which it finds itself in. It lacks a comprehensive theory of human nature that gives an account of human bodily, animal nature and its ontological and epistemological significance that could provide an instructive understanding of what it means to live as an animal and that could provide a specific account of the role of the sensible in epistemology and how it underwrites the universal knowledge that ethics demands. In addition, Adorno unjustifiably dismisses both a teleological interpretation of nature that would make his ethical claims more intelligible and the eudaemonist ethical tradition of virtue and happiness. Therefore, I argue that an engagement with the ethical thought of Thomas Aquinas can both take Adorno's ethical concerns into account and then move his project forward in order for the possibility of right living to emerge.

Adorno wants humans to attune to their bodily natures and impulses. But, in order to accomplish this, we must adopt a more comprehensive view of human nature as it relates to the bodily and material. I argue that Aquinas' ontology of the body-soul relation provides a superior account of how humans live both a rational and material life that does not oppose the two as Adorno's negative dialectics is sometimes prone to do. Aquinas' case for the unity of the human being as intellectual and animal allows for ethics to encompass the whole of human life.

Adorno's justified reproach of identity-thinking leads him to reject the possibility of universal knowledge. However, Aquinas' account of the sense powers and their role in the structure of sense experience shows that knowledge of the particular as particular is

possible and that knowledge of the universal is grounded in sense experience and the knowledge of particular individual material things. Thus, ethics can take account of particularity and relate it to universal ethical claims without the violence of identity-thinking.

Moreover, Aquinas' analyses of sensitive and intellectual appetites provide material content and a teleological framework that render ethical life more intelligible. Aquinas' account of the sensitive appetite throws light on our animal and material life in a way Adorno's thought does not. Aquinas' account of how the sensitive appetite inclines humans to particular sensible goods appropriate to them and its participation in an intellectual principle is a more dialectical account of both particularity and universality, and material (or sensitive) and intellectual principles. Instead of rejecting an intellectual and rational appropriation of impulse over concern for identity, Aquinas depicts an intellectual and material engagement with objects in our inclinations to and cognition of them. It is here that Aquinas' teleology becomes salient, for the inclination to particular goods is only intelligible within a framework where inclinations are toward a goal, for a reason and that refer beyond themselves toward the universal good, thus negating their immanent character in Adorno's thought and making them pertinent to ethical norms and principles. This also provides a metaphysical and more intelligible way to interpret human suffering as it denotes suffering as a lack of a good appropriate to humans, whether material or intellectual.

The intellectual appetite, or the will, is an inclination to the good in general, but that is, in accord with our bodily existence, found in the particular goods, though incompletely. It is then the intellectual appetite that impels humans to transcend the many

individual material goods we are inclined to toward something more complete, the universal good. The intellectual appetite is for Aquinas also the location of human freedom as the intellect cooperates with the will in what Aquinas terms “choice.” Though the will is inclined necessarily its goal, to happiness, it is free in choosing, through rational judgment, whether or not to pursue the particular goods it is inclined to. Furthermore, I argue that though Aquinas’ account of freedom does not satisfy Adorno’s thesis that all acts and concepts are socially mediated,<sup>341</sup> it does, as Adorno proposes we do, give an account of how humans can become aware of themselves as nature in an intellectual grasp of our intellectual and bodily nature and inclinations that underscores human freedom and the necessary parameters within which that freedom is exercised.

As is Aquinas’ philosophy of human nature, I argue that virtue theory and Aquinas’ view of happiness also are fertile areas for the advancement of Adorno’s ethical thought. Though dismissed by Adorno, virtues, as good habits that mediate between powers and acts, are indispensable for the consistent rational choosing of actions that are appropriate to natural human intellectual and material ends. Furthermore, the formation of virtues (and their opposite, vices) is individual and particular to the agent, thus furnishing an explanation of the various ways in which humans, who share a common human nature, act in further particularizing unique situations and that is consistent with our experience.

I argue that Aquinas’ eudaemonist ethics with happiness as the last end most importantly provides Adorno’s ethical thought a goal that can make his thought, which lacks any teleology, more intelligible by explaining the purposefulness of all actions and the evident order in nature toward what Aquinas calls the perfection of the universe. It

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<sup>341</sup> Aquinas perhaps accounts for some degree of social mediation in his analysis of human law, but does not consider the possibility that *all* our concepts are socially and historically mediated.

does this largely by denoting that happiness is the flourishing of the whole of human nature in articulating the bodily and intellectual content of happiness. Also, Aquinas can agree with Adorno's assessment that wrong life cannot be lived rightly asserting that perfect and complete happiness is unattainable in this life, but partial and imperfect happiness can be achieved in this life by performing actions which are appropriate to our nature.

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