
Adorno, Hegel and the concrete universal

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Abstract

The core argument of this article is that Adorno adopts the distinction between an abstract and a concrete universal from Hegel and criticizes Hegel, on that basis, as abstract. The first two parts of the article outline that both thinkers take the abstract universal to be the form of a false type of knowledge and society, and the concrete universal to be a positive aim. However, as the third part argues, Adorno rejects how the concrete universal is understood in Hegel's philosophy and formulates a different conception of it. The fourth part questions if Adorno manages to overcome the problems he identifies in Hegel or whether they are inherent to the programme of dialectics both endorse.

Keywords

abstract and concrete universal, Theodor Adorno, G. W. F. Hegel, negative dialectics, rational society, true knowledge

Introduction

It is no secret that Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* incorporates and at the same time criticizes Hegelian philosophy. Adorno often makes explicit his debt to Hegel's dialectics, but also differentiates his method from the predecessor. His thoughts on history and the state are formulated, in large parts, as a critique of Hegel's social philosophy. So, Bernstein is certainly not exaggerating when he claims that 'Adorno was a Hegelian, that, however he departs from Hegel, he accepts the rudiments of Hegelian idealism'.¹

But how exactly does Adorno position himself towards Hegel? Can a general argument be traced which is the basis for the methodological as well as for the epistemological and socio-political parts of Adorno's critique? This article will lay out such a

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general argument and how it appears in the different aspects of Adorno's critique of Hegel: Adorno follows Hegel's conception that false knowledge and an irrational society have the form of an abstract universal (I), while a true knowledge and a rational society would have the form of a concrete universal (II). However, criticizing Hegel's precise understanding of the concrete universal, Adorno develops his own interpretation of it and explicates this logical reconception in terms of knowledge and society (III). It will be questioned, in the last part, if the difference between Hegel's argument and Adorno's truly is as clear-cut as Adorno would like to believe (IV).

I Common grounds between Hegel and Adorno: critique of the abstract universal

I The abstract universal

There are two common conceptions of universal concepts: the first, one might say the subjectivist one, takes universals to be ways in which we group things together in our minds. We can arbitrarily use the general terms 'dog', 'red', 'living', 'Australian' and so on to categorize things, and each time different objects will be grouped together. The second position would claim on the contrary that universals denominate a real similarity between things; there is or are thus only one or a few universals which truly describe what something is. In Platonic terms dogs are only, however imperfect, copies of the idea of dogness; this universal is therefore essential to what they are.

Strikingly, however different both accounts are, they have something in common: in both cases, the universal does unite or subsume particulars, dogs, red things, etc., but it is also something different from them. In the first conception, it is a category we have in our minds; in the other account, it is an idea or a pure form that exists in something like a heaven of ideas, beyond the world of particular things. This is a very similar structure to what Hegel criticizes as an abstract universal: universals denominate or identify particulars, but they do not fully express what they are – and are thus also different from or abstract against them. Or you could say: universals unite many particulars, but only by reducing them to their common denominator, rather than expressing their manifold and differentiated relations. The unity does not arise organically from its own parts or members, but is something, at least partly, imposed on them.

This definition can be elucidated with the example of a dictatorship: the government unites under its rule its citizens and society. In this sense it is a universal. But its decision-making and structure do not reflect the wills of its citizens or the differentiation of social spheres. Hegel says in the *Logic* that in abstract universals the 'content has the form of indifference against its universal' (WdL2 284).² The ruler is perfectly alien to or abstract against that which he or she rules, the content of his or her rule, namely the people. If particulars are defined as specific entities that are distinguished from and determined against others, this means that the universal itself, here the government, is particular (cf. *ibid.*, 281). Similarly, in nature, universals uniting particular individuals are only visible when destroying their difference: the universal of life when animals die and become nourishment for other living beings; the species when animals procreate and die, maintaining their species alive; natural laws when different things come to react the

same way. Even though they unite particular things, these universals do not express their specificities and complex relations.

The structure of an abstract universal, however, does not only exist objectively in reality, but it also applies to knowledge, as in the two opinions about universal concepts sketched above. While these are two abstract conceptions of knowledge, Hegel is more interested in knowledge itself having the form of an abstract universal: this is the case if knowledge, which is supposed to contain or grasp its objects, is actually different from them, does not fully grasp them. In what Hegel calls abstract subjectivity, for example, the subject identifies the objects with the concepts it has itself applied to them, takes them to be nothing but what the subject wants them to mean. Even though the subject does refer to the objects in a way, it only comes to know its own categories and remains thus totally unrelated to, or abstract against, what the objects truly and internally are. Another form of false knowledge is a universal of the understanding: it is a concept which correctly expresses one aspect of the object or names the general class something pertains to, but misses out on the internal complexity and manifold relatedness of the object of knowledge. Instead of starting out from the specific internal differentiation and relations of the thing at hand, which defines its concept, the understanding applies words to objects externally like labels. Even though our subjective word for something, say 'dog', does serve to denominate a type of animal and this type objectively is a species, the universal dog nevertheless fails to fully express what constitutes real dogs: namely not only their species, but their complex relations to other species, nature and society. To truly grasp the object, the concept 'dog' has to be thought within this complex context. An abstract universal in this subjective sense is thus a conception of the object, which misses out on what this object truly is. This, however, does not depend primarily on the word as such which is being used – for example, adjectives being abstract as Robert Stern suggests³ – but rather on the way the concept is conceived of (cf. WdL2 285).

2 Identity thinking in Adorno

In contrast to Hegel, Adorno employs the concept of an abstract universal only rarely (cf. ND 342) and is rather famous for criticizing the concept of identity. Brian O'Connor notes that 'confusingly, Adorno appears to offer two quite different explanations of the concept of identity'⁴ and goes on to describe each one. One form of identity consists in the claim to 'exhaustive correspondence'⁵ of the concept and what it is applied to. The other is described by Adorno as subsuming a particular under a universal concept, thus saying 'what it exemplifies or represents and what, accordingly, it is not' (ND 152).⁶ The two forms of identity thus seem to have opposite meanings: one claims identity of the concept and the object it means; the other divides concept and object, shows that the particular is different from the concept which subsumes it.

This puzzle is resolved, by reading these two meanings of identity as parts of one logical structure, an abstract universal. Judith Butler has remarked upon the similarity between 'Adorno's critique of abstract universality' and the Hegelian critique of this structure in relation to terror, but did not dwell upon it.⁷ By drawing on O'Connor's account of the meaning of identity, one may explicate the structure of an abstract

universal as follows: abstract concepts are supposed to fully express the particular contents they apply to. The concept is taken to say everything there is to say about this particular object we are talking about. As Adorno puts it, these real objects are taken to be mere 'examples of the concept' (ND 20); real dogs or red things mere instantiations of the general idea 'dog' and 'red'. The so-called second form of identity only notes the falseness of this claim of identity: you cannot 'drag the *facta bruta* over to you by the hair' or 'glue specific things into the text' (ND 23) – the real, individual object will always be more than our words for it. Concepts name only one aspect something has or say only what class of things a real particular object belongs to, not what this particular individual is. Citing Adorno, O'Connor says that this second form of identity 'divides the world as chaotic, many-sided and disparate from the known, one and identical'.⁸ We know the general category 'dog' and order animals according as they pertain to this category, and are thus 'identical' in that they are dogs. The 'many sides' this or that dog has beyond just being a dog are not classifiable and we leave them out of our conceptual thinking, as the 'chaotic', unknowable. There is thus a difference between the universal and the merely particular, unknowable aspect of a thing, its being a dog as against its individuality. Or, put differently, there is a difference between the pure concept of dog and its necessarily imperfect, individual instantiation.

Also the two conceptions of universals at the beginning of this article contained this tension: on the one hand, our concepts do refer to and thus identify real things; on the other hand, in both theories, universals are also different from them. Adorno's thought is also similar to Hegel's critique of universals subsuming particulars, as Espen Hammer points out⁹ – however, with the difference that Adorno identifies real things as '*facta bruta*' (ND 23), seemingly something physical and singular, while Hegel takes objects to be constituted by their specific differentiated definition. What is particular about Adorno's argument, however, is that he draws a strong causal connection between these two aspects, the identity and the difference between the word and the thing it means: '[T]he universal dictates the difference between the particular and the universal' (ND 18). '[T]he principle of identity perpetuates the antagonism' (ND 146, cf. ND 17). It is because the real, singular object is taken to be nothing but an example of a universal concept that a difference or even an antagonism arises between the concept and the real object. Iain Macdonald correctly notes that, with the advent of consciousness, human beings distinguish themselves from the objects.¹⁰ And while they only knew singular things through their senses beforehand, their universal concepts are now different from the particular, real things. But this does not explain why, according to Adorno, it is because we identify the particular with our concepts that this difference arises. The answer must be that Adorno detects a mimetic element inherent in language,¹¹ which early humans still expressed when imitating animals and plants in their magic practices.¹² The use of universal concepts, however, dispenses us from striving to grasp and mimic this specific object we mean; one word already sufficiently designates or identifies it.

But how can Adorno say that there is not only a difference but an antagonism between what the concept does express and what it does not? The 'contradiction is the non-identical under the aspect of identity' (ND 17). The contradiction Adorno refers to is between the claim that the concept and its object are identical and what is non-identical, i.e. contradicts this claim (cf. ND 160). As against this claim to identity, 'the

slightest remainder of non-identity ... would suffice to deny identity' (ND 33). From the viewpoint of identity non-identity with the concept is like a threat; if it were true the claim to identity would be false. If the individuality of this particular dog in front of me, its body, name, owner, life were what truly characterized it, then the concept 'dog', the claim that the dog is nothing but one specimen of a species called dogs, would be false. The non-identical must therefore be repressed, its validity must be denied, it must be regarded as inessential and unimportant (cf. ND 146).

One might object that nobody thinks that the word 'dog' is identical to the real dog sitting in front of me slaving. Brian O'Connor suggests that this way of thinking is an 'epistemological model',¹³ which misconstrues 'the subject-object relation ... as one of identity'.¹⁴ This phrasing is misleading, for it suggests that identity thinking is one specific form of thinking besides another, better one Adorno is going to argue for. This is, however, not the case, as already the very citation O'Connor provides shows: 'The copula [the word 'is' in a judgement] says: It is so, not otherwise. ... The will to identity works in every synthesis' (ND 151). In another passage Adorno says: 'the appearance of identity is, however, inherent to thinking by its very form. To think means to identify' (ND 17). To use concepts, to judge, to think has as its implicit presupposition that the concepts coincide with what we are thinking about. A judgement is not only supposed to be logically possible in that the concepts 'house', 'red' and 'is' can be combined in a non-contradictory manner, but it is supposed to be correct in expressing the object, reality. Simon Jarvis offers a slightly different interpretation, as for him we falsely identify when judging 'the rose is all its properties put in words'.¹⁵ Even though he puts it differently, also in this case the problem is that what we mean by 'the rose', namely the physical, living individual plant, is never identical to the words we use for it, but our judgements imply it is. What Adorno is thus arguing is that our thinking, concepts, judgements necessarily do identify; nevertheless, and also necessarily, they are false. The claim is thus not about a correct or false conceptualization of what rationality really is, but about the falseness of rationality itself. Applying concepts to many different, complex and changing objects of thought implies that they are identical, with the concept, with each other and with themselves over time (cf. ND 156, 141). As one word is supposed to say fully what something is, objects appear to be absolutely simple, self-identical given units of a concept. This conception of objects coincides with the appearance in capitalism, but this is not how objects and individuals truly are.

3 Capitalism as an abstract society

As Brian O'Connor correctly says, abstract rationality or identity thinking is, for Adorno, 'isomorphic to the economic structure of society'.¹⁶ Adorno detects this relation of identity and difference, which is characteristic for his understanding of an abstract universal, also in the market: individual products and human beings count on the market only as equal, atomistic examples of universal concepts like value and labour power. This is the 'levelling principle of exchange' (ND 179). As Adorno says, extending Marx slightly: exchange reduces 'human labour to the abstract universal term of average labour time' (ND 149), particular human beings are attributed their ready-made social roles (ND 155). Because individuals act in the market as equal, atomistic units of social concepts, not as

specific persons with specific needs or as socially related individuals, the collective outcome of their actions does not correspond to their specific wills. Society is an 'objectivity which subsumes subjects', 'something external, a coercive collective'.¹⁷ The development of prices is caused by and affects all our acts of buying and selling, but it is also 'external', unintended; it is a universal, uniting all our exchanges but also abstract against all our wills. Hegel, in the same vein, calls lawlike, market developments 'necessities which come about by themselves'¹⁸ or a 'blind necessity',¹⁹ which is the contrary of self-determination and a conscious organization of society.²⁰ Adorno goes even further than Hegel, as he regards not only the price mechanism, but also history and state institutions, as abstract universals: since technology is developed for profit, not to improve the lives of individuals, progress and history are 'a universality which has emancipated itself from the individuals it subsumes'.²¹ Institutions are 'external to the subject, heteronomous',²² social reality is 'alien and reified over against the subject'.²³

II Common grounds: the concrete universal as an aim or ideal

I Hegel's concrete universal

The problem a concrete universal responds to is how to unite many distinct entities without denying their difference. In an abstract universal, particulars appear to be nothing but examples of a universal concept. A concrete universal, on the contrary, is, as Hegel says, the 'unity of distinct determinations',²⁴ the universal's 'determination is . . . the principle of its differences' (WdL2 285). What does that mean? As Robert Stern correctly points out, a concrete universal should not be thought to unite differences in the sense of one substance which has many properties.²⁵ It rather is the 'principle of its differences' in that it only exists through two distinct entities, or that their difference only exists through it. There are two paradigmatic instances of this figure of thought in Hegel's philosophy, each of which can serve to elucidate one of the two aspects: following Westphal, we can remind ourselves that Hegel compares it to love (cf. WdL2 276).²⁶ Love is nothing but the relation between two distinct beings. As Hegel rejects self-love, there would not be love for him without the two distinct individuals and their difference; love only exists through their difference. Love is the unity of the two different individuals, the 'non-otherness of the most genuinely other'.²⁷ Both persons are separate, but also identical in that both are the loving and the beloved; they thus recognize themselves in the other.²⁸ Love is a reciprocal relation, in which what you are, a lover, is essentially being in unity with the other.²⁹ So both, the universal, the relation of love, and the particular, the lovers, only exist in this unity with one another. The concept of love is most recurrent in Hegel's early philosophy and the emphasis clearly lies with difference, as love is a relation between two pre-existing individuals and thus secondary.

In his mature philosophy, the paradigmatic instance of a concrete universal would be subjectivity, and here the emphasis lies with unity. Subjectivity means self-relation.³⁰ In order for there to be a relation at all, from one to another, a difference or more precisely a self-differentiation must be given. As a first approximation one might think of human self-consciousness, in which the subject has to make itself its object of thought, and then recognize this object as itself. The subject thus goes through three moments: the

undifferentiated unity, simple identity with itself, the difference between itself as the subject and itself as the object of knowledge, and finally a conscious, differentiated unity with itself. Hegel calls this self-referential structure subjectivity, also because it is productive, creates differences. It is not only the case that self-relation, not to be empty, requires difference, but also difference requires unity: for Hegel two categories or even human beings are particular, distinct, only if they are distinguished from one another. This is the principle of determinate negation. It is thus their relation, the distinguishing, which constitutes them as different. But distinguishing requires unity, relating one to the other.³¹ In this sense, logically, unity precedes and enables difference.

Hegel translates this logical argument into a metaphysical one: as this logical structure of self-differentiation and self-relation is the only one which can create differences without leading to antinomies, it must be what really constitutes and contains in it the (whole) diversity of our world. In an all-encompassing hierarchy of things, from natural to social object to world spirit, each simpler entity is only what it is because of its specific difference from others which it is related to in a bigger unity. The final, all-encompassing unity is absolute spirit. Hegel conceives of absolute spirit as having the form of a subject: it has its self-identity in the *Logic*, where thought and reality are indistinct, and comes to acquire self-consciousness when human beings make society and nature the object of their thought and subsequently recognize themselves in them.

When Hegel thus claims that the concrete universal contains differences and particulars, he refers to these two relations: the universal is nothing but the totality of the relations between particulars and at the same time what constitutes them as different. In this broad sense, every third category in the dialectical movement is a concrete universal. Without determinate being, i.e. the existence of determinate things, being would not differ from nothing. It thus enables the difference between nothing and being (cf. WdL1104, 116). Inversely, determinate being, and even more clearly becoming, is only through the difference between nothing and being: determinate being is being that has a limit where it is not; only in this way is it a specific unit as against being in general. It must of course be conceded to Robert Stern³² that, in Hegel's *Logic*, it is only in the last part, the 'Logic of the Concept', that the very definition of the concepts, for example, subjectivity, is posited as containing difference and unity. But even though it becomes evident only in this part of the *Logic*, the structure of a concrete universal already underlies also the earlier conceptions.

2 A concrete universal in Adorno?

How can Adorno, the big critic of identity, unity and universals, have anything to do with this concept of a concrete universal? The conception of absolute spirit, which creates the whole world out of itself, can certainly not be found in Adorno's philosophy. But could he be approving of the general idea of a concrete universal, a unity in difference? Adorno says that the 'universal in its current form is not a true universal'.³³ The universal must lose 'its false particularity' (ND 200). So what Adorno rejects of the universal is that it is particular, different from and antagonistic to what it is supposed to contain. It is not truly universal, does not realize its own claim. 'In the reproach that the thing is not identical to its concept lives also its longing to be so' (ND 152). The moment of truth in identity

thinking, is that 'there should be no contradiction, no antagonism' (ND 153). 'Unity and unanimity are at the same time the oblique projection of a reconciled, no longer antagonistic condition on the coordinates of manorial and over-bearing thinking' (ND 117). Adorno thus does not reject concepts like unity and identity altogether, but on the contrary argues that they should be truly realized. What he criticizes is that the way how these concepts are thought and appear in society thwarts the positive aim they denote.

The concepts of unity and identity in this positive sense are, however, not as recurrent in Adorno's philosophy as the concept of reconciliation. Adorno writes that 'reconciliation' would be 'neither the undifferentiated unity of subject and object nor their antagonistic antithesis, but rather the communication between the different'.³⁴ And this statement is supposed to be true in an 'objective' as well as in an 'epistemological' sense.³⁵ The way Adorno describes reconciliation here, by opposing it to undifferentiated unity and absolute difference, directly parallels Hegel's typical definition of the concrete universal as unity in difference.

3 True knowledge as a concrete universal

The problem of knowledge consists in that concepts are different from real, individual things. One possible solution would be simply to give up the use of concepts, to stop distinguishing oneself from the object. This undifferentiated unity of the knowing subject and the object is what Adorno takes to be the Heideggerian position (ND 92). Adorno rejects this solution, however, for the same reason that having one proper name for each particular object is not viable: it means the end of thinking (ND 6). But for Adorno, subject and object are 'neither the ultimate duality, nor does the ultimate unity hide behind them' (ND 176). He thus equally rejects the Kantian stance, which posits an absolute difference between subject and object, denying the possibility of true knowledge altogether (ND 175 f.). Without the however naive belief that knowledge is possible, Adorno says, philosophy and spirit in general would capitulate (ND 21). Another position that is derived from the Kantian one is simply to take the object to be nothing but the concepts the subject applies to it. Here, you have implicitly accepted the absolute difference between subject and object, but you deny the existence of the real, self-standing and meaningful object altogether. In this vein, Hegel describes the Fichtian $I = I$ as a 'motionless tautology',³⁶ in which the subject only gets to know its own categories and does not relate to the object whatsoever. Adorno agrees with this criticism, saying that '[w]ithout (the idea of otherness) cognition would degenerate into a tautology; what would be cognized would be cognition itself' (ND 185).

Knowledge can thus consist neither in an immediate oneness of subject and object, nor in their absolute separateness in which the subject relates only to itself. You have to strive to grasp the inner structure of the object, not only your own concepts. As Hegel famously demands, 'scientific cognition' must be 'immersed in the matter'.³⁷ Adorno approvingly paraphrases him saying that thought has to be 'in the thing, rather than beyond it'.³⁸ His 'philosophy', like Hegel's, 'aims at what is not a priori already itself' (ND 26), grasping the really other object. But, as Hegel demands, knowledge must contain the difference between the knowing subject and its object or, to say it differently: know the object as different from the subject. Adorno says that Hegel's 'knowledge

“which accords with the object” sounds like a program of Negative Dialectics’ (ND 162 f.). ‘The utopia of cognition would be to open up the non-conceptual with concepts without making it equal to them’ (ND 21). What his ‘Negative Dialectics’ aims at would also be a knowledge containing its other as other.

This last citation also reveals another parallel between Adorno’s and Hegel’s conception of true knowledge: not only do they agree that knowledge must have the form of a unity in difference, but they both claim that the same entity that caused the split of subject and object is also what reunites them: Adorno compares concepts to a ‘wall’ that separates us from our object of knowledge (ND 27, 41). Through consciousness or thinking we distinguish ourselves from the object, and our conception of the object comes to be different from the physical, real thing. But Adorno also writes ‘that the concept can transcend the concept, as what mantles and cuts off [the object], and that it thereby reaches the non-conceptual, is indispensable for philosophy’ (ND 21). We necessarily have to think that this split between subject and object, caused by thinking, can be overcome precisely by conceptual thinking. It is generally a typical element of Hegelian dialectics, and particularly of the concrete universal, that the false, or here the division, is not put aside or done away with, but rather the true comes to be realized through the false, the unity through difference. More specifically, this precise argument, that only conceptual cognition or thinking can bridge the difference it caused, stems from Hegel, as Iain Macdonald made clear.³⁹ Both philosophers use the image of Greek mythology: *trosas iasetai*,⁴⁰ the wounder will heal. Consciousness and thinking enable human beings to differentiate themselves from the objects surrounding them, but they are also the means to fully grasp those objects.

4 A rational society as a concrete universal

Hegel conceives of modern society as a whole, or what he calls the state, as a concrete universal. It is a self-determining and self-knowing social entity,⁴¹ having the triad structure of subjectivity. The first moment is an immediate unity with oneself, which means here: of the social with the individuals which are its part. The individual does not distinguish itself from the community, in the family and agriculture. Working for the community, participating in it, comes naturally to the individual person, without reflecting it might also decide not to. One could say the social already exists (*an sich*), but is not conscious of itself. The second moment is difference. Here, in morality and civil society, the individual knows that it is individual and that society is separate from it. You could also say, inversely, that the social becomes apparent, ‘aware of itself’, as not identical to the individuals that constitute it. The third moment is a mediated unity. Here the individual realizes that the state corresponds to what its own reason shows it to be rational and that it can only be a fully human being in the state. The state, on the other hand, allows for subjective freedom of the individual and is structured just as a self-determining, thinking subject.⁴²

Adorno does not give such a many-layered description of society, much less does he conceive of it as one all-encompassing subject. However, Adorno says that ‘[d]ialectics serve reconciliation’ (ND 18). His philosophy has as its aim a non-antagonistic condition, which by ‘giving individuals what is theirs would rid the universal of its false

particularity' (ND 200). In another part he writes: 'if no human being was denied a part of its living labour, rational identity would be reached and society would have transcended identity thinking' (ND 150). Transcending identification, humanity would 'achieve the identity with its concept' (ND 149). Adorno thus opposes the kind of identity which is operant at the moment, to a true identity of society and individual, a true realization of the concept of humanity. This latter idea 'comes close enough to Hegel' (ND 150), Adorno admits. For Adorno the true reconciliation and truly rational society can be reached only if difference and individuality are no longer repressed. Individuals must be given 'what is theirs': they must be enabled really to be individual, distinct particulars, count as more than just equal bearers of labour power performing one simple function in the system. They would receive all parts of their 'living labour', which can mean that everyone would be allowed to work in many different forms, which are particular to him or her, or that no surplus value would be abstracted. Both directly imply the end of capitalism. In such a reconciled condition, the individual would be recognized as and really be different from society, not subsumable under the concepts which structure society as a whole, namely value and labour. It would be a unity in difference and in this sense have the structure of a concrete universal.

5 Hegelian dialectics as a means of critique

Dialectics refers to a logical structure, which has the triad form of unity, difference and differentiated unity. These are also the three steps which establish a concrete universal. As the concrete universal is not a neutral descriptive term but describes something as more rational than the earlier two moments, its movement also has an argumentative quality. This aspect is what the term 'dialectics' usually denotes.

For Adorno '[d]ialectics is the consciousness of non-identity' (ND 18). He takes Hegel to uncover non-identity in his dialectics in two senses: Hegel starts out with simple unity or a state where a universal concept is supposed simply to be identical to what it refers to, its object. Hegel shows that the first universal does not fully grasp the real object. He thus performs an immanent critique of the concept against the object it tries to express and vice versa,⁴³ which Adorno adopts as his own method.⁴⁴ As Adorno says, it is the crux of Hegel's argument to show that 'every singular concept is false, that is, that no finite concept is really identical to what it refers to'.⁴⁵ No concept by itself fully grasps its object. Because of this insufficiency Hegel must always move on to other, better conceptions of reality. Additionally, in the second moment of his dialectics, namely difference, Hegel shows that all concepts, individual things, or human beings only have their specificity and meaning when differentiated from others. As Adorno approvingly notes: 'no particular is true' (ND 155), nothing is 'for itself', separate (ND 164). That something is a particular, separate, unrelated entity is a false appearance; in fact it is only their differentiating relation which gives them their specific meaning. Individuals are not given, self-identical independent atoms, but they are what they are only through and in society.⁴⁶

Adorno approvingly states that 'Hegel's philosophy is a critical philosophy in the eminent sense of the word'.⁴⁷ It subjects to scrutiny what are supposedly given truths: first the implicit claim that concepts fully express their real object and second the

given, unrelated, pre-social existence of individuals or categories. Adorno, however, disapproves of how the last moment, the concrete universal or the identity in difference, is understood. In his own conception 'identity does not disappear, but it changes qualitatively' (ND 152).

III Adorno's critique and reformulation of Hegel's concrete universal

I Problematic aspects of Hegel's concrete universal

Hegel's concrete universal displays two characteristics which Adorno focuses on: first it is established via the negation of the negation, i.e. the negation of the relation of difference; second it is conceived as one simple, self-identical whole, which is expressed in one concept. The negation of the negation is the movement from difference to the concrete universal. You could also say that it is the argumentative strategy which shows that different particulars are actually united in the concrete universal. This figure has already implicitly been mentioned in part II.1 in relation to subjectivity: categories, things and human beings are only particular if distinct from others. Each one is defined only as the not-other, the negation of an other (WdL2 275): the category nothing only has a specific meaning if we think it in contrast to being; nothing is not-being. It only has a meaning because of this difference. One particular individual thing or human being is defined and distinguished from others by having specific universal properties. This is what makes it particular. Every property is only determinate when distinguished from other properties this individual does not have; for example, being tall not short. By negating all other properties, it also negates all other individuals, which are characterized by, and thus only particular because of, these determinations – in this sense also the individual is defined as the negation of other individuals, as not having these properties others have (cf. WdL2 284). This is the determinate or first negation – the differentiation of the one from the other which makes categories and individuals particular. The negation of the negation is only a different perspective on the same relation or a 'different aspect of one and the same negation':⁴⁸ as, in the determinate negation, both particulars are only particular if and insofar as they are distinguished from one another, it is actually this distinguishing, this relation, which constitutes them as particular. Their difference is thus derived from their relation or unity in which they are distinguished. They are not absolutely different, but distinct members of one unity. Furthermore, both are determined in the same way, as the not-other. The argument of the negation of the negation can also be put in a dynamic manner: as the particular is only determinate via its negative relation to the other, it has to be distinguished from the other in more ways in order to be more determinate. Thus, the more determinate something is, the more related it is to its other. At some point they become so intertwined that they must be regarded as parts of a unity – this is the so-called 'turning point' in Hegel's dialectics.⁴⁹

The second aspect Adorno focuses on is that Hegel's concrete universal is one closed, absolute whole, unrelated to anything outside itself. The logical argument behind this figure seems to be that in the negation of the negation difference was negated, shown to be not really different. Negating their difference, the particular, distinct entities negate

themselves or what constituted them as particulars. If distinct particulars are negated, you implicitly posit non-difference, i.e. the simple self-identity of one singular entity. This self-relation, which negates the existence or difference of any other, preserves the meaning of being in a later, more developed logical form: it defines something that is simply there, given, exists and is meaningful for itself, unrelated to others. The concrete universal is thus the ‘mediation’, the relation between particulars which constitutes them, but it is itself not ‘mediated’ (WdL2 275),⁵⁰ i.e. does not depend for its existence or meaning on the relation to an other. It is ‘positive, identical, universal’, a second immediate (WdL2 564).

This characterization of the concrete universal seems to contradict the definition that was given in II.1, characterizing it as a differentiated unity. However, for Hegel, the concrete universal unites the difference that precedes it and turns it into one specific, simple concept. The differentiation is ‘in itself’, i.e. is only ‘in its concept’ (WdL1 130), ‘pertains to our reflection’ (WdL1 117). After the negation of the negation, a new concept emerges, which has a more complex definition than the former ones. Determinate being is more complex than being. But this complexity is at this point only what *we* think when regarding this concept, how we would define it. This complexity is not yet expressed in the concept’s structure, not explicated, conceptually laid out (cf. WdL2 252, 279). Hegel says that, ‘because of the form of simplicity, which the determinations have attained, it is a new beginning’ (WdL2 569). That the third category in the dialectical triad is again one simple given category, just like the first universal, is the mechanism enabling Hegel’s dialectics to proceed. This self-identity and simplicity will again be revealed as false. Differences will be developed out of this concept, as the second step in a new dialectical triad and as a third step they will be shown to be nothing but parts of one whole.

2 Adorno’s critique of Hegel’s concrete universal

What is problematic about the simplicity of the concrete universal, its being one specific, self-identical concept? What Adorno criticizes is already pointed to by Brian O’Connor when he wonders how ‘finding conditions’ of the particular ‘becomes, willy nilly, a moment of thinking the Absolute’.⁵¹ Josiah Royce dryly remarks that Hegel, when having shown particular determinations to be ‘interrelated and inseparable’, takes them to be ‘members of one organic total’.⁵² But how can the complex relations between particulars be reinterpreted into one simple, self-identical whole and be expressed in one concept? How can the totality of conditioned particulars be an unconditioned universal, their absolute mediation itself be immediate?⁵³ A mediated immediate is what Marx calls a fetish, something which seems to be absolute and independently given, but is actually conditioned, is constituted through, and dependent on, the relations to others. Even though Hegel claims that the concept, the idea, absolute spirit are only the concrete totality of all earlier moments, he, at the same time, quite easily defines them also abstractly. They are specific, uniform principles, which are supposed to unite the complex and different earlier moments. This is the contradiction Adorno admonishes in Hegel’s subject–object dialectics, which is supposed to be ‘devoid of any abstract generic term’ and at the same time the ‘life of absolute spirit’.⁵⁴ The Hegel scholar Maluschke voices a similar criticism: on the one hand, each concept is supposed to dialectically move to its own

sublation without an external motor, only because of its internal contradiction; on the other hand, the concept in the *Logic*, and absolute spirit in general, is taken to be the 'moving soul' of the whole of Hegel's system.⁵⁵

What is peculiar about Adorno's line of reasoning, however, is his conclusion: the 'perversion of universality, which is inherent in the concept of a whole, . . . transforms the whole again into a particularity'.⁵⁶ Because the unity is one closed, 'self-identical whole',⁵⁷ one specific, simple concept, this unity must necessarily be abstract against the particulars it is supposed to contain. 'What does not tolerate anything which is not like itself, thwarts the reconciliation for which it mistakes itself. The act of violence of making others equal to oneself reproduces the contradiction which it stamps out' (ND 146). Hegel's positing of one self-identical whole containing all particulars, denies and excludes the complexity and individuality of these particulars instead of uniting them in a harmonic whole. What does not fit under this 'generic term' is excluded and negated (ND 32, 312).

[T]he inclusion of everything non-identical and objective in the subjectivity, which is expanded and exalted to the absolute Spirit, is supposed to achieve reconciliation. On the other hand the power of the whole which is effective in every particular determination is not only its negation but also the negative, the untrue. The philosophy of the absolute, total subject is particular. (ND 145)

Hegel's system, because it claims the absolute, reconciled unity in the spirit, is exclusive, thus fails to produce unity. The identification of everything with the whole is 'untrue', not corresponding to the true nature of the particular, and hence repressive, denying the true particular its due. The whole is thus different from the particular entities it is supposed to contain. What Adorno is claiming here is that Hegel's concrete universal is abstract.

In what sense is Hegel's claim to a self-identical whole abstract, his absolute spirit exclusive? First, Adorno remarks that what is not conceptually graspable is reduced to the 'transient and inconsequential', 'lazy existence' (ND 20). What does not fit into the system is not truly real, but only an accidental, unimportant happening. The non-conceptual is excluded and its validity is denied. More importantly, within the system, Adorno regards Hegel's concrete universal as abstract in two ways: in its conception of the whole and in its conception of the particular. The totality of the logical categories, the idea, and the totality of everything in the world, absolute spirit, are supposed to be self-identical, not mediated by anything outside themselves. But Hegel himself has proved in his dialectics that concepts and real things need to be differentiated from one another to have a meaning or be determinate. In the same vein, Hegel rejects that any particular concept can grasp its object, only to claim that the whole of the logical categories, the absolute idea, does fully depict, or rather is, the logical structure of reality. As Adorno puts it, Hegel wants 'to compensate for this difference' he uncovers, 'to restore, through the totality of the system, this identity between thought and the thing, between subject and object, which goes bankrupt in any singular concept'.⁵⁸ Following Hegel's own argument, such an entity which is not mediated by an other, another concept or real object, is abstract: it is totally indeterminate and empty, something

you can arbitrarily attribute properties to – and as such certainly different from the many particular determinations and specific entities it is supposed to contain.

In relation to knowledge, this oneness or full identity of subject and object means that categories which denoted a relation between two, come to be simple descriptions of this given, self-identical whole. The two sides of the relations of truth and knowledge, the knowing subject and the object, are both parts of absolute spirit, which it has posited out of itself. It is thus pre-established that subject and object are identical. Truth and knowledge are given, even though in the beginning of Hegel's system they are not fully realized. Truth and knowledge are simply attributes of the self-knowing absolute spirit – not a relation between the subjective conception and the real object, which might very well fail to be one of identity. Taking absolute spirit to be one whole, unrelated to anything other, Hegel thus perverts the meaning of those attributes he wants to apply to it.

Similarly, as regards history and the state, Adorno argues that Hegel, by taking the identity between society and the individual to be given, thwarts it: for Hegel, the modern state and history have come about as necessary conclusions in a logical development. They have the only truly rational form, namely the form of subjectivity, of which individuals are a moment. As the individuals are rational, parts of this whole, and also have the form of subjectivity, they must approve of and identify with the state and history. The rationality of the whole and the harmony between society and the individual is a given, assured truth, a simple description of how things are. But what if, as Adorno claims, the 'logic of things is at odds with the sense of the individual fate'?⁵⁹ Society and history are certainly irrational, self-contradictory, if they are detrimental to the individuals through which they only exist.⁶⁰ For Adorno, the 'supposedly higher concept of spirit has to prove its identity before the living and real spirit of human beings'.⁶¹ A concept only has a meaning and a full existence in the minds of real human beings; they have to judge history to be the realization of reason, history thus has to 'prove to them' that its concept is correct. 'The judgement over reason or unreason is rooted in the individual reason.'⁶² Rationality and harmony cannot be reduced to the mere given description of an all-encompassing whole.

Apart from the whole losing its specific determination when it is seen as absolute and unrelated to others, this conception also qualifies the validity of particulars: according to Adorno, Hegel denies the real difference of particulars as they are nothing but moments of one and the same. For example, Adorno criticizes that even parts of the system, like civil society, which have been shown to be irrational, are legitimized and declared not really irrational because they are parts of a rational whole, the state.⁶³ More importantly, there cannot be any difference for Hegel between what the particular truly is and what it is constituted as, by the whole. It is precisely the function of the negation of the negation to show that all differences depend on and are constituted by the whole; all categories only have a distinct meaning via their relation in the absolute idea, all distinct social spheres and individual roles only exist within the state. Particulars are nothing but a specific differentiation of the whole, the concrete universal. They do not have an existence or a particularity beyond that. This implies necessarily that particulars are in perfect harmony with the concrete universal, which has given them their existence. Hegel puts this thought very drastically in the *Logic*, where he maintains that even if 'violence' (WdL2 235) destroys the self-standing existence of another entity, this other only 'receives its due through the

[violent] action on it' (ibid.). The destructive violence only realizes the true nature of this entity, namely that it is not given, separate and self-standing – but merely a moment of a whole (ibid.). As Hegel says in a different passage: it is the 'nature of the finite' (WdL1 150), determinate particular entities to be absorbed without remainder into the whole which constitutes them (cf. also WdL2 189). For Adorno, on the contrary, 'the negation of the negation does not, or not automatically, not just like that, result in positivity'.⁶⁴ The whole which conditions particulars can also be repressive, denying their particularity its due expression. With this thought, Adorno implies that individuals are more than just moments of the whole; they have a certain existence for themselves which the whole can be repressive against.

In relation to absolute knowledge, Adorno puts this argument as follows: Hegel only grasps the object of knowledge fully by 'extinguishing the immediate being-like-this' (ND 162) of the object. As Bernstein formulates it, Hegel performs 'the reduction of the object to its concept'.⁶⁵ It comes to be nothing but a conceptual differentiation; within the total of all concepts the subject knows or which form reason, the object consists of a specific constellation of some concepts. But knowing an object in this sense, is 'no longer a knowledge of the object at all, but the tautology of an absolutely posited *noesis noeseos* [thinking of thinking]' (ND 163).⁶⁶ What Adorno is arguing is that Hegel's philosophy, despite its effort to grasp the real object, ends up being abstract, more precisely what Hegel calls abstract subjectivity: it mistakes its concepts for the real object (cf. ND 35). Adorno concedes that 'to think ... the particular would be impossible without this moment of universality which distinguishes the particular, ... in a certain sense makes it particular'. But, 'the moment of something particular, opaque, which the predication refers to and is based on, does not perish therein' (ND 322). We can 'think' the particular, distinguish particular objects and human beings only by attributing universal properties to them which others do not have. But this does not mean that they were not particular already beforehand.

As regards the state, Hegel posits that individuals only come to be particular by making legally valid decisions and by performing specific social roles as a family member, professional and citizen. Only in this way can the individuals themselves and others say and know what is particular about them; only thus can they conceive of themselves and socially count as individuals. Adorno judges the negation of the negation to correctly show that individuals are conditioned by the society.⁶⁷ He admits that, materially and spiritually, individuals only exist thanks to society, have their essence and existence in it.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Adorno insists that society is also coercive and repressive,⁶⁹ that social roles are forced upon individuals (cf. ND 155). Adorno thus implies that the individual is not fully constituted by its social roles and the legal persona the state attributes to it. It is more than just a derived moment of the state, in a pre-established harmony with it. The typical position against Hegel would be to claim that individuals are particular in a given, pre-social, innate way. Adorno, however, agrees with Hegel that there is no given particular, no atomistic, pre-social individual. What Adorno does is to posit a particular which is also mediated, not only by its social roles but in a more complex manner, through production, the environment, personal and cultural intercourse, physical nourishment and more.

3 Adorno's concrete universal

'The idea of reconciliation irreconcilably opposes its affirmation in the concept' (ND 163, cf. 148 f.). Adorno approves of the 'idea of reconciliation' which motivates Hegel's philosophy. Without it, neither truth, as the unity of subjective concepts and their object, nor a better society, in which social developments correspond to the individual's conscious decisions and needs, could be imagined. But to affirm that it has been reached, that the concept fully grasps the object, that social concepts or roles grasp the individual, as Hegel does, thwarts the very project. A 'complete system and achieved reconciliation is not the same, but rather a contradiction: the unity of the system derives from the irreconcilable violence' (ND 273). Positing one closed, all-encompassing whole in one concept, absolute knowledge or the state, amounts to negating the real difference of the other. '[A]ccomplished identity, would not be the identification of everything under one total, one concept, one integral society, but accomplished identity would have to be the consciousness of non-identity or, maybe put more correctly, the establishment of a reconciled non-identity.'⁷⁰ 'The reconciled condition would not annex what is alien by means of philosophical imperialism, but would find its happiness in that even in the proximity which was granted, it [the other] remained alien and different, neither heterogeneous nor its own' (ND 192).

To understand this last citation one has to recognize that Adorno differentiates between contradiction and non-identity. Contradiction is what ensues after the claim to identity. It is the contradiction between this supposed identity of the concept and its object and what is not identical, between what is 'its own' and what is 'heterogeneous', what the concept grasps and what it misses. As against that, Adorno conceptualizes a proximity in which the other remains simply different, non-identical. Adorno establishes his concrete universal via two opposites routes: on the one hand he starts out from an understanding of what the particular truly is and asks in what universal condition it would cease to be repressed; on the other hand, Adorno also enquires into what the universal or specific universals must truly mean and how their positive aim could be realized in and through particulars.⁷¹

How would individual things be if our identifying concepts and social concepts like value did not continually distort them? If they were not claimed to be identical, they 'would be indifferent to each other, to use a favourite term of Hegel' (ND 160), 'indifferently distinct' (ND 58). The particular would be neither absolutely different nor totally identical, but 'in its other and related to its other' (ND 164), mediated in a conceptual and non-conceptual manner (cf. ND 62). Things would be constituted by complex relations to others, be 'a communication with others' (ND 164). Adorno therefore says that the particular is non-identical to itself (cf. *ibid.*); it is not a given, unrelated self-identical atom, but rather is what it is only through its relations to others, only through what is non-identical to itself. This reconception of the particular entails a new conception of the whole as a constellation of relations. Martin Jay understands a constellation as 'a juxtaposed rather than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common denominator'.⁷² The crux of this complicated definition is that, in contrast to Hegel's concrete universal, Adorno withstands reducing the relations between many to one simple whole, definable with one concept. Their interrelation remains an immensely complex net of relations.

The argument so far is fairly abstract. What would such a state of non-identity be like? How could it come about? As mentioned above, Adorno takes individual products and humans to be non-identical, manifoldly related objects behind their appearance as mere values in capitalism. Realizing non-identity thus must be a matter of bringing this repressed reality to the front. While today knowledge and society are abstract, repress the complex individuality of products and human beings, they must come to express how these individuals really are. In relation to our knowledge, as already mentioned above, Adorno believes that the difference to or misidentification of the object can only be bridged by what caused it: *'trosas iasetai'* (ND 62). The expression of the particular in a concept is necessarily simplified and misses out on it. Weighing the concept against the object it refers to, a 'determinable error' (ibid.) or a difference between them can be noticed, the conception amended and then re-examined against the real object it describes. Continually noticing its misidentification and amending its conception, thinking acquires an ever more complex and differentiated description of the particular (ND 57), which comes to be in affinity with it (ND 152).

The subject thus approaches the object via mimesis, imitation (cf. ND 26, 153), and at the same time 'critically establishe[s]' (ND 190) the object: the subject makes this complexly related object visible for the first time, as it existed neither in capitalist appearance, nor in our subjective knowledge until now. Even though Adorno only makes this argument in relation to knowledge, it translates well into a social argument: To overcome the abstractness of social concepts like labour power, individuals have to count socially in ever more ways – taking the real, complex human beings as a standard. Everyone should have several social roles, his or her particular labour should be provided with a differentiated description or a specific category and should be socially related to others on this basis. In this way society would be 'giving individuals what is theirs' (ND 200), would enable them to count socially as specific individual persons. This implies a non-capitalist society, in which a social organ consciously connects different producers. However, Adorno explicitly opposes communism if it refers to one total, all-encompassing social order, which reduces individuals to its moments.⁷³ In Adorno's conception, subjective knowledge and the object, social roles and the real individual become ever more similar and related, but never reach a turning point at which they are so intertwined that they must be conceived as two moments of one and the same. Rejecting Hegel's later conception of the concrete universal, Adorno says, in the manner of the early Hegel: 'The rescue of it [the non-identical] means the love for the objects' (ND 191). It would be a relation, recognizing the other as other: accepting that the object is different from our concepts, that the social individual is more than any social roles, and continually describing this difference we would improve our knowledge of the object and our social conception of the individual, 'rescue' it from oblivion.

Additionally to the question how particulars can be known and count in society, Adorno discusses how universals could be truly realized. In general, Adorno argues that unity of the whole is only achieved by recognizing non-identity. Identity can only be achieved if it is never fully reached, if there always remains a difference.⁷⁴ More specifically, what Adorno claims is that all-inclusive concepts in Hegel, like freedom and reason, can only be realized, really have their meaning, if their difference and dependence on the individual and other concepts are acknowledged. He dismisses Hegel's

conception of freedom, individuality, reason, because Hegel, according to Adorno, simply identifies them with the ruling universal, the state, world spirit (cf. ND 311). For Adorno, on the contrary, reason would have to be a 'relation of the universal to the particular',⁷⁵ humanity must be realized in non-identity (ND 191), freedom denotes a situation in which individuals would be distinct from one another (ND 153) and the shift to real humanity would involve a change in all relevant social concepts (ND 149). What does that mean? Categories like freedom, reason, or humanity denominate principles which are not identical to any individual action or their sum; they are necessarily realized differently by different individuals. However, these concepts only have a meaning in relation to the real individuals they refer to (cf. ND 254). Neither freedom nor self-realizing reason is absolute, independent from others, but they depend for their realization on other social concepts and on real, physical human beings. If social concepts such as exchange and labour are irrational, as Hegel shows, rationality cannot be realized in the whole, the state.⁷⁶ Adorno thus demands to continually check the universal against the individual's participation in it (cf. *ibid.*).

IV Problems in Adorno's counter-concept to Hegel

One could find many quotes in which Hegel denies to be doing exactly what Adorno claims he does, namely, reduce everything particular to moments of one and the same, dissolve the real object into its conceptual determinations. It is precisely Hegel's intention to develop a conception of a whole which constitutes different entities and allows for their free existence within it, rather than destroying them. However, Adorno's doubts are nevertheless warranted, as Hegel does make concessions to the idea of one self-identical whole, which limit the extent to which difference can be conceived of. Rather than searching for quotes to refute Adorno's criticism, the best defence of Hegel is to point out problems in Adorno's reconceptualization or sublation of Hegel's concrete universal. The question needs to be raised whether maybe the aspects Adorno criticizes in Hegel are unavoidable within this programme of dialectics that both endorse.

Adorno follows Hegel in regarding the individual category, thing and person not as something atom-like and given, but as constituted by their specific relations, a 'communication with others' (ND 164). However, in contrast to Hegel, he argues that the individual cannot be dissolved in a totality of relations, it is always more than just a moment of a whole. But if the thing is nothing but relations,⁷⁷ is Hegel then not correct in saying that it is the relations which are essential, and only they which give it the 'determination by which a thing is only *this* thing', a determinate particular (WdL2 137)? Is the particular thus not secondary to the relations, the total, simply a spot where they happen to cross, one moment of the total net of relations?

More importantly, in relation to knowledge, Adorno presupposes that the particular can never be fully known: but if relations which characterize the particular can be put into words and the individual is nothing but relations, absolute knowledge, a full grasp of the object, must be, in principle, possible. Even more so as most relations things stand in are themselves social and therefore conceptual.

In addition, Adorno argues that the manifold relations which characterize the truly particular, non-identical objects can only be uncovered by comparing their concept to

what it subsumes, formulating an ever more differentiated description. The manifold, truly different object to be known is not what counts as the object in capitalism: the commodity, the mere identical example of the concept of value. As the true object is not simply given to us in capitalism, it is 'something to be critically established' (ND 190). 'The priority of the object is attainable only through subjective reflection, and the one on the subject' (ND 186). But if this is so: how is this account different from the idealist claim? Also Hegel does not argue that our subjective thinking brings objects into being but that they have to be congruent with it, that only our thinking can discover their true structure. As in Adorno's programme the object seems to be nothing but what the subject continually discovers and formulates, he comes very close to making the same claim.

In relation to society, Adorno implies that the social roles of the individual should express ever more closely the specific, manifold characteristics of this particular person. This is a legitimate claim, particularly if you do not share Hegel's triad conception of the subject, which justifies, in his eyes, the three social roles of individuals in his *Philosophy of Right*. There are, however, two problems in Adorno's conception. First he suggests that no matter how many social roles are applied to the individual, its true manifold nature will never be fully expressed. He implicitly claims that social roles are something external to the individual. But social roles can not only serve to express the individuality of someone, but they also react back on how this person conceives of her or his very individuality. Second, social relations do not only particularize, make everyone a particular 'communication with others' (ND 164), but they also make individuals more equal: individuals come to think similar to the spirit of their time, imitate others, identify with their social roles. And this is not necessarily a sign of repression. If you stick to the claim that the true individual is necessarily always different from social roles and ways of thinking, you risk falling back into regarding the individual as an asocial given atom – a conception both Adorno and Hegel reject. Such a result would not at all further Adorno's quest to think the particular, because this asocial individual would not be particular whatsoever, as everyone would have the same, inexpressibly particular, asocial character.

Conclusion

Adorno points out an important problem in Hegel's concrete universal: how can an entity exist and have a meaning without relating to and being distinguished from something it is not? Even Hegel's idea is one determinate entity only because it is distinguished as purely logical from the realm of physical reality. Similarly, Hegel's state is one determinate singular, a closed and specific entity only via its distinction from other nation-states or spirits of a people. How can absolute spirit escape this fate? How can it be a specific unity, have specific determinations, such as being rational, free, true, without this relation to an other? It thus seems that even within Hegel's own philosophy his claim to an absolute self-identical unity is problematic and contradicts his own insight that everything depends on relations to others. In this sense his concrete universal is abstract.

However legitimate his critique appears, Adorno's reconceptualization of the concrete universal is confronted with a difficult problem: Adorno wants to preserve Hegel's critical insight, that all particulars are mediated, without coming to construe mediation as such as an absolute entity, prior to and constitutive of particulars, as Hegel does. But

Hegel claims that he can only disprove the validity and independence of supposedly atomistic particulars by ‘bringing them back to their unity’ (WdL2 287). Adorno admits that Hegel ‘appeals to this however problematic totality’ in order to show that ‘the immediate is false’,⁷⁸ that it is in fact mediated. Hegel’s argument, showing the particular to be mediated and not simply given, is what leads him to posit mediation as prior to particulars and itself unmediated. Adorno has problems avoiding the same conclusion.

Notes

1. Jay M. Bernstein, ‘Negative Dialectics as Fate. Adorno and Hegel’, in *Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 19.
2. The abbreviations WdL1 and WdL2 refer to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vols 1–2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969). The abbreviation ND refers to Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik. Jargon der Eigentlichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003). For the translation I have consulted, and often slightly amended, that available on a web site: <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>
3. Cf. Robert Stern, ‘Hegel, British Idealism and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal’, *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15 (2007): 115–53 (here particularly 132).
4. Brian O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic. Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), p. 17.
5. *ibid.*, p. 18.
6. *ibid.*
7. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 6.
8. O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic*, p. 18; see also Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003), p. 46.
9. Cf. Espen Hammer, *Adorno & the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 101.
10. Cf. Iain Macdonald, ‘The Wounder will heal. Cognition and Reconciliation in Hegel and Adorno’, *Philosophy Today* 44 (2000, SPEP Supplement): 132–9 (134).
11. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie. Drei Studien zu Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 148.
12. Cf. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p. 17.
13. O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic*, p. 1.
14. *ibid.*, p. 66.
15. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno. A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 165.
16. O’Connor, *Adorno’s Negative Dialectic*, p. 3; cf. also ND 58.
17. Theodor W. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 31.
18. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 347, addition to § 189.
19. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, vol. 3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 328, § 532.
20. Cf. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 343, § 186.
21. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), p. 67.

22. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), p. 331.
23. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 29.
24. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 176, § 82.
25. Cf. Stern, 'Hegel, British Idealism and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal', p. 122.
26. Cf. Merold Westphal, 'Hegel's Theory of the Concept', in *G. W. F. Hegel: Selected Writings*, ed. Lawrence Stepelevich (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1993), p. 39.
27. *ibid.*, p. 35.
28. Cf. Kathleen Wright, 'Hegel: the Identity of Identity and Non-identity', *Idealistic Studies* 13 (1983): 11–32 (15 f.).
29. Cf. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 307, § 158.
30. Cf. Petra Brautling, *Hegels Subjektivitätsbegriff. Eine Analyse mit Berücksichtigung intersubjektiver Aspekte* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991), pp. 181 ff.
31. Cf. Christian Iber, 'Hegels Konzeption des Begriffs', in *Wissenschaft der Logik, Klassiker Auslegen*, ed. Anton Koch and Friederike Schick (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002), p. 182.
32. Cf. Stern, 'Hegel, British Idealism and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal', pp. 125 f.
33. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 33.
34. Theodor W. Adorno, 'Dialektische Epilegomena. Zu Subjekt und Objekt', in his *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I/II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003), p. 743.
35. *ibid.*
36. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 138, § 167.
37. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 52.
38. Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit. Zur deutschen Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964), p. 443.
39. Cf. Macdonald, 'The Wounder will heal', p. 132.
40. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 220, cf. p. 233. See also ND 62, 233. See for Hegel: Macdonald, 'The Wounder will heal', p. 132.
41. Cf. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, p. 398, § 257.
42. This section on Hegel's state is reproduced from my article: Charlotte Baumann, 'A Hegel–Marx Debate on the Individual and Society', *Studies in Marxism* (forthcoming).
43. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 44 and ND 17.
44. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 18 and also ND 154.
45. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik*, p. 62.
46. Cf. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, pp. 73, 88.
47. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 315.
48. Christian Iber, *Metaphysik absoluter Relationalität. Eine Studie zu den beiden ersten Kapiteln von Hegels Wesenslogik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990), p. 226.
49. Cf. Hans Friedrich Fulda, 'Hegels Dialektik als Begriffsbewegung und Darstellungsweise', in *Seminar: Dialektik in der Philosophie*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 144.
50. Cf. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 347.
51. Brian O'Connor, 'Hegel, Adorno and the Concept of Mediation' (2007: 5), accessed 1.2.2007 at: <http://www.ucd.ie/philosophy/staff/oconnor/HegelAdorno.pdf>

52. Josiah Royce, 'Appendix C: The Hegelian Theory of Universals', in his *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy* (1892: 4), accessed 1.2.2007 at: <http://www.class.uidaho.edu/mickelsen/texts/Royce%20%20Hegel%20Apend%20C.htm>
53. Cf. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, pp. 165, 191.
54. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 261.
55. Cf. Günther Maluschke, *Kritik und absolute Methode in Hegels Dialektik* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, 1984), pp. 204 f.
56. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 68.
57. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 367.
58. Adorno, *Ontologie und Dialektik*, p. 62; see also ND 126.
59. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 43, cf. pp. 62, 70, 165.
60. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 41 f.
61. *ibid.*, p. 70.
62. *ibid.*, p. 165.
63. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 34 and also Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 302.
64. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 32.
65. Jay Bernstein, '6. Negative Dialektik. Begriff und Kategorien III. Adorno zwischen Kant und Hegel', in *Negative Dialektik. Klassiker Auslegen*, ed. Axel Honneth and Christoph Menke (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2006), p. 97.
66. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 47.
67. Cf. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, pp. 73, 88.
68. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, pp. 28 ff.
69. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 31.
70. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 82.
71. For these two complementary aspects, see Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 18.
72. Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 14 f.
73. Cf. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 82.
74. Cf. Mauro Bozetti, *Hegel und Adorno. Die kritische Funktion des philosophischen Systems* (Freiburg and Munich: Verlag Karl Alber, 1996), p. 60.
75. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, p. 62.
76. Cf. Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, p. 34, and also Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 302.
77. Cf. Christian Iber, *Das Andere der Vernunft als ihr Prinzip* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 366 f.
78. Adorno, *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, p. 336.