

**Is it possible to live a right life in a wrong life?  
-Adorno's critique of Kant's view of freedom and the moral imperative**

**Abstract**

This article discusses a crucial question through an analysis of Adorno's critique of Kant's moral philosophy: can human beings live a good life? Kant optimistically argues that human beings as rational beings have transcendental freedom and can autonomously formulate and follow universal moral laws without any empirical conditions. Therefore, human beings can always act morally and live a good life. Adorno, on the other hand, argues that there is no right life in a wrong life.

Adorno, who was at a different time in history from Kant, criticized Kant's philosophy of transcendental freedom, moral imperative, and identity, and proposed new moral imperatives. I think Adorno's critique of Kant's conception of freedom failed, but his critique of the moral imperatives and identity shows a complex and profound philosophical reflection and practical concern.

*Keywords:* moral Imperatives, transcendental freedom, non-identity

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## **Is it possible to live a right life in a wrong life?**

### **-Adorno's critique of Kant's view of freedom and the moral imperative**

Can human beings live a right life? On this question, both Adorno and Kant seem to propose a kind of moral antinomy in an extreme situation. Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno (1997), reflecting on the Nazi genocide of the Jews in the Second World War and the cultural industrial phenomenon of late capitalist society, explicitly states that "in the bad life a good life is not possible" (p. 177). Adorno argues that in an extremely wrong social environment, people cannot live a morally right life anyway. Whatever we do, apart from changing the social structure, we are only conniving, directly or indirectly, at some evil. Kant (1785), however, argues that, as rational beings, humans have a practical reason or a priori freedom to make and follow universal moral laws on their own. Even if the moral situation is very difficult and dangerous, man can always make the right choice. It is even this difficult moral situation that reveals morality (Kant, 1788). Adorno believes that human beings are not free in the wrong social circumstances. Kant, on the other hand, believes that human beings are free regardless of their social circumstances.

More than that, for Adorno, the unfreedom of modern society was closely linked to the formalist and abstract view of freedom of Kantian ethics. He criticizes Kant's moral philosophy in *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (1997) and *Negative Dialectics* (2003). He argues that Kant constructs a logical system that seeks identity, ignores concrete specificity, and is purely free of contradiction, with the concept of reason at its core. Although such a moral philosophy was beneficial to the bourgeoisie's opposition to a hierarchical society, the rigid Enlightenment rationality gradually became instrumental

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rationality. It is under the domination of this instrumental rationality that modern people cannot reflect and choose the right life on their own.

Adorno (1951) also argues that a purely formal moral imperative could easily slip into the moral indifference that was the key condition that made the Auschwitz massacre possible. On this basis, Adorno proposes a new moral imperative to prevent a similar catastrophe from happening again.

### **Adorno's Critique of Kant's View of Freedom**

According to Kant, the validity of the moral law lies in its absolute necessity. And the absolute necessity of the moral law lies in the fact that it is not grounded in the empirical world, but its innate validity. This innate validity can only be found in the concept of pure reason. Pure reason, or pure practical reason, has a property of free will, which can autonomously formulate a universal moral law independently of the prescriptions of the empirical world, which is Kant's idea of freedom. This is transcendental freedom, a freedom that is independent of the empirical world and which, according to reason, innately and autonomously formulates moral laws.

Adorno raises doubts about Kant's transcendental freedom. He argues that the necessity of the moral law ("You must act thus and not otherwise") and the necessity that the subject must obey this command out of reverence leads to the disappearance of freedom (Kant, 1785, p. 132). In other words, if people are compelled and limited by these two necessities in real life, then there is little freedom left. Thus, Adorno (1997) argues that Kant's rational freedom, in the end, leads to unfreedom.

"His philosophy starts off by postulating freedom and extracts an immense pathos from it, but in the process of developing its meaning, this freedom dwindles to the point

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of extinction and his philosophy ends up by dispensing with freedom entirely – even though this is done in a purely formal manner, without deferring in any obvious way to authoritarian or hierarchical ideas. Of the two factors that are held in suspension here, that of necessity or law and that of freedom, the element of necessity actually devours that of freedom.” (pp.133).

Adorno affirms Kant's emphasis on freedom at the beginning of his theory, namely that human beings, like God, can make laws on their own. However, the equation of freedom with the law has the consequence that not only is freedom canceled out in theory, but it is also simply not possible in practice. The harshness and coercion of practical reason reduce the space for individual freedom to a very small extent, while “the coercive nature of reality, of the social reality in which we live, prevails over freedom.” (Adorno, 1997, p. 133). In summary, Adorno (1997) believes that “the repressive element that is implicit in the structure of practical reason proves to be stronger by far than the element of freedom.” (p. 133).

Kant's interpretation of the imperative and the reverential sentiment of “necessity” in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* gives the oppressive illusion that “you must do so”. Kant's principle of universalizability is as follows: “there is therefore only a single categorical imperative, and it is this: act only according to that maxim through you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” (Kant, 1785, p. 71). The universal imperative of duty could also be expressed as follows: “so act as if the maxim of your action were to become by your will a universal law of nature.” (Kant, 1785, p. 71). There are three elements in the imperative: the law, the norm, and the will. Laws are the general principles of action. Norms are the subjective principles of action. The will is

thought of as a capacity to determine itself to action “in conformity with the representation of certain laws” (Kant, 1785, p. 83). Formally, the core of the imperative is the requirement that our subjective guidelines for action must conform to objective universal laws. And the supremacy of the law lies in the fact that it has an innate validity, being formulated prior to empirical experience and independent of any preferences and needs. “we would be instructed to act even if every propensity, inclination, and natural arrangement of ours were against it.” (Kant, 1785, p. 79).

In Kant (1785), however, the compulsion of law is derived from the autonomy of the will. The rational being obeys only his own, but universal legislation. And man must act only in accordance with his own, but universally legislated will. (p. 85) This obedience is precisely freedom in Kant's view because people obey their own autonomously formulated laws, not external natural causality, or religious commandments. The principle of self-legislated, the principle of making and following one's laws, is a central element in understanding Kant's conception of freedom.

Adorno, who was well versed in Kant's moral philosophy, was certainly aware of the relationship between Kant's principle of self-discipline and Kant's concept of freedom. However, Adorno's critique of Kant was more of an ideological critique. He argues that the bourgeoisie, represented by Kant, conceals new oppressions in the name of opposing old ones. Kant's autonomy is, in fact, a form of Heteronomy, and Kant's freedom is a form of unfreedom. Specifically, Adorno argues his point from three levels: philosophical, sociological, and psychoanalytical.

First, on a philosophical level, Adorno regards the objectification of the self as a process of externalization and self-alienation. Freedom, the subject's autonomous will to

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enact the laws of sameness, is influenced and regulated from the outset by the external world. Pure, independent, and abstract freedom can only be a “concept fetishism” (Adorno, 2003, p. 216), which does not exist. “Identity, the condition of freedom, is immediately and simultaneously the principle of determinism. There is a will insofar as a man objectified himself into a character. Toward himself—whatever that may be—he thus becomes something external, after the model of the outward world of things that are subjected to causality.” (Adorno, 2003, p. 216-217).

Second, from a sociological perspective, Adorno argues that the relationship between freedom and society is not one in which the idea of freedom constructs society, as Kant imagined; rather, Adorno agrees with Marx that it is the existence of a society that determines the idea of freedom. “it is the nature-controlling sovereignty and its social form, dominion over people, that suggest the opposite to our consciousness: the idea of freedom.” (Adorno, 2003, p. 220). Adorno therefore strongly disagreed with Kant's view that there is a right life even in a wrong life. “Kant’s stubborn endeavor to demonstrate the moral sense as something that exists everywhere, even in the radically wicked.” (Adorno, 2003, p. 218). According to Adorno, the individual does not exist in isolation in a vacuum. The freedom of the individual is closely linked to the general state of society. Freedom becomes a real problem when the individual pursues his or her interests with rationality and comes into conflict with society. “whether society permits the individual to be as free as it promises, and thus it was also the question whether society itself is as free as it promises.” (Adorno, 2003, p. 219). The freedom of the individual and the unfreedom of society are always intertwined. In a society of extreme evil, people cannot

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choose the right life. Under the Nazi totalitarianism of the Second World War, for example, no one could choose a right and moral life.

Finally, from a psychoanalytic perspective, Adorno (1997) argues that the compulsion of the moral law lies not in what Kant calls its innate validity, but in the fact that it when a psychological fact.

“Psychoanalysis in its strict form has shown that these compulsive mechanisms that we are subject to are phylogenetic, that is to say, they are internalizations of actual power, internalizations of dominant social norms. These norms are transmitted to us through the family and we generally appropriate them by identifying with father figures... Moreover, psychoanalysis has shown something that would not have been to Kant’s taste at all. This is the idea that the authority known to psychoanalysis as compulsive character, or in Freud’s later writing as super-ego, is irrational in so far as it is pathogenic. That means that this compulsion tends to be transmitted to things that are irreconcilable with reason.” (p.82).

That is, people comply with moral compulsions and display certain behaviors not necessarily because they are following rational free will, but possibly because of an irrational instinctive impulse - an instinctive urge to obey the social norms of the superego. This impulse is irrational and precedes self-consciousness.

Adorno argues from three levels of philosophy, sociology, and psychoanalysis that humans are not unconditionally free subjects. The subject is influenced and limited from the very beginning by an object, which includes both natural objects and society. At the same time, the subject is controlled and influenced by the inner superego. Thus, the independent, autonomous, rational, morally law-abiding subject envisaged by Kant does

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not exist. The subject can never be called the “sphere of absolute origins”(Adorno, 2003, p. 223)in philosophy. Kant derives human freedom from the validity of the moral law, but for Adorno, this freedom is precisely an unfreedom, which always contains a heteronomy element in autonomy. Freedom and determinism are in this sense the same thing.

Since Kant and Adorno had different understandings of freedom, they also had different interpretations of the antinomy. According to Kant, on the level of theoretical reason, human beings are not free, because they are always a link in a natural causal chain. On the other hand, on the level of practical reason, humans have absolute spontaneity, can create new causal sequences, can formulate moral laws according to their rational faculties, and are therefore free.

In this way, Adorno argues, Kant focuses the problem of free will on individual determination. However, what Kant calls the decisive subject, or the individual does not have ontological priority. The individual is always in a certain context and is a social being. Since Kant, the excessive advocacy of individual freedom has promoted a bourgeois revolt against the old oppression and achieved bourgeois freedom. But this approach has brought about new oppression, which is hidden in the principle of rationality. For Adorno, freedom, and oppression were always linked, and the two formed a new coalition, which was the antinomy of freedom in late capitalist society.

### **Reflections on Adorno's critique of Kant's view of freedom**

#### ***The failure of the critique of a transcendental freedom***

It is important to clarify that Kant's 'Three Critiques' and Adorno's 'Critique' have different meanings. Kant's 'critique' is an examination, whereas Adorno's critique of Kant

is ideological. Adorno's critique of social unfreedom and the domination of rationality cannot refute Kant's transcendental freedom, and the critique is a failure. Adorno emphasizes the influence of natural causality in the empirical world on the subject. He argues that the subject is not free, which is determined by human beings' preferences, desires, unconsciousness, and social environment. Adorno's subject has tended to be de-subjectified, rather than the rational subject of the post-Enlightenment period. In this way, freedom does not exist either. Kant's freedom, however, is an a priori freedom. He had already expressed his position clearly in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* that the ground of freedom for moral philosophy cannot be found empirically, but only a priori in the concept of pure reason. Only the moral law thus established is necessary and universal. What Kant does is strip away all empirical factors from the universal law, for it is only by excluding all natural and empirical conditions and applying the a priori freedom of reason that a universal, necessary, and valid moral law can be formulated. Adorno's critique of Kant's transcendental freedom of the rational subject by an 'unfreedom of the empirical subject' is, therefore, a failure.

I think that Adorno confuses actuality/oughtness, fact/norm, and natural causality/free causality. Indeed, Adorno tends to, or rather deliberately, subsumes the latter into the former. In an unfree social situation, we may not be able to act rightly and morally, but this does not mean that we lose the rational freedom to know 'what to do' altogether. For Kant, this freedom is a subjective condition of being human. It is the essence of personhood and divinity, that is, the dignity of the human person. What distinguishes man as a rational being from the animal is that he can set moral laws

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autonomously according to his rational will, regardless of external limitations and bodily impulses. This a priori freedom is neither compelled by natural causality nor is it arbitrary and chaotic. This rational capacity not only provides the objective law of freedom but also gives us the requirement that “something should happen”. As Robert B. Pippin (2005) comments on Adorno, he thinks that Adorno has always ignored Kant's strict distinction between practical necessity and causal necessity. (p. 115).

***Behind the De-transcendental: A Critique of Identity***

It would be too simplistic for us to identify the weaknesses of Adorno's critique of the unfoundedness of a priori freedom only on a theoretical level. For Adorno, steeped in the German classical philosophical tradition, was he unaware of the distinction between the empirical realm and the transcendental realm? Why did he try so hard to de-transcendental Kant's moral philosophy? This is a question that deserves some further reflection.

Adorno's time was set in the first half of the 20th century, when the philosophical trend was 'anti-systemic' and 'back to the world of individual lives, reflecting on reason and rationalization and recalibrating the moral codes of behavior of modern people. The position and spirit of Adorno's Negative Dialectics also inform us that his critique is of Kantian transcendental freedom and, above all, of “identity”. Adorno (2003) thinks “the mistake in traditional thinking is that identity is taken for the goal.” (p. 149). Kant's transcendental freedom embodies that identical character of traditional philosophy. When the subject uses rationality to grasp the object, using concepts and logic free of contradiction to present the thing being thought, there is always a tendency to totalize. When Kant asserts that human beings use rationality to innately formulate moral laws,

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what they are doing is assimilating those things that are non-identical, which is a great compulsion. It is this identity that Adorno criticizes. For Adorno, non-identity is more fundamental because identity is based on non-identity. The subject first must stipulate to the not-identity to become a subject with identity. Otherwise, the subject cannot generate consciousness of identity. In this sense, the transcendental subject requires irreducible non-identities. This means that the subject is a dialectical and contradictory synthesis of sameness and non-sameness. In contrast, Kant's a priori free subject denies contradiction.

The focus of Adorno's critique, therefore, lies in the identicalizing operation of traditional metaphysics. When traditional philosophy employs thought, rationality, concepts, and logos to grasp objects, it excludes or identifies non-identical objects, culminating in a system of non-contradictory and identical concepts. Such a system of sameness, according to Adorno, is a primordial ideology. It appears without contradiction but is the product of subjective rationality. Adorno (2003) advocates "the recollection of the cognitive powers themselves" (p. 61), that is, a skepticism towards our rational constructs and a rethinking of our philosophy of consciousness. To return to the question of freedom, if we use concepts to grasp freedom, we necessarily oppose the idea of freedom to freedom itself. "Whenever we try by a merely posited, "operational" definition to strip the concept of freedom of what philosophical terminology used to call its idea, we are arbitrarily diminishing the concept for utility's sake, in comparison with what it means in itself." (Adorno, 2003, p. 151).

Moreover, Adorno's reflections on the genocide at Auschwitz are closely linked to his critique of identity. Adorno (2003) argues that "Genocide is the absolute integration" (p. 362). When the Nazi regime slaughtered millions of Jews by administrative measures,

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it was performing an identical operation. “Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death” (Adorno, 2003, p. 362). The metaphysical thinking of identity triumphs in terror when the Jew is eliminated as non-identical things. For Adorno, totalitarianism is an identical rational way of thinking, the essence of which is the elimination of difference. the grinding down of human individuality and freedom by the capitalist cultural industry, which pursues standardization, commercialization, and homogenization is also a form of identical violence. The richness and differences of the individual are eroded in this integration. As a result, the freedom promised by the spirit of the Enlightenment, marked by the courage to be practical and rational, was not realized. Adorno and M. Max Horkheimer (1997) concluded that “Enlightenment becomes myth again”.

It is important to note here that Adorno is not opposed to the principle of identity. He uses the existence of non-identities, particulars, and non-conceptual things, as a reminder to reflect on and correct the serious flaws and disastrous consequences of traditional metaphysics. “To change the direction of conceptual thinking, to turn it toward the nonidentical-that is the hinge of negative dialectics. Confronted with the insight into the way the nonconceptual necessarily shapes all concepts, the identity compulsion afflicting all concepts lacking this counter-reflective moment would dissolve.” (Schweppenhäuser, 2009, p. 47). In other words, Adorno is reminding us that thought, in using concepts to grasp objects, can never grasp the completely. The negative dialectic is not a demand that thought can take in the whole heterogeneity of things, but a demand that thought reflects on its finitude and that rationality criticizes itself. Adorno does not completely deny the legitimacy of identity, but only emphasizes the dialectical

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relationship between thought and object, subject and object, freedom, and nature, in terms of the existence of 'non-identity'. Only by maintaining an awareness of the constant reflection on rationality itself can society move towards true freedom. (Huhn,2004, p. 51).

### **Adorno's critique of Kant's moral imperative**

#### ***Moral formalism and moral indifference***

After analyzing and reflecting on Adorno's critique of Kant's a priori freedom, we turn to Adorno's critique of the moral imperative. The categorical imperative is the fundamental principle of free will, the cornerstone of Kant's moral philosophy.

Adorno begins with a critique of the validity of this moral imperative. In Kant, the categorical imperative is a rational fact, and it is precisely because it is a given rational fact that the moral imperative is absolute and that only a rational person is necessarily obliged by it. In *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno (1997) commented that the reason why Kant would argue that rational agents necessarily obey moral imperatives lies in the unity of reason and will in rational beings. However, human practice shows that reason and will are not united and that having the right consciousness does not necessarily lead to the right action. (p. 110). In modern society, with the disintegration of traditional ethics, the individual and reality are separated or even opposed to each other, “no direct path leads from knowledge to practice” (p. 110-113). Since reason cannot be the direct basis for action, the categorical imperative is no longer valid for rational actions.

Secondly, Adorno argues that this abstract, purely formal moral imperative and denaturalized moral motives have led to the general moral indifference which is the dominant principle of modern society, and which was an important cause of Auschwitz.

A common critique of Kant's moral imperative is to say that Kant's universal law only requires the identity of form but not the identity of content, which is an empty formalism. If no empirical motive could serve as the basis for a moral imperative, the result would be that the moral imperative would be separated from actual moral values, and doing good would become a purely rational obligation, completely unrelated to one's sentimental motives. To exclude the connection between morality and nature is in effect to abstract the purpose of morality, which is a dubious position.

The critique of formalism and the tendency to denaturalize moral motives is not a feature of Adorno's critique. What is unique about Adorno's critique of the categorical imperative is that he draws a connection between moral formalism and fascism based on empirical evidence, attempting to demonstrate that there is some hidden link between Kant's moral formalism and Auschwitz. In Adorno's view, moral formalism can easily slip into the moral indifference that was the key condition that made the Auschwitz massacre possible.

According to Adorno, Kant's moral philosophy is based on two obligations, one is the positive obligation of self-control, namely using reason to control emotions. The other is the negative obligation to be indifferent, that is, to not allow emotions to control oneself. Both two obligations make it a goal to act with indifference. For Kant, sympathy is the emotional motive that most needs to be denounced. The arbitrary and blind nature of sympathy makes it impossible to serve as a reliable basis for universal legislation.

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According to Kant, moral motives must exclude all elements of sentiment and preference and act solely out of reverence for moral principles. This rejection of sympathy leads reason continually to indifference, and once this indifference is taken to its extreme, morality is left with formal reliability and not content reliability.

***self-preservation and instrumental rationality***

In addition to this, Adorno also critiques the principle of self-preservation, a hidden ideological bias in this moral formalism. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) pointed out that rational formalism develops from the principle of self-preservation, which makes the individual a closed subject with blind self-preservation. Such a subject excludes the unknown other (external nature and inner desires, emotions, and inclinations) as alien. To realize the principle of self-preservation, reason must calculate, formalize and instrumentalize itself. The subject and the object need to be in a state of the most economical emotional indifference. This moral indifference is also exacerbated by the high division of labor in modern capitalist society. In the process, Enlightenment reason or sublime practical reason gradually becomes indifferent instrumental reason, and absolute submission to moral imperatives gradually becomes absolute submission to socio-economic norms. Freedom and coercion are combined peculiarly. Adorno argues that the Holocaust at Auschwitz was a disaster caused by this general moral indifference. The participants and bystanders of the Holocaust were blind to the suffering of the Jews because they had lost all sympathy for the suffering of others. They would actively obey the orders of their commanders but were indifferent to the content of the orders. Based on the above analysis, Adorno (2003)

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concludes that "Indifference is the dominant principle of modern society and without it, there would be no genocide." (p. 363).

How to live a right life: a new moral imperative based on moral impulses

Adorno's dialectic of negation allows us to think outside the traditional metaphysical mode of reason and opens the space for the others to think in terms of "non-identity", revealing the "freedom" of capitalist society as a kind of unfreedom. A society constructed according to the principle of "identity" is a wrong society, not only in its tendency towards totalitarianism but also in the creation of various coercive structures in production and life. In a wrong society, people cannot be free and cannot lead a right life.

How should modern people live a right life? Adorno argues that we need to establish a new moral philosophy. This moral philosophy should not be based on abstract individual freedom, which is unthinkable without the freedom of society. Therefore, those who are in the wrong life must first criticize and change this life situation. Furthermore, to overcome the limitations of Kant's formalist moral imperative and to prevent Auschwitz from happening again, Adorno (2003) proposed a new absolute imperative: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself so that nothing similar will happen. (p. 365).

Adorno believes that the universality of moral norms does not come from reason, but from the living body - the body that everyone possesses that can feel pain. This bodily response in the face of real suffering is more self-evident than reason because the bodily response precedes the formation of the subject. The body's normal reaction in front of a real catastrophe is the basis on which the new categorical imperative is established. The body knows that no one wants to starve, that no one wants to be tortured,

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and that “all violence should be abolished” (1951). We all know that suffering is wrong, and resistance to suffering that should be avoided becomes a moral imperative of the highest priority.

Unbearable physical pain is the starting point for all action and reflection. The moral principle should be formulated thus: "man should be tortured; there should be no concentration camps." (Adorno, 2003, p. 285). Moral impulses are more reliable than moral reasoning in the face of negative empirical reality. Morality is true by impulse, and this moral impulse is not rationalized. “As an abstract principle, they would fall promptly into the bad infinities of derivation and validity. ” (Adorno, 2003, p. 285). To reason one's way to the ultimate grounds of principle would remove the urgency that morality should have in confronting suffering in the face. To summarize the moral lessons of Auschwitz as a universal law would again fall into the realm of rationalized deduction, rendering it a meditation irrelevant to practice. Adorno (2003) pointed out that “What is most urgent would become contemplative again, mocking its urgency.” (p. 286). It is hence pointless to seek rational justification for moral impulses.

Adorno's new moral imperative rests on moral impulses, not on reason. He argues that recourse to moral impulses does not diminish the objectivity and universality of morality, because moral impulses exist before the formation of the subject, before rational reflection, and are the universal moral feelings expected of human beings in the face of suffering. Without such impulses, freedom would not arise. (Adorno, 2003, p. 221-223).

We can see the shift from Kant to Adorno from the pursuit of the moral supreme good to the insistence on the moral bottom line. What we need to do now is to insist on

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minimal morality (no physical pain) rather than the affirmative pursuit of the supreme good. The physical experience of pain, such as hatred and disgust, makes morality imperative. This moral impulse is itself a moral duty and an important resource for rebuilding moral philosophy on the ruins of morality.

It should be acknowledged that Adorno's critique of Kant's moral philosophy, and the new moral imperative that Adorno proposes, can inspire us to reconceptualize the complex relationship between reason and morality, and keep us alert to the philosophy of identity. However, I think there are several unresolved issues with Adorno's theory. Firstly, how can the historical experience of other peoples and nations be understood within his theory, which is concerned with European history and the fate of the Jews in particular? Secondly, Adorno's new moral imperative has substantial content in comparison to Kant's moral imperative. However, the new moral imperative seems too closely connected to experience to serve as an object of moral meditation. Thirdly, if the minimal morality is not to have physical pain, how to define whether a physical sensation is painful or pleasurable for different people? For example, whipping another person does cause physical harm to him or her. However, the person who is whipped considers it not painful but pleasurable. In this case, should we consider it moral or immoral?

### **Conclusion**

There is no simple answer to the question of whether one can live a right life. The question involves a complex dialectic of freedom and determinism, a priori freedom and social freedom, identity, and non-identity. Both Kant's and Adorno's answers are given in the light of the social context in which they represent their respective positions. Conceptualists such as Kant believe that people are free to choose to live the right life

even if the overall structure of society is wrong. Materialists such as Adorno, on the other hand, would argue that it is not possible to live a right life in a wrong social structure. Changing the structure of society is the first step toward true freedom. Within these two positions, the definition of freedom and the pursuit of morality are very different. In terms of historical effects, Kant's vision of freedom brought about the bourgeois-democratic constitution of citizenship and human rights. Adorno, on the other hand, warned of the sense in which the Enlightenment had moved towards its opposite, and that the freedom promised by the Enlightenment had not yet been realized. Both moral philosophies are an important part of the development of the genealogy of freedom in modern society. They both provide an important theoretical basis for the development of individual freedom.

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