

The Neo-Hegelian Theory of Freedom and the Limits of Emancipation

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Abstract

This paper critically evaluates what it identifies as ‘the institutional theory of freedom’ developed within recent neo-Hegelian philosophy (by Robert Pippin and, in a different way, Axel Honneth). Whilst acknowledging the gains made against the Kantian theory of autonomy as detachment it is argued that the institutional theory ultimately undermines the very meaning of practical agency. By tying agency to institutionally sustained recognition it effectively excludes the exercise of practical reason geared toward emancipation from a settled normative order. Adorno’s notion of autonomy as resistance is enlisted to develop an account of practical reason that is neither institutionally constrained nor without appropriate consideration of the historical location of the practical agent.

For Kant the autonomy of the moral agent consists of both its freedom from nature and its exercise of self-legislation (the rational agent gives itself practical laws). Freedom and self-legislation do not imply each other: a creature determined by nature could not, of course, be self-legislating, but freedom from nature does not entail that freedom is necessarily self-legislative. For Kant, the actions of the autonomous agent are produced by subjecting desires, or what have come to be called first-order reasons, to higher-order reasons through the categorical imperative, to the test of lawlikeness. Maxims of action are those that can pass that test. It is this account of self-legislation that stimulated Hegel’s influential allegation that moral agency is ‘reduced to empty formalism’ by the categorical imperative (Hegel 1991: § 135).

There are two countervailing claims within Hegel’s charge. First, against *formalism*, the maxims of an agent are not constructed by means of abstract principles about the form of what one ought to choose: rather, rational choosing appeals to already existing norms pertinent to the context or situation in which the agent’s choosing finds itself. Second, with regards to the *emptiness*, the agent has commitments – a personal history or formation – that frame that agent’s choosing. Hegel argues, in

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effect, that a theory that purifies moral agency of its prior commitments is incapable of explaining the actual performance of self-determination, understood as the efforts of an agent to organize a life that accords with that agent's conception of what is substantively preferable. If our conception of autonomy is to be plausible it must be developed, Hegel holds, from within these 'concrete' conditions of human agency, rather than be conceived as the abstracted freedom of transcendental subjectivity.

I do not propose to explore the justice or otherwise of Hegel's criticism of Kant. The issue I want to consider here is what the positive theory upon which that criticism is based implies for the possibility of the exercise of freedom in emancipatory demands. By emancipatory demands I mean the efforts of individuals seeking to liberate themselves from normative orders that are, in some way, formative of their identities and that make claims on them as beings with those identities.¹ My question concerns what the Hegelian philosophical norm of 'concretion' does to affect the legitimacy of those demands. Not every emancipatory demand is agreeable or worthy of support. And to think of an emancipatory demand as legitimate is not the same thing as agreeing with it. The issue of legitimacy relates to the very permissibility of making those demands with a view to entering them into a debate whose outcome cannot be determined in advance. To allege that a theory is inhospitable to emancipatory perspectives is to say that it undercuts, in principle, the possibility of those perspectives being part of the discussion. And it does so by questioning the very rationality in principle of those perspectives. Hegel himself was famously accused of narrowing the possibilities of social transformation by identifying the existing condition of the Prussian state with the full realization of history. Curiously, though, recent Hegelian practical philosophy, aware of the well-discussed deterministic implications of universal history, turns out to be at least as problematical for expressions of forms of life that are not already validated by history. This neo-Hegelian theory of freedom, I will argue, excludes the space of the emancipatory interest.

Neo-Hegelian theory attempts both to build on the 'empty formalism' thesis and to make an explicit systematic connection between freedom as recognition and the existence of rational institutions. This connection, I want to show, can provide no legitimacy for the exercise of freedom outside the institutional life of a rational

society. Emancipatory demands are suffocated by that connection because they are the exercise of a practical reason that understands itself as a critical rejection of some form of institutional life. In some cases the demand may be for (1) *reform* of an institution in an effort to make it more inclusive of groups hitherto unrecognized (civil rights claims pre-eminently). There may (2) be demands for an *end* to some institutions on the grounds that they are irrational. Their existence cannot be justified by reasons that are not intrinsically biased. And (3) there may be *transformational* demands whose reasonableness can only be appreciated once the transformation has been realized. Hence demands of types (2) and (3) are likely to be rejected by individuals whose reasons are shaped by the institutions whose abolition or transformation is demanded. Neo-Hegelianism satisfies itself with an account of institutional change that can accommodate (1). The deeper demands of (2) and (3), however, are not encompassed by the theory. Demands of type (3), it might be observed, sometimes take a dangerous turn. It is a well-exploited tactic of revolutionary movements to seek to transform public consciousness through acts of unprovoked violence. And they have occasionally succeeded, placing the eventual beneficiaries of their acts in a troubled relationship with their historical origins. It would be comforting, though difficult, to exclude these kinds of acts from the list of options available to those making emancipatory demands. In practice this tactic is generally perceived as contrary to the stated ideals of freedom for the sake of which emancipatory demands are made.

Hegelian practical philosophy does not necessarily exclude the emancipatory interest. It is, however, those articulations of Hegelian freedom that construct a systematic relationship between freedom, autonomy, recognition and practical reason that lead to difficulties.² Robert Pippin's Hegelian conception of practical philosophy is the most sustained of that kind. It will therefore be the principal text analyzed in this paper. Axel Honneth's (arguably uncharacteristic) reading of the *Philosophy of Right* shares with Pippin's a commitment to developing the connection between recognition and institutions. Indeed, the notion of 'suffering from indeterminacy' to which Pippin appeals – the notion of being an individual unable to develop an identity because of exclusion from interpersonal social practices – comes from Honneth (PIF 7 et passim). Honneth's neo-Hegelian conception, in so far as it maintains the systematicity of freedom and recognition, will also be considered.

The central thesis of my criticism of the neo-Hegelian theory of freedom is that it effectively excludes the variety of practical reason upon which an emancipatory perspective depends. Practical reason in this employment is a capacity of individuals to take a critical perspective on the traditions, customs or norms that characterize the societies in which they live and whose values and norms have formed them in various ways, and who, upon some consideration, refuse to be guided further by them. Practical reason here does not imply that individuals have a capacity to raise themselves above history or context. The alternative to complete context saturation is not transcendental moral agency, and that is a claim I shall try to defend. That alternative should not be sought in any form of compatibilism. The possibility of the exercise of an emancipatory practical reason is not part of the theoretical problematic of free will. It is, rather, a question, at the existential level, about the contested legitimacy of agents' claims to critical perspectives on the norms that influence their reasons, claims that have thereby placed them outside full commitment to or identification with those norms. I shall argue that Adorno's notion of autonomy as resistance offers a promising though incomplete alternative to transcendentalism and context dependence theories. In the first section of this paper the neo-Hegelian repudiation of Kantian constructivism will be outlined. The various ways in which it excludes an emancipatory practical reason are to be critically evaluated in the section two. The final section will consider Adorno's alternative notion of autonomy in light of the limitations of the institutional theory of freedom.

At one level the criticisms of the neo-Hegelian account of freedom developed in this paper appear to be further versions of a position that has rearticulated itself ever since Kantians first responded to Hegel's critique of *Moralität*. Are we really just the emergent properties of sociality? My criticisms can certainly be aligned in a general way with that complaint. However, there are two differentiating elements in play here. The first involves taking seriously the claim of neo-Hegelianism that its innovative development of the connection between recognition and autonomy (qua rational freedom) that institutional life enables distinguishes it from conventionalism (HPP 31), conservatism (HPP 185) and most significantly communitarianism. Honneth laments that communitarian philosophers have failed to see what can be gained for them through Hegel's 'attractive' 'attempt at setting the abstract principles of modern

right and morality within an institutional framework' (PIF 2). That specific objective motivates a new range of criticisms. The second differentiating element involves outlining an alternative to the distinctive claims of neo-Hegelian 'autonomy' which does not amount to yet another Kantian or deontological rejoinder.

1. Neo-Hegelian Practical Freedom

Responding to the Kantian thesis that the individual's free agency is irreducible to sociality Pippin adopts Hegel's 'empty formalism' criticism and contends that we could not explain how 'considerations arrived at by [such] an individual as a result of rational deliberation alone... could have much content or could be action guiding' (HPP 22). Without normative biographies individuals would be indifferent to the options generated by pure rational deliberation. Agents, however, are concretely situated in a normative order that is formative of their identities. Because of those identities they have normative perspectives that generate options relevant to the challenges of their contexts. Making a deliberative choice about how to act should therefore involve explicating the norms of one's identity. For instance, the choices an individual as a parent will consider fall within the normative range of that identity (i.e. options that consider how to nurture, protect and educate the child).

The identities we have as practical agents are explicable through our engagement with specific normative orders with which we identify. Those orders are sustained through institutions, as Hegel had argued, and through social roles which for the neo-Hegelians also appear to function as institutions. Honneth, in fact, criticizes Hegel's narrowing of institutional life to the three principal domains of family, ethical life and state (PIF 63-80). Pippin and Honneth are not alone in emphasizing in the importance for Hegel of institutions in the realization of freedom and self-determination.³ However, the neo-Hegelians radicalize this notion by construing the activities of agency – reflection, practical reason, intention formation, inter alia – as fundamentally explicable through the institutional life of the agent. As Honneth puts it: 'in social reality, at least in that of modernity, we come across some spheres of action in which inclinations and moral norms, interests, and values are already fused in the form of institutionalized interactions' (PIF 6). This is a core claim of a theory of freedom as institutionally sustained. Institutionalized interactions are free, and they are infused with norms of what agents are supposed to do.

Both Pippin and Honneth understand this institutional theory of freedom as systematically connected with the thesis of recognition. The lesson of Hegel's dialectic of recognition is that freedom is essentially relational and not, therefore, in contrast with the apparent claim of transcendental idealism, a self-subsisting condition of individuality. Pippin defends the notion that 'subjects cannot be free unless recognized by others in a certain way' (HPP 28). In a free society individuals enjoy the recognition of others as they each willingly participate in specific institutions within that society. Freedom as recognition is, as Honneth puts it, 'an effortless mutual acknowledgement of certain aspects of the other's personality, connected to the prevailing mode of social interaction' (PIF 50). What it is that one is recognized as – and wishes to be recognized as – is as an effective actor within a specified form of life. These forms of life within the modern state are the institutions that normatively frame us, for instance, as citizens, as bearers of rights, or as individuals whose roles are acknowledged as beneficial to the social whole. The exercise of freedom is pursued through a rational engagement with one's socially recognized role. In this way freedom is grounded as recognition within an institutional practice. The absence of recognition deprives individuals of the conditions in which they can act freely: they are excluded from, to use Honneth's formulation, 'communicative relationships that can be experienced as expressions of their own freedom' (PIF 15).

Pippin argues that the institutional theory is compatible with the principle of autonomy, defined as the 'self-legislated character of all normativity' (HPP 17). The recognitional model may appear to suggest that individuals are free only within institutions which they cannot themselves have constructed, and it might therefore be difficult to see exactly what kind of self-legislation is going on in them. However, what Hegelian freedom entails, according to Pippin, is the act of 'self-constraining' (HPP 108). Within our institutional forms of life we constrain our desires not under formal principles but under the norms of the institution(s) to which we commit ourselves. In that way our desires are given 'rational form' (HPP 143) under institutional norms that we accept. Possession of a role or an institutional position does not mean obedience to the norms of an entity that is alien to us. Pippin writes: 'Whatever social roles we inhabit or conventions we act out, we have somehow *made them our own*; they function as norms and ideals for us that we must actively and with

some justification to ourselves and to others actively sustain...’ (HPP 68). (‘Somehow’ bears a great deal of weight here, signifying without explanation that the process in which individuals gain autonomy – self-legislatingly – is by endorsing the institutional norms in which they happen to be positioned.⁴ Individuals may find themselves with institutional identities and social roles that command varying degrees of what they understand as their personal identities, ranging from total equivalence to the dutiful, formally correct and deliberate performance of them in which, nevertheless, they do not see their ‘true’ selves.) We therefore have reasons, which we can call our own because we accept them, for whether or not to act upon our desires. Acting institutionally, then, means adjusting behaviour, autonomously, according to the norms of the institution.

Acting freely within a role is a reflective and rational task: reflection requires reasons. The normative scope of a given task – considerations that are relevant to how to perform it – is specific. Reflection is not a matter of detached ‘merely intellectual’ (HPP 135) speculation about the nature of the good. It is, rather, tied to how we live the roles we occupy. Pippin writes: ‘*Our reflective capacities are always treated as aspects of various social roles, or of our engagement in practices and institutions*; any such deliberation is reflection *qua* parent, property owner, citizen, and so forth’ (HPP 23, emphasis added). And this is because ‘there is no pure, supremely independent standpoint as rational agent as such and so no moment when one can be said to “step” back from *all* of one’s attachments and dependencies and then resolve which are worthy of affirmation’ (HPP 23). It is only through institutional action that one realizes oneself as a rational agent. Agents do not, Pippin maintains, decide from a neutral perspective to which institutions they will commit themselves. Practical reason is not the business of how agents *enter into* institutions, but of how they *negotiate* their ways within them. This involves the exercise of reflection, argument or justification. Again, there are norms constitutive of these practices: what counts as a good reason is context specific, not universally applicable. Having reasons, Pippin writes, is ‘a matter of participation in a social practice under certain conditions, practices largely defined by what is accepted and rejected in the giving of and asking for reasons by members whose actions inevitably affect what others would otherwise be able to do’ (HPP 24). The rules of ‘giving and asking for reasons’ will turn out to be a feature of Pippin’s effective exclusion of an emancipatory perspective. The

recognitive process is at work in that complex, in that the very ‘making sense’ (HPP 5) to the agent of her actions requires the validation and endorsement by others – or by the institutional norms sustained by others – of the rationality of those actions. Recognition is provided by others who participate in that institution and who, notionally at least, affirm the individual’s actions as the actions that a rational agent working within that institution should want to undertake.

Social roles and institutions are historical and they take their place in what Pippin understands as a rational social whole. When we reflect upon them we do so as ‘concretely human’ agents. And our evaluations of our institutional commitments are influenced by norms that ‘arise out of and are always aspects of already ongoing ways of life, attachments, institutions, and dependencies’ that are ‘*constitutive of being an individual human agent*’ (HPP 67, emphasis added). The status of the norms within an institution is objective. As we enter into institutions, taking on the practical identities specific to them, we adopt the rules of those institutions. What this means is that we can speak of institutions as objectively rational. As Pippin writes: ‘My internalization of their [institutions’] rules is an internalization of what *stand in themselves* [objectively], and function in me as, *effective reasons* [rational], genuine justifications’ (HPP 242, emphasis added). They ‘stand in themselves’ as reasons and hence are objectively rational.

What the neo-Hegelians do not want to say is that every institution or every social role can provide the conditions of recognition based freedom: not all are, as they conceptualize it, objectively rational. There may be institutions that individuals enter without any expectation that those institutions will permit the exercise of their freedom or, *a fortiori*, the development of their personalities. In a progressive society institutions that fail to provide the possibility of recognition would be replaced or transformed. A rational society is one in which all of the institutions that place a demand for individuals’ participation would enable the self-realization of those individuals. Individuals would act rationally (i.e. within the scope of their institutions’ reasons), and therefore freely, and be recognized as agents within those institutions.

An institution that can be described as objectively rational is not the produce of the collective preferences of rational individual subjects. And nor is that objectivity to be

conceived of as the set of transcendental conditions for the realization of rational agency (HPP 258) (an hypostatization of agency). Neither of these conceptions of the objective rationality of institutions captures the distinctive feature of Hegelian objectivity: that institutions can be rational in themselves. Pippin attributes objective rationality to institutions that furnish a set of norms through which agents can gain an identity and scope for practical action. In this way agents cease to ‘suffer from indeterminacy’ or, to use another of Honneth’s quasi-pathological metaphors, from ‘excruciating emptiness’ (PIF 43), becoming thereby concrete, recognized, normatively integrated actors. Institutions are, Pippin says, ‘a rationally required component of the objective human world, required for that world to be a truly human one’ (HPP 259). The mark of what is ‘truly human’ is that of ‘free, rationally self-determining agents’ engaged ‘in unavoidable recognitive relations with each other’ (HPP 262).

2. Criticisms

The intended project of the neo-Hegelian theory of freedom is not to undermine the possibility of an emancipatory perspective. Because, however, it explains freedom through the recognitive processes of supposedly objectively rational institutions it crowds out the ground for the legitimate exercise of any other variety of freedom. Pippin holds that the individual’s self-understanding as an individual – as one who can make free and rational decisions – is not to be explained as a process that precedes social experience. Rather, institutions frame the individual’s self-understanding as a concrete actor facing choices within spaces that are meaningful to the institutionalized agent that individual has come to be. It is therefore a mistake to develop a notion of autonomy based on a conception of the *a priori* identity of the individual as a rational agent. The rational agent is always an institutional being. Pippin takes that to mean that the individual is ontologically dependent on sociality. He writes: ‘being an individual subject is something like a collective or social normative achievement and the *putative independence* of such subjects is thus always intertwined with a distinct sort of profound, even *ontological dependence*’ (HPP 9, emphasis added).

Pippin is not obliged to move from a rejection of an *a priori* theory of selfhood to one of ontological dependence. Indeed it is difficult to locate a methodology that might

demonstrate how it is that the reasons we act under are the expressions of our institutional identities. How can we show that socio-biography exhausts the normativity of our practical options? Only as an interpretative exercise, it seems to me, might that even be attempted, and that would involve tracing back patterns of actual arguments enunciated by an individual to a background of institutional commitments. But the possibility of unfalsifiability would lurk within this exercise. In defence of that procedure it might be argued that the ontological dependence thesis is an inference to the best explanation. Given that a great deal of our practical reason is limited to understanding what, from within our societal roles, we should be doing it is safe to conclude that the reasons we use are generated by our institutional commitments. Where else could they come from? But that question is precisely what remains at issue.

As we have seen, Pippin holds that there are '*attachments and dependencies*' that are '*constitutive of being an individual human agent*'. Now there is little of controversy in the claim that certain 'attachments and dependencies' form even considerable parts of a person's identity. But it is a further step to claim that what constitutes an individual's institutional identity also forms that individual's agency, or practical identity. Let me make use of a passage from Christine Korsgaard in order to tease out this distinction. Korsgaard writes: (i) 'Practical identity is a complex matter and for the average person there will be a jumble of such conceptions. You are a human being, a woman or a man, an adherent of a certain religion, a member of an ethnic group, a member of a certain profession, someone's lover or friend, and so on. And all of these identities give rise to reasons and obligations' (Korsgaard 1996: 101). What is described here (to put it repetitively) is that one's identity gives rise to reasons and obligations *simpliciter*. Then she continues: (ii) 'Your reasons express your identity, your nature; your obligations spring from what that identity forbids'. Now there is, it seems to me, a disputable inference here. Sentence (ii) is not an entailment of (i). It (ii) claims that all reasons and obligations are produced through practical identities, whereas (i) had claimed only that practical identities produce reasons and obligations, though not that they exclusively produce them. The delimitation of emancipatory demands that this inference can produce is arguably avoided by Korsgaard because she builds into the notion of practical agency a conception of humanity that is context transcending (Korsgaard 1996: 123). This further step, however, is necessarily absent

from the neo-Hegelian notion of autonomy as exhaustively the product of the interdependence of freedom and recognition, i.e. the institutional theory. The conflation of social role / institutional identity with practical identity sustains the thesis that deliberation is inextricable from *who one is*, the story of which can be told with reference to the institutional life of one's society or community. A conception of oneself as an institutional agent is present in every act of practical reason. As Pippin puts it: 'it is only within and as a result of certain sorts of norm-governed societies that I could become a determinate, deliberating individual at all, with any basis for reflecting on what I ought to do' (HPP 247).

A further difficulty with the ontological dependency thesis is that it allocates to institutions authority over what is to count as rational. Since the normative content of individuals' lives is determined by their social constitution claims for spaces of action outside that constitution – for independence – are merely *putative*, as we have seen Pippin claim. This identification of rational agency with social constitution is grounded, after all, in a communitarian fallacy.⁵ The implications of this fallacy for the possibility of an emancipatory perspective are fatal. It excludes any kind of reasons (i.e. therefore not only its intended targets, those that claim universality or apriority) that declare a validity not grounded within specifiable institutional forms of life or social roles. And this deprives agents, in principle, of legitimate normative assessment of the norms that have played a role in their practical identities hitherto. Practical reason becomes an affirmative task since agents cannot operate with perspectives not grounded in a socio-biographically saturated identity. Pippin understands the efforts of agents to get outside their practical identities as the delusion of a neutral perspective. It is an impossible effort 'not to be determined'. All we have, he believes, is practical reason or reflection 'from an institutional position' (HPP 265); reflection is 'always institutionally and historically bound' (HPP 137). (Note the concurrence of institution and history). The non-delusory exercise of these capacities is intra-institutional, requiring us 'to understand just what one's role calls for and what it does not' (HPP 265). What it does not justify is an assessment of the rationality of the role or the institution that requires that role. And this is why neo-Hegelian autonomy begins to look like irrevocable social affirmation: it de-legitimizes a perspective outside the institution to which one's identity is seemingly bound and which therefore one cannot critically assess. The normativity of the institutions to

which individuals belong saturates their practical identities, providing them, in effect, with norms they will have to deploy in any critical evaluation of those institutions. The multiple identities of agents cannot ground their critique either: it is inappropriate to bring to bear the foreign norms of one institutional life upon another.

Pippin's thesis that practical reason and reflection are always institutionally rooted might seem to be less contentious than I am claiming. We are all familiar with the process of invoking an institutional perspective, though we may not quite thematize it that way. For example, one might step back from one's patriotic sense of what as a citizen one ought to do by assessing one's responsibilities under egalitarian or libertarian principles. And certainly the latter can be described as intellectual institutions with perspective or outlook determining norms. A series of questions arises from this kind of response though. (1) They may be institutions, but does the fact that I now use them make them institutions *for me* or make them formative of my practical identity? (2) Should the fact that they seem useful to me be attributed to some implicit place of those institutions within my identity? (I am obscurely predisposed towards them thanks to some other institutional commitment.) (3) The methodological difficulty already discussed reappears: the impossibility of demonstrating that all critical perspectives are institutional. The critic may develop a response to the normative order in which she lives that appears to be radically opposed to it, yet that response will 'somehow' be explicable as the exercise of an institution. Pippin's position is problematic because it sees only two ways of explaining the practical reason of an autonomous agent: either as transcendental and *a priori*, which he intelligibly rejects, or as institutional which he accepts and builds into a total system of freedom. That leads to the homogenization of all forms of practical reason – of even that form which is directed against the normative order which has significantly determined one's identity – into institutional perspectives.

Pippin pursues this all the way to a complete institutionalist systematization of the very process of giving and asking for reasons.: '...the quality of the reasons available to me in understanding and justifying my deeds is not in the deepest sense "up to me", and is inextricable from the nature of the social practices (practices that inevitably involve relations of power and recognition) at a time' (HPP 25). What Pippin describes here is, in one way, clearly right. A declared reason might not be recognized

as a good one within a social practice, regardless of how intensely an individual might be committed to that reason. But we could imagine that an individual whose reason is scorned would nevertheless attempt to persuade others of its advantages. How is that to be done? If we are to try to give rational dignity to our reasons we cannot avail of the resources of the institution we are reasoning against (though there may, in some cases, be strategic advantages in so doing).⁶ Yet that is what Pippin actually specifies as the justificatory process of giving reasons. We avail of norms that ‘reflect social proprieties, already widely shared, proprieties functioning as individually inherited standards for such deliberation’ (HPP 149). Reasons, however, do not solely make explicit one’s institutional commitments. There are reasons, for instance, whose contents are imaginative; e.g. claims that the world would be better without states or money. And one might attempt to lead one’s life – however impracticably – under maxims built on those claims. Or it might be enough to believe that those super-institutions have failed too often to justify now a complete repudiation of them. It is not incoherent to attempt to defend these projections, but the norms of the justification must be sought, if they can be found at all, outside institutional life. These may be unpersuasive to others, but it does not follow that they are not legitimate. For neo-Hegelianism reasons have institutional validity only – all else is ‘merely intellectual’ – because their validity is recognitively sustained. It follows that emancipatory claims must rest on reasons that are not recognized, which is uncontroversial, and that those claims are therefore illegitimate, which is another matter entirely. They are illegitimate because by lacking an ontological basis – rooted in institutions – they are outside the context of ‘coherent meaning’ (HPP 5).

The analysis of practical reason so far has assumed the context of the unproblematic existence of rational institutions through which individuals might enjoy recognition as effective agents. Although Pippin cites, without criticism, Hegel’s comment about ‘delighting in the present’ (HPP 269) he concedes that social institutions may not always be objectively rational. The discussion of this possibility deserves particular attention because Pippin wants to defend the central Hegelian principle that ‘only an ethical being, a rights-bearing, morally responsible member of modern ethical life and the modern state can be free’ (HPP 125). That obliges him to offer some kind of account of the ‘freedom’ that may be ascribed to individuals outside those conditions who appear to make rational decisions about the kinds of norms they wish to act upon,

or reject. Pippin, referring to the *Philosophy of Right* § 138, notes that for Hegel ‘there can be historical periods where the major actual institutions have, as he puts it, a “hollow, spiritless, and unsettled existence”, when finding one’s duty in what is socially required could be a mistake...’ (HPP 243). What is problematic for neo-Hegelianism about this uncontroversial claim is the space it allows to practical reason. It is surely an exercise of practical reason to determine that it is mistaken to undertake what is ‘socially required’. But how is this judgment possible at all given what Pippin – though not necessarily Hegel – has attempted to establish about the essentially institutional basis of practical reason? He has argued that a transcendental perspective is false in principle: reflective detachment is, essentially, an anthropological misconception, grounded in what he refers ironically to as the ‘Inner Citadel of Subjective Certainty’ (HPP 233). Considerations that are independent of an individual’s social ontology have to be at play when that individual withdraws from institutions. (That is, unless we are discussing Hegel’s interpretation of Socrates’ withdrawal from ethical life, a situation in which the normative excellence of society is now perceived to be lost. Members of a self-declared rational society, however, could not intelligibly articulate a complaint of decline because of the closed rationality of institutional life. I will return to the discussion of Socrates below.) The basis of the disavowal of convention must therefore be found in a conception of autonomy that is excluded by Pippin. The implications of Hegel’s scenario for Pippin’s institutional theory of freedom are significant. By acknowledging that scenario Pippin undermines his own efforts to establish that institutional identity encompasses practical identity. He effectively concedes that the agent, not after all merely putatively independent, is capable of other kinds of freedom and of practical reason, involving a disavowal of ‘hollow, spiritless’ institutions. In view of this concession we find – produced from within Pippin’s position – this difficult question: why is it that in a rational world the only legitimate exercises of practical reason relate to questions of ‘just what one’s role calls for and what it does not’ (HPP 265), rather than whether the role should be accepted or otherwise? Individuals situated in darker times, contrastively, may consider not only what is ‘socially required’, but may chose to reject the institutions that give rise to these obligations. Pippin’s position unravels because it is based on a conflation of institutional identity and practical identity. Another way of capturing this problem concisely is that the effort to bind recognition

to freedom has subordinated freedom to recognition, forcing the artificial conclusion that the absence of recognitive conditions entails the absence of freedom.

Honneth also explores the possibilities for institutional detachment. He offers what, on examination, turn out to be three lines of thought. First, he sees in Hegel's notion of formal right 'a recognized possibility of withdrawal behind all the norms associated with [ethical] life'. The individual as a 'bearer of rights' understands that she has the freedom for 'indeterminacy and openness' (PIF 36). However, this is not actually a detachment from institutional life. Honneth claims that 'formal right is an intersubjective institution' and it involves 'only a minimal part' of the personality of individuals (PIF 33). It seems, then, that there is a space which is intersubjectively legitimated that the individual can invoke when the concrete – not formal – norms of ethical life no longer seem attractive. Hegel is critical of the effort to base freedom on formal right as it permits only minimal interaction and no self-determination. Honneth tells us that it is no more than 'the right to property and freedom of contract' (PIF 33). In this respect, however, it is the right to a degree of indeterminacy, but it is not the basis of an emancipatory perspective, since it is itself an intra-institutional exercise of freedom.

The second consideration also remains within the institutional frame. Honneth argues that for Hegel 'our assent to social practices' is 'conditional on the results of a rational scrutiny of their reasons' (PIF 38). This reflective attitude – in which we determine our agreement or otherwise with the social practice in question – seems to resonate with the principle of autonomy. It is a matter of self-legislation, though not of the Kantian variety in which the agent determines her actions under context neutral principles. For Honneth the rational scrutinizer must 'resort to certain normative guidelines drawn from the institutionalized practices of his environment which provide him with the most basic information about what may be regarded as a "good" reason in any situation' (PIF 39). What this does for the emancipatory possibilities of autonomy should be clear from what I tried to show as the consequences of Pippin's similar formulations. Autonomy is narrowed to reflection through the 'normative guidelines' of existing institutions. This prejudices the answer to the question of assent to social practices in favour of assent. That is not to say that the agent will always be committed to every form of given institutions. But it does mean that it will

be difficult for an agent to produce reasons for alternatives when the terms of a discussion are circumscribed by already existing institutions.

Finally, Honneth, like Pippin, turns to the *Philosophy of Right* § 138 to examine Hegel's acknowledgement that there may be times when objective or prevailing rationality becomes suspect. According to Honneth Hegel is 'prepared for the possibility of a subject coming to a halt in his "ethical" everyday life because the normative guidelines of his social environment no longer seem to offer any guarantee of being rational in the sense that the underlying principles can be generalized' (PIF 40). What is described here is quite unlike the retreat to formal right, to a minimal sphere of lawfully protected freedom. It is not a matter of the right to be indeterminate because in this case the agent seeks to continue to exercise her freedom with normative content. That content, however, cannot be located in 'existing norms' (PIF 40). Honneth quotes Hegel's claim that under these circumstances 'the better will... no longer finds itself in the duties recognized in this world and must seek to recover in ideal inwardness alone that harmony which it has lost in actuality' (PIF 41). What Hegel is describing is the retreat of Socrates from the corrupt ethical life of Athens to a normative order he had experienced before the period of decline. But what space exists for a Socrates who has come to doubt our modern 'objectively rational' institutions? He would have no prior experience of a good society with which to furnish his inward normativity. Honneth, like Pippin, provides us with a glimpse of a valid exercise of practical reason that has no foundation in institutional life. Inwardness, significantly, represents a space of agency not saturated with institutional identity and that can supposedly function without a recognitive environment. Inwardness is a retreat from interpersonal determinations. Whilst Hegel thinks of this form of freedom, in the *Phenomenology*, as the unhappy consciousness it is nevertheless freedom. Hegel's consideration of this notion interrupts the systematization of freedom as an activity specific to a world rationally structured through its recognition sustaining institutions. The notion that the exercise of normativity – of practical reason – is always an institutional perspective is challenged, within Hegelianism at least, by the thesis of inwardness.

3. Adorno: Autonomy as Resistance

The neo-Hegelian theory just considered fails to accommodate the legitimacy of emancipatory demands, I have argued, essentially because of its saturation of agency with institutional identity. The practical reasons available to individuals are always informed by an institutional position. But how are we to provide a theory of the exercise of practical reason which accommodates institutional detachment and criticism without reverting to the perceived difficulties of transcendental indeterminacy? Hegel's notion of 'inwardness' cannot be pursued as a candidate theory if Socrates is its exemplar as in that model the agent has already experienced a once wholesome ethical life.

I want to suggest that Adorno's conception of autonomy offers a promising, though incomplete, alternative to the models we have considered. It avoids the converse difficulties of the deontological and institutional exercises of practical reason. Adorno endorses the principle that normativity is irreducible to the context of institutionalized practices. But he also accepts that agency has no easy way of eschewing its socialized normativity. This may look like an effort to have things both ways. However, Adorno's notion of autonomy, in contrast to the positions just examined, is not conceived within the space of ideal theory. His analysis does not, as we shall see, take as its defining question how agents within a rational society ought to choose. And he does not believe that agents can make transparent their normative commitments. He holds that the institutionalized life of society attempts to totalize human beings, providing them with norms that, to use Habermas' term, colonize the entirety of experience. These norms, Adorno and others argue (including Honneth when philosophizing outside Hegel's political theory)⁷, are contrary to individual self-expression and to non-manipulative interpersonal relationships. In this context, the concern for Adorno must be how agents in an irrational society can choose in such a way as to emancipate themselves from that society. Emancipation here involves agents disaligning themselves from societal norms. Adorno rejects the basis of the transcendental position that we can devise a form of reason that is free of the influence of history and context. And there is no appeal to the sanctuary of inwardness either. Rather, under present historical circumstances, autonomous action is to be resistance to a normative order which influences our judgment, generally for the worse. Autonomy is, he argues, a reflective distancing from what that order demands of oneself, an analysis of its implications and, where determined, a denial of

its demands. Adorno does not see his theory of autonomy as transhistorically applicable. The theory is a response to the historical experience of the twentieth century in which the society to which Adorno belonged could find persuasive justifications for discriminatory policies and the destruction that followed from them. The question of how a person in the aftermath of that society might attempt to self-legislate is what Adorno's account of autonomy tries to explain. And this, as a question prompted by the emancipatory interest, will have to be addressed through considerations of how we experience unfreedom in our lives rather than on theoretical grounds, as Adorno specifies.⁸

Adorno does not help himself to an unencumbered conception of practical reason. Through the social theory to which he is committed he identifies a variety of ways in which contemporary society limits our capacity to determine ourselves. There are two forces, in particular, that impede the realization of a form of practical reason that would allow us to take a comprehensive view of our normative commitments: (i) the reduction of practical reason to instrumental reason; (ii) the socialization process through which the central norm of capitalism – exchange – is internalized. Both (i) and (ii) are processes, and indicate that Adorno conceives of reason as an 'historical' phenomenon (ND 27, GS 37). What is accepted as a good justification or a winning claim is a historical variable. For example, in the current socio-historical environment a person is recognized as rational – for among other attributes – because she acts according to considerations of self, profit, personal advantage; she is merely emotional if sympathy and sentiment guide her actions.

(i) Adorno develops the notion of the reduction of practical reason to instrumental reason within his account of the so-called 'dialectic of Enlightenment'. Although the Enlightenment promised to generate the conditions in which autonomy might be enjoyed – freedom from the external authorities of power and nature – Adorno with Horkheimer claims that the version of reason it developed compromised reason's own emancipatory potential. In their efforts bring reason into some kind of order – to avoid any regression – Enlightenment intellectuals, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, believed it was necessary to give it a discipline of correct procedure. They produced science as a model of this discipline. Impressed by the power and success of scientific methods and scientific criteria in their original domain the theorists of the

Enlightenment never considered whether science could serve as the foundation of rationality elsewhere. The scientific model became authoritative in settling questions of how rational beings should think and act. Reason in this new form acquired an authority that could not be contested. There was no effective means of self-critique since critique could only be seriously entertained if it played by the rules of the very form of reason it might seek to criticize. Reason could not see beyond its existing form. It is precisely this dialectic that Adorno and Horkheimer call the 'self-destruction of enlightenment' (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: xiv).

(ii) The development of instrumental reason is paralleled by that of capitalism (the connection between the emergence of instrumental reason and capitalism is apparent for Adorno, but not explained). The environment in which individuals in contemporary society must preserve themselves is set by the conditions of capitalism. Its key principle is that everything can be made equivalent and exchanged through the universal token, money. However, we do not pragmatically adopt the principle of equivalence as a means to self-preservation. We find ourselves already committed to it because of its constitutive influence over us. To be socialized, Adorno claims, is to be an effective agent of exchange. Exchange is, he writes, 'the underlying social fact through which socialization first comes about' (Adorno 2000b: 31, Adorno 1993a: 58). What this means is that the very process of becoming an individual in a society which operates the exchange principle requires the individual to be integrated within the institutions of capitalism. The spontaneous behaviour of the 'normal' person will be framed by the institutional norms of capitalism. In this context the individual exercises autonomy only as strategic exercises of calculation. The capacity to evaluate our normative environment is thereby damaged as it cannot be accessed through the precepts of strategic calculation. It is in this context that Adorno sets out to identify a weakened capacity for self-determination and how, from that position, we might begin to think about the prospects for autonomy.

In the essay, 'Education After Auschwitz' (1966) Adorno charts out a number of features of German society which he believes set the conditions for the realization and implementation of the Nazi's genocidal policies. He considers the role of *authority* in German life as one explanation for the blind rule-following that was required for enforcement of the laws of the state. And he explores the attendant issue of the

common desire to ‘fit in’ by *following the rules*. Also discussed are the dangers of a community that closes itself through *social bonds*, based on sentiment. Those who are connected through these bonds may form hostile perceptions of outside groups who are, their assumption goes, spiritually incapable of true social belonging. Adorno expresses worries about a contrived ‘aggressive’ (EAA 192, GS 10.2: 675) and ‘evil’ (EAA 203, GS 10.2: 689) nationalism. Opposing all of these tendencies, he claims, is the potential of autonomy: ‘The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating (*Nicht-Mitmachen*)’ (EAA 195, GS 10.2: 679). He recommends a new programme of education geared towards the development of a capacity for the exercise of this power, encapsulated as ‘critical self-reflection’ (EAA 193, GS 10.2: 676). It is significant that he conjoins the activities of ‘reflection’, ‘self-determination’ and ‘not cooperating’. These activities are specified for a historical context, a context that shares nothing with the assumed context of ideal theories in which institutions are either already rational or can be made so with the use of existing norms. Autonomy, conceived as resistance, will, Adorno thinks, prevent the recurrence of the consequences of the normative order in which prejudice became – nothing less than – an institutional identity.

‘The premier demand upon all education’, Adorno writes, ‘is that Auschwitz not happen again’ (EAA 191, GS 10.2: 674). He adds: ‘Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to this single ideal: never again Auschwitz’ (EAA 191, GS 10.2: 674). Adorno, in fact, considers those ideals precisely in order to develop a form of education which equips individuals with autonomy, in the sense he himself has specified. Certainly Adorno’s account of education departs from the classical ideals that have generally formed the focal point of the debate. Adorno does not contribute to the theory of education as *Bildung* because, according to his analysis, the conditions which once permitted *Bildung* no longer prevail. As he writes elsewhere: ‘*Bildung* was supposed to benefit the free individual – an individual grounded in his own consciousness but developing within society, sublimating his instincts purely as his own spirit (*Geist*). *Bildung* is implicitly the prerequisite of an autonomous society – the more enlightened the individual, the more enlightened society as a whole’ (Adorno 1993b: 19 translation altered, GS 8: 97). The power of *Kultur* to provide the individual with a humanistic consciousness

was overwhelmed by the very social forces against which Adorno's conception of autonomy directs itself. Education is now to be the business of enabling individuals to recognize within themselves, and thereafter to take an oppositional attitude to, those norms which have carried non-reflective, non-self-critical individuals – perhaps even themselves – into collective blindness.

Adorno is not, then, resurrecting the Kantian conception of a self-legislating agent who can positively act according to universal maxims free of heteronomous motivations. Adorno frequently criticizes this model on the grounds that its invocation of pure reason misses the degree to which reasons and motivations are already socially determined.⁹ In this respect Adorno's position lays the foundation for one of the key contentions of non-ideal theory, which Mills expresses in this way: 'What distinguishes ideal theory [from non-ideal theory] is the reliance on idealization to the exclusion, or at least marginalization, of the actual' (Mills 205: 168). The actual that Adorno's position acknowledges is the prevalence of unthinking identification with the processes of society. That identification is demanded by contemporary institutional life. Since agents adopt much of what they take to be the good from social institutions that are, Adorno holds, suspect, the notion that they might develop substantial and purified alternatives to which they could give the form of reason is a naïve claim about the possibility of autonomy. The autonomous agent, rather, exercises practical reason through vigilant self-reflection. She suspects her own tendency to act according to the norms of her society. She is concerned, for example, by her weakness for authority, her desire to be recognized as a rule-follower who can fit in and succeed, and she fears her valorization of communal identity over non-identity. We live in the false or 'wrong life', Adorno claims (Adorno: 1974: 39, GS 4: 43). Our 'wrong' or 'false' communities contain no values from which we might simply select in order to develop a moral resilience to forms of consciousness that could produce Auschwitz. The norms that bind society together, he believes, serve merely to perpetuate a society that does not contribute to the fulfilment of the individual: 'life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live the good life in it or to fulfill his destiny as a human being' (PMP 167, PdM 248). The claim, made by Honneth, that the agent engaged rational scrutiny must 'resort to certain normative guidelines drawn from the institutionalized practices of his environment' to

establish 'what may be regarded as a "good" reason in any situation' takes on an ironic significance in this context.

In a radio discussion with Hellmut Becker Adorno identifies the notion of intellectual maturity, *Mündigkeit*, with autonomy. He laments a contemporary lack of 'regard to autonomy, and therefore to maturity' (EMR 24, EzM 136). It was Kant who announced, famously, in 'What is Enlightenment?' (1784) the Enlightenment as the most important development in the realization of humanity's maturity: '*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity (Unmündigkeit). Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another*' (Kant 1991: 54). Kant perceives this *Unmündigkeit* as a moral failing which can nevertheless be overcome with courage: '*Sapere Aude!*' Elsewhere Kant develops a pedagogy for moral education which effectively acknowledges that autonomy is an achievement, rather than the default position of human beings (see Kant 2011). Adorno specifies that education for *Mündigkeit* is one of 'education for protest and for resistance' (EMR 31, EzM 145). This conception of autonomy / *Mündigkeit* represents a significant departure from the classical models. Its conception of self-determination is narrow. It is not a theory of how individuals might, through their own free and rational choices, achieve dignified and flourishing lives. Autonomy as a form of resistance is, strictly, resistance to the power of societal determination, and is self-determination only in so far as it is resistance. It is, according to Adorno, a determinate stance of non-cooperation. Finlayson helpfully elaborates this as an 'ethics of resistance' (Finlayson 2002: 5).¹⁰ A determinate stance means that resistance cannot be a blank negativity or a reactive rejection. It is, rather, a reflective process, in which individuals assert autonomy by trying to understand the normative forces that influence their inclinations and spontaneous responses. It is 'resistance to heteronomy... the countless forms of morality that are imposed from outside' (PMP 170, PdM 252). Adorno's theory, cognizant of the determining force of institutions, is under no illusion that autonomy as self-reflection will lead to an emancipated world, free of domination and manipulation. He notes: '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. Other than this negative prescription no guidance can really be envisaged' (PMP 167-8, PdM 248-9).

However, resistance too requires a criterion. If it is to be determinately negative – ‘the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through’ (PMP 168, PdM 249) – there must be a principle by means of which what is to be resisted can be identified. The agent must, in other words, have some way of deciding which first-order reasons can be endorsed and which rejected. The Kantian categorical imperative has as its criterion what can be made a universalizable maxim of action. Universalizability, then, provides a reason for endorsement of a desire. Adorno too develops the self-legislating process as a categorical imperative, but it takes a form appropriate to a society in the aftermath of destruction. It subjects inclinations to a concrete historical reason. Adorno writes: ‘A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen’ (ND 365, GS 6: 358). The concretion of this image makes the criterion of endorsability which we apply to our inclinations a substantive one, rather than formal. And we might think of this criterion itself as non-discursive, requiring no justification, and being normatively primitive. But it is to be, for Adorno, the criterion of autonomous moral action. If our thoughts incline towards generalization, towards group-think, towards rigorous laws over mimetic and sympathetic interactions, then Auschwitz speaks against acting upon them.

The criterion of Adorno’s categorical imperative is deliberately emotive too, since he seeks to redress what he identifies as ‘coldness’ – an inability to love, ‘indifference to the fate of others’ (EAA 201, GS 10.2: 687) – as a core part of the tyrannical character responsible for countless atrocities against other human beings. In the essay ‘Philosophy and Teachers’ Adorno speaks about the decline in a capacity to love and specifically disqualifies from the teaching profession individuals who are evidently without this capacity. Emotionally limited teachers would contribute to a reproduction of coldness in their students (PT 28, GS 10.2: 485). And in ‘Education after Auschwitz’ he understands the positive example of a loving teacher to be effective for early childhood experience only (EAA 193, GS 10.2: 676). For others, that effort would be ‘futile’ (EAA 202, GS 10.2: 688).

What Adorno is proposing is a thoroughly historical conception of the criterion of endorsability: resistance is the essence of autonomy in a world that knows it is

capable of producing Auschwitz. This is a model that may be of no service to other possible societies. The reaction of readers today may be to think that our democratic institutions are now so well-entrenched that the time for Adorno's crisis driven conception of autonomy has passed. To insist on the comportment of resistance would be to deprive us of the opportunity to develop positive responses to the very new challenges that contemporary societies face. Yet it remains a commitment of contemporary critically minded theory that we have not yet liberated ourselves from the dangers of technological catastrophe, over-bearing social totalities and patterns of discrimination, and that until we have properly understood the societal norms that sustain these tendencies we must pause before developing progressive social institutions. Whether the image of Auschwitz itself captures the possible dangers within today's tendencies may be open to reconsideration.

We do not have to accept the specifics of Adorno's interpretation about either the conditions within which autonomy operates (instrumental, calculative) or that Auschwitz is the inevitable product of a society that has lost the capacity for self-determination in order to see his conception of autonomy as an alternative to institutionalism. The central principle that we take from Adorno's theory is that acts of self-determination are subject to objective conditions of which the agent is not the author. The institutional theory of freedom is also committed to this notion, but with the assumption that the institutions with which an agent identifies are rational because she experiences her freedom through them. But if, as Adorno proposes, institutions contribute to patterns of behaviour that are unavailable to intra-institutional criticism then we must – in the absence of ideal institutions – assume a critical relationship to the normative commitments with which we are provided through membership of those institutions. This is not a view from nowhere.

It seems to me that Adorno's account of autonomy as resistance coherently accommodates emancipatory demands. Unlike the neo-Hegelians discussed in this paper, it does not fall into the difficulty of tying autonomy to supposedly rational institutions. By systematizing freedom and recognition the neo-Hegelians, I have argued, deny themselves any way of theorizing a withdrawal from institutions, resting tentatively and against their own principles on the mysterious possibility of (non-Socratic) inwardness. Adorno's notion of autonomy acknowledges the power of our

institutional commitments. It does not suggest that even in the face of the recognized failure of institutions that individuals can assume that they have divested themselves of the norms that sustained those institutions. The danger of such an assumption is that it is a step towards the construction of a normative order which may falsely believe itself to be genuinely new and distinguishable from its predecessor (the problem of ideal theorizing). The exercise of resistance therefore does not generate a substantive moral alternative. That is not to say that it is not effectively a normative theory, but rather that it is motivated by the principle of what must be avoided.¹¹ And in that respect it does not attempt to rival the classical theories where an account of autonomy as flourishing, through autonomous self-determination, forms part of the story. In contrast to the neo-Hegelian theory Adorno offers a conception of autonomy in which the outcome of a self-legislating process is not legitimated in advance by the institutional commitments which are supposed to give us our reasons.

Nevertheless, Adorno's position is not well-developed and, as a consequence, it leaves a central issue exposed, that of whether education for autonomy is even possible. What is involved in the educational process, as he describes it, diverges in fundamental ways from the primary experience of autonomy upon which Adorno bases his explanation of resistance. There are the critics who have 'seen through' the forms of the false life. They have done so without the guidance of others and in independence of the prevailing norms. In these specific senses they have an emancipatory perspective. But this achievement of autonomy resembles a talent, an act of genius. In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno speaks of 'a stroke of undeserved luck [that] has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms' (ND 41, GS 6: 51). The distribution of this talent is clearly not equal, Adorno thinks. And it is deeply individual: Adorno does not envisage possession of this capacity for critical insight as the basis of collective action. Such action is excluded by the 'categorical imperative' because of its tendency to institutionalize its participants. Beside the few individuals – isolated and 'unhampered by any ukase' (ND 46, GS 6: 56) – there are those who are to be instructed in the skill of seeing through for themselves what has been 'critically dissected by the most progressive minds'. Can a deeply individual perspective be translated, by some educational process, into autonomy for all? In 'Education after Auschwitz' Adorno clarifies that education for autonomy should take the form of sociology – perhaps he

might have said critical theory – which ‘must teach about the societal play of forces that operates beneath the surface of political forms’ (EAA 203, GS 10.2: 690). In this case, however, the notion of autonomy becomes less clear. Those instructed in autonomy in this sense may be, against Adorno, conceived as operating within a specific institutional form of life – a sociological/critical theoretical one – which has its own defined practices in the whole business of giving reasons. To counter the charge of an implicit institutionalism a response might be – gathering some of Adorno’s thoughts together – that children who both receive a critical education and are taught by exemplary characters – teachers who can love – may develop a capacity for autonomy which is not compromised by the institutional practices of an intellectual theory (thinking within the institution of sociology about how to act). As individuals without coldness their reasons will, like those of the original ‘lucky’ individual, be directed by a love of things, responding freely to the self-evidently morally repugnant, rather than by a need for institutional recognition: ‘to rescue’ what has been subjugated, Adorno writes, ‘means to love things’ (ND 191, GS 6: 191). But this is to speculate on an answer that Adorno did not begin to provide. The task of constructing a theory of education lay outside Adorno’s range.¹² What that deficiency highlights is the obvious difference between a description of autonomous agency (and its conditions) and a theory of education for autonomy. The first is a philosophical task, while the second requires theories of pedagogy and of childhood development that are absent from Adorno’s reflections.

This is not an unusual deficiency among philosophers who propose theories of education, but the problem arguably goes deeper in Adorno. What his notion of education for autonomy as resistance specifies is the development of an essentially critical-theoretical consciousness. This negativism precludes him from proposing instruction on, for example, comprehensively grounded notions of human dignity, respect and toleration. We might contrast Adorno’s reticence with Korsgaard who, as I noted, develops a positive context transcending notion of humanity. She sets out a sequence of inferences that takes us from the claim that it matters to human beings that they conform to their practical identities, because their ‘humanity’ is the ‘source’ of their reasons, to the claim that acting therefore means endorsing that humanity, from which it follows that ‘human beings are valuable’ (Korsgaard 1996: 123). Adorno acknowledges that the original Kantian formulation of humanity refuses ‘to

cede the idea of humanity to the existing society' – a negative value – though it struggles in its efforts to avoid transcendentalism (ND 258, GS 6: 256). Nevertheless, if the original version is commended for not settling for current social arrangements a conception of humanity based on the experience of existing societies will not work. From the perspective of Adorno's position, deriving the notion of humanity from a conception of one's humanity would reproduce the current intuitions of what humanity is. Beginning with one's self-conception as a human being roots us in the present. And, further, it is no guarantee that one will be capable of recognizing humanity (in this sense) in others.¹³ It is easy to see why a theorist in the era of Auschwitz might have lost confidence in the saving power of the ideals of human dignity etc. Yet without them individuals are ill-equipped to be educated in acting under the new categorical imperative that Adorno has proposed.

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Notes

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¹ To contrast, Nietzsche's *Übermensch* represents completed emancipation: no part of its identity can be traced back to the normative order that it has overcome. Its relation to that order is not one of negation: it has no continuity with that order. Within the theory of emancipation, however, part of the struggle for liberation is the struggle with oneself as one recognizes oneself as a discontented member, but nevertheless member, of a normative order.

² Here I separate Frederick Neuhouser's interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right* from that of the neo-Hegelians. The basis of this distinction will become clearer in the course of the paper. The vital point of departure lies in his clarification that it 'is not Hegel's view that social members are, or ought to be, so closely identified with their roles that they are unable to distance themselves reflectively from their social attachments and question the value of those attachments and the institutions of which they are a part'. As Neuhouser points out this notion would, for Hegel, deprive the individual of freedom in those attachments (Neuhouser 2000: 95).

³ See, for instance, Patten 1999: 176-190.

⁴ Similarly, evaluation of a first-order desire, he writes, 'is a matter of *somehow* being able to identify myself with the determinate individual course chosen' (HPP 143, emphasis added).

⁵ Rainer Forst explains that fallacy in this way: ‘It is... a communitarian fallacy to infer the impossibility of any deontological or legal principles from the thesis of the intersubjective constitution of the self’ (Forst 2002: 231).

⁶ For instance: Habermas adopts Rawls’ translation proviso that religious citizens seeking to contribute to debates in the public sphere must find secular justification for their religiously determined norms, for ‘without a successful translation there is no prospect of the substantive content of religious voices being taken up in the agendas and negotiations within political bodies and in the broader political process’ (Habermas 2006: 11).

⁷ See, in particular, Honneth 1995.

⁸ In *Negative Dialectics* he writes: ‘The contradiction of freedom and determinism is not, as Kant’s understanding of his *Critiques* would have it, a contradiction between two theoretical positions, dogmatism and skepticism; it is a contradiction in the subjects’ way to experience themselves, as now free, now unfree’ (ND 299, GS 6: 294). See Wellmer 2009: 221 for a discussion of Adorno’s existential reorientation of Kant’s theoretical construction of freedom and determination.

⁹ Though Adorno, it should be noted, defends formalism in ethics – with its context-independent stipulations of universalism and categorical obligation – when the only other option happens to be the ‘bloody colors’ of ethnic politics (ND 236, GS 6: 235). It is nevertheless no basis for genuine moral responsiveness. Its ‘painful abstractness’ (ND 272, GS 6: 268) means, for Adorno, that it departs from the particular demand of historical moral situations.

¹⁰ Finlayson’s discussion on the consistency of Adorno negativism – his setting out of moral action in terms of what must be avoided – is the most substantial consideration to date of the relationship between resistance and normative ethics in Adorno’s work. Although the question of that consistency does not bear upon the analysis of resistance this paper provides – setting up a general alternative to context saturated agency – Finlayson provides useful explanations for the sources of moral motivation in Adorno’s work that (in the terms of this paper) have no institutionalized background.

¹¹ See Freyenhagen 2008 for a reading of Adorno that defends the possibility of his negativistic ethics.

¹² Nimrod Aloni (Aloni 2002) provides a theory for the realization of education for autonomy that is not institutionally constrained and which, like Adorno’s draft proposal, emphasizes autonomy’s affective dimensions.

¹³ And finally, Korsgaard’s phenomenological affirmation of agency – eliciting the intuitions that attend these notions, ‘I couldn’t live with myself’ (Korsgaard 1996: 101), ‘how would you like it if someone did that to you?’ (Korsgaard 1996: 142) – locates the limits of one’s autonomy in one’s conception of oneself. This seems apparent also in the account of what one takes one’s practical identity to be: ‘a description under which you value yourself, a description under which you find your life to be worth living and your actions to be worth undertaking’ (Korsgaard 1996: 101).

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Abbreviations used

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- EzM Adorno, T. W. (1971), *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit, Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker 1959-1969*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
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