

Adorno on Kant, Freedom and Determinism

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Abstract: In this paper I argue that Adorno's metacritique of freedom in *Negative Dialectics* and related texts remains fruitful today. I begin with some background on Adorno's conception of 'metacritique' and on Kant's conception of freedom, as I understand it. Next, I discuss Adorno's analysis of the experiential content of Kantian freedom, according to which Kant has reified the particular social experience of the early modern bourgeoisie in his conception of unconditioned freedom. Adorno argues against this conception of freedom and suggests that freedom is always conditioned by our embodiment and by our social and historical situation. Finally, I turn to Adorno's criticism of Kant's discussion of freedom and determinism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* and argue that while his philosophical argument against Kant fails, his metacritical argument remains suggestive. Scepticism about freedom arises when the standpoint of theoretical reason encroaches upon the standpoint of practical reason and assimilates persons to things.

1. Introduction

In this paper I examine Theodor W. Adorno's 'metacritique' of freedom in *Negative Dialectics*, which focuses on Kant's discussion of freedom and determinism in the Third Antinomy of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. I argue that Adorno's approach to Kant is original and reveals insights that are often missed in standard interpretations of Kant. I do not argue that Adorno gets Kant right all the time; in fact, I believe that he often gets him wrong. Nevertheless, I believe that his approach remains fruitful and enriches our understanding of both Kant and freedom. Adorno's most important insight is that it is *social heteronomy*, rather than *natural causality* that

undermines our confidence in freedom and motivates our attraction to determinism as a philosophical position.¹ Consequently, his analysis of Kant's philosophy, and in particular of the Third Antinomy, aims to uncover the social experience that is expressed in it. As we shall see, Adorno's metacritique of the Third Antinomy suggests that scepticism about freedom arises when the standpoint of theoretical reason encroaches upon the standpoint of practical reason and assimilates persons to things.

Since Adorno's reading of Kant is unusual, it requires a lot of exposition as well as evaluation and criticism. Let me begin with four remarks on Adorno's approach in order to lay the groundwork for what is to come. *First*, Adorno subtitles the 'Freedom' chapter of *Negative Dialectics* as a 'metacritique' (ND 211/211). The methodological intention of a metacritique is to inquire into the presuppositions, philosophical or non-philosophical, of a particular philosophical problem.² In the present case a metacritique may attempt to answer the following questions: Why is freedom so important to Kant? Why does he conceive of it as an absolute beginning? And why has he framed the conflict between freedom and determinism as a conflict about the nature and scope of causality? *Second*, Adorno distinguishes between the substantial motivation (*sachliche Motivation*) and the experiential content (*Erfahrungsgehalt*) of a philosophical position. Whereas the former concerns the philosophical problem at hand, the latter concerns the social-historical experience sedimented in the text. It illuminates the historical specificity and concreteness of seemingly timeless and abstract questions.³ Kant's substantial motivation in the Third Antinomy is to consider the conflicting theses to which his conception of causality gives rise when totalized and to show that transcendental idealism offers a resolution of the antinomial conflict. Its experiential content, Adorno suggests, is the historical struggle over social and political freedom in the early modern period and the scepticism about freedom engendered by scientific progress. *Third*, Adorno's metacritical approach and his interest in the experiential content of the Third Antinomy make him vulnerable to the objection

that he is not properly concerned with free will at all, but with some kind of subsidiary form of practical, social or political freedom, perhaps the freedom to get what one wants, as opposed to the more traditional concerns of the free will debate, such as the freedom to will what one wants to will.⁴ A defender of Adorno will respond that, for Adorno, it is impossible to consider the question of free will in abstraction from the practical, social and political freedoms modern subjects enjoy. As a Hegelian of sorts, Adorno believes that freedom is historical, both as an idea and as an experience (ND 218/218), and that the subject first acquires the concepts of freedom and unfreedom through its experiences of frustration, failure and constraint and subsequently internalizes them (ND 219/219–20). Consequently, freedom of the will cannot be separated from its social institutionalization.⁵

Finally, Adorno's discussion of freedom is difficult to place within the modern debate about compatibilism and incompatibilism. To be sure, there are passages in which Adorno seems to advocate an incompatibilist position. Most prominently, near the beginning of the 'Freedom' chapter he writes that '[t]he decisions of the subject do not roll off a causal chain; a jolt occurs' (ND 225/226–27).⁶ However, as the remainder of the passage makes abundantly clear, Adorno rejects Kant's attempt to interpret this jolt as an intramental occurrence that somehow intervenes into causal processes governed by natural laws. Rather, he suggests that this jolt, which he characterises as an 'addendum' (*das Hinzutretende*) is a reminder of the fact that human willing is an embodied activity that occurs consciously yet transcends pure consciousness.⁷ Moreover, an incompatibilist position must seem unattractive to Adorno, because of the domination of reason over nature that is implied in the idea of *unconditioned* freedom, that is, a form of freedom that is in no way *conditioned* by the subject's circumstances.⁸

My discussion in this paper proceeds in five steps. Following a brief sketch of Kant's conception of freedom (§2) I turn to Adorno's critique of it, beginning with his analysis of the experiential content of the Third Antinomy (§3) and his criticism of Kant's unconditioned conception of freedom (§4). Next, I turn to Adorno's interpretation of the Third Antinomy and suggest that Adorno pursues two distinct lines of argument: while his *philosophical* criticism of causality fails as a criticism of Kant (§5), his *metacritique* of the totalizing character of theoretical reason is more successful. Since Adorno does not develop this criticism as much as he could have, I conclude with some suggestions about how he could have developed it further (§6).

2. A brief Sketch of Kant's Conception of Freedom

The problem of freedom first arises in the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the Third Antinomy⁹ Kant contrasts the thesis that a 'causality through freedom' (A444/B472) must be posited in addition to the causality of nature, affirmed in the Second Analogy, in order to explain the totality of appearances in the world, with its antithesis, according to which no such causality through freedom is either possible or necessary. This 'cosmological' question is directly relevant for human freedom, because the 'transcendental' freedom defended in the thesis is the 'real ground' of the imputability of actions to agents (A448/B476), and therefore the basis of moral responsibility. Kant resolves the Antinomy through an appeal to transcendental idealism and the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. While the empirical world is subject to the causality of nature, human beings *must* see themselves as *also* 'belonging to the intelligible world' (G 452), and therefore as free. However, this resolution of the Antinomy comes at a price. On the one hand, Kant's practical philosophy struggles to reconcile the schism of the empirical and the intelligible in a unitary theory of the subject. On the other hand, the appeal to the transcendental distinction

forces Kant to adopt an incompatibilist conception of freedom in which freedom is completely *unconditioned* by the empirical world.¹⁰ As Adorno puts it: ‘Freedom is spiritualised [*vergeistigt*] as freedom from the realm of causality, as an abstract general concept that is beyond nature’ (ND 219/220, cf. ND 227/227–28).

In his practical philosophy, from the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason* to *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant develops this conception of freedom into an attractive account of human autonomy. This account may be stated in the form of two closely related claims. The first claim is that our needs, desires and inclinations of themselves cannot determine the will. This is the upshot of a famous passage in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which Henry Allison has christened the Incorporation Thesis:

[F]reedom of the power of choice [*Willkür*] has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself). (Rel 24)

The incorporation of an incentive, that is, a particular need, desire or inclination, into a maxim consists in its subjection to a practical principle. And this incorporation is an act of freedom.¹¹ The second claim concerns the practical principles to which needs, desires and inclinations are subjected. According to Kant, the generation of maxims is governed by non-empirical principles of reason, namely, the hypothetical and categorical imperatives, which bestow their form upon a maxim.¹² Whereas the hypothetical imperative is a conditional practical principle, which commands that one take the means to one’s ends, the categorical imperative is an unconditional practical principle, which commands that one’s maxims must be morally permissible (G 420–

21). Finally, Kant argues that the practical principles of reason are self-legislated and therefore a will governed by them is a free will.

This model of will formation assumes that ‘desires do not come with pre-assigned weights’.¹³ Their weight, as well as their status as reasons for action, derives from the value the agent confers on them. Such a value conferral may be based on complex processes of deliberation, but for present purposes the decisive consideration is that the mere presence of a desire or inclination does not constrain that process of deliberation in any way.¹⁴ Kant is therefore right to characterize the freedom of choice at issue here as ‘absolute spontaneity’ (Rel 24). Of course, the paradigmatic case of this absolute spontaneity is action from the motive of duty, where pure practical reason ‘immediately’ gives a law to the will (KpV 31) and therefore is ‘unconditionally practical’ (KpV 15). And the metaphysical assumption behind this conception of freedom and of the will is that the human will is free in an incompatibilist sense: the causality through freedom ascribed to the will is distinct from the causality in accordance with laws of nature that govern the empirical world. As Adorno points out, on this understanding, the ‘subject is the “sphere of absolute origins”’ (ND 222/223).

3. The Experiential Content of the Third Antinomy

According to Adorno, the Third Antinomy reflects a real, contradictory experience that modern subjects have. He begins his analysis of freedom in *Negative Dialectics* with the question, ‘why have the two theses, “The will is free” and “The will is unfree,” become an Antinomy’ (ND 217/218)? And his answer is that modern subjects have objective reasons to see themselves as both free and unfree (ND 294/299). In particular, they vacillate between their conception of themselves as free agents, which they are encouraged to adopt, and the many forms of unfreedom they experience, be they psychological, social or economic. The precise details are

difficult to establish, because Adorno discusses a number of closely related issues, all of which concern the ambivalent character of freedom in the early modern period, but the principal claims of his account can be stated succinctly. To begin with, Adorno argues that the political interest of the bourgeoisie to emancipate itself provides the experiential background for the concern with freedom in early modern philosophy. ‘Since the seventeenth century great philosophy had determined freedom as its most characteristic interest’. It had ‘the unexpressed mandate of the bourgeois class to ground it in a transparent manner’ (ND 213/214). The purpose of grounding freedom in this way was to debunk the myths of aristocratic superiority.

However, this bourgeois interest in freedom is antagonistic or contradictory in at least three ways. *First*, it ‘goes against the traditional domination and promotes the new one, which is contained in the rational principle itself. A common formula for freedom and domination is sought’ (ND 213/214). This common formula is ‘rationality’ and, in particular, law. Rationality is constitutive of freedom, because it makes self-determination possible; yet, it is an expression of domination, because it dominates the non-rational elements of human nature. This thesis, which is familiar already from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, leads to the question of whether a non-dominating form of rational self-determination is possible and, if so, how (see my discussion in §4(2)). *Second*, progress in modern science undermines our confidence in freedom through its insights into the causal determination of the world. ‘In Kant, and later in the idealists, the idea of freedom comes to be contrasted with research in the individual sciences, especially in psychology’ (ND 214/214). The more psychology finds out about human motivation, the less room remains for free will, as bourgeois philosophy conceives of it.¹⁵ Moreover, the more the natural sciences find out about the causal determination of the natural world, the less room remains for free human agents in this world. Yet, the bourgeoisie depends upon the sciences, and therefore it is torn between the commitment to freedom and to the pursuit of science that undermines its confidence in it (ND 214/214, GF 269/195). *Third*,

according to Adorno, the bourgeoisie was first and foremost interested in its own freedom, rather than in universal human freedom. In particular, it resisted any conception of freedom that ‘threatened to go beyond the bourgeois order’ (GF 270/195).

This leads me to what I believe is Adorno’s central insight concerning the relationship between the experiential content and the substantial motivation of the free will problem. ‘The bourgeoisie postulated freedom in a highly external [*auswendigen*], objective sense. It meant freedom from the restrictions and dependencies that the feudal system had imposed on the bourgeois order, the bourgeois class’ (GF 267/193–94). In the context of this *political* struggle for bourgeois emancipation the challenge for early modern philosophy was to justify the bourgeois struggle in *philosophical* terms. ‘In raising the question of freedom, the youthful, increasingly confident bourgeois class felt it essential to ground freedom in the nature of man. From there it is but a step to inquire whether human beings are essentially free or not free’ (GF 267/194). However, this step from political struggle to philosophical justification changes the character of the freedom under discussion. As Adorno puts it: ‘This rational justification of man as free proceeds from man’s actual liberation, but attempts to ground this actual liberation in his own nature, that is to say, in man’s nature as a subject’. Liberation (*Befreiung*) is a process, and it is always liberation from something specific. Yet, once philosophy justifies human freedom (*Freiheit*) this relational character is lost. Freedom is reified as abstract, formal and ahistorical; it becomes a metaphysical property of the human being. As a result of this conceptual reification, nothing in the empirical world, be it social and political domination, economic pressure or scientific progress, can touch it.¹⁶

If this analysis of the experiential content of the free will problem is plausible, then it is readily apparent why Kant was drawn to an (incompatibilist) unconditioned conception of free will, rather than to a (compatibilist) conditioned one (though, of course, there also are many

good reasons to prefer an incompatibilist to a compatibilist conception of free will on *substantial* philosophical grounds¹⁷). It removes freedom from the empirical world and locates it in the intelligible world, where its existence remains unaffected by empirical unfreedom. ‘Not the least of the reasons why freedom lost its power over people is that from the outset it was conceived so abstractly and subjectively that the objective social trends found it easy to bury’ (ND 215/215). By contrast, Adorno argues that freedom is *always* freedom from something and ‘can be grasped only in determinate negation, corresponding to the concrete shape of unfreedom’ (ND 230/231, cf. 219/219–20). As he also puts it: ‘Introspection reveals neither freedom nor unfreedom as existing. It conceptualises both in relation to something extra-mental: freedom as the polemic counter-image to suffering under social domination, unfreedom as its image’ (ND 222/223). As a result, the question of whether we enjoy freedom of the will in any given situation is *conditioned* by the specific circumstances of that situation; we are never unconditionally free. In fact, Adorno believes that the hubris of unconditioned freedom is damaging, because it encourages people to ascribe more freedom (or a more demanding form of freedom) to themselves than they do in fact have:

The more freedom the subject – and the community of subjects – ascribes to itself, the greater its responsibility; and before this responsibility it must fail in a bourgeois life which in practice has never endowed a subject with the unabridged autonomy accorded to it in theory. Hence the subject must feel guilty. What makes the subjects aware of the bounds of their freedom is that they are part of nature, and finally, that they are powerless against society which has become independent of them. (ND 220/221)

This passage points beyond the social philosophical considerations considered so far and at Adorno’s more systematic critique of Kant’s account of unconditioned freedom.

4. Conditioned and Unconditioned Freedom

Adorno's critique confronts Kant's practical philosophy with Freud's conception of ego formation in order to undermine the strict separation of genesis and validity that is constitutive of transcendental philosophy.¹⁸ It enables Adorno to criticise both the *real* objectification (*Objektivierung*) of the will in the course of the phylogenetic and ontogenetic development of humanity and the *conceptual* reification (*Vergegenständlichung*) of the will in Kant's practical philosophy.¹⁹ In the course of this critique, the outlines of Adorno's own account of conditioned freedom will become apparent, too.

In the Preface to the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant writes that it is the purpose of this book to offer an account of practical reason 'without special reference to human nature' (KpV 8). He is concerned with the validity of the use of reason, rather than with the genesis of reason and freedom in our natural and embodied existence as a species. By contrast, Adorno believes that reason cannot be conceived of as nature's other in an absolute sense (ND 228/228–29). Following Freud, he is interested in how reason has evolved from nature and remains related to it:

That reason is other than nature, and yet a moment of it, is its prehistory and has become its immanent vocation. It is natural as a psychological force, split off for the purposes of self-preservation; but once split off and contrasted with nature, it becomes nature's other. EphemERICALLY raised above it, reason is identical and nonidentical with nature, dialectical according to its own concept. (ND 285/289)²⁰

In the case of practical reason this dialectic means that 'reason in the shape of the will takes possession of the instinctual drive', and therefore, 'the will is the element of available instinctual energy that is diverted and subjected to the conscious will' (PM 190/128, cf. ND 229/230, GF 329/237). And Adorno infers from this that if reason has developed both phylogenetically and

ontogenetically out of (human) nature, as these passages suggest, then it will always strive toward the fulfilment of natural impulses, however mediated they may be by reason.²¹

Of course, it is not *per se* a failing of Kant's transcendental philosophy that it does not offer a genetic account of reason and its origin in nature (arguably, Kant does offer such an account elsewhere²²), but Adorno believes that Kant's conceptual reification of the will issues in the misguided view that reason 'creates its own reality, independently of its material' (ND 226/227). This view is misguided for two reasons: (1) our existing needs, desires and inclinations are themselves reason-giving, and therefore their subsumption under rational principles in the process of will formation is by no means an exercise of unconditioned freedom; and (2) Kant cannot distinguish between dominating and non-dominating forms of ego integration.

(1) According to Adorno, freedom and unfreedom co-originate in the process of will formation.²³ Identity is the operative concept in this process. He writes,

What has been objectified in human beings on the basis of their reflexes and in response to them, character or will, the potential organ of freedom, also undermines freedom, because it embodies the principle of domination to which human beings progressively succumb. Identity of the self and alienation from the self go hand in hand from the beginning. Identity is the condition of freedom and, at the same time, the principle of determinism. Will is insofar as human beings objectify themselves into a character. (ND 216/216–17)²⁴

The objectification of the will is a precondition of freedom, because without it no unified self could emerge and all behavior would be reaction to external stimuli. Hence, 'the subject knows itself as free only insofar as its actions appear identical with it' (ND 226/227). And this identity is generated when subjects form their wills in accordance with their best judgment about their

needs, desires and inclinations.²⁵ In the process of will formation some of these needs, desires and inclinations may acquire an importance that justifies long-term attention while others are less important. Thus,

The objectification of individual impulses into the will, which synthesizes them and renders them determinate, is their sublimation, their successful, delaying permanence-involving diversion from the primary goal of drives. Kant faithfully describes this as rationality of the will. Through it the will becomes something other than its ‘material,’ the diffuse impulses. To stress a human being’s will is to stress the moment of unity in its actions, and that is their subordination under reason. (ND 237/238)

So far, Adorno seems to agree with Kant’s conception of will formation as transcendental synthesis. Their disagreement concerns the status of needs and desires in will formation. As Adorno understands Kant, needs, desires and inclinations have no claims on us independently of their subjection to practical principles.

Adorno makes this point (negatively) in terms of the distinction between reason and its material: ‘The material of my feelings, therefore, and indeed everything that comes to me from outside, everything that is not me in the sense of being my own reason, is really no more than a stimulus’ (PM 106/70). But if needs and desires, because they are ‘external, alien’ (PM 107/71) to reason, are no more than a stimulus, they do not constrain the rational process of will formation in any way. Reason then ‘creates its own reality, independently of its material’ (ND 226/227, cf. PM 106/70–71).²⁶ This criticism of the relationship between reason and desire parallels Adorno’s criticism of the relationship between reason and intuition in Kant’s theoretical philosophy.²⁷ He writes, ‘every synthesis – and reason is after all the capacity for synthesis – does more than create order and structure in things that are external to it and contingent. It becomes truth only by expressing as a synthesis the substantial content of the

underlying objects' (GF 348–49/251). In other words: 'There can be no synthesis, no judgment, unless what is being joined together in fact belongs together' (GF 349/251).²⁸ And, having formulated this criticism of Kant's theory of synthesis in experience, Adorno adds, 'this criticism applies also to Kant's doctrine of the will because his theory of the will and hence of freedom is structured in the same way as his doctrine of reason...[It] is falsified by the absolute separation of the will from its material' (GF 349/251).

In the light of this criticism, one would expect Adorno to offer an alternative (positive) account of the relationship between the will and its 'material'. But, unfortunately, he does not offer such an account either in *Negative Dialectics* or in one of the two sets of lectures from which I have quoted. Nevertheless, two lines of thought suggest themselves. First, given Adorno's genetic account of reason's origin in human nature (as outlined at the beginning of this section), he may argue that reason retains a certain affinity with the 'natural' stratum of human existence, and therefore needs, desires and inclinations never appear to a rational agent as mere sensible givens. If this is right, then it explains why Adorno thinks that synthesis consists in joining together what belongs together in some sense.²⁹ Second, Adorno may appeal to his 1942 paper 'Theses on Need', where he had argued that our needs, desires and inclinations are never merely natural; rather, they are always already socially and historically mediated and therefore themselves reason-giving: 'Need is a social category. Nature, the "drive", is contained in it. But the social and the natural moment of need cannot be separated from one another as primary and secondary, in order to posit a hierarchy of satisfaction' (GS 8: 392).³⁰

As we have seen in §2, Kant believes that the process of will formation is underdetermined by our needs, desires and inclinations. They do not possess a determinate value prior to their incorporation into maxims; rather, when a rational agent incorporates a sensible desire into a maxim she must assign a weight to it. By contrast, if my argument in this section is right, then

Adorno believes that our needs, desires and inclinations ‘always already’ have a claim on us in virtue of the fact that (i) their content is not as alien to reason as Kant’s dualism of reason and sensible desire would make us believe, and that (ii) they are socially and historically mediated and therefore *pre-weighted*.³¹ This account of the relationship between practical reason and sensible desire solves a problem to which Robert Pippin has drawn our attention in a number of papers over the last two decades. The problem is that if desires do not come with pre-assigned weights, what rational criterion does a rational agent have at her disposal that would enable her to assign a weight to them? Neither the quantitative strength of a desire nor any other criterion is *per se* rational, and, as a result, ‘if nothing about our empirical character could count as a reason for acting unless already incorporated into a maxim, it is hard to see the possibility of an *original* rationale for any such maxim or policy’.³² In other words, unless we apprehend our needs, desires and inclinations as always already having a claim on us, their subjections to *formal* practical principles (the hypothetical and categorical imperatives) cannot transform them into such a claim either, because these principles *by themselves* lack the substantial criteria that would justify such a transformation. By contrast, Adorno’s account of willing, which acknowledges that our needs, desires and inclinations always already have a claim on us, escapes this problem: ‘countless moments of external, notably social, reality enter into decisions designated with will and freedom; if the term reasonable [*der Begriff des Vernunftgemäßen*] in the will means anything, it means that’ (ND 212/213).

If this interpretation of Adorno is right, it raises an interesting question about the role of the addendum (*das Hinzutretende*) in Adorno’s account of willing. In §1 I had briefly mentioned that Adorno introduces the addendum as a placeholder concept in order to account for the fact that human willing is an embodied activity and cannot be reduced to a merely intramental act. So far in this section I have concentrated on showing that needs, desires and inclinations are never merely sensible givens and therefore have claims on us as rational agents. However,

nothing that I have said denies the fact that they are also *impulses*³³ and, therefore, ‘intramental and somatic at once’ (ND 228/228–29). Adorno refers to the addendum in order to account for the fact that our conscious, conceptual grasp of a desire, say, does not exhaust what that desire is, because, as a sensible desire, it is also a bodily reaction and, therefore, ‘transcends consciousness’ (ND 228/229). From the perspective of rational agency, this aspect of a desire is indeed ‘non-rational’³⁴, and thus it seems as if ‘something other were added to rationality’ (ND 228/229).

(2) As we have seen (in the passage quoted at the beginning of (1)), Adorno maintains that identity makes both freedom and unfreedom possible. The objectification of the will makes freedom possible, because through it a person’s impulses are unified and therefore she can identify with her will and the actions that flow from it. At the same time, Adorno suggests that identity also dominates these impulses through their subjection to the principles that order them. I believe that there are two ways in which this *domination thesis* may be read, and I shall suggest that only one of them is plausible. On the first reading the unification of the individual impulses through their subjection to principles of the will is always already an instance of domination (this is an aspect of Adorno’s notorious criticism of identity thinking³⁵); on the second reading it is an empirical question whether the unification of individual impulses in the will amounts to domination. As we shall see, in the latter case the answer to this question depends on the possibilities of desire satisfaction that individuals have in society as a matter of fact. The first reading of the domination thesis is apparent in this passage:

Only insofar as someone acts as a subject, rather than merely reacts, can his action be called free. *Nevertheless, that which is not tamed by the subject as the principle of all determination, what seems unfree to the subject, as in Kant’s moral philosophy, and which hitherto has been unfree in fact, would be equally free.* (ND 222/222, emphasis mine)

I believe that this reading of the domination thesis is implausible. To make it work, Adorno would need to show that an *individual impulse*, rather than the person whose impulse it is, can be free or unfree. But no such account seems possible.³⁶ It is only once a subject has appropriated its impulses and made them its own, that the subject may be free or unfree, depending on whether the impulses can be expressed.³⁷ Then, and only then, can Adorno argue that the frustration of an impulse is an instance of unfreedom.

On the second reading, the ‘domination of inner nature’ (ND 221/222) that Adorno criticises concerns the norms according to which subjects appropriate their impulses, and these norms are *social norms*. Will formation is a self-relation, whereby subjects appropriate their impulses by subjecting them to norms, but since these norms are social norms, this self-relation is subject to social constraints nonetheless.³⁸ And, according to Adorno’s account of subjectivization from the *Dialectic Enlightenment* to *Negative Dialectics* and beyond, modern societies have forced people to repress their needs, postpone desire fulfilment indefinitely and conceive of themselves as merely rational beings that must master their ‘natural’ being in order to ensure their individual and collective survival. However, whereas Freud thought that this process of renunciation is a necessary part of the human condition (PM 203/137)³⁹, Adorno thinks that it is a result of the contingent path of human history that could have been and still could be otherwise. Unfortunately, Adorno sometimes formulates his account of this process of renunciation in crudely hedonistic terms; nevertheless, its structure is clear enough: the rationality of renunciation depends upon the legitimate expectation that the rational organisation of a subject’s life that is made possible through renunciation compensates the subject for it. However, modern societies are organised in such a manner that ‘the compensation promised by civilization and by our education in return for our acts of renunciation is not forthcoming...In other words, society is organized irrationally’ (PM 205–206/138–39).

The first thing to say about this analysis is that Adorno offers a criterion for the rationality of modern societies: namely, that people are compensated for their individual acts of renunciation.⁴⁰ Of course, it is an open question whether this criterion is plausible, and whether it is met by any society. In fact, Adorno's criterion may seem extremely implausible for a number of reasons. Thus, the pleasure renounced in the process of civilization may be incommensurable with that offered in compensation. Moreover, even if it were commensurable, it may be impossible to determine the level of compensation to which a person is entitled. Finally, it may seem that Adorno's criterion is too demanding. Nevertheless, for present purposes the important point is that Adorno's criterion establishes a link between the phylogenetic process of ego formation, the ontogenetic process of will formation and social organization that is missing in Kant's practical philosophy. The latter models the domination of inner nature as the subjection of needs, desires and inclinations to practical principles, but it cannot distinguish between oppressive and non-oppressive forms of ego and will formation, because it does not connect the formal rationality of these practical principles to the forms of social organization. As Adorno also puts it, when Kant severs the link between virtuous conduct on the one hand, and the happiness of the individual and the welfare of the species on the other, he makes a *fetish* out of renunciation (PM 207–208/139).⁴¹

In summary, then, Adorno's objections to Kant's account of unconditioned freedom do motivate a certain amount of scepticism about the norms and principles governing the exercise of freedom on that account. Unfortunately, Adorno does not develop these insights any further. Rather, in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on the *Problems of Moral Philosophy* he develops his scepticism about Kant's practical principles into a full-blown attack on the Third Antinomy, where he suspects to find the origin of the problematic relationship between freedom, law and causality in Kant (PM 75/48).

5. The Third Antinomy

As we have seen, Adorno believes that modern subjects have objective reasons to see themselves as free and unfree, and the Third Antinomy expresses this contradictory experience. It is no surprise, then, that in the Freedom chapter of *Negative Dialectics* Adorno devotes considerable space to a discussion of the Third Antinomy. In fact, Adorno pursues two distinct lines of argument in this discussion. The first, *metacritical*, argument concerns the totalizing character of theoretical reason expressed in both the thesis and antithesis arguments. The second, *philosophical*, argument concerns Kant's conception of causality, whose validity in experience is undisputed in the Third Antinomy⁴², though commentators cannot agree what exactly causality in the Second Analogy amounts to. As the author of a book on the topic notes, 'we can't agree whether Kant successfully proved, by whatever method he was trying to use, whatever it was that he was trying to prove'.⁴³ In particular, the question is whether the Second Analogy establishes that every event falls under a strictly necessary universal law or whether it merely establishes that every event has some cause, in which case the existence of universal laws is a merely regulative idea.⁴⁴

Adorno believes that causality is an instrument of domination. It originates in the need to order the natural world according to some principle in order to make its domination possible. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer capture this thought in this harrowing claim: 'The domination of nature draws the circle into which the *Critique of Pure Reason* banished thought' (DdA 43/19). The thought is that transcendental idealism represents the natural world as a causally ordered system of objects in space and time, because human self-preservation, be it through ancient myth or modern science, depends upon such an ordered system.⁴⁵ If this were true, if causality had a 'compulsive epistemological character', as Adorno

puts it at one point (ND 247/249), then we would expect to find traces of this in Kant's conception of it. And Adorno's *philosophical* criticism of causality attempts to reveal precisely those traces. In particular, he tries to show that Kant's conception of causality cannot inform us about the causal powers of objects and about the causal relationships that obtain between objects. I believe that this line of argument is fundamentally flawed, and in the remainder of this section I argue that Adorno's arguments against Kant fail. In the next section I return to Adorno's first, *metacritical* line of argument in *Negative Dialectics*, which focuses on the totalizing character of theoretical reason and argue that it is more successful.

According to Adorno's interpretation of it, Kant's conception of causality is 'formal' (ND 245/247, PM 76/49). In particular, Adorno claims (1) that it is reduced to a mere function of subjective reason, and (2) that it exhibits 'a particular kind of externality'.⁴⁶ Finally, he also suggests (3) that the subject 'must think causally' (ND 246/248).

(1) Adorno's first claim is that causality 'approximates the principle of reason as such, thinking according to rules. Judgments about causal relations come close to be tautologies: reason asserts of them what it effects as the faculty of laws' (ND 245/247, cf. DdA 43/19–20). As the result of this construal, 'causality is to originate not in the objects and their relations, but instead merely in the subjective compulsion of thought' (ND 245/248). The aim of Adorno's argument is obvious. According to Kant, causality is a category applied in judgments of experience; in a sense, we bring it to experience. From this plausible claim Adorno infers implausibly that judgments about causal relations are tautologous and merely report a relationship that is the result of the activity of reasoning in the first place.⁴⁷ The inference is implausible because it commits Kant to the view that in judgments of experience we do not learn anything about the objects of these judgments. But this is clearly wrong. Our empirical knowledge of objects given in intuition is genuinely knowledge, even though it is partially the

product of human reason. On Kant's view, we do not arbitrarily *impose* our concepts on the world; rather, the use of the understanding in judgment is constrained by the conditions of experience and by the deliverances of sensibility.⁴⁸

(2) Adorno's second claim is a development of the first and concerns Kant's criticism of Leibniz. Kant had argued against Leibniz that causality couldn't be based on 'inner necessity' because, according to Kant, we cannot know the inner determinations of things, but merely their appearances (see Kant's discussion of Leibniz at A268–80/B324–36). Since causal relationships rely on both spatial and temporal properties of objects, intellectual access to things in themselves (if it was possible) could not reveal these relationships. Rather, sensible intuition of an object is needed to individuate it in space and time. Adorno criticizes Kant for the *externality* of this conception of causality:

That one state of affairs could have something, specific, essential to do with the one following it, is dogmatic...for Kant. But one could posit nomothetical relations of succession, on the Kantian conception, which have nothing to do with causal relationships...The simplest meaning of the claim that something is the cause [*Ursache*] of something else is ignored. A causality rigorously insulated against the interiority of objects is no more than its own shell. The *reductio ad hominem* in the concept of law reaches a threshold where the law says nothing about the object anymore. (ND 245–46/248)

On the assumption that the 'object' in question is an object of experience, Adorno's criticism is unfounded. For even if the transcendental principle of causality merely establishes an objective temporal order (as the every-event-has-some-cause reading suggests), in experience we find regularities in events that enable us to formulate (empirical) causal laws, which ascribe causal powers to specific objects of experience. Therefore, *pace* Adorno, it is possible to distinguish

between genuine causal relationships and ‘nomothetical relations of succession...which have nothing to do with causal relationships’ (ND 245/248). The sun heating a stone is Kant’s paradigmatic example for this kind of empirical causal law.⁴⁹

(3) Finally, Adorno questions the apparent ascription of causality to thought itself. He claims that, ‘when Kant maintains that the subject must think causally, his analysis of the constituents, according to the literal sense of “must”, is following the very causal proposition to which he would be entitled to subject only the *constituta*’ (ND 246/248, cf. 232/233–34). If causality is a category, it only applies to objects of possible experience. But does Kant not assume it already in the act of thinking? This line of thought prepares the ground for Adorno’s global suspicion of law and lawfulness, be it in experience (knowing) or intention (willing). With respect to knowledge, the claim is that since the subject must think causally, it prejudices the causality of the event that is thought. However, as a number of commentators have objected, this argument rests on a conflation between the meta-level and object-level of thinking.⁵⁰ I think that this objection can be sharpened further. The argument rests, in fact, on a conflation of general and transcendental logic, where the former governs thought in general, and the latter governs thought about objects (A53/B77, A57/B81–82). Kant’s distinction between these two forms of logic and their respective application conditions is a major achievement of transcendental philosophy⁵¹, and Adorno’s failure to engage with it invalidates his criticism of Kant on this point. With respect to willing, Adorno suggests that practical reason is law-governed and therefore unfree.⁵² He complains that Kant construes even freedom as ‘a special case of causality’ (ND 248/250), and, elsewhere, suggests that ‘causality through freedom’ is an oxymoron (ND 227/228). In response several commentators have pointed out that this conflation of the causal necessity that laws of nature possess with the practical necessity that results from one’s submission to a practical principle is unjustified.⁵³ Moreover, as I have argued

in §4(2), the unfreedom that modern subjects experience originates in the submission to particular, oppressive social norms, rather than in their submission to norms *per se*.

I believe my brief discussion of Adorno's *philosophical* criticism of Kant's conception of causality shows that this criticism fails, and I now return to the first, *metacritical* line of argument in *Negative Dialectics*, which I believe to be more successful. This line of argument concerns Kant's concern with totality in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

6. Transcendental Illusion

As I have said, Adorno's focus on causality prevents him from seeing the Third Antinomy in the wider context of the Transcendental Dialectic. This is unfortunate, because recent work on Kant has shown convincingly that a proper understanding of the Antinomy requires attention to this context. In particular, Michelle Grier has shown that all species of transcendental illusion (the Paralogisms, the Antinomy and the Ideal) are the result of the same error, which she characterizes as the conflation of a subjectively necessary principle of reason with the assumption that it holds objectively (A298/B354). This subjective principle is to find 'for the conditioned knowledge given through the understanding the unconditioned whereby its unity is brought to completion'.⁵⁴ The illusion arises because the commitment to this subjective principle seemingly entails the commitment to the objective principle that if 'the conditioned is given, the whole series of conditions...which is therefore itself unconditioned – is likewise given'.⁵⁵ In the case of the Third Antinomy the completeness at issue is that of a series of causes and effects. Such completeness is required if a unified and ordered system of knowledge of the world, considered as 'the sum total of all appearances' (A419/B447), is to be established. The conflation occurs when reason slides from being guided by a subjective principle of inquiry to the claim that such a complete series (here: of causes leading up to a particular event) could be given in

experience. On this account, illusion is unavoidable because the subjective principle of reason is necessary for the purposes of *knowledge acquisition*.⁵⁶ To be sure, while the illusion is unavoidable, the judgmental errors that follow from it are not. As Kant puts it, while the illusion necessarily deceives (*täuscht*) us, it does not necessarily defraud (*betrügt*) us (A422/B450).⁵⁷ But it is the positive function of the illusion in knowledge acquisition that is decisive for present purposes. Reason seeks to systematize and unify the knowledge provided by the understanding and, for this purpose, it forms transcendental ideas, including the idea of a whole of knowledge. Subsequently, ‘we question nature according to these ideas, and we take our cognition to be defective as long as it is not adequate to them’ (A645–46/B673–74).

This conclusion is pertinent here, because Adorno offers a very similar argument in *Negative Dialectics*. In the remainder of this section I shall suggest that Adorno could have offered a more compelling reading of Kant, had he pursued this, metacritical, line of argument further. Adorno takes it that the main thrust of the Antinomy is the ‘anti-idealist prohibition against positing absolute identity’ (ND 244/246), that is, the identity of thought and being, and I want to suggest that this identity just is the conflation of a subjectively necessary principle of reason with the assumption that it holds objectively.

Reason, which proceeds in the way for which [Kant] criticizes it, has to proceed according to its own meaning and its inexorable ideal of cognition, as it should not, as if subject to a natural and irresistible temptation. It is insinuated to reason that the totality of the real converges with it after all. (ND 244/246)⁵⁸

At the same time, Adorno recognises that reason’s quest for the unconditioned, for the totality of conditions is an authentic quest:

[T]he necessity of this infinite progress on the part of reason searching for further conditions, however alien to [Kant’s] system, has something authentic about it, the idea

of the absolute, without which truth could not be thought, as opposed to knowledge as mere *adaequatio rei atque cogitationis*. (ND 244/246)

This dialectic, the natural and unavoidable, yet illusory quest for the unconditioned, informs Adorno's reading of the Third Antinomy's thesis and antithesis arguments.

According to Adorno, Kant must posit the existence of causality through freedom in the *thesis* argument, because he tacitly makes the completeness of conditions of any given conditioned a criterion of knowledge. But this criterion is external to the understanding. As Adorno puts it, '[t]he totality of knowledge, which is here tacitly equated with truth, would be the identity of subject and object. Kant restricts it as a critic of knowledge and teaches it as a theorist of truth' (ND 247/250). In other words, the thesis indicates that reason aims at a truth that is somehow more than knowledge (an ontological truth). Such an aim is not in itself problematic, but it becomes problematic when reason no longer recognizes its limits and assumes that its subjective need entails objective givenness. By the same token, in the *antithesis* argument 'the category of causality is said to transcend the bounds of possible experience' (ND 249/252), because it must presuppose the infinite regress of conditions as given.⁵⁹ But this presupposition is the result of the same conflation of subjective necessity and objective validity.

Had Adorno pursued this line of argument further, he might have linked his criticism of the (posited) subject-object identity resulting from the conflation of the subjective principle of reason with its objective validity to his criticism of the domination of nature in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics*. In particular, he might have asked whether the unavoidability of transcendental illusion is, in fact, *natural*, as Kant claims (A298/B354, cf. A407/B433), or whether it is *social*. Recall that, according to Grier's interpretation of the Transcendental Dialectic, the projection of unity on nature is a vision that guides us in the

process of knowledge acquisition.⁶⁰ This process goes astray when it leads to a form of *reification*, whereby the heuristic assumption of the unity of nature is reified into the claim that nature really is unified.⁶¹ And it is the social organisation of knowledge acquisition (for the purposes of the domination of nature) that is the object of Adorno's metacritique. As we have seen, the Third Antinomy does not arise because of the way in which Kant conceptualises causality, but because of the *totalization* of its application. Natural causality becomes a threat to freedom when the standpoint of theoretical reason encroaches upon the standpoint of practical reason, making the very existence of the latter an object of scepticism. This leads to two questions that should be of interest to Adorno: (1) why does this happen?, and (2) what are the consequences for our self-conception of free agents?

(1) Here is how Adorno might have answered the first question: our compulsive need as a species to dominate nature reduces everything and everyone to an object of theoretical reason to be apprehended in terms of its phenomenal causality. To be sure, the domination of nature begins with the domination of outer nature. But scientific progress in chemistry, biology and psychology soon leads to new forms of knowledge that enable us to conceive of inner nature by analogy to outer nature. Theories of psychological determinism lead the way (ND 213/213–14), but they seem harmless today, as neurobiology and prenatal genetic screening make human nature available in objectifying ways that neither Kant nor Adorno could have imagined.⁶² It is not surprising, in the light of these developments, that modern subjects find it difficult to find the conceptual space for freedom. In the light of this analysis, the *natural* character of the transcendental illusion reveals itself as *naturwüchsig*. In other words, it is a social phenomenon that seems natural, because humanity as a whole has not yet taken control over its own destiny. Following Marx's lead in *Capital*, Adorno frequently utilizes the concept of *Naturwüchsigkeit* in order to analyze the ways in which modern societies remain blind to the laws of their own reproduction (for example, ND 145/141, 190/190, 260/262)⁶³, and there are two passages in

Negative Dialectics where he explicitly characterizes causality as a form of *Naturwüchsigkeit* (both at ND 266/269) that seeks to dominate nature for the purposes of self-preservation. As Adorno points out, once reason liberates itself from this totalizing spell (*Bann*), the true nature of causality will be revealed. Maybe this would be the end of transcendental illusion, too.

(2) I can think of two ways in which Adorno might have developed his metacritical analysis into a phenomenology of defective self-conceptions. They examine what happens when modern subjects make theoretical reason authoritative over themselves or others. In the first case I have a form of self-reification in mind, which articulates itself in an attitude that Axel Honneth, following David Finkelstein, has called ‘detectivist’. Here, ‘the subject is conceived as a detective who possesses privileged knowledge of his own desires and feelings because he has undertaken a search in his own mental world and “discovered” these desires and feelings’.⁶⁴ The existence of desires and feelings is here conceived as given prior to the subject’s recognition of them, and their discovery is conceived as a cognitive achievement, rather than as a cognitive appropriation of some sort. Thus, if *theoretical* reason is made authoritative over inner nature, the result is the exact opposite of the Kantian conception of *practical* reason, where desires and feelings are underdetermined in their givenness and require their appropriation (see my discussion in §4(1)). As Adorno points out, in pathological cases (which are neurotic) the subject experiences its own unfreedom when it cannot identify with its own inner nature (ND 221–222/222). In the second case I have the attitude in mind that we take toward others when we consider them from the standpoint of theoretical reason. As Peter Strawson has pointed out, when we take such an ‘objective attitude’ toward others or treat them as ‘object[s] of social policy’, then we evaluate their conduct in terms of causal explanations rather than in terms of freely chosen intentions.⁶⁵ Clearly, if theoretical reason becomes authoritative over us in either of these ways, our self-relation and social relations will be severely damaged, and the pathology of this damage will be traceable to the need to dominate nature in the first place.

7. Conclusion

In this paper I have discussed Adorno's metacritique of freedom in *Negative Dialectics* and related writings. I suggested at the outset that Adorno's reading of Kant with respect to freedom is original and remains worthy of serious consideration. Adorno rejects Kant's conception of unconditioned freedom and offers the outline of an alternative account, which sees reason, and therefore freedom, as continuous with our (human) nature, rather than its absolute other. At the same time, Adorno tries to undermine the alleged unavoidability of the Third Antinomy through a *philosophical* critique of Kant's conception of causality, which he sees as the underlying problem of the antinomial conflict between freedom and determinism. I have argued that Adorno's criticism of causality fails and is rooted in an inadequate understanding of the complexity of Kant's transcendental idealism. However, I argued that Adorno pursues a second, *metacritical* argument against Kant, which is more successful. This argument asks how theoretical reason could become authoritative over our self-conception and our conceptions of others and what the consequences of that would be. I briefly suggested that this could happen if our need as a species to dominate nature leads us to extend the realm of theoretical reason beyond its proper realm of application and into the realm of practical reason. If that happened, we would treat ourselves and others as things.⁶⁶

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Notes

¹ See also Habermas 2008, who arrives at similar conclusions to mine, albeit by a different route.

Other substantial discussions of Adorno's reading of Kant with respect to freedom include Bernstein 2001: 250–62, Tong 1995: chs. 2 and 3, Wischke 1993: 82–111, Schweppenhäuser 1993: ch. 3, Günther 1985, and Pothast 1980: 299–313.

² The term 'metacritique' was coined by Johann Georg Hamann in his unpublished critique of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, entitled *Metakritik über den Purismus der Vernunft* (1784), which criticizes Kant for abstracting from the ways in which reason is culturally and linguistically embedded in a community and asks what presuppositions this approach implies.

³ Cf. Adorno 1973/4, vol. 2: 174. To be sure, Adorno rejects the reductionist thesis that philosophical problems can be reduced to the social circumstances in which they arise or which they express: 'Criticism of a philosophy is only ever possible as a criticism of its truth. The mere indication that it is positively or negatively related to some social condition or other has no critical force. On the other hand, even the most abstract distinguishing features of the kind we have encountered in Kant have their place in the real social constellation from which they have arisen. And it is possible to assign to the abstract concepts of Kant's moral philosophy something of the concrete specificity that is not immediately perceptible in them, but which does lie hidden in their underlying substance' (PM 225/152).

⁴ See Frankfurt 1988.

⁵ Robert Pippin has argued recently that this is indeed Hegel's position. On his reading, Hegel 'denies that we can separate the moral-psychological, individual dimension of freedom (the possibility of the "freedom of the will") from social relations of dependence and independence said to be equally constitutive of freedom (the freedom to act), and he assesses these social arrangements in light of their rationality', where this rationality is understood in some historicised, social or pragmatic sense (Pippin 2008: 7).

⁶ I believe that Habermas' interpretation of this passage (2008: 193–94) indicates an incompatibilist reading of Adorno.

Fabian Freyenhagen has suggested that Adorno's conception of freedom requires an account of causal powers of objects, an element of chance and an indeterministic conception of natural causality (2006:

436). However, while I agree that Adorno discusses all of these desiderata at various places in *Negative Dialectics*, I do not think that it is possible to reconstruct a full-blown conception of freedom on their basis.

⁷ In this sense the addendum is a placeholder concept. It stands for all the bodily impulses that have been excluded from Kant's conception of the will. 'The impulse, intramental and somatic in one, drives beyond the sphere of consciousness, to which it belongs nonetheless. With it freedom extends to the sphere of experience; that animates the concept of freedom as a state that would be neither blind nor oppressed nature. Its phantasm, which reason will not allow to be withered by any proof of causal interdependence, is that of a reconciliation of spirit and nature. This is not as alien to reason as it appears due to Kant's equation of the latter with the will; it does not drop from heaven. To philosophical reflection it appears as a downright other, because the will that has been reduced to pure practical reason is an abstraction. The addendum is the name for that which was eliminated in this abstraction; will would not be at all without it' (ND 228/228–29). See also my brief discussion of the addendum at the end of §4(1).

⁸ I adopt the distinction between conditioned and unconditioned freedom from Bieri 2003. I have learned a lot from this remarkable defence of conditioned freedom against its unconditioned alternative.

⁹ Strictly speaking, there is only one Antinomy of Pure Reason that gives rise to four conflicts of transcendental ideas. However, as is customary, I will refer to the 'Third Conflict of the Transcendental Ideas' as the Third Antinomy.

¹⁰ Here I follow Henry Allison's incompatibilist reading of Kant (1990: Part I). For a compatibilist reading of Kant see Wood 1984. Many interpreters think that Kant is neither an incompatibilist nor a compatibilist in today's terms. See, for example, Timmermann 2003: ch. 3.

¹¹ See Allison 1990: 40.

¹² In this paragraph I aim to give a very broad account of Kant's practical philosophy. Therefore, I shall not discuss the complicated questions of the form, content and scope of maxims.

¹³ Allison 1996b: 113.

¹⁴ This conferral account of value goes back to Korsgaard 1996a, 1996b.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that Kant denied psychology the status of a science because it does not yield natural laws. See his discussion in the preface to the *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* (1786), Ak 4: 471.

¹⁶ I believe that ‘conceptual reification’ is the organizing principle of Adorno’s criticism of Kant’s practical philosophy as a whole.

¹⁷ The most convincing cases for the significance of an incompatibilist conception of free will for our intuitions about freedom, imputation and responsibility that I know of are Kane 1996: ch. 6, and van Inwagen 1983: ch. 5.

¹⁸ See Whitebook 2004 and 1995: chs. 2 and 3; see also Günther 1985: 235–37, 239–41.

¹⁹ A note on the terminology: When Adorno uses the term *Vergegenständlichung* in order to refer to what I have called conceptual reification in §3 (for example, ND 234/235, 236/237, 237/239), I have translated it as ‘reification’, rather than ‘objectification’, in order to maintain consistency.

²⁰ The last sentence of this passage is omitted in the English translation.

²¹ This account of the origin of the human will is similar to Nietzsche’s in *The Gay Science* ([1882] 2001: §110).

²² See, for example, his shorter essays ‘Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View’ (1784, Ak 8: 15–31) and ‘Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History’ (1786, Ak 8: 107–23). For a discussion see Wood 1999: ch. 7, and Yovel 1980.

²³ I am very grateful to an anonymous referee for this *Journal*, whose detailed comments and criticisms have prompted me to revise this section of the paper extensively.

²⁴ Some Kant scholars may be surprised at Adorno’s equation of will and character in this and other passages (for example, ND 292/297). However, there is some support for this equation. As Karl Ameriks (1989) has shown, Kant operates with different conceptions of the will and one of them, the ‘whole character view’, is similar to Adorno’s.

²⁵ On this point see Bieri 2003: 54–61, 80–81.

²⁶ On ‘independence’ see also Allison 1990: 38 *and passim*.

²⁷ If anything, Adorno suggests, Kant's practical philosophy is more dogmatic than his theoretical philosophy (cf. ND 226/227), since the latter expresses the non-identity of reason and nature in the concept of the thing-in-itself. See also Adorno 2001: 66–67.

²⁸ For a discussion of this criticism of Kant in the context of Adorno's theory of experience see O'Connor 2004: ch. 2.

²⁹ 'In some sense', because, as Adorno points out in the passage I have quoted above (ND 285/289), reason is 'identical and nonidentical with nature'. For the dimension of nonidentity see my discussion of the addendum at the end of §4(1).

³⁰ Of course, Adorno is well aware that because our needs are socially and historically mediated, they are subject to ideological distortion (GS 8: 393). This is particularly true in capitalist societies. The contradiction of the concept of need in capitalist societies is that while the distinction between 'true' and 'false' needs is central to social criticism, it is impossible to adjudicate the truth or falsity of any particular need from within capitalist society.

³¹ To be sure, those pre-weighted needs, desires and inclinations do not *causally* determine the will. Rather, will formation occurs on the basis of these needs and desires as always already having a claim on us. Therefore, will formation is not an exercise of unconditional freedom.

³² Pippin 1991: 539, see also 2000, 2001.

³³ Note that my discussion of the impulse in this passage is not exhaustive. In particular, I do not discuss its role in *moral* experience, where Adorno appeals to it in order to characterize the way in which we experience moral compulsion (ND 281/285). For good discussions of this role of the impulse see Menke 2005 and Schweppenhäuser 1993: 113–22, 187–91. See also my brief remarks in note 36.

³⁴ At ND 227/228, Adorno calls it 'irrational', but I think 'non-rational' better captures his intention. In general, Adorno sees the relationship between reason and desire analogously to that of reason and intuition as one of identity *and* non-identity. In other words, objects 'are linguistic and conceptual and also non-conceptual: we cannot capture objects exclusively through their conceptual properties, and yet their nonconceptual properties – what is "captured" or "conjured" – cannot be positively articulated through concepts. The object then is articulated through concepts, but not reducible to them' (O'Connor 2004: 50).

³⁵ One reason for its notoriety is that ‘identity thinking’ encompasses a number of different yet related practices. As Anke Thyen has pointed out, it is a ‘historically evolved, universal mode of being-in-the-world’ that first seems to be an epistemological problem, but comes to appear also in the domains of social theory, the philosophy of history and, possibly, even anthropology (1989: 113). In the present context, Adorno’s criticism is that the *identity* of the subject is produced through the domination of the subject’s inner nature (its drives, instincts and bodily needs) by abstract principles of reason.

The most useful discussion of identity thinking in Adorno remains Schnädelbach 1983.

³⁶ Eckart Goebel suggests that the impulse makes it possible to grasp ‘the idea of freedom’ (ND 228/229). On his reading, the impulse is not itself free or unfree; rather, it serves to emphasise the importance of our embodiment to any conception of freedom (1995: 113).

In my view, this reading, though preferable to the first reading of the domination thesis, leads to a larger problem: it is not at all clear that all impulses are good; they may be egoistic or anti-social. In fact, Adorno seems to suggest that in unfree societies our impulses are very likely to be deformed in such ways. Hence their exercise may be very bad, both for the person herself and for others. But if that is true, it is very difficult to see how any normative conclusions can be drawn from the fact that we have those impulses (and it also becomes very difficult to see how the impulse could be understood as Adorno’s substitute for Kant’s respect [*Achtung*], as Goebel suggests). For a discussion of Adorno that draws attention to this ‘moral ambiguity of energetic demands’ see Obermaier 2005: 878.

³⁷ Note that I am not committed to the view that the appropriation of an individual impulse is an act of unconditional freedom. I adopt the notion of appropriation from Bieri 2003: ch. 10, though Bieri is concerned with the appropriation of one’s will, rather than an individual impulse.

³⁸ Earlier I said that, according to Kant, maxims are formed by subjecting needs, desires and inclinations to practical principles. But any appeal to a practical principle relies on a background of social norms. For example, in order to decide whether a specific means-ends consideration is rational, one would need to know whether the means in question are rationally acceptable means for the pursuit of the end in question. The same is true of the categorical imperative. In order to decide whether a specific maxim is morally permissible, one would need to know whether its adoption violates a specific interpretation of what the moral law requires. For more on this see Herman 1993: chs. 4, 7 and 10.

³⁹ This is Adorno's interpretation of Freud's 1930 book *Civilization and Its Discontents*. I am not concerned with the cogency of Adorno's Freud interpretation here.

⁴⁰ Note that this criterion imposes a very strong, *contractarian* constraint on social organization. I do not believe that this element of Adorno's critical theory has received sufficient attention to date.

⁴¹ Of course, Adorno does not offer an account of non-oppressive ego formation either. As Joel Whitebook points out, there is a tendency in Adorno's work to identify the pathological forms of ego formation in late capitalist societies with ego formation *per se* and, as a result, Adorno cannot see a way out of the dialectic of freedom and unfreedom that I have discussed in this section. According to Whitebook, the solution to the problem of how a no-oppressive form of ego integration can be imagined would require a return to the concept of sublimation (2004: 70–71).

⁴² That is, the thesis and antithesis sides of the Third Antinomy agree that the mode of causality affirmed in the Second Analogy, '[e]verything that happens presupposes something which it follows in accordance with a rule' (A189), is valid within experience. Cf. Allison 2004: 376.

⁴³ Bayne 2004: xiv.

⁴⁴ For the former view see Friedman 1992; for the latter see Allison 1996a.

⁴⁵ The section entitled 'Causality as Spell' in the Freedom chapter of *Negative Dialectics* (ND 266–67/269–70) explicitly links causality to the domination of nature.

⁴⁶ Adorno also claims that Kant's conception of causality is 'extraordinarily broad' (PM 76/48). In *Negative Dialectics* this amounts to the claim that one 'could posit nomological regularities, which have nothing to do with causal relations' (ND 245/248). Mere statistical coincidences would be causally connected on this conception of causality (ND 263/266). This claim is less relevant for my argument, and I will leave it aside here.

⁴⁷ This is a version of the well-known Lovejoy-Strawson objection to the Second Analogy.

⁴⁸ In my view, the best discussion of this *imposition problem* remains Pippin 1982: ch. 8.

⁴⁹ Kant discusses this example in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science* (1783), Ak 4: 301n, 305n. See also Buchdahl 1969: 653–54, and O'Shea 1997.

⁵⁰ For a recent version of this criticism see Pippin 2005: 115. For older versions see Thyen 1989: 179, Braun 1983: 143–45, and Beier 1977: 63.

⁵¹ For an excellent account of how Kant developed this distinction in the course of his career see Longuenesse 2005.

⁵² Adorno infers the ‘predominance of the concept of law’ from the fact that Kant appeals to it in his conceptions of both freedom and causality (ND 249/252).

⁵³ As Pippin puts this criticism: ‘Only a very crude appeal to the “literal sense of ‘must’” could lead one to think that the “must” involved in claims such as “If you believe ‘If A, then B’, and you believe ‘A’, then you must believe ‘B’” or “If you are to be able to represent an event, you must experience that event as necessarily following another according to a rule” or “If you set out to obtain X and Y is the only means to X, you must either obtain Y or give up the goal X” is *the same* as the must in “If copper is heated, it must expand.”’ (2005: 115).

⁵⁴ Grier 2001: 119. Allison has called this principle an ‘intellectual categorical imperative’ (2004: 330).

⁵⁵ Grier 2001: 122.

⁵⁶ In fact, as Grier points out, what counts as knowledge will partly be determined by whether it accords with this transcendental assumption of reason (2001: 282).

⁵⁷ Cf. Grier 2001: 127–30.

⁵⁸ This nearly untranslatable passage reads: ‘Vernunft, die verfährt, wie [Kant] an ihr es tadelt, muß dem eigenen Sinn nach, ihrem unaufhaltsamen Erkenntnisideal zuliebe, so weiter gehen, wie sie es nicht dürfe, gleichwie unter einer natürlichen und unwiderstehlichen Versuchung. Der Vernunft werde zugeflüstert, die Totalität des Seienden konvergiere doch mit ihr’.

⁵⁹ Adorno’s interpretation of the antithesis is complicated by the fact the he denies the cogency of this claim. Just as W.H. Walsh (1975: 173) would argue a few years later, Adorno argues that a consistent scientism ‘will guard against such a metaphysical use of that category [of causality]’ (ND 249/252). I will leave this complication aside.

⁶⁰ Cf. Grier 2001: 276–77.

⁶¹ For an analysis of this process in terms of *reification* see Neiman 1994: 188–89.

⁶² Habermas’ reading of Adorno leads to similar conclusions on this point (2008: 200–208, cf. 2003, 2007).

⁶³ The English translation obscures Adorno's intention by translating *Naturwüchsigkeit* variously as 'the blind growth of nature', 'natural growth', 'primitivity' and 'natural origin'.

⁶⁴ Honneth 2008: 67. Cf. Finkelstein 2003: ch. 1. I believe that Honneth's account of self-reification is an important contribution to the understanding of modern social pathologies. Unfortunately, I do not believe that the same can be said of his account of interpersonal reification. Cf. Jütten 2010.

⁶⁵ Cf. Strawson 1974: 9. Of course, Strawson reserves this sort of attitude for 'psychologically abnormal' or 'morally undeveloped' people (and he knows that these characterisations are very crude).

⁶⁶ This paper has been in the making for a very long time. It originates in my DPhil thesis, which I submitted to the University of Sussex in 2008. I am very grateful to my supervisors, Andrew Chitty and Daniel Steuer, and to the thesis' examiners, Gordon Finlayson and Robert Pippin, for all their help and encouragement. I have presented earlier versions of this paper at the *Society for European Philosophy/Forum for European Philosophy Joint Conference 2008* in Dublin and at the Research Seminar of the School of Philosophy, University College Dublin in November 2009, and I am very grateful to the audiences at these events for many helpful comments. In particular, I would like to thank Deborah Cook, Maeve Cooke, Stan Erraught and Brian O'Connor. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for this *Journal* and a member of its editorial committee for thoughtful comments and criticism.

References

Abbreviations

a) Adorno

All references to Adorno's writings are first to T.W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften (GS)*, ed. R. Tiedemann et al., 23 volumes (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997) and *Nachgelassene Schriften (NaS)*, edited by the Theodor W. Adorno Archiv (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996–) and second to the following English translations (frequently amended):

DdA: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. G. Schmid Noerr, trans. E. Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) [GS 3];

GF: *History and Freedom*, trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2006) [NaS IV.13];

ND: *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London and New York: Routledge, 1973) [GS 6];

PM: *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) [NaS IV.10].

b) Kant

All references to Kant are to the pagination of *Kants Gesammelte Schriften (Ak)*, edited by the Deutsche (formerly Königlich Preussische) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 29 volumes (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1902–) with the exception of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where references are given to the first (A) and second (B) editions respectively. The following translations have been used:

A/B: *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1787), trans. and ed. P. Guyer and A.W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) [Ak 3+4];

G: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), trans. M. J. Gregor, ed. C.M. Korsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) [Ak 4];

KpV: *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), trans. M.J. Gregor, ed. A. Reath (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) [Ak 5];

Rel: *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), in *Religion and Rational Theology* (The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant), trans. and ed. A.W. Wood and G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) [Ak 6].

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