The Concept of Need in the Thought of Theodor Adorno

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Abstract

Philosophical thinking, according to Theodor W. Adorno, ought to resist the positing of foundational principles. Philosophy of need—in its usual variants—is thought to require such principles to undergird its intelligibility and specific normative force. It turns out that Adorno invokes the concept of need in several key areas of his corpus. Yet, Adorno's anti-foundationalism appears to deprive him of any resources to coherently appeal to needs. This generates, I submit, three questions about his thought on the concept of need, and given his pervasive reliance on it, the coherence of his project more generally. First, Adorno's appeal to needs calls for some reconstructed notion of human essence. Second, his thinking relies on a non-reductive understanding of psychic drives and impulses. Third, Adorno's insistence on the inseparability of true from false needs calls for interpretation, as it appears to pull the rug under any philosophy of need—including his own. In this thesis I explore which philosophical ideas and traditions, if any, can mitigate these three problems. I argue that for a significant extent these incoherencies can be resolved. I proceed by providing detailed analyses of Adorno's reflections on metaphysics, epistemology and social explanation, and by so doing underscore the decisive—if not always well understood—influence the writings of Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud had on Adorno. This thesis contributes to Adorno scholarship, contemporary critical theory, and the broader intersection of social criticism and psychoanalytic thought.

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Introduction

Theodor Adorno's writings contain several references to the concept of need, touching on topics in metaphysics, epistemology and social critique. A closer inspection reveals a tension ridden set of statements and implications. The purpose of this introduction is to outline and motivate three problems which follow from them. Should they remain unaddressed—as I will show in the paragraphs below—Adorno's appeal to needs clash with other major aspects of his corpus.

0.1.Adorno and Needs: Three problems

Generally speaking, philosophical conversation about need or needs presuppose a bearer, some being or entity to which such needs are indexed. More specifically, the notion of human needs suggests that such a bearer is understood as distinct from bearers which we associate with non-human animals or other living organisms. A human being belongs to a kind different from a 'cat-kind' or a 'tree-kind'. Certainly the latter two have 'needs' *qua* biological requirements for sustenance which it could be said that human beings also have, but a human being has needs that are indexed (one feels the pressure to say) to humans as bearers of their own specific, qualitatively different kind.

Adorno's appeal to needs contains a strand which seems to be consistent with this starting point. Indeed, in terms not too dissimilar to the early Marx, Adorno holds the capitalist system responsible for stultifying human needs. This can be presented as two-sided attack: first, regarding the great masses of the poor capitalism does not meet even the most basic or vital needs; and second, even when it does meet basic or more complicated needs, it meets

them in an alienated, inhuman, way. These thoughts presuppose some notion of the human life form.

Any claim about a life-form, it would appear, is a claim about some type of human essence or nature. Despite making these claims about needs (which lean on the idea of human essence), Adorno also rules out the usual commitments to support them— the philosophical engine room required to keep them going. For Adorno, the notion of human nature seems to be in principle off the cards, which we can evidence from his pervasive attacks on philosophical 'invariants' [*Invarianten*]– a commitment he coins 'first philosophy'.[1] Preliminarily, according to Adorno, philosophical categories are not metaphysically stable but rather aspects of the dynamics of history. To think that they transcend these dynamics is to take leave of the human predicament, and to succumb to a dangerous consolation.[2] Indeed, he calls projects oriented by the establishment of invariants an indication of a peculiar type of need itself, an 'ontological need [*ontologisches Bedürfnis*]'.[3] Therefore, it is not clear how to make sense of Adorno's appeal – even if perhaps only implicitly – to bearers of need whose interests are tied to their nature or essence. There is a threat of incoherence hanging over his philosophy of need – between what looks like a demand for an essentialist stance, and his explicit anti-foundationalism. This is the first of three problems I will investigate and address in this dissertation.

If we call the just preceding conversation indicating a metaphysical or ontological problem— despite Adorno's denial that he is engaged in either—then the second problem can be broadly conceived under the terms of knowledge and subjectivity. Adorno can be understood

1 ND p. 129.
2 ND p. 41
3 ND p. 92

as an epistemological 'materialist'. Very roughly, materialism is the view that the subject or the 'I' apprehends objects, has knowledge, via a process where their sensuous life is not passive, but involved. Compare this to the view held typically by Kantians, such as Korsgaard, who insist that from the standpoint of rational action, impulses are 'material upon which the active will operates'.[4] This implies that the role of needs is ultimately passive with respect to rational action.

Adorno belongs to a group of thinkers who challenge this image. Moreover, he holds that impulsive aspects of experience are not merely internal or subjective. They tell us something about the broader world. In the *Theses on Need* he does so specifically: 'Need is a social category; nature as "drive" is contained within it'.[5] And in the same 'Theses', Adorno claims that life is characterised by 'repression' of our needs.[6] The concept of 'drive' is also employed in the form of 'survival drive' in some of Adorno's central claims about the fate of modernity as an ongoing domination of nature, and ourselves as part of it.[7] Thus, needs as drives have an important diagnostic and normative purchase on our world.

Impulses, drives and repression are part of the philosophy of psychoanalytic thought. Furthermore, within this paradigm the theory of psychic drives is indispensable if the other concepts (many of with which Adorno peppers his writings) are to be intelligible. And in other contexts, Adorno points to Freud as a source insight for philosophical thinking as such.[8] Thus, any clarification of Adorno's philosophy of need cannot be undertaken without

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[4] Christine M Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*, (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 241.
[5] TN p. 392.
[6] Ibid.
[7] This thesis is central to *Dialectics of Enlightenment*.
[8] '[P]hilosophy [...] ought to follow Freud's truly brilliant example and concentrate on matters that have not been pre-digested by the pre-existing concepts of the prevailing philosophy and science'. NDL p. 69.

stumbling onto questions about the philosophical status of psychoanalytic terms in general, and Freud's 'drive' [*Trieb*] in particular. This issue features only implicitly in Adorno commentaries, making this an under-explored territory. There is little detailed commentary on the question of whether or not Freud's drive theory could be understood in a productive manner with respect to the central themes of Adorno's philosophy.

His indebtedness to Freud's enterprise brings with it a tension—the second problem which I address in this study. Freud's drive psychology is often accused of rendering explanations 'deterministic', meaning that they lose what is distinctive to the objects they are intended to explain: intentionality, value, meaning and so on. In the analytical tradition the issue is often framed via Wittgenstein's remarks. In a rudimentary sense, this Wittgensteinian objection rests on a distinction between reasons (understood as meanings) and causes (understood as chains of events which are studied without involving meanings).[9] On the basis of this distinction, it is held that these involve two different types of investigation—interpretation and causal explanation. This issue is often summarised as 'reasons cannot be causes'. The common view is that that Freudian explanations conflate reasons with causes in trying to account psychopathology, say, in terms of underlying drive structures. Explanations based on Freud's drive psychology are causal, and since causal explanations are about states of affairs ultimately grounded in physical states, then given the subject matter of psychoanalysis which clearly does involve reasons, these explanations cannot but be spurious and reductive.[10]

[9] For a discussion of this objection, see. James Hopkins and Richard Wollheim, 'Philosophical Essays on Freud', (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. vii-ix).

[10] As an influential example of such criticism, Erich Fromm takes leave from Freud's drive on the grounds of objecting to Freud's understanding of psychosexual development. The key assumption is that drive theory commits us to a notion of a physical substrate, teleologically determined towards a certain kind of form, which yields a strictly ahistorical, asocial, standards of success and failure in reaching it. Fromm then jettisons drive theory altogether and replaces it with a socially constructivist

If this objection to Freud is compelling, then Adorno cannot be justified in appealing to the basic concepts of this psychology, *given* that he repeatedly emphasises the mediated character of the mental and the somatic, and seems to reject explanations which are based on determined or mechanistic causes. Matters are not aided by Adorno's dispersed and occasionally mixed views on Freud.[11]

The usual way commentators deal with this difficulty is by downplaying Adorno's causal terminology. I proceed differently. In order to bring relief to this tension I investigate the little charted terrain of Adorno's explicit writings on causality. Adorno is indeed best read as a dialectical thinker with respect to the mind and the body, and, as I endeavour to show, there is a non-deterministic reading available to underpin his 'causal' language.

With respect to the underlying psychoanalytic story, we have the following options. If it turns out that Freud is guilty of causal determinism, then either Adorno's reading of drive theory is highly idiosyncratic (against Freud), or Adorno's commitment to specifically Freudian sense of these terms is a signal of a major incoherence in his philosophy. However, if we can read Freud differently (as opposed to the common view even in psychoanalytically inflected critical theory) then this *prima facie* incoherence between Adorno drive psychology dissolves. This also means the downplaying of the specifically Freudian backdrop of these terms is not motivated. To this end we require some mediation story about the body and the mind, whereby the workings of impulses and drives is not causally deterministic, but in some

ontology. Here I follow John Abromeit's reconstruction. John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, (Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 341-42.

[11] MM, pp. 60-61.

sense subject to consciousness and evaluation. I appeal to Hans Loewald's reading of Freud, as well as recent work in the analytical philosophy of psychoanalysis.

We now come to the third and final problem, likewise a threat of incoherency in Adorno's philosophy of need. Adorno appears to commit to a strong thesis of epistemic ignorance: in class societies, including capitalism, there seems to be little point in talking about needs philosophically. As he puts it: 'The indistinguishability of genuine and false needs belongs intrinsically to class domination' [*Die Undurchdringlichkeit von echtem und falschem Bedürfnis gehört wesentlich zu der Klassenherrschaft*]'.[12] I call this the 'indistinguishability thesis' (IT).

Among some commentators, the term 'false need' evokes the idea that the capitalist system manipulatively constitutes the needs of its subjects, somehow diverting them from what their needs otherwise would be. This thought is developed in a contemporaneous social critique which hinges on the view that such 'false needs' work to explain how and why the capitalist system self-maintains, despite the fact—so the argument goes—that it could be transcended.[13] It is evident from Adorno's texts that he criticises some aspects of this view.

However, how is he justified, under his own lights, to any version such view if 'true' and 'false' needs cannot be distinguished? How, given IT, can he be *warranted* in criticising capitalism for inverting our genuine needs to false needs, when he also denies that we can know which ones are our genuine needs? Further still, an austere reading of IT pulls the rug

[12] TN p. 394.

[13] This is roughly the view shared among Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm and Agnes Heller. See especially, Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, (Routledge, 2013). Chapter 1.; Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, (Beacon Press, 1974). For a critical overview of these thinkers, see Patricia Springborg, *The Problem of Human Needs and Critique of Civilization*, (Unwin Hyman, 1981). Chapters 1 and 8 – 11.

out of any philosophy of need. Thus, we have the purported indistinguishability of true and false needs as a third threat to coherence.

0.2. Aims and approach

The aim of this dissertation is to bring internal coherence between Adorno's claims about needs and his central philosophical commitments. I defend the claim that Adorno's philosophy of need does not clash quite so fatally with his commonly recognised philosophical commitments. Further, I show that buried in Adorno's writings is a nuanced treatment of the possibilities and difficulties of a need based social critique. Whether that or Adorno's philosophy in general is compelling, remains largely outside the scope of this study. That said, in chapters five and six I offer some suggestions towards a freestanding defence of these commitments and aspects of Adorno's philosophy of need.

I proceed by way of detailed explorations of the three problems identified in the previous section: the problems of essentialism, knowledge and drive determinism, and apparent indistinguishability between true and false needs. The philosophical topics discussed include Adorno's reflections on metaphysics and epistemology, method of social explanation, and critical normativity. By so doing I underscore the decisive—if not always well understood—relevance of the Marxian and psychoanalytic traditions. This thesis contributes to Adorno scholarship, contemporary critical theory, and the broader intersection of social criticism and psychoanalytic thought.

0.3. Chapter outline

Chapter one focuses on the primary material with respect to Adorno's writings on needs, laying the textual foundation for these three problems. I also investigate logical variants of

common need philosophies in order to distinguish what they offer in mitigating these problems. I also review secondary literature regarding Adorno on needs.

The task of chapter two is to clarify whether Adorno can hold on to the concept of essence – and thereby to the idea of a bearer of need which appears to be required for any conversation about needs. Further still, Adorno makes claims about bearers whose essence is in some sense degraded in what he calls 'late capitalism'. It is not obvious that this can be sustained given his hostility to philosophical invariants. I show that Adorno's position can be reconstructed in the following three steps: the concept of essence can be understood as (a) not involving invariants, (b) non-prescriptive in terms of the 'good' or 'right' life, and (c) this concept of essence is 'materialistic'—and in that qualified sense still recognizably 'essentialist'. I suggest that replacing a Platonic form of essence with a modified Aristotelian one, satisfies Adorno's anti-foundationalism, and thus brings relief to our first problem.

In chapter three I begin a conversation about needs and Freud's theory of drives – the threat of a second incoherence. Here I make the exegetical case for thinking that the notion of drive is indispensable for Adorno's philosophy of need. Drive psychological explanations are types of causal explanation. This chapter thus raises the stakes since it shows exegetically that Adorno is indeed committed to Freud in his appeals to needs in the form of drives. This intensifies the demand to show that Adorno's anti-foundationalist essentialism defended in chapter two is compatible with some variant of drive theory.

This issue plays out in two domains, corresponding to chapters four and five. First, it can be discussed internally to Adorno were we to think his is a highly idiosyncratic version of drive theory. There other area is the compatibility between Adorno's philosophy of need and the philosophy of psychoanalysis. Chapters four and five bring these two aspects together, bring relief to the second threat of incoherence. I argue this also is a promising way to develop

Adorno scholarship and the relationship between critical theory and psychoanalytic thought.

In chapter four I investigate whether it is possible to read Adorno in a way that combines the notion human essence from chapter two and some notion of causal explanation. I proceed by reconstructing Adorno's criticism of the dominant Humean-Kantian understanding of causality. I have two aims. First, I demonstrate that Adorno is not committed to methodological determinism. Second, I argue that his explanations which appeal to causality can be made sense of. Indeed, I take them as a cue for reconstructing Adorno's stance so that it involves teleology. At this juncture we can appeal to some recent work in the Aristotelian tradition (Foot, Thompson, Lear). Accordingly, teleological description does not have to mean that one attributes a specific purpose or end state to what is explained. Rather, it is a presupposition of any credible characterisation of human life. Such a reading dovetails with my proposal in chapter two.

In chapter five, I support Adorno's philosophy of need with respect to its direction of travel with Freudian psychoanalysis. I argue that Freud's drive psychology is neither causally deterministic, nor biologistic – or at least a philosophically and textually compelling alternative is available. I argue that Hans Loewald's reading of Freud provides the suitable conceptual architecture.[14] For Loewald—whose position has influenced Aristotelian readings of Freud[15]—drives are 'somatic representations', borders between somatic matter and the mind. This dialectical conception drive as bodily representative is causally non-

[14] I am indebted to Joel Whitebook's discussion on the notion of 'sublimation'. Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, (MIT Press, 1996). Chapter 5.
[15] J. Lear, *Love and Its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis*, (Yale University Press, 1998).

deterministic. This, I propose, works to buttress Adorno's claims about drive causality, resolving the tension introduced above.

At the inner circle, since Freud can be read in such a dialectical fashion, and if we consider Adorno's own views on causality, then Adorno's philosophy of need is not beset by incoherence when understanding drives (and thereby needs) via the Freudian framework. At the outer circle, this works well to support my interpretation of Adorno's need philosophy as a whole: if it is true that human beings carry immanently their life-form, then drives are in some sense expressions of it, not instances of mere biological propulsion. And if such a life-form involves the potential to set conscious ends, then it is fitting that human drives are characterised as teleologically causal. Thus, my reconstructions in chapters two, three and four are supported at least by some resources from the philosophy of psychoanalysis. Chapter five ends with an excursus to Adorno's analysis of prejudice as an application of psychoanalytic terms in social diagnosis.

Chapter six deals with the third problem motivating this dissertation. I offer a reading of Adorno's indistinguishability thesis which is compatible with thinking that, with certain conditions, we can have knowledge of false needs. Thus, I interpret IT beyond what is at first blush a sceptical impasse. I do this first by way of a return to Adorno's debt to Marx, but now discuss it in the context of the latter's 'mature' philosophy.[16] Second, I attempt to bring the notion of human essence articulated in chapter two in conversation with some of the categories available from psychoanalytic thought.

[16] Without here committing to a view about purported theoretical rifts or phases in Marx, I chiefly mean the notions of labour and commodity as they feature in his mature works, *Grundrisse* and *Capital*.

Preliminarily, as isolated judgements, we cannot say which need is true or false (or to which extent any particular need is true or false, or a human being sick or healthy). However, relating the terms to a relevant whole, more can be said, thus bringing relief to the third incoherency explored in the present study. The relevant notion of human essence is introduced in chapter two, and chapter six complements it via categories from Marx's critique of political economy. This fits well with Adorno's inverted Hegelianism: 'the whole is the false [*Das Ganze ist das Unwahre*]'.[17] This accusation, one might think, itself presupposes an evaluative norm—under some description of immanence.[18] I propose that we distinguish between a descriptive reading of IT—where such indistinguishability describes a prevalent consciousness, and a reflective one which subjects that state of affairs to a critique. Chapter six also ties together the Marxian-Aristotelian and Freudian aspects of Adorno's philosophy of need. Since human essence is expressed and realised via malleable drive structures, it is frail and can be distorted as to be functionally compatible with internally self-undermining, and externally destructive reproductive relations ('life and its suppression').[19] I close by commenting on contemporary critical theory with these ideas as the backdrop.

[17] MM p. 50 /80.

[18] I discovered only at a very late stage of writing Michael Theunissen's criticisms of this aspect of Adorno's and thus did not have the chance to engage with it properly.

[19] Adorno's critical theory is an anti-system and concerns systems. It is about an object that is understood as an interconnected whole. But criticising this whole does not imply that the theory forms 'a system', a closed structure of ahistorical claims. Adorno doubts that proceeding in a rational manner requires a system of this kind as one's epistemic model. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', *New German Critique*, (1984).

1. Adorno on philosophies of need and survey of secondary literature

In this chapter I develop the problems discussed in the introduction with the primary material of Adorno's works and the secondary literature. First, I will lay out Adorno's specific statements and assertions about needs and unpack them in relation to some general observations about needs (section 1). I then construct three logical variants of common need philosophies and discuss what we can take as Adorno's criticisms of them. This serves the purpose of showing how they inform our three problems (sections 2 and 3). Finally, I survey Adorno commentaries with respect to these and related issues (section 4). In deploying the primary material, I do not differentiate between early or later works, but follow other commentators in treating Adorno's works from 1931 onwards as forming one continuous corpus.[20]

1.1. The Concept of need and Adorno

To speak of needs and needing, we generally evoke a distinct, if not easily characterisable, normative force. Need, it is thought, appeals to something normatively different than desires and wants.[21] Notably, often need is understood as in some sense more objective than the mere subjective whims expressed in people's (given) desires and wants. The distinction between categorical and instrumental status does not alter this. Needs are objective in that they are inescapably part of the human condition, and they can be contingently objectively as in functional (require x in order to y, where x is the only way to satisfy y) for a specific end.

[20] Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* as well has his large body of writings on music remain outside the scope of this study.

[21] David Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, (Oxford University Press, 1997).; Ian Doyle and Len Gough, *A Theory of Human Need*, (1991).

With this very general frame as the backdrop, I begin with a passage where Adorno explicitly appeals to the supposed objectivity of human needs in criticising modern capitalist societies. In capitalism, the following is the case:

> Not only are needs satisfied purely indirectly, by means of exchange-values, but within the relevant economic sectors produced by the profit-motive, and thus at the cost of the objective needs of the consumers, namely those for adequate housing, and completely so in terms of the education and information over the processes which most affect them.[22]

Here Adorno makes a direct appeal to objective human needs, as relating both to material and agency requirements in the present moment. He claims that these needs are satisfied only indirectly; and that any satisfaction happens in the context of the pursuit of a different aim, the profit-motive. The upshot of both these elements seems to be that objective needs are not being met ('at the cost of the objective needs') or at least not in the right way ('purely indirectly').[23]

Elsewhere Adorno claims that modern subjects live in a 'delusive context' [*Verblendungszusammenhang*].[24] Given that such a context is the backdrop, needs (perhaps all of them) of modern subjects are entangled in what he calls false consciousness.

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[22] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society? The Fundamental Question of the Present Structure of Society', in *Modern German Sociology*, (1987), pp. 111-25.

[23] Adorno relies on quasi-empirical premise of the following sort: both the economic and the political system take human beings to be primarily consumers, as *qua* consumers their needs are met only in so far as they can be translated to effective demand for commodities. The role of political life, I take Adorno to mean, is largely reduced to technocratic administration of the economic mechanism, in which knowledge and the ability to pose questions about these processes themselves is largely absent.

[24] ND p. 92.

> the faulty consciousness [*falsche Bewußtsein*] of their needs aims at things not needed by subjects, human beings who have come of age, and thus compromises every possible fulfilment'.[25]

In the first passage Adorno mentions needs in the sense of need for dwelling and education. In the second passage directly above, false consciousness directs one to 'things not needed' by 'mature' human beings. Despite there being obvious differences in the satisfiers of such needs, centrally, in both passages Adorno makes an appeal to *objective* human needs. Need for housing as positive claim about human needs, and critique of needs to 'things' not needed by mature subjects makes an indirect appeal to human needs—those which mature subjects would do without.

In the first passage needs for are directly available to us, and in the latter needs are addressed negatively. In a related passage below he comments on the notion of 'real needs'.

> Real needs [*Reale Bedürfnisse*] can objectively be ideologies without entitling us to deny them.[26]

Here the connection between 'real' and 'ideological' is at least initially puzzling. How can 'the ideological' (so, false) and 'the real' be judgements about the same need? The difficulty may in large part be due the ambiguous meaning of 'false' [*falsch*]—standing in for ideological here. False can mean the opposite true, where the options are strictly exclusive of one another. For instance, when I have made a false inference from some set of statements to a conclusion, we mean that there no is no such implication at all. The other option is to think of false as corrupt or spurious specimen of a type. A politician may be corrupt, but still a

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.

politician—the falseness is internal to the category. Where Adorno appeals to 'not needed', he leans on an intuition about a perfectionist type knowledge, suggesting that from the perspective of that condition, some current needs are not properly speaking needs at all. And yet, that perspective is not very helpful for us currently. After all, just because a disease such a plague has by now been eradicated, does not change the need for cure that human beings had in the 12th century.

It is helpful here to understand this in the way Marx's understands religion as the 'soul of the soulless conditions'.[27] I will refer to this as the 'Marxian notion of ideology' as a shorthand, which runs along the second reading of 'false', as in distorted or corrupt.[28] This type of ideology critique leans on the thought that there is something obscured going on behind the apparent – notably certain types of suffering, which can motivate complicated intellectual and spiritual products as consolations. The latter then function to mute the suffering, and the perhaps the epistemic value of it. As an outcome, they obscure what the genuine cause of the suffering is. (Take a flatfooted example: poverty is not genuinely explainable by lack of moral acts or primordial fallenness, but, say, an unjust distribution of wealth; and yet people might pin it on the former.) Adorno repeatedly refers to this type of ideology critique in his critical remarks about 'ontology'. The latter is understood as an indication of 'the need for something solid.'[29]

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[27] Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd Edition edn (New York London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978), p. 54.

[28] This is one of many, but I think for Adorno the most central. For a detailed typology variant of notions of ideology, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, (Cambridge University Press, 1981). Chapter 1.

[29] ND p. 93.

> This need inspires the ontologies; it is what they adjust to. Its right lies in the will of the people to be safe form being buried by a historical dynamics they feel helpless against.[30]

False consciousness of needs, whether material or intellectual, then, have what Adorno calls a 'real moment'. They are indications of something not immediately apparent: 'unconscious [*unbewußte*] suffering'.[31] [F]alse consciousness, thinks Adorno, 'passes off what is unattainable as attainable, complementarily to the possible attainment of needs, which it is forbidden'.[32] In this sense, false consciousness of needs is an inversion: what is feasible appears falsely as not feasible, and that which is genuinely impossible, appears falsely as possible (as an delusion).

Thrown in such conditions, the project of *critical* philosophy, thinks Adorno, is to vocalise the suffering that might otherwise go un-noticed: 'The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth'.[33] In some manner, such a lending of voice is possible, despite the rather dramatic claims Adorno makes about the inversions of our needs. Indeed, Adorno thinks this inversion does not completely escape the awareness of human beings.

> [I]n the needs of even the people who are covered, who are administered, there reacts something in regard to which they are not fully covered–a surplus of their subjective share, which the system has not wholly mastered [*dessen das System nicht vollends Herr wurde*].[34]

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[30] Ibid. [my italics]
[31] ND pp. 92 -93.
[32] Ibid. p. 93.
[33] Ibid. p. 17.
[34] Ibid. p. 92.

Here an appeal has been made to some type of reaction even in those who otherwise are well entrenched ('covered') members of a society characterized by pervasive delusions. Adorno claims that 'there reacts something', a surplus' [*Überschuß*][35] which is not *completely* dominated by the social system.[36] The appeal to reaction, inkling, or impulse then is central to the possibility of critique. I find 'impulse' the best term in this context. A detailed discussion about reasons for this will have to be postponed, but preliminarily we can think it is attractive due Adorno's claim that suffering can takes place at the level of the 'unconscious'. So then, epistemic access to the inversion, and thus the preliminary requirement for critique, is dependent on some form of knowledge of this unconscious. The character of such knowledge and the capacity it may depend upon—that which 'reacts'—I leave open for now.

The below passage indirectly supports the suitability of thinking about this in terms of impulses because it points to the role of subjective and marginal experiences in registering the inversion.

> Means and ends [*Zweck*] are inverted. A dim awareness of this perverse *quid pro quo* has still not been quite eradicated from life.[37]

Here Adorno gives shape to the thought that inverted needs express something objective, since means and ends have been inverted in that human beings instead of pursuing ends, pursue means as if they were ends. Yet, minimal awareness of the inversion persists. This claim about a 'dim' awareness is compatible with thinking of them as only partly conscious impulses. The passage continues as follows.

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[35] Ibid. p. 92/97.
[36] Ibid. p. 92/97.
[37] MM p. 15.

> Reduced and degraded essence [*Wesen*] tenaciously resists [*sträubt*] the magic that transforms it into a façade.[38]

Here some kind of essence claim is made, according to which essence is both damaged, and at least partly constitutive of struggle or bristle against the inversion of means and ends. The connection between resistance (understood in a loose sense as standing against, a rupture, a hindrance) and objectivity come to the fore yet again when Adorno speaks of 'free-time':

> Apparently the integration of consciousness and free time has not yet wholly succeeded. The real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist, up to a point, their total appropriation.[39]

Here non-productive activities during 'free time' can be read as expressive of objective interests ('real interests') which resist co-option, integration. That, as well as the notion essence in the above passage, are normally understood carry an objective status.

Elsewhere in a fragment he writers, with Max Horkheimer, that an element of resistance is at the same time a mark of some type of damage done to the individuals:

> The radically individual, unassimilated features of a human being are always both at once: residues not fully encompassed by the prevailing system and still happily surviving, and marks of the mutilation inflicted on its members by that system. [40]

Here that which 'survives' even if only as mutilated residues, could be read to imply that real interests and objective essences serve as props to make such a view intelligible. Further in this passage, these 'residues' are understood to be present as psychological symptoms:

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[38] Ibid.
[39] CM p. 175.
[40] DE p. 200.

'miserliness, for example, magnifies the principle of fixed property, hypochondria that of unreflecting self-preservation.'[41] These exaggerated responses, Adorno thinks, are marks of damage, traceable in their manifest content to the principles of social organisation that they arguably reflect. And yet, he appears to suggest, the compulsive trait is both a 'resisting' and 'surviving' residue.

As I have shown with this survey, the concept of need appears repeatedly within central elements of Adorno's social critique – that we live in a delusional context, that capitalism inverts means and ends, and that there is something in us that pushes against both of these and underpins possible resistance to them. The inversion of means and ends is *felt*, and this counts as some kind of knowledge for someone—even if only indirect, symptom-like knowledge. Further, Adorno makes claims about these resistive impulses with reference to notion of essence.

Adorno also assigns needs a more technical role in his discussions on epistemology. Here Adorno also leans indirectly on some conception of objectivity of need in knowledge.

> A thought without a need, a thought that wished for nothing, would be like nothing; but a thought based on a need becomes confused if our conception of the need is purely subjective.[42]

Here we are quite straightforwardly told that no thoughts at all exist independently of need, wish or desire. What I take Adorno to mean is that thinking in general and thinking that aims to reach truth in particular are not wish or desire neutral phenomena. Needs have a key epistemological role: I take it that Adorno's stance is not 'consciousness of hunger causes a

[41] Ibid p. 201.
[42] ND p. 93.

desire to eat', but rather 'hunger causes a certain type of consciousness'. The vocabulary of needs, wants and desires is loose here, an issue I will return to.

The passage continues by turning to evaluative terms basic to critique: 'Needs are conglomerates of truth and falsehood; what is true is the thought that wants the right thing [*wahr wäre der Gedanke, der Richtiges wünscht*]'.[43] In the first part of the sentence, the Marxian notion of ideology I glossed over operates as the basis of a diagnostic claim. To rerun the thought: religious consciousness is a distorted expression (that is, wanting the unattainable) of a genuine need (the condition to which religion responds exists independently of religion). The second part of the sentence contains the thought that the very idea of *truth* is tied with wanting the *right* thing, suggesting perhaps that correctly or well-formed desires are relevant both for the question of truth in general and what real needs (or objective interests) are.

However, strikingly, this way of proceeding the explication of these passages seems to be impossible to support coherently. Adorno also claims this conglomeration of truth and falsity cannot be disentangled: 'The indistinguishability of true and false needs is an essential part of the present phase'.[44] This will prove to be a crucial passage for the remainder of the thesis. In a condensed manner, it relates to a set of problems that seem to beset Adorno's philosophy of need. As a reminder, Adorno thinks some impulse like experiences connect human beings to their essence, leading to the thought that perhaps critique can and should do is to analyse to those fleeting experiences. But if true and false needs are 'indistinguishable', how could that be possible?

[43] Ibid. p. 93.
[44] P p. 109.

To explicate the various strands I presented in this section more systematically: According to Adorno, needs are in some yet to be clarified sense, objective, whereby this sense is contrasted with being (purely) subjective. Adorno does not here clarify the sense in which 'subjective' and 'objective' are to be understood. In the most general sense 'subjective' pertains to subjects and minds, whereas the 'objective' stands in some sense outside or independently of subjects and minds. I take it that the notion of 'real interests' is objective in the sense that something can be in one's interest without any knowledge of it being so (or even a desire to attain it). Adorno appeals to objective interests of human beings, and needs that correspond to these interests, and follows this line of thinking in introducing the notion of human essence. In this sense, human beings bear their essence, their life-form, which is expressed in through their needs.

Second, we are told that there is a false consciousness of our needs (to do with the profit structured social life) in the context of an inversion of means and ends. False consciousness is so deep that true and false needs are, Adorno claims, indistinguishable.

Third, there is nonetheless some relief through impulse type experiences through which the 'unassimilated features of a human being' reveal themselves. This also makes some, yet to be clarified, sense of critical awareness and even resistance possible. Finally, Adorno claims that human beings suffer from all this—even if only unconsciously. He also thinks that a proper kind of philosophy should be able to interpret or diagnose this suffering.

Given these claims, one would expect Adorno to subscribe to a fairly robust, perhaps quasi-naturalist, philosophy of need to render intelligible and to justify the use of such concepts. As it is often the case with Adorno, one learns about his own thinking by examining the views he rejects. I propose that Adorno's own philosophy of need must be preliminarily examined through his critical remarks on the philosophical basis of common alternatives. In the next

section I examine three logical possibilities for a philosophy of need which could potentially be employed as the basis of Adorno's thinking about needs. I call them 'empiricist', 'a priori constructivist', and 'Hegelian' types. At the end of this discussion, it should be clear that none of these alternatives can be directly employed to help with the questions Adorno's own claims about needs leave us with.

1.2. Common philosophies of need and Adorno

Human need is a complex phenomenon, which means that an adequate explanation of need is a daunting task. Three approaches dominate contemporary debates. I will sketch them succinctly and comment on the Adorno's views are incompatible with each.

1.2.1. Empiricist accounts of needs

One way to go in providing a philosophy of need would be to read off human needs from a combination of a hypothesis and observed manifest behaviour – I call this position 'empiricism'. In this context, Adorno positions his own understanding of social 'theory' in the proper sense in contrast with 'positivism', which he takes to be a theory taking 'the natural sciences as its model'. [45] This is a highly complex issue, and I present here only the aspect I take to be central to our topic of needs. Two issues deserve attention: holism about meaning, and critical self-reflectivity of method.

[45] This issue is clearly present in Adorno's discussion in the 1960's about what he took to be the 'primacy empirical sociology'. Theodor W. Adorno, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, (Heinemann London, 1976), pp. 68-72.

Take for instance the method of the survey. Responses from surveys to whatever specific questions, Adorno thinks, are always more than answers to those specifics, that is, they 'are statements about how human subjects see themselves and reality'.[46]

With respect to needs, Adorno comments here how this demand applies to understanding even the seemingly simple phenomenon of hunger:

> To satisfy the concrete hunger of civilized peoples, however, implies that what they have to eat does not disgust them; in this disgust and its opposite is reflected the whole of history. So it goes with each need. Each drive is so socially mediated that its natural side never appears immediately, but always only as socially produced.[47]

Let us pass by the rather antiquated phrasing on 'civilized peoples'. I think the point here is that needs imply norms, which reflect a historical situation. The considerations that are required to understand those norms are complex. For instance, the physiological aspects behind the norm of 'ailing if lacking nutrition' is where the need expressed in hunger springs from, but the physiological aspects are mediated by social, technological and aesthetic considerations (to mention just a few): this is what I think Adorno means by the 'natural side', not appearing as an immediate, as hunger pure and simple. Since we are dealing with this type of complexity, explanation of need cannot be a question of verifying a hypothesis by observable 'behaviour'. The question of human needs presupposes broader considerations which have to taken into account of any proper understanding of even an individual need, but this presupposes a different philosophical enterprise than empiricism (thus understood).

[46] ibid. p. 71.
[47] TN p. 392.

The second point concerns the place of the investigator. The issue where empiricism goes astray, Adorno thinks, is its assumption that the connection between a 'hypothesis' and 'data' could be the bedrock of an adequate account of human behaviour.[48] Adorno's reason for thinking is that elements of social life are already built-in the hypothesis setting, but in manner the such studies themselves cannot account for. In this sense, Adorno thinks, the very idea of hypothesis verification, inherited from the natural sciences, presupposes a social context which it tries to understand from an illusory vantage point of neutrality. Such 'the isolated observation through which it [hypothesis] is verified, belongs, in turn, to the context of delusion which it desires to penetrate'.[49]

While that in itself may not move an empirical sociologist, to appreciate Adorno's thinking we have add a two key premises: the social reality is understood as a whole to be pervasively in bad way so that understanding is never disconnected from an interest in changing it. Second, as we have seen through Adorno's reflection on needs, social reality is also pervasively opaque—delusive context—about its true character, even including the badness.

1.2.2. A priori accounts of needs

This emphasis on concreteness of context sets any philosophy of need of Adornian persuasion also against *a priori* accounts of needs. To propose that we can provide such an account of human needs relies on assuming these needs and the bearer of needs, human subjects, are historically invariable. But Adorno clearly thinks otherwise: 'the subject of the given is not ahistorically identical and transcendental'.[50] Moreover, there is a second related problem. If the subject is not an invariant, then we cannot distinguish its needs proper from

[48] Adorno, p. 69.
[49] Ibid.
[50] AP p. 125.

other motivational states in an a priori fashion. This underpins Adorno claim where he speaks directly of needs, asserting that 'It [a theory of need] cannot allow itself to be given the distinction between good and bad, genuine and manufactured, right and false need, in an *a priori* way'.[51]

Rather, philosophy of need in a critical sense, must begin immanently, that is, from within a specific historical context. It has its point of entry in the 'satisfaction of need in their most immediate, most concrete form'.[52] A common criticism of universalist normative accounts—of which Doyal and Gough's account is an example—is that either the account it gives of human need is too formal to be meaningful, or, it involves an imposition of a specific historically formed framework (say, western legal modernity) whereby it is illegitimately elevated to the status of a universal.[53] Adorno, I would suggest on the basis of the passages I introduced so far, would share this criticism. Whereas normative theorising of this sort is chiefly concerned with providing logically compelling arguments to enforce agreement on lists of 'primary goods'[54], adherents of a *critical* theory of need reject such foundations as unjustifiable.

1.2.3. Hegelian accounts of needs

At this point, it starts to look obvious that Adorno's thought resonates with Hegel's ideas in that that human need and satisfaction are social and historical. For Adorno, this third way of thinking about human needs is at a different level in plausibility altogether. To Hegel, our

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[51] TN p. 394.
[52] Ibid.
[53] For further discussion, see Lawrence A. Hamilton, *The Political Philosophy of Needs*, (Cambridge University Press, 2003).
[54] John Rawls, 'Social unity and primary goods' in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 162-63.

needs require others for meeting them, and this shared condition ties human beings and their activities together: 'Needs and means, as things existent *realiter*, become something which has being for others by whose needs and labour satisfaction of all alike is conditioned'.[55] And further still, according to Hegel, human needs are not static.

> Intelligence, with its grasp of distinctions, multiplies [...] human needs, and since taste and utility become criteria of judgement, even the needs themselves are affected thereby. [56]

In these passages, Hegel thinks that human need is intrinsically social—when we really talk about existing needs and satisfaction, they have 'being for others' – and this is so, Hegel thinks, because we require the labour of others, and they in turn require ours, to meet needs. He goes on to say that intellectual capacities for making distinctions renders needs subject to perceptions of utility and taste, to the extent that in the 'concrete' sense needs themselves are affected by them. In the most general sense—to distinguish Hegel from a priori philosophies—needs, desires, passions and interests are historically variable. Nonetheless, the distinctive aspect of Hegel's thought is his view that they are the 'tools and means of the World Spirit', the drivers of history itself.[57]

Marx famously adopts a central aspect of this view, as he claims that 'the production of the means' to satisfy needs is 'the first historical act'. [58] Furthermore, Marx argues, both the satisfaction of the 'first need', and 'the instrument of satisfaction which has been required',

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[55] G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford University Press Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 127.
[56] ibid. §190, Addition
[57] G. W. F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History: With Selections from the Philosophy of Right*, (Indianapolis&Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), p. 28.
[58] Marx, K. in Marx, p. 156.

result in further needs, and these further needs and their means of satisfaction, constitute the logic of history.

Adorno shares these basic assumptions Hegel's and Marx's thinking of needs. However, Adorno makes a global claim to the effect that since modern subjects live in amidst opaque and confusing relations of social reproduction (recall here inversions of needs), any direct appeal to practises as they currently are, cannot be the whole story about our needs. Adorno agrees with Hegel insofar as modernity is characterizable as having an 'objective spirit', but disagrees with Hegel about whether we can indeed find a home for the subject in it. From this we can surmise that Adorno rejects Hegel inspired positions, which are often presented as alternatives to empiricist and universalist accounts, namely, some version of social constructivism, historicism, or communitarianism:

> If there is any truth to the doctrine that human needs cannot be told by a state of nature, only by the so-called cultural standard, the relations of social production along with their bad irrationality [*schlechten Irrationalität*] are also part of that standard.[59]

It is difficult to know what to make of this. The above 'cultural standard' could be filled with various contents. The sense in which one relates to these contents, cultural norms—passively following, forcefully re-enacting, ironically acquiescing—has a lot to do with how we understand the other terms: principles underpinning social production, social classes, irrationality and repression. Social production contains 'bad irrationality', which implies that how we express, interpret and experience our needs, is shot through with problematic relations of social production. I take this badness to denote issues noted in the previous

[59] ND p. 93 translation amended.

section. For what are presented as genuine needs, needs expressing good taste or health, in fact, are, he claims, 'to a large extent products of the process of denial, and fulfil a deflecting function.'[60] He claims that class societies are bound to produce a 'semblance' [*Schein*] distinction between 'superficial' and 'deep' needs.[61]

As a variant of this all too easy distinction, Adorno identifies an urge to live as one with non-human nature. Rather: 'Northing real, of course, can be neatly peeled out of its ideological shell if the critique itself is not to succumb to ideology; to the ideology of simple natural life.'[62] Adorno thus rejects a romantic criticism of 'false' needs, which attributes the latter to modern social formations, and postulates a state of bliss achievable if only these layers could be peeled off.

> the theory of need must recognise the existing needs in their present shape as products of class society. No clear distinction can be made between a need proper to humanity and one that would be a consequence of repression. [63]

Here, in this second step, Adorno is suggesting that in identifying what human beings genuinely need qua human beings, we cannot simply abstract from the existing context of social reproduction.

In sum, in the distorted (social) world, we cannot appeal to what is explicitly accepted as objective ends within it, and criticise reality immanently in reference to them, as this would involve blending its 'bad irrationality' with our critical standard. In this way, Hegelian contextualism about needs does not suffice for Adorno's critical theory. In its dialectical and

[60] TN p. 394.
[61] Ibid.
[62] ND p. 92.
[63] TN p. 394.

holistic orientation, it is in principle the most promising way to think about needs, but in a wrong social world even that kind of thinking is not enough. At the same time (and for the same reasons), there is no stepping out, no access to pre-repression human nature and so we cannot make the alleged needs of such nature our critical standard either.

1.3. Secondary literature on Adorno and needs

Despite its place as a rather pivotal concept in Adorno's philosophy, the topic of need is not discussed extensively in the literature on Adorno. Given the depths of the difficulties highlighted above, it is perhaps not surprising that commentators have struggled with articulating what a coherent account of the idea of need in Adorno could look like.

For example, Deborah Cook claims that "because the distinction [between false and true needs] is impossible to make, a theory of needs must view the satisfaction of all needs as legitimate".[64] Such a reading takes its cue from principally from what I have called 'the indistinguishability thesis' (IT). There is also evidence that Adorno claims that repression, even of those needs generated by capitalism, is problematic, suggesting that satisfaction of even false needs should not be dismissed.[65] And, finally, Adorno does make claims to the effect that all needs should be granted unlimited satisfaction.[66]

However, what I have suggested is that in terms of textual evidence Adorno appears to also contradict IT, seemingly identifying some objective interests (and thereby needs) and rejecting others as false needs. Given that we have been given such an unclear set of claims, I

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[64] Deborah Cook, 'Adorno's Critical Materialism', *Philosophy & social criticism*, 32 (2006), p. 729.
[65] 'Material needs should be respected even in their wrong form, the form caused by repression" P p. 92.
[66] 'If production is redirected towards the unconditional and unlimited satisfaction of needs, including precisely those produced by the hitherto prevailing system, needs themselves will be decisively altered.' P p. 109.

think it is too quick to conclude that there are no resources in Adorno to go any further than simply viewing satisfaction of all needs as legitimate. Specifically, we should accommodate the intuition that at least under some description the satisfaction of a false need is damaging and implicated in the 20th century horrors that feature so prominently in Adorno's sombre ethical outlook. For instance, consider what he says about certain forms of delusion [*Verblendung*]: Adorno thinks, for example, that identification with authority figures can function as a substitute for the unsatisfied needs of individual egos, and that it can become socially pathological (I comment on Adorno's socially critical application of the notion of narcissism in chapter four).

In this connection, Raymond Geuss claims that Adorno's appeal to normativity of human suffering is problematic: it is 'undialectical', too undifferentiated and potentially itself liable to ideological co-option.[67] His examples involve liberal humanism and post-modern identity politics. In my view, Geuss poses an important challenge. Some types of injury to group identity can result in mental anguish in the sense that surely qualifies as suffering. For my purposes, we can think of them as expressing some underlying need. So here Geuss' worry about Adorno placing 'the abolition of suffering in a rather unqualified sense one of the central motifs of his philosophy', dovetails with the material I have discussed above that amount to Adorno calling for an unlimited satisfaction of all existing needs.[68] On these lines, if we then think that all needs are to be treated as warranting satisfaction, what reasons could one offer to oppose a culturally or ethically uniformist identity politics (assuming that a critical theorist would like to do that)? Or its extension to, say, immigration policy, argued for on the back the suffering that the presence of migrants purportedly causes to some

[67] Raymond Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, (Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 130.
[68] Ibid.

people? Surely some political versions of 'ontological needs' cannot be granted satisfaction, no matter how much suffering their non-satisfaction inflicts upon those in their grip. What I propose in chapter six in regard to IT, will be hopefully serve as a beginning of an answer to the question of how we can navigate the challenge Geuss rightly points to.

Rahel Jaeggi, while not commenting on Adorno's appeal to needs directly, has made some interesting suggestions with respect to his project as a critique of life forms. Accordingly, we should understand it as a specific version of left-Hegelian immanent critique, in which no strictly context-transcending notion of goodness or rightness is necessary or desirable.[69] Rather, she claims, we find in Adorno's writings 'situationally defined counterimages to a bad reality'.[70] These counterimages are positive enough to count as anticipatory and thus motivating, but empty enough not to count as perfectionist blueprints for a good or flourishing society. Jaeggi's reading is ethically negativistic, in the sense that it is through practising a philosophical critique from the instances suffering and longing that these anticipatory counterimages emerge. However, such a strategy is usually expected to commit to there being some rational content in our historical moment, or as Jaeggi puts it, borrowing from Michael Theunissen, 'inner normativity of historical reality itself'.[71] Jaeggi is aware of the difficulties of such a reading of Adorno. She is right to note that, while Adorno sometimes relies on immanent strategies, his critique of late capitalism also denies assumption of an implicit rationality in history.[72] In the final analysis, she thinks we should read Adorno's immanent critique to be operating with various notions of falsity or inappropriateness. I follow her on this, to an extent. In brief, I think Jaeggi is correct to bring

[69] Rahel Jaeggi, '"No Individual Can Resist": Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life', *Constellations*, 12 (2005).
[70] ibid. p. 76.
[71] Ibid. p. 76.
[72] P p. 33.

in the specifically Freudian territory in notions such as 'self-deception' and 'regression' to the fore.[73] However, I think her reading underplays Adorno's emphasis on the systemic essence of capitalist life-form as a key element of his philosophy of need—essence which itself requires first identification before it can be raised to critical consciousness. I return to this in chapter six.

For Adorno, needs are, as we have seen, socially mediated. In some difficult to clarify sense, they are neither strictly givens or revealed, or strictly generated by historically changing individuals or groups. However, this still leaves their precise status unclear, which becomes a problem, especially if we (as Adorno does) wish to keep with the possibility of *false needs*. The historical mediation of some non-historical substrate does not make sense if there is no such substrate. If were none, then the implication would be needs as such are not distinguishable from need-interpretations. Consider Hammer's view that for Adorno

> "[N]ature" designates a feature of the constitution of needs which, in the absence of dialectical mediation, is completely indeterminate. Since needs are shaped by our self-interpretation, and self-interpretations are mediated by through and through by the system of exchange, there can be no sudden "revelation" of needs, and no social and political action that can once and for all bring the subject to a full awareness of itself as a natural being.[74]

Here Hammer reformulates the epistemic prohibition towards an account of 'natural' needs. While I agree with the general direction of the criticism in that political action should not take the form of 'revealing' human nature as something that exists behind our backs, I

[73] Rahel Jaeggi, *On the Critique of Forms of Life*, (Belknap Press, 2018), pp. 78-79.
[74] Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, (Routledge, 2013), p. 83.

wonder if the idea of such nature can be wholly dismissed. The aim is here to avoid naïve realism about needs—which Adorno is clearly against (a topic I will return to in the second chapter). However, it does not seem plausible to think that self-interpretations are mediated by 'system of exchange' alone, since one would think that even the exchange economy only exists by virtue of natural and historical "raw-materials".

One clue for why this is so for Adorno and why Hammer's position is problematic is the following. Adorno's view is that it is *only* from the perspective of conceptual determination that nature or the non-conceptual aspects of the self appear as wholly indeterminate. His project is best seen as 'directed towards moving beyond the split between bare facticity and conceptual determination'.[75] On these lines, mediation and interpretation only makes sense if what is mediated has a structure that the mediation can have a grip on. Adorno, for better or worse, thinks that conceptual mediation requires a non-conceptual input, but one that has to have structure and cohesion in some sense independently of the meditation. There has to be *something* mediated which is not, logically speaking, wholly indeterminate prior to mediation. Otherwise, it would appear, that the mediation itself is indistinguishable from full determination.

Need in Adorno's theory is not solely an ethical concept, but it has a bearing on ethics, and we can see this in the commentaries. This is perhaps why those defending Adorno (and hoping thereby to contribute to debates in moral and practical philosophy as well as meta-ethics), have in their respective reconstructions of Adorno appealed to the notion of need.

[75] Peter Dews, 'Post-Structuralism, Critique of Identity', in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso; New Left Review, 1994), (p. 56).

Most notably, Jay Bernstein reads Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* as a "response to a damaged sensuous particularity".[76] Furthermore, "ethical concepts jointly articulate, give expression to the originary demandingness of auratic individuality".[77] Bernstein's argument is that the moral norms arise out of particular situations, and as such they are not contained in the propositional content of the norm. What currently prevents us from such an orientation, for the most part, is the epistemological and social dominance of the logical axis of the concept and accompanying forms of communication. In this sense, Adorno's account is not completely bereft of immanent normative resources, but these resources are not discursive principles as such, but are based on fleeting experiences of aspect of our life form. In the most general level, Bernstein's account is based on the idea of morality as material inferences: "the bindingness of moral norms is to be understood primarily as nothing other than material inferences from states of affairs". These states of affairs put forward claims on us to "acknowledge, protect and foster the integrity of injurable selves in an environment of other injurable forms of life".[78]

What worries me about the general idea of material inference is that – given the issues Adorno's writings on needs raise – it is not clear how, taking the Adornian stance, one could make a positive appeal to individual sensuous experience. Perhaps Bernstein thinks that that Adorno's ethics can be understood as a reflective awareness of conceptualisation and the corresponding social needs, and that if we understand our social needs in the right sort of way, we will also develop the correct kinds of material inferences.[79] However, as I will

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[76] J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*, (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 361.
[77] Ibid. p. 323.
[78] Ibid. p. 322.
[79] '[…] the three modes of authority, the complex concept writ large, are modes, and nothing in their characterization points to any ideal synthesis, a utopia of authority; the different orientation that each axis of the concept and its reproduction through time invokes equally point toward different

discuss later on, the constraints that Adorno places on the normative resources of any existing or past human culture, would appear to clash with Bernstein's proposal.[80] I am similarly concerned with drawing directly on an Aristotelian metaphysical thesis about 'harmony' as a normative stake in proposing a positive need philosophy on Adorno's behalf.[81]

However, I conclude with thought the that the Aristotelian tradition has nonetheless invaluable aspects to contribute. For instance, Fabian Freyenhagen reads Adorno's meta-ethics in Aristotelian colours, and tries to defend it as negativistic. As part of this, he in several instances employs the concept of need. [82] He attributes to Adorno the views that 'capitalism has replaced human ends and needs with its own telos'[83], that it fails to provide 'what people genuinely need'[84], and ultimately fails 'humanity and its needs'.[85] On Freyenhagen's account, we avoid the demand of having to provide a positive knowledge of genuine need with an appeal to experiences of badness in our world.[86] In this sense, at least some of the instances of badness are dependent on the fact that human beings are denied their 'basic needs' as requirements for 'basic functioning'.[87]

This returns us to our problems in two senses. If human beings 'genuine needs' (which are real even if not met or even recognised), then it would seem to call for some positive account about the bearer of such needs. But it also appears that Adorno's 'indistinguishability thesis'

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cognitive needs; and the different cognitive needs coordinate with different social needs [...]' ibid. p. 328.

80 For similar reasons, I think that Alistair Macintyre's critique of late modernity, despite some parallels to Adorno's, is ultimately compromised in dealing with this problem of needs.

81 For instance, Craig Reeves, 'Beyond the Postmetaphysical Turn: Ethics and Metaphysics in Critical Theory', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 15 (2016), 239.

82 Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly*, (Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 211.

83 Ibid. p. 45.

84 Ibid. p. 48.

85 Ibid. p. 49.

86 Ibid. p. 240.

87 Ibid. p. 253, chapter 9 generally.

pulls the rug out any such enterprise, since accordingly there are no grounds for making distinctions between true and false needs. If we cannot make these commitments cohere, then an interpretation of Adorno and a broader negativist research project in ethics—such as Freyenhagen's—that leans on the concept of need inherits these problems.

1.4. Conclusion

I have now briefly discussed Adorno's criticism of three logical variants that philosophies of need could make use of – empiricist, a priori-constructivist, and Hegelian. I surveyed secondary literature on Adorno and needs. These sections were intended to inform the three problems outlined in the introduction. Before moving on, it must be noted that Adorno's thinking on needs is deeply influenced by the Hegelian account, albeit via Marx. We can see this from Adorno's criticisms of empiricist and a priori approaches, which in many ways are what one might call Hegelian criticisms. However, there are complex reasons why Hegel's affirmative need philosophy is not an adequate alternative either. Indeed, this discussion should also be taken as a preliminary building block to the first of my interpretative aims in this dissertation. Namely, I argue that in Marx we find indispensable resources which Adorno's philosophy presupposes for its intelligibility, but which also render it somewhat coherent with his general project. This is broadly the view that the question of human essence and needs is framed as our sensuous and practical relationships within the world and its objects, where consciousness or the mind is a higher level accomplishment of the gratified senses—without reducing this relation to the arid mechanical chains of Newton and Hume. This issue is an ongoing theme from chapters two to four.

2. Essence and the human life form

To speak of needs in the sense of requirements and necessities, implies a bearer of need to which they belong to. The idea of a bearer of needs, in turn raises the question of what kind or genus such bearers themselves belong to. As I have in the previous chapter shown, Adorno makes references to human interests and real or true needs, as well as false needs. One would expect such line of thought to follow through to some account of human essence, nature or life-form. Adorno's does not. Quite the contrary, *prima facie* he explicitly rejects such projects as at best philosophically confused, and at worst (also) ideologically pernicious. In this chapter, I first introduce the textual material which pulls in these two opposite directions. I then formalise the problem via an inconsistent triad this evidence generates. Following that, I clarify what is at the heart of Adorno's critique of essentialism and proceed to showing that a specific sort of appeal to essences does not generate a fatal incoherency with such critique. In the final section of this chapter I draw on Marx, Alfred Schmidt and Michael Thompson to show that we can think of human essence in a way which not only passes Adorno's set of requirements, but in fact underpins his critique of capitalist society. If this is successful, then Adorno's philosophy of need—implying some notion of human essence—can be taken to be compatible with other fundamental aspects of his work. Thus, the first of the three threats to coherence would have been removed.

2.1. A preliminary sketch of Adorno's essentialism

Let us examine some evidence for the claim that Adorno makes a positive use of the concept of essence (i.e. that he holds what I refer to as 'essentialism'). In this section, I sketch this briefly in order to provide a basis for contrasting it to Adorno's explicitly anti-essentialist

views, which I turn to in the following section. For now, I connect his essentialism to two themes: *critique of society*, and *particularity of objects*.

I commence by noting that the concept of 'society' [*Gesellschaft*], thinks Adorno, is often misleadingly thought to pick out a group of people as its substrate. In actual fact, accordingly, 'society' is historical and functional dynamic, and thus the term stands for a specific kind of modern intersubjective dependency.[88] Critique of the concept of 'society' is not disconnected from a critique of the specific mode of human organisation of the capitalist age. In that sense, 'society' for Adorno is not a neutral descriptive term.

In this context, Adorno claims that 'essence passes into that which lies concealed beneath the façade of immediacy, of the supposed facts, and makes the facts what they are'.[89] In other words, under the only apparent immediacy of 'facts' lies something without which the facts would not exist. Here is similar passage, in which Adorno also appeals to the term 'power', which I read to equal 'essence'.

> [One] who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy must scrutinize its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses.[90]

Packed within a thesis about estrangement, is a thesis about objective social powers. These objective powers, or essences, tell us about 'life', but in an estranged form.

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[88] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Gesellschaft (Ii)', in *Gesammelte Schriften: Soziologische Schriften. - 1.*, ed. by R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990).
[89] ND p. 167.
[90] MM p. 15.

How are we to read this striking assertion about such estranged essences? Estrangement from what? How does such estrangement operate? In this context one cannot sidestep Adorno's repeated remarks about the 'exchange relation' [*Tauschverhältnis*] and 'exchange principle' [*Tauschprinzip*].[91] In broad strokes, exchange in the modern mass society sense, depends on making incommensurables – different objects, different concrete labour, particular human energies and achievements – commensurable, even identical.[92] It is here where we can also see that the exchange principle crucial for capitalism is intertwined with the other principle that Adorno identifies as crucial for the modern world, the identity principle (or, as this translation has it, the identification-principle):

> The exchange-principle, the reduction of human labor to an abstract general concept of average labor-time, is Ur-related to the identification-principle.[93]

In sum, the first context in which Adorno invokes the idea of essence is in his description and critique of capitalism. He operates here with some sort of distinction between surface-level appearances and an underlying essence. While the fuller explication of the distinction has to wait, it can be contrasted to at least the sorts of explanations which do not accommodate such distinction. I have already briefly introduced Adorno's critique of empiricist social research as a method of explaining human needs (1.21).

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[91] The term 'exchange' is ubiquitous in *Negative Dialectics* and for the sake of my argument it is useful to note that it also appears repeatedly in its theoretically most dense section 'concept and categories', for instance ND pp. 146 - 47, 152, 166, 178, 190. Translation amended. As is by now well known, Ashton's translation of *Tausch* as 'barter' is misleading, not least because it renders obscure the link to the notion of exchange value, *Tauschwert* which is a central concept in Marx and classical political economy.

[93] ND pp. 149-151. italics added

Let me now turn to the second theme in relation to which Adorno speaks of essence in a way that seems to support that notion. I discuss this in epistemological and ontological senses (both terms understood in a very broad sense). In this order, 'Essence' appears in connection to one of the most frequently used terms in his philosophy: 'the non-identical [*Nichtidentität*]'. 'Essence' in this sense is the particular, which concepts seek to express, to signify: 'Essence recalls the non-identity in the concept of that which, by the subject, is not posited but followed.'[94] Here is another key passage again: 'Reduced and degraded essence [*Wesen*] tenaciously resists [*sträubt*] the magic that transforms it into a façade'.[95] These are not the same levels of investigation. The first passage emphasises a passive element in conceptualisation (the following), but it would be odd to think that objects in general 'resist' their conceptualisation, a term we find in the second. Here I think we make sense of this by turning our attention to human subjects, and in that sense to ontology. We can recall here Adorno's reflections on the human subject on the 'sphere of consumption' (related to the brief mention of his discussion of free-time in chapter one). Therein Adorno finds a possibility for 'opposition to production', and for transformation to an 'order' [...] more worthy of human beings'.[96]

From these lines of thinking, it is evident that Adorno's analysis and critique of society, philosophically speaking, does make an appeal to the concept of essence, and in different ways. Specific historical forms of social life – our is notably capitalism – have an essence. This is an essentialist thesis in that it contains a commitment to the difference between essence and appearance.[97] As a second essentialism, Adorno proposes that what is being cut

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[94] ND p. 168.
[95] MM p. 15.
[96] Ibid.
[97] As I have explained in chapter 1, Adorno thinks that 'positivism'—an explicitly anti-essentialist doctrine—takes observable facts or data as the only legitimate source of knowledge in the study of

away by the operations of the exchange principle and the identity principle has, in a certain sense, also an essence. Moreover, the latter essence is, in a certain sense, opposed to the former – the objective powers characteristic of capitalism appears to run counter to something in objects very broadly understood, and also human beings, that cannot be completely governed or eradicated (or, at least, it has not yet become completely governed or eradicated at the point Adorno was writing). The philosophical claim in Adorno's essentialism of the 'non-identical' draws attention to what is irreducible in experience, and the bearers of such experiences as living creatures. While we are currently in the dark about the status and implications of these passages, they do sit at the heart of Adorno's philosophy. Thus, it is at least minimally plausible that Adorno is *some kind of essentialist*.[98] This is a controversial suggestion, and I will now turn to the considerable evidence against it.

2.2. Adorno's anti-essentialism

As the second task of this chapter I investigate how Adorno jettisons the category of essence. At the end of this section a tension between his essentialism and anti-essentialism should be evident. For the time being the specific topic of needs and their bearers moves to the background as the central passages which evidence this tension are located in Adorno's comments on what the took to be the metaphysical tradition in general.

With respect to anti-essentialism, I orient myself by issues which Adorno discusses already at the beginning of his professional philosophical career, notably in 'The Actuality of

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social life. As Adorno understands it, it is predicated on an *a priori* denial of the possibility of underlying, or 'hidden' dynamics.

98 Adorno's frequent allusions to Marx also raises similar thoughts. Commentators have wrestled with clarifying the status of 'essentialism' and 'nature' in Marx. John Stanley, 'The Marxism of Marx's Doctoral Dissertation', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 33 (1995).; Scott Meikle, *Essentialism in the Thought of Karl Marx*, (Duckworth, 1985).; Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature Refutation of a Legend*, (1983).

Philosophy'. Generally, he already then thinks that philosophy should limit its ambitions and not attempt 'to grasp the whole of the real'.[99] The text contains two relevant stakes about such a limitation for this discussion: 'the avoidance of invariant general concepts' and steering clear of 'the concept of man' in particular.[100]

In what follows, I discuss Adorno's view of three kinds of essentialism: Platonic, existential humanist, and Heideggerian essentialism, respectively. I offer somewhat impressionistic presentations of these kinds. My purpose is not to suggest that Adorno's characterisation of the thinkers in these categories or Adorno's critique of them are compelling. Rather, my purpose is to explicate what his discussion of these representative positions reveals about his own position – notably his own anti-essentialism. What matters is the type of critique in each case, and how that informs Adorno's understanding of the concept of essence. I discuss the three kinds in the indicated order.

2.2.1. Platonic Essentialism

In order to understand what I mean by 'Platonic Essentialism', it is helpful not to turn straight to Adorno's rejection of it, but instead to preface it by a brief contemporary discussions of it. Especially in the analytic tradition, 20th century philosophy pushed against the conception of essentialism that had, at least in the eyes of analytical philosophers, dominated the philosophical tradition since Plato's Socrates. Here is Ernst Mayr's description of the issue and what motivates the rejection of essentialism.

> European philosophy through all the centuries was unable to free itself from the strait jacket of Plato's essentialism. Essentialism, with its emphasis on discontinuity,

[99] AP p. 120.
[100] AP p. 129.

> constancy, and typical values ("typology"), dominated the thinking of the western world to a degree that is still not yet fully appreciated by the historians of ideas. Darwin, one of the first thinkers to reject essentialism (at least in part), was not at all understood by the contemporary philosophers (all of whom were essentialists), and his concept of evolution through natural selection was therefore found unacceptable. [...] Because evolution as explained by Darwin is by necessity gradual, it is quite incompatible with essentialism.[101]

As articulated here by Mayr, Platonic essentialism, say in respect with a given animal species, takes essences to be determinate, static, unchanging, and external to their instantiations. It is thought that essences define distinct objects, with clear cut borders, and yield a definite set of properties that belong to these objects. What a given essence amounts to is thought to exist entirely independently of its actual empirical manifestations, which in turn are understood to be mere approximations of the underlying essences. Darwin's theory of evolution, the story goes, struck decisive blows to such a view. If essences of living entities are static, they are in principle incompatible with Darwin's theory which showed how species in fact evolve from one to the other.

While Adorno does not specifically discuss philosophy of biology, he is also highly critical of a central tenant of essentialism, so conceived: *the idea of invariants*. In his lectures on metaphysics he attributes this view both to Plato and Aristotle. The central element in ancient essentialism, Adorno thinks, is that the essences, or forms, are as such elevated to being 'imperishable and eternal'.[102] Plato's paradigmatic essences are geometrical shapes,

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[101] Ernst Mayr, *The Growth of Biological Thought: Diversity, Evolution, and Inheritance*, (Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 38-39.
[102] MPC p. 70.

which are understood to be stand as pure and unchanging in relation to their manifestations in the empirical world. As is well-known, Aristotle grounds essences in the empirical world of living things with the idea of teleological life-cycles, denying specifically the notion that essences qua forms are imperishable. However, according to Adorno, there is ultimately not much water between Plato and Aristotle. The latter's error, according to Adorno, is in relating form or concept to matter without suitable mediation: 'Because he understands pure form as pure actuality or pure reality [...] it becomes the only force which realizes the purpose [...] contained in scattered individual things. It thus becomes a *causa finalis*, an ultimate causality on the basis of which the process of the universe is constituted.'[103] What I take to be the gist of Adorno's criticism is that in Aristotle's teleology, the form of living life remains external to what the form mediates, and in that central point Aristotle preserves an aspect of Plato's view about the invariant character of essences.[104]

Whatever the merits of this critique of Plato and especially Aristotle, one clear lesson is that Adorno rejects essentialism insofar as it involves the claims that there are some pure invariant forms (whether in some special domain or in living nature), from which it follows that however human beings fit in to such an order, they cannot have transformative relationships to forms.

This stance can plays out also as a critique of second kind of essentialism, this time on the question of human nature and more specifically on a particular account of what it is to realise such human nature. I turn to the discussion of this next.

2.2.2. Existential Humanism

[103] MPC p. 73.
[104] On this point, see Tom Whyman, 'Adorno's Aristotle Critique and Ethical Naturalism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 25 (2017).

The notion of humanism is particularly relevant to Adorno's relationship to the Hegelian-Marxian tradition, and thus to his philosophy of need as whole. As already noted, Adorno shares many aspects of Hegel's thinking on needs, as well as Marx's needs-based critique of Hegel. For the purposes of getting the contours of Adorno's position better in view, I focus on aspects of the humanist position he does *not* share.

This point has to be taken with some care, since what I here call the 'existential humanist' stance takes Marx as a departure point—but as I argue in just a moment, transforms it critical punch into something else. In the so-called Paris Manuscript, Marx argues that human development, ultimately, depends on developing first-personal needs towards the totality of human capacities:

> The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being *in need of* a totality of human life-activities, the man to whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as *need*. [105]

As we see here, Marx thinks that conscious, self-determining human beings—well-functioning agents as opposed to stunted ones—'need' in a way that is orientated to the totality of activities. This means that 'richly' living human beings, the self-development in that direction *itself* becomes a felt *need*. In my view, this is one of the most interesting and yet ambiguous aspects of the early Marx. For instance, here the external sense of need as a necessity fully merges with the motivational aspect. I will now comment on how, deriving from Adorno, we should *not* read it—which is the way the existential humanist reads it.

[105] Marx. p. 91; italics in the original.

According to this controversial reading of Marx notions such as 'life' and 'activity' are given a special status as critical forks.[106] In this vein, the concepts no longer function as critical social and economic categories—postulates which Marx's a critique of the capitalist form of production leans on. Instead, they are read as transhistorical existential categories.[107] The perceived benefit for critics of this hue is that then existing conditions of industrial modernity can be criticised against the idea of truly human existence.

However, the problem in such a project is quite apparent. If a purportedly critical philosophy grounds both empirical and normative stakes in clearly identifiable aspects of existing societies, it has to show why and how it not itself reproducing aspects of it (or itself another historically contingent *Weltanschauung*, no more justified than the one criticised). Adorno writes that if 'the image of an uninhibited, vital, creative man' raised to the level of essence, we may be simply affirming a 'bourgeois conception of nature'. This contains the assumption of 'development in only one direction', ever-increasing production and activity.[108] According to Adorno, any invariant grounds, authorised by philosophy, will rationalize aspects of the social status quo.

Adorno typically combines such a 'meta-critical' point with an internal one. To illustrate this, consider the existential humanist (following Sartre's dictum) insistence that existence

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[106] Erich Fromm is an influential example: "For Spinoza, Goethe, Hegel, as well as Marx, man is alive only in as much as he is productive, inasmuch as he grasps the world outside him in the act of expressing his own specific human powers, and of grasping the world with these powers. Inasmuch as man is not productive, inasmuch as he is receptive and passive, he is nothing, he is dead. In this productive process, man realizes his own essence, he returns to his own essence, which in theological language is nothing other than his return to God." Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, (Open Road Media, 2013), p. 26.

[107] The Marxists are not alone with this commitment. For example, we also find somewhat similar thoughts about 'the need for self-actualization' in the work of Abraham Maslow: 'What a man *can* be, he *must* be' Abraham H Maslow, 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological review*, 50 (1943)., p. 382.

[108] MM p. 156.

cannot be derived from essences, but is in some important aspect self-grounding. Adorno's reply is that despite the existentialist claim to move away from essentialism, and because of the shape of such a move,

> As Being's mode to be, existence is no longer the antithetical opposite of the concept. Its poignancy has been removed. It is awarded the dignity of the Platonic idea.[109]

The reference to 'Being' here alludes to Heidegger, but that is not central here (for better or worse, Adorno reads Heidegger as an existentialist). The central point is that when existence is raised to level of a contentless 'mode', it begins to resemble the form-content distinction in Plato: 'the thesis that the ontical cannot be ontologized will itself remain a judgment on invariant structural relations.'[110] These metaphysical errors matter, Adorno writes, because of the confusion they generate with respect to the possibility of a better future.

> We cannot say what man is. Man today is a function, unfree, regressing behind whatever is ascribed to him as invariant [...] He drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations inflicted upon him over thousands of years. To decipher the human essence by the way it is now would sabotage its possibility.[111]

To declare what human beings are—including the thesis of 'indefiniteness [...] as definite'—would give human beings an impossible benchmark.[112] The claim 'man is function', is important here. If x is a function of y, then we make a mistake if we assume we can say something invariant about x independently of y—I take it that this is what is meant by 'regressing behind' any content according to which human beings are defined. Whatever the

[109] ND p. 122.
[110] Ibid. p. 123.
[111] Ibid. p. 123
[112] Ibid.

content of the invariant, currently human beings do not and could not live up to it – accounts of human nature therefore fail in their descriptive task. They also fail in their normative task: Adorno thinks such accounts both wrongly suggest that, in some sense, the history of human suffering can be vindicated, and fail to give space for the possibility that the best is yet to come for human beings. So then, from this evidence we can conclude that Adorno's anti-essentialism, among other things, is targeted against the existential-humanist position.

2.2.3. Heideggerian Essentialism

I will now turn to discuss a position (the third in this section) – namely, notion of essentialism at play in (Adorno's reading of) the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. I call it 'Heideggerian essentialism', for short.

Centrally to my purposes, Heidegger, like Adorno, grants the category of history a key place in his philosophy. In that sense, one might think that Heidegger's views are consanguine with Adorno's, since he too wished to move away from what I have described as the Platonic commitment to philosophical invariants.

However, as I will show in the below, Adorno accuses Heidegger of turning *history* itself into an 'invariant'—and in that sense illegitimately blocking the possibility of change towards something radically new. As I understand his thinking, Heidegger aims to supply content for Being [*Sein*] through history, or historicity, as a type of transcendental condition for actually existing human beings. This move may be attractive at first blush. Yet, at least on Adorno's reading, Heidegger nonetheless commits to an invariant.

> When history becomes the basic ontological structure of things in being, if not indeed the *qualitas occulta* of being itself, it is mutation as immutability, copied from

> the religion of inescapable nature. This allows us to transpose historic specifics into invariance at will, and to wrap a philosophical cloak around the vulgar view in which historic situations seem as natural in modern times as they once seemed divinely willed. This is one of the temptations to *essentialize* entity.[113]

This passage contains references to 'things', 'entities' and 'beings'. The place of the subject is central to this. Adorno accuses Heidegger primarily of collapsing the subject-object divide, doing away with any epistemological moment, and philosophising about ontology directly. The very idea of change (the quality that separates history from determination of nature) becomes thus the unchanging, an invariant.

As the upshot all human thought and action are ultimately instances of a greater substance, the flow of the history. The ideological character of such a stance is, Adorno suggest, a philosophically sanctioned resignation of agency under the wheels of history. Similarly to the existential humanist thesis about the openness of human beings, Adorno views this as ultimately similar to Platonic essentialism, which has the particular in a subservient position. Heidegger (so construed) loses the possibility of granting concrete meaning to historical specifics. Heidegger's historicity of Being (thus presented) is an abstract invariant, which when employed, will result in the arbitrary elevation of the manifestly changing facts of life to an invariant status.

2.3. The Problem

As per the first section of this chapter, Adorno gives reasons to think that his position demands some notion of essence. I have given a preliminary sketch in which Adorno in two

[113] Ibid. p. 358; my italics.

areas commits to essentialism: the question of what must be true of capitalism as if we are to have accurate knowledge of it, and essence as the human beings caught up in it, along with materiality of objects of knowledge. For these many aspects he repeatedly assigns the term 'non-identical'. I then examined in more detail how Adorno also propounds views that are clearly anti-essentialist. He rejects what I have called a traditional notion of essence in three variants: Platonic, existential-humanist and Heideggerian. I have talked about three variants to demonstrate the consistency of Adorno's views across various philosophical landscapes.

I am now in a position to formulate the central problem of this chapter. Each of the three essentialisms Adorno rejects involves *invariants*. Adorno distinguishes his own way of thinking from this, which we can further evidence from his critical use of the terms 'first philosophy', *prima philosophia* or the idea of the 'absolute first'.[114]

The evidence from these two sections generates an inconsistent triad.

1. Adorno appeals positively to the notion of essence: he is an essentialist. (Section 1)

2. Essentialism involves a commitment to invariants. (Section 2)

3. Adorno rejects invariants: he is an anti-essentialist. (Section 2)

On the face of it, these claims do not fit together. I propose that we have the following alternatives as ways of bringing relief to this tension:

(a) Adorno is merely skirting around the concept of essence; he does not, after all, commit to essentialism.

[114] Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2014), pp. 11-12.

(b) Adorno, despite appearances, does not reject philosophical invariants whole-sale, only some representative positions. Thus, he commits to invariants of another type, and he is thus coherently an essentialist.

(c) Adorno's position is muddled: he both rejects and commits to key elements of essentialism. Either his essentialism or anti-essentialism must go.

(d) The standard, 'invariantist', view of essentialism is not all there is to essentialism. Thus, Adorno rejects the standard view of essentialism, *and* his positive essentialism is of a non-standard kind.

Proposals a, b and c are defusing strategies with respect to the inconsistent triad. The burden with each is that they imply deflating significant sections of the evidence I have presented. Interpretation a is incompatible with the passages I began this chapter (section 1). Similarly with b, it is difficult in light of what I have presented (in section 2) to think that Adorno is committed to invariants, after all.

In addition, with respect to b, Adorno offers a conclusion to the effect that he thinks an appeal to philosophical invariants with respect to human beings is *redundant*. This claim speaks against interpretation b, and I provided some interpretative argumentation to support such a view in section 2.2.2.

As for interpretation c, the principle of charity suggests that it should be rejected as long as there is a viable alternative, which allows Adorno to hold on to both his essentialism and anti-essentialism. I propose that interpretation d is this viable alternative. If traditional essentialism is not all there is to essentialism, we can accept the language of essentialism while not committing to the truth of any philosophical invariants (at issue in his anti-essentialism). However, to show that it is viable requires showing that one can appeal to the

concept of essence in a non-standard sense, that is, without resorting to invariants. If defence of interpretation d is successful, then a, b and interpretation c—that Adorno is simply confused in one way or another—can be crossed out. Defending d has two major advantages. First, unlike the defusing strategies, it resolves the inconsistent triad without deflating central claims embedded in Adorno's thinking; second, if successful, it may yield something interesting about the topic of essentialism as such.

With respect to the triad, I therefore propose that (3) is indisputable: Adorno does indeed reject philosophical invariants. I argue that Adorno can hold on to (1), (2) and (3), *if* his essentialism (1), is not the traditional sort (2). The next part of the discussion is a reconstruction of (1). The question guiding it is: *what kind of essentialism, if any, is compatible with rejection of invariants*?

2.4. Essence Without Invariants

This section puts more flesh on the bones of with respect to what Adorno's essentialism without invariants involves. Ultimately, my aim is to defend interpretation d with respect to our inconsistent triad in the previous section. Interpretation d was:

> The standard view of essentialism is not all there is to essentialism. Thus, Adorno rejects the standard view of essentialism, *and* his positive essentialism is of a non-standard kind.

Thus, the key task for this section is to show that there is another way of being an essentialist than the 'invariantist' way, and second, that Adorno's theory can be re-constructed to embrace such a view sufficiently so that we can read his positive appeals to essence in fact to be musings of that kind.

Thus far I have not distinguished between types invariants formally, but rather explored Adorno's various critiques of major positions in the tradition. I begin this section by discussing epistemological aspects of Adorno's thinking about invariants, and then propose a sketch of essentialist thinking which does not require positing of invariants. I then focus on reconstructing an argument on Adorno's behalf that no such invariants are required in the specific sense of human essence.

For now, I wish to focus for a moment on an issue which is at heart of Adorno's writings on cognition and knowledge—the issue of identity. As examined above, one of the two positive uses of essence in Adorno speaks of 'the object' as 'non-identical'. Therefore, to understand this positive use of essence we must examine what in Adorno's view goes amiss in what he calls 'identity thinking'. In this sense, identity thinking is what, as I understand it, sits at the heart of the worry about postulating philosophical invariants.

2.4.1. 'identity' and 'non-identity'

This section provides the epistemological backdrop to the conversation about invariants which follows it. The epistemological reasons behind Adorno's critique of invariants, I propose, are to do with principle of identity such invariance claims involve. Let me explain. To Adorno, philosophical thinking (and perhaps experience more broadly) should not be classification of things under pre-conceived categories: 'To comprehend a thing itself, not just to fit and register it in its system of reference'.[115] Further, language is not treated as a system of general symbols: 'the point of interpretative philosophy is to construct keys [...] as to the size of key categories, they are specially made to order.'[116] Invariant categories, play a

[115] ND p. 25.
[116] AP p. 130.

role in what Adorno calls 'traditional' or 'identitarian' thinking. To cognize or comprehend a thing, its essence is 'non-identitarian'. Of the latter he writes:

> This cognition seeks to say what something is, while identitarian thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself. The more relentlessly our identitarian thinking besets its object, the farther will it take us from the identity of the object.[117]

Identitarian thinking encircles or possesses its object, by way of approaching objects with the question 'what classifications it falls under'. To give a classificatory definition of, say a living organism, it is to show under which genus or species it belongs, e.g., 'this furry carnivorous creature in front of us is a mammal called cat'. Our particular animal exemplifies the general class of animals. But Adorno thinks what makes objects what they are, their essence, is another issue. Once again: 'Essence recalls the non-identity in the concept of that which, by the subject, is not posited but followed'.[118] The last sentence of the longer passage quoted above—'identity of the object'—speaks to this point. Accordingly, the more seamless the locating of objects under classifications, the poorer the understanding of what they are in themselves ('identity of the object'). This other sense of identification calls for a type of passivity, 'following'. Here identity is used in a second sense, not as 'falls under'.

This might initially appear to be a rather obvious thing to state. After all, one must think within language, and language involves classifications, and that must involve eschewing diversity for the sake of unity. Conceptualisation in the 'identity sense' is the very basis of

[117] ND p. 149.
[118] Ibid. p. 168.

practical activity. By defining things under categories, human beings translate their intentions, aims and needs to matter (broadly construed).

Adorno does not deny any of this. Rather, the emphasis on practical activity, I take it, is at the heart of the issue. Consciousness and every thought (concepts included) only exist within a field of practical engagement, broadly understood. Where classificatory thinking goes amiss, I take Adorno to argue, is its pretence to be neutral about these considerations, interests and needs it is embedded in—that the identity between concept and object is all there is to be said about the object. Why such neutrality is a pretence, Adorno argues, is that there is a non-conceptual, sensuous, somatic or practical moment in conceptualisation itself: 'the need in thinking is what makes us think [...] Represented in the inmost cell of thought is that which is unlike thought.' [119] This intriguing statement deserves longer comment than can be accomplished here. For start, it is rather unclear what 'representation' here means. I will explore this more with a proposal in chapter five. For now, it is sufficient to note that Adorno thinks there is no such thing as need-free thinking, and any thinking must be about something, some content that cannot be contained in pure thought.

However, does this mean that Adorno denies the status of 2+2=4 as unconditionally, and *invariantly*, true? It would appear that the purest form of identity thinking is found in realms of theoretical mathematics and logic. In this context it is important to point out Adorno does not deny the *validity* of formal logic and mathematics, but rather questions the hierarchy of truthfulness in the assumption that the more formal is of higher and purer value than the contextual.

[119] Ibid. p. 408.

> Nothing but a childish relativism would deny the validity of formal logic and mathematics and treat them as ephemeral because they have come to be. Yet the invariants, whose own invariance has been produced, cannot be peeled out of the variables as if all truth were at hand, then.[120]

In this sense, questioning identity thinking is not a questioning of validity, but rather questioning impartiality towards interests. The truths of these disciplines have an invariant status, but they are, Adorno writes, manufactured invariants—produced to meet human needs. Even if highly formal and sophisticated, in Adorno' view in principle no different from hammers and tables. For further evidence, Adorno approaches this issue also through the concept of reason. He claims that 'realized reason' can only be accomplished leaving 'the particular reason of the universal behind.'[121] The notion of reason (the potentially realised) here is not sought on the basis of the identity between the thing and concept. The identitarian reason is, as Adorno puts it, still particular, that is, not genuinely universal.

In this context, it is worth noting that to Adorno the notion identity thinking is not a totalising description of what reason and concept use *as such* is.[122] Rather, thinking has an identificatory and a non-identical element: 'We can see through the identity principle, but we cannot think without identifying. Any definition is identification.'[123] This dual character

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[120] Ibid. p. 40.
[121] ND p. 318.
[122] This issue divides Adorno commentators. The idea that instrumental reason equals conceptual thought as such is most notably associated with Habermas and Wellmer. For critiques of this reading, see Espen Hammer, 'Minding the World: Adorno's Critique of Idealism', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 26 (2000).; J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). For similar reasons, I think that Finlayson's intriguing account of 'ineffable experiences' starts from a too narrow an understanding of Adorno's point. 'James Gordon Finlayson, 'Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 10 (2002), 11. See also James Gordon Finlayson, 'On Not Being Silent in the Darkness: Adorno's Singular Apophaticism', *Harvard Theological Review*, 105 (2011).
[123] ND p. 149.

of thinking quite clear from the text itself. 'Cognition', Adorno thinks, 'identifies to a greater extent, and in other ways, than identitarian thinking'.[124]

> Non-identity is the secret *telos* of identification. It is the part that can be salvaged; the mistake in traditional thinking is that identity is taken for the goal. [...] Dialectically, cognition of nonidentity lies also in the fact that this very cognition identifies—that it identifies to a greater extent, and in other ways, than identitarian thinking.[125]

Adorno clearly plays off the 'identitarian' mode of cognition against *identification* in some other sense. Appreciating the non-identity—or, as he sometimes puts it, essence—of the object, he claims, is the hidden telos of identification.[126] So then, it strongly looks as if to Adorno the identitarian aspect of conceptual thought is not the whole story about thought.

2.4.2. Redundancy of invariants for essentialism

In support of my interpretation of Adorno's essentialism, I argue that the commitment to invariants is redundant for essentialist thinking. For the claim that Adorno can hold on to essentialism this is central, since essentialism has to be available in the mode of relating to the essences themselves, and not their classifications under concepts. I will begin by zooming out for a moment to discuss the attraction of essentialism, and then show that we can keep the attractive element without committing to invariants.

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[124] Ibid.

[126] A note on Adorno's notion of object: by object he also means human beings, at least is three senses: the human body as a physical object, as a non-conceptual element which is cognitively meaningful (which I examine in the next chapter in relation to psychoanalytic thought), and finally human beings can become object-like, reified through social relations.

I take it that the attraction of essentialism is the ability to distinguish accidental change from other types of change. For example, if a terrier puppy gets hit by a car and killed, it undergoes a change, but this is a random occurrence and deserves the status of an accidental change. If the puppy grows to be a vigorous menace of a terrier, it undergoes not accidental change, but change of a different order. It changes in way that is characteristic to its kind. That distinction between accidental and change characteristic to a kind implies a commitment to a 'terrier nature'. Essence, so construed, is the assumption persistence over time, which undergirds and holds together the idea that there is 'something' which undergoes change, and offers a way to distinguish between types of change. But how does one know what can be said to have a given essence? One way to go would be to give a description of properties of terriers. However, while the properties may be relatively fixed on the level of an individual creature, they are not necessarily so for the species as a whole, the life form—and that has implications to the philosophical assumptions on the individual level as well.

This raises a question about the assumption of invariance – namely, how can any species as a whole change, if by essences we understand properties as invariant sets? Or differently put, does change make sense if by it we mean leaps from one invariant essence at time *a* to another invariant essence at time *b*? That would mean that evolutionary change of any species would be a chain of individually unique species essences existing at various times. As I glossed in the beginning, this is one of the aspects of what I have called Platonic essentialism which is directly challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution which is predicated on the idea of incremental change of species. Therefore, for essentialism—of a sort which leaves room for such change—has to in principle grant the following: The determination whether a particular individual bears a given essence cannot be accomplished by an appeal to an invariant set of properties. If we grant that species change over time, then

we must exclude the assumption that essences determine their instantiations in ways that could be captured with lists of necessary properties or features.

For now, in this sense, essences, the 'persisting over time' is understood not as a 'thing' but rather as a process. Furthermore, we can grant that processes exists at different levels, where the processes cannot be reduced to any specific determinable set of properties. The human body is a process, composed of organs, but is not reducible to these organs. Organs in turn are made up of tissue and cells but, are not reducible to them. Even if it is the case that existing human beings will always, as far as we can tell, exhibit some attributes (such as the tendency to cry occasionally or emit bodily odours), philosophically speaking, the essence claim is not predicated on a set of invariant properties (even if it is the case that some might empirically turn out to be permanent). The process which is the human being is contained within a broader process, which typically is some type of human community: and similarly, the community is not exhaustible to given specific members—it can sustain its identity even if some members leave, and others join.

Let me expand on the first of these two points, i.e., let me comment on my claim that to account for change in essentialist terms does not require the assumption of invariant properties. In fact, to think that essences are determinable as sets of properties is commit to a particular view of essentialism, but as I will propose below, not the only one. The argument I am proposing on Adorno's behalf is to show that the there is, generally speaking, a type of essentialism which does not depend on invariants. With this in mind, I now move to the question of human essence.

2.4.3. Redundancy of an invariant image of a human being

An important clue emerges from Adorno's early lecture where he addresses an objection. This objection is that his philosophy, despite appearances to the contrary, nonetheless depends on hidden invariants about human essence. He reports the charge that 'I allegedly shrank from putting these invariants [i.e. those implied by his position] forth clearly and left them clouded'.[127] A few lines down he accepts that his views may be articulable as a particular account (perhaps an invariant one) of human nature, but denies that he has to rely on one. He says,

> I will not decide whether a particular conception of man and being lies at the base of my theory, but I do deny the necessity of resorting to this conception. It is an idealist demand, that of an absolute beginning, as only pure thought by itself can accomplish. It is Cartesian demand, which believes it is necessary to raise thinking to the form of its thought presuppositions and axioms.[128]

Here Adorno speaks of 'a particular conception of man' which is rather open-ended phrasing. I read him to mean philosophical 'invariants', because it fits the formulations 'a blueprint of Being', 'ontological first principles' and 'permanent standard'.[129] As we have seen, in various contexts Adorno makes the further claim that resorting [*rekurrieren*] to such conceptions is also ideologically misleading, but here I shall focus on the more narrowly philosophical claim that they are *redundant* (not 'necessary'), and that on such a redundancy claim rest the criticisms of philosophies which insist on them, broadly speaking, rationalism understood here as 'idealist' and 'Cartesian'.

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[127] AP p. 132.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

This brings about a shift from the question "*which* invariant conception of a human being?" to the question "*why* an invariant conception of human being?". Adorno does not argue for this shift, just asserts 'deny the necessity' of conceptions of human essence. Furthermore, as the mere statement that something is Cartesian or idealist does not decide the issue, I now reconstruct an argument to supports the conclusion, that is, the redundancy claim.

Let me for a moment consider what might be productive in positing an invariant notion of human essence. The idea of invariant human capacities is intuitively plausible if we consider the persistence of some existential questions. We might wonder would Sophocles have anything to teach us if Antigone and Ismene did not share with modern human beings something that is invariant. Would these stories even be intelligible to us were it not for invariant human essence? Not only are permanent attributes compatible with relative change, one can also argue that that the very acknowledgement that human beings change presupposes that there is a species as a subject to these changes, on which the changes can be predicated.

I suggest that it is easy to conflate the assumption of invariance with that of persistence. That we, indeed, are able to relate to questions of identity and loyalty which Antigone struggles with, can also be explained by an appeal to historical persistence, which does not necessitate a metaphysical invariance assumption. Us late moderns have inherited the ancient world and some of its questions turn out to be, as far as we can tell, persistently enduring. To put it in another way, the ancients had their questions, but we inherited their world, and in a recognisable sense, those questions. Perhaps some existential questions have, for whatever reasons, been pressing for all hitherto existing human beings, but that does not vindicate the metaphysical assumption of invariant principles. For instance, to be able to relate to the problems of the past from the present perspective *requires* only that some

concepts and what they correspond to must be very gradually changing and suitably overlapping in meaning. To be clear, the argument for the redundancy of such 'referring back' is *not* a refutation of the claim 'human nature contains invariant aspects', or the findings of empirically stable things in the natural world.[130]

One might wonder what this implies for an alternative essentialism. If some existential questions are persistent, does that not call for a philosophical explanation, that is, a grounding of some kind? Aristotelian essentialists subscribe to a distinction between *dynamic* wholes and *atomist* wholes. The difference is that between certain kinds of complex unities and those unities, which, no matter how structurally complicated in other ways, do not have *such* complexity. This is not a question of degree, but of kinds. A simple contrast can be drawn between a living creature and a heap of rocks. But as the distinction is qualitative, it is also the case that even more complex static structures than heaps of rocks do not have essences in the dynamic sense. In contrast, living things, even the most uncomplicated ones, do. What distinguishes entities that have a dynamic essence from those with the atomist variant, is that in accounting for dynamic essences, one must recognise that its bearers have the potential for certain kinds of change, which are typical for the kind. This is a type of 'grounding'.

Essentialists hold that bearers of need in general have potential—which cannot be described by purely empirical means—for certain kinds of change. This issue of the non-empirical type of knowledge is an aspect of such essentialism which may lead one to think that it lapses back to an account of invariant properties and first principles. That would be pre-mature. We can in this context draw briefly on Michael Thompson's arguments on the description of

[130] In this sense, the redundancy argument is compatible with empirically discovered invariance, say of the atomic structure of, say, helium, or the findings from fossil records.

living forms.[131] Roughly, I gather he starts from the idea that assumptions which govern practises—such as the rules and aims in a game of billiards—have a transcendental status in relationship to descriptions of individual acts within the practise—such as striking the cue ball in a specific angle. No amount of collected descriptions of the mere physical acts could alone allow one to understand them as legal or proficient shots because formal and informal rules and conventions are not empirically manifest on the individual level, but are presupposed by them. In form, Thompson argues, a similar demand applies also on biological description. Describing beings *as alive* is dependent on being able understand specific acts, say, of munching and swallowing *as eating*, (rather than some biomatter passing through tissue), and such description is necessarily teleological in form. In principle, this is what Adorno thinks is necessary for description of human needs: 'To satisfy hunger concretely [...] means that people have something to eat that does not disgust them, and in disgust and its opposite the whole of history is reflected'.[132]

Thompson argues that these 'general propositions about the life form have unusual temporal properties'.[133] I take this to mean that the concept of life-form functions similarly to specific specimens as the rules of a game do to specific acts within it—its status is formal in relation to the individual appearances in that it renders them intelligible as belonging to the 'kind'.

The reason why this not branch of invariantism, is that ultimately whether a thing we encounter is a being with an essence (that is, it is not a heap of matter or a computer), and what that essence amounts to, is a question of studying it, drawing conclusions about what it does. The appeal to invariants is not what is characteristic, in my understanding, of the

[131] Michael Thompson, 'Apprehending Human Form', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements*, 54 (2004).
[132] TN p. 392
[133] Thompson, p. 49.

Marxian-Aristotelian stance, which I have in this section appealed to as an interpretation of Adorno. Rather, it is characterised by taking substance, or essence, as non-reducible to their manifestations. It is this distinction which matters. The *a priori* question whether these substances or essences themselves are *invariant* or not seems to me an idle one. If it turns out to be empirically speaking true that there are life-forms that have always been exactly as we now find them (such as some type of deep water lung-fish), I wonder if anything is added to that empirical fact by committing to a metaphysical invariant on top of what we can know about such lungfish. The opposite deduction to the effect that essences must be 'not invariable', that is, metaphysically variable, falls back on itself in that the variability becomes the invariant (this is similar to Adorno's critique of history as ontology). There are some building blocks for an essentialism which make no claims for invariance. As I will explain below, such an essentialism is *not redundant* at all for Adorno's own position. I now turn to a reconstruction of Adorno's essentialism.

2.5. Adorno's 'materialist' essentialism

So then, what is philosophically at stake on the 'positive' side of Adorno's essentialism about the human bearer of needs? To which philosophical resources or motifs can we appeal with respect to our inconsistent triad? Is it possible to clarify Adorno's appeals to the concept of essence any further given than he resists giving positive determination to the idea of a human being (and by extension, the human bearer of need), as well as their proper dwelling place (a 'good' or 'right' world)? In other words, can we ultimately say anything more about a 'non-standard', 'anti-foundationalist', 'non-invariantist' essentialism? I think we can. In this section I argue for two positions. First, there is an essentialism which passes Adorno's own 'criteria', and thus gives relief to our inconsistent triad. Second, the logic of his critique of

capitalism presupposes such essentialism (albeit that the full defence of this claim is also part of the work of subsequent chapters).

I return to Adorno as an inheritor to the Marxian tradition. I draw on Alfred Schmidt—in particular his interpretation of Marx's concept of nature.[134] As Adorno's student Schmidt was likely to have shared at least some of his teacher's intuitions, and Adorno in turn also refers approvingly to his published Marx manuscript. [135] The pertinent issues are often discussed under the heading of *materialism*.[136]

That said, the philosophical issues are the decisive ones. According to Schmidt, materialistic thinking first and foremost involves jettisoning the demand for foundations or the 'highest principle' [*obersten Prinzip*].[137] For Schmidt, materialism is a term for thinking without philosophical foundations, and in that sense turning attention to the 'non-identical' constituents of experience and knowledge. To Schmidt's reading of Marx, this is compatible with some notion of essence, even though it can be expressed only indirectly. Hence, he uses the formulation 'negatively ontological' to capture the notion of nature in Marx.[138]

What is the purpose behind postulating such a negative essence? It is a shift in the particular-universal relation, from taking it as a conceptual ascent towards an *invariant*, to instead viewing it as a descent to history. Such a particular-universal relation does require positing an essence, as something enduring while also changing. Schmidt understands essence as 'motion', understood as not only as change of place (as it would be for

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134 Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx*, (Verso Trade, 2013), p. 8.
135 ND p. 121. n 16.
136 This is a philosophical materialism, and little to do with the official 'dialectical-materialism' of the various 20th century Marxist-Leninist movements.
137 Alfred Schmidt, *'Begriff Des Materialismus Bei Adorno' in Adorno-Konferenz 1983* (Suhrkamp 1983), p. 14.
138 Schmidt, p. 8.

circumscribed objects), but also as change of quality. One central benefit of this view, about the change of quality, means that one can maintain that human beings are a part of nature, and one of the 'forces' of nature, and think that their productive activities and the life of non-human nature are different, yet not radically separate. By proceeding in this manner preserves, dialectically, an aspect [*Moment*] of independence for external nature, or what we commonly mean by the natural environment or the physical human body.[139] The dialectic of nature and history at any given moment involves some sort of confrontation: 'We must remember, however, that even the most ingenious human discoveries can only unfold the possibilities latent within nature.'[140]

This is not without difficulty. In what sense are conscious human beings individuated from such general flow of nature, and still unfolding *its* possibilities? There is a worry that such notion of essence is so thin that, one might argue, replacing it with description of various epochs amounts to the same. These questions turn on issues of potential, substance, identity and change. My aim here is to show that this is a recognisably essentialist position which is not crossed out by Adorno's specific criticism of standard essentialisms—so even if it has other difficulties, they are not the same ones on the bases of which Adorno rejects standard essentialism. I now turn to the details.

Notwithstanding the difficulties there, I think we can take a building block from Schmidt and Marx. In general, anthropological terms, Adorno's philosophy of need depends on the claim that human beings, by their essence, mix their labour with non-human nature, and in that sense generate new needs and capacities. Human nature is both given and made, and this is so because what is given is not merely physical raw materials but kind of *potential*. Yet,

[139] *Moment* is a lock-stock Hegel term, which Adorno uses repeatedly in these contexts.
[140] Schmidt, p. 78.

this potential is the human sort, since not all living life has that specific potential. We can think of cat-nature having its own potential, but that potential runs its course behind the backs of individual cats, as it were. Human essence does not run its course behind our backs but is acted out or performed by human beings through history.

Such a human essence unfolds as a 'second nature' [*zweite Natur*]. In Adorno this term speaks both to human possibilities—their biology is not a straight-jacket—and the compulsiveness that appears as invariant nature is ultimately the product of their own unconscious work. According to Adorno, modern capitalist societies are an outgrowth of essence as 'second nature', a 'spell' in this context.[141] I take him to mean by this 'spell' that the capitalist logic has a quasi-independent, functional kind of essence which is thought to breach human bearers of need.

Following and developing an idea of Marx's, bearers of need express their needs in a diverted form: in fact, bearers of need are bodily creatures and individuals which set ends, but also simultaneously bearers of the commodity form (below as 'merchandise'). Accordingly, the 'spell' or breach is a kind of diversion. Here Adorno comments on this issue in terms of ends and means.

> The difference of means and ends which Kant decisively stressed is a social difference; it is the difference between the subjects as merchandise, as labor power that can be managed so as to produce value, and the human beings who even in the form of such merchandise remain the subjects for whose sake the whole machinery is set in motion—the machinery in which they are forgotten and only incidentally satisfied.[142]

[141] ND, p. 68.
[142] Ibid. p. 257.

It suffices at this point that we can discuss bearers of need in essentialist terms, in the sense that human beings are such social creatures which set ends. (So when Adorno here writes 'social difference' I take him to draw a contrast to Kant's deontology, not to suggest that this difference is merely contingent on 'social' situations or groups.) In the above passage where both Marx and Kant are employed, I interpret Adorno to make the point that capitalist modernity is a diverted and degrading realisation of the life of bearers of need—where need satisfaction is epiphenomenal to value production.

Adorno asserts that through the exchange mechanism, the 'non-identical particular *essences* and achievements become commensurable, identical'.[143] This is a type of derailment of possibility: capitalist life meets human need but in a manner which keeps human beings 'natural' – with 'natural' here understood as compulsive repetition of mere survival.

> Such essence, to begin with, is the fatal mischief of a world arranged so as to degrade men to means of their *sese conservare*, a world that curtails and threatens their life by reproducing it and making them believe that it has this character so as to satisfy their needs.[144]

The world arranged in a specific way has an essence, and living human beings live through a and by the virtue of a type of antagonism, where the world of their own making undermines them. As Schmidt puts it sharply: 'the content of this metabolic [*Stoffwechsel*] interaction is that nature is humanized and while men are naturalized'.[145] Capitalist societies, that is, for Adorno *society* as such, is understood to be in breach of the potential in human bearers of

[143] Ibid. pp. 149-151. italics added.
[144] Ibid. p. 167.
[145] Schmidt, p. 78.

need (making them mere nature), and also reducing the otherness of non-human nature to mere raw materials.

In keeping with Adorno's negativism, knowledge of such a species is derived indirectly. In general, Adorno holds that all dialectical knowledge emerges through suffering or pain. He writes: '[a]ll pain and all negativity, the motor of dialectical thinking, is the variously mediated, at times unrecognisable form of the physical'.[146] Indeed, '[i]n the dimension of pleasure and displeasure', one can notice that 'the supposed basic facts of consciousness', are not merely facts about consciousness, 'but are invaded by a physical moment'.[147] Adorno places great emphasis on the physicality of pain and thinking—even when it is not in fact experienced directly physical. Centrally, in this context Adorno appeals not to cultural, economic or regional groups, but to humanity as such. When argues that it is not for individuals to 'abolish suffering or mitigate it', but—and strikingly—such a task is 'solely to the species [*Gattung*], to which the individual belongs even where he subjectively renounces it'.[148]

I argue that Adorno's essentialism can be spelled out as these four points.

a.) human beings have a potential specific to the human species to acquire a relationship to their need-satisfaction where they can take themselves and their activities as conscious ends.

[146] ND p. 202. translation amended.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid. p. 203.

b.) both needs and capacities for their satisfaction exist through historical forms, and the type of form human beings inhabit dialectically mediates both their physiological and mental experiences.

c.) in capitalist societies, where human beings have largely the function of *means* rather than *ends*, (they have 'a second nature') we encounter mental and physical anguish.

d.) Adorno's critique of late capitalism presupposes that the anguish (c) is explained in a manner which presupposes (a) and (b).

Human potential, a type of essentialism works as a condition for the logic for Adorno's critique of late capitalism: An explanatory critique d presupposes that c is due to a particular relationship between a and b (though not the only possible one). On these bases, not only can Adorno's committed claims about essence and his anti-foundationalist views be held together, but his critical enterprise depends upon such essence. Together these give relief to our inconsistent triad.[149]

I now offer additional support for this interpretation by showing how it meets one further condition Adorno explicitly sets for the validity of using the categories of essence and appearance (and by so doing give some substance to the condition itself). In a passage introduced in section one, Adorno states that the categories 'essence and appearance' are valid insofar as their 'directional tendency is reversed'.[150] What is the tendency and what could it mean to reverse it? I explain two reversals that support my interpretation. But

[149] This view comes close to what Karen Ng has suggested as 'dialectics of life and self-consciousness' as basis for 'non-reductive critical naturalism'. On her reading, however, the position in its critical form is already contained in Hegel's *Logic*. This is not a reading I can assess here. Karen Ng, 'Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory', *Constellations*, 22 (2015), 400.
[150] ND p. 167.

before turning to thoughts familiar from Schmidt or Marx, I take a passage from Michael Thompson which I think gets the first issue of reversal in sharp focus.

The first reversal concerns Platonic essentialism. Characteristically, for the Platonist, essence is that which sits behind all the shared properties of its instantiations. Plato's Socrates asks questions such as 'what is justice' and then goes along trying to find those characteristics that purported examples of justice have in common. It is this understanding of the general-particular pair, I gather, that should be reversed. This is suggestively similar to Michael Thompson's account discussed in the previous section, where explanation of practises within kinds presupposes an assumption of a form, status of which in an explanation is *a priori*, not reducible to what can be shown via empirical evidence at any particular time. Let us examine this Thompson's contrast between what he calls Aristotelian 'natural-historical' judgements and 'Fregean universal thinking'.

> The unity of subject and predicate realized in an Aristotelian categorical, "The S is F," and the act of mind expressed in it, are thus not to be compared with those realized and expressed in the English forms "Some S is F," "All S's are F" and "Most S's are F" or indeed "Any S is F in normal circumstances, or ceteris paribus." The latter, we may say, relate directly to features of individuals covered by the subject term; in the proper analysis of such propositions the predicative element will be revealed as attached to an individual variable. The attempt to produce a natural history, by contrast, expresses one's interpretation or understanding of the life-form shared by the members of that class, if you like, and each judgment in it will bring the predicate-concept into direct connection with a representation of that "form".[151]

[151] Michael Thompson, *Life and Action*, (Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 73.

The example of S's and F's, as I understand it, illustrates classifying particulars under variables which relate directly to features of individual specimens—the Platonic model of essence. Whereas in the Aristotelian judgement, the members of the class are thought to bear the form immanently ('shared by members of that class'), even if some or even most members fail to manifest what for statistical judgements are the relevant variables. As I understand Thompson, individual members carry the life-form essence in them, but as a living and dynamic form, characterisation of which 'natural-historical' judgements are the appropriate ones.

But what in this reverses the essence-appearance pair? I propose that this Aristotelian thought is 'a reversal' of the direction of essence and appearance, and also shifting their content: for Thompson, the particulars bear the essence as robustly as individuals *qua* members, not simply as holders of variables which are secured by an essence which stands behind them as a pure, timeless form. What for Platonic thinking is the individual as a mere manifestation (appearance), now has some of the stature which was only granted to the highest truth (essence).

The second reversal concerns the reproductive logic which militates against the very bearers of the life-form and their potential to set conscious ends (the Schmidt-Marx position which Adorno presupposes under my reconstruction). Human beings can self-destructively reproduce, and that makes the normative evaluation dimension of Thompson's claims problematic. (That human beings realise their life-form through the reproductive system they have built, and could have built differently, makes the idea that the human life form could in principle be the basis of normative judgements akin to how the geranium life-form gives basis for normative judgements about individual geraniums hard to maintain. This is a

topic for another occasion, however.) [152] For the tradition of critical theory, such individuals are yet to be realised. The goal of such a theory, writes Schmidt, is to bring 'hitherto unconsciously governing forces' under the 'consciousness of solidary individuals.'[153]

Adorno thinks the 'objective abstraction to which the social process of life is subject', is 'more palpable than the power of any other single institution'.[154] With respect to analysis of social life, this is clearly an essentialist thesis, in that the abstraction processes are thought to be entrenched and confronting human beings as their reality. Marx's notion of 'exchange relation' is a term for that form, and thus the essence of capitalism is posited as a thesis describing such a logic—it is 'conceptual rather than immediate'—but it is not a 'product of the cognitive subject'.[155] Not the doing of narrowly 'cognitive' subject, that social form is historical product of sensuous and practical subjects, involving the reproduction of their physical bodies. Since the content of what essence here denotes is not merely in thoughts, it cannot be wished away or eradicated by theoretical fiats. Here the most abstract common denominator, exchange value, is the chief organising principle, which enforces a kind immanence to itself. In that sense, the traditional movement from the most particular to the most abstract is still very much real, but it is real on the level of human thought and action, and not 'behind' mere appearances.

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[152] I mean 'normative' in a very general sense, but a parallel worry about ethical normativity is a difficulty beset by reading Adorno's ethics via the lens of Neo-Aristotelianism.

[153] Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History*, (MIT Press Cambridge Massachusetts, 1981), p. 44.

[154] Adorno. 'Late capitalism or industrial society?' p. 120.

[155] ND p. 167.

2.6. Conclusion

If we accept that need is a notion which, in addition to indicating motivation, also stands for capabilities and powers, then it implies that any description of these capabilities and powers equals to spelling out what their bearer is like. This notion of what they 'are like' has a pressure of objectivity and externality about it—it does not logically hang on desires or preferences, or their own conceptions of themselves as authentic or inauthentic. Rather, it hangs on some assumptions about human essence.

This generates a special difficulty for an Adornian philosophy of need: a tension between Adorno's essentialist and anti-essentialist strains of thought. Via the Hegel-Marx-Schmidt route, we can think of essence without such invariants. As this generally works to underpin Adorno's essence claims, he escapes the inconsistent triad.[156] Furthermore, I have argued that Adorno's philosophy of need as a critique of capitalism requires such split essence, an antagonistic unity *between* their species potential and its historical form under capitalism.

Bearers of need suffer not merely because of a loss of a particularity and creativity, but Adorno thinks this loss in bound to self-undermining aspect of the productive system as such. Adorno asserts that human beings as a whole, have historically yet to realise their humanity, that is, yet to become 'properly' historical: '[w]ithout exception, men have yet to become themselves.'[157] A post-capitalist world would realise the essence of bearers of need in

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[156] This was the inconsistent triad:

1. Adorno appeals positively to the notion of essence: he is an essentialist.
2. Essentialism involves a commitment to invariants.
3. Adorno rejects invariants: he is an anti-essentialist.

Interpretation d yields a rejection of 2: Essentialism does not have to involve a commitment to invariants.

[157] ND p. 278, for discussion of this point, see Freyenhagen. Adorno's practical philosophy Chapter 9.; Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Critique of Late Capitalism: Negative, Explanatory and Practical', in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, (Springer, 2012), pp. 175-92.

that their potential would *not* be truncated in the ways it currently is, it would not be 'a second nature'.

Such a notion of human essence is dynamic. In principle, this essence cannot be justified in a non-circular way. Its theoretical meaning cannot be conclusively argued for, but it can be shown by an appeal to appropriate historical action, which in turn means the very unfolding of that essence: human beings becoming themselves. So then, this essence is presupposed by this type of philosophy of need as *a critique*. Under these assumptions the style of critical diagnosis is not only coherent with anti-foundationalism but a robust version of it.

3. Impulse and drive

As discussed in the introduction and chapter one, Adorno appeals to specifically psychoanalytic concepts in his writings on needs. The standard objection to such model of needs is that psychological terms reductively explain away questions of meaning, value and agency. Indeed, one might think that as an upshot these questions are not only obscured by a language of psychic processes, but that they do not genuinely exist. We might condense this and say, according to the criticism, Freudians provide causal explanations, where interpretation should be sought. At worst, Freud's views appear to suggest (many have thought) that human beings are determined by their biology. If Adorno's philosophy of need ultimately can only run as a causally reductive form of explanation, it would be both incoherent with his basic philosophical intuitions and generally implausible.

As discussed earlier, Adorno often articulates the phenomenology of need by focusing on fleeting impulses and urges as philosophically relevant registers. In this chapter, I turn my attention specifically to these aspects. I claim that Adorno is committed to a recognisably Freudian drive theory with respect to needs. The presentation in this chapter is largely exegetical, but towards the end I explain the tensions Adorno's Freudian leanings generate. I explain that some of the objections one can draw from commentators who engage critically with Adorno's relationship to Freud, explicitly and implicitly echo aspects of those tensions. Indeed, what I take to be animating these commentaries is the premise that Freud's drive theory necessitates a biologistic determinism with respect to human nature – a premise I challenge in chapter five.

3.1. Adorno on drive, instinct and impulse: a commitment to Freud's concepts

In this section, I will demonstrate how Adorno commits to Freud's conceptual framework when he discusses needs in the form of drives, instincts and impulses. The first task is to approach the central terms. How do drives, instincts, impulses relate to one another in Adorno writings? Further still, how do they have a bearing on needs? In this section, I aim to unpack some of the potential differences and similarities between these terms, and to show that implicitly (and on occasion explicitly) Adorno is presupposing elements Freud's conceptual toolkit.

I start from the textual material where Adorno links the concept of need with the concept of drive. He claims, '[n]eed is a social category; nature as "drive" [*Natur, der 'Trieb'*] is contained within it.[158] I take Adorno here to point out that it is false to draw an absolute contrast between society and nature, and to warn us against an appeal to nature or drive, taken to express something immediately given. Indeed, a few lines further, Adorno adds that '[e]ach drive [*Jeder Trieb*] is so socially mediated that its natural side never appears immediately, but always only as socially produced'.[159] The first thing to note is that here, in contrast to the first quotation above, reference to 'drive [*Trieb*]' does not appear in scare quotes. This suggests that Adorno does not reject drive language as such. Rather, we must engage carefully with it (hence the scarce quote in the first passage), and once we do so, we can refer to it (hence the dropping of the scare quotes in the second passage). To display such care leads us to the second point: it is a mistake to understand drives as unmediated first nature.

[158] TN p. 392.
[159] Ibid.

In sum, the concept of drive is used legitimately, when it is taken in in such a way as to acknowledge that drive does not stand for something external to the social.

However, we cannot but note that claims to social 'containment', 'mediation' and 'production' do not automatically amount to the same claims (for example, something can be contained in a social context, but not produced by it). Also, they are not in any obvious way compatible with one another. I will come back to these complexities later. For now, I only wish to show that Adorno invokes drive language in the context of deploying his concept of need.

Elsewhere, Adorno also appeals to instincts [*Instinkte*] akin to the drive-need connection. I will introduce such a key passage momentarily, but, first, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the socially diagnostic and critical epistemic aspect of needs, discussed in the first chapter. I will return to this issue again later on, but for now this aspect is pertinent to keep it in mind in order to appreciate the significance of the drive-instinct-need terrain for understanding Adorno. Here is the key passage again: 'For in the needs of even the people who are covered, who are administered, there reacts something in regard to which they are not fully covered'.[160] This raises questions about what this 'something' in fact is, and what are the presuppositions in thinking that there is that 'something'. The following passage is reminiscent of this claim, but dressed in the language of instincts.

> Neuroses are pillars of society; they thwart the better potential of men, and thus the objectively better condition which men might bring about. There are instincts [*Instinkte*] spurring men beyond the false condition; but the neuroses tend to dam up

[160] ND p. 92.

> those instincts, to push them back toward narcissistic self-gratification in the false condition.[161]

In this passage, Adorno claims that instincts provide stimulus to human beings above and over their current, 'false', condition, but neuroses work as to stultify the push towards this better condition. I take it that Adorno means that in neurotic repetition of some task (of cleaning one's kitchen compulsively, for instance), we witness such 'thwarting' of instinctual energy. This works as an example of the specific instance of the of 'needs of the people who are covered' in the passage on the previous page.

My view is that Adorno does not clearly distinguish between drive and instinct, and both terms sit tightly in the same conceptual neighbourhood relevant for understanding human needs. In the following passage, where Adorno again discusses the prevalence of neuroses, he clearly indicates that he is appealing to Freud's theories, but employs 'drive' instead of 'instinct.'

> Psychoanalysis has portrayed the internal small business which thus came into being as a complex dynamic of unconscious and conscious elements, of id, ego, and superego. In its negotiations with the superego, the ego, the agency of social control within the individual, keeps the drives within the limits set by self-preservation. The areas of friction are large and neuroses, the incidental expenses of such a drive economy, inevitable.[162]

In both passages, Adorno is clearly operating with a set of concepts that require thorough explanation. For now, I will only comment on the drive-instinct issue. In both passages,

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[161] Ibid. p. 298.
[162] DE p. 168.

societal requirements cannot be met without problems that show up in a symptom: the neuroses. In both passages, the terms instinct and drive stand for a psychic energy which is re-directed, and then makes an appearance in a new form (neuroses). The energy and direction of both instincts and drives can be dwarfed by societal pressures, and in this Freudian story that pressure is internalized in the agency of the super-ego.

The question whether there is a theoretically relevant distinction between drive and instinct in Adorno's works, is further complicated by some translations from German to English which render a putative distinction harder to trace. In the below, I have added the originals to demonstrate the issue. Here Adorno explains his understanding of Freud's theory of repression.

> The distinction that he [Freud] made was between two kinds of renunciation of instinct [*Triebverzicht*]. On the one hand there is repression - this is a behaviour that refuses to look this renunciation [*Triebverzicht*] in the eye, but instead shifts the instincts [*Triebe*] into the unconscious and produces in their place some kind of surrogate gratification of a precarious and problematic sort. Alternatively, there is the conscious renunciation of instinct [*Triebverzicht*], so that even man's instinctual [*triebmäβige*] behaviour is placed under the supervision of reason.[163]

My suggestion is not that Livingstone is in any straightforward sense wrong to translate '*Trieb*' as 'instinct'. Partly the issue tracks a by now well-known issue within philosophy and psychoanalytic thought, originating from the English language *Standard Edition of Freud's Collected Works*, of which I will comment on in a moment. But for now, independently of that,

[163] PMP p. 137 / 203.

it does appear to be that case that Adorno himself occasionally uses the terms interchangeably, which could on its own vindicate and explain this translation. In commenting on what he takes to be the diminishing autonomy of modern subjects, Adorno laments the loss of 'a painful inner dialogue between conscience, self-preservation, and drives [*Trieben*]'.[164] A few lines down, he switches the term to 'instinct'.

> The committees and stars function as ego and superego, and the masses, stripped of even the semblance of personality, are molded far more compliantly by the catchwords and models than ever the instincts [*Instinkte*] were by the internal censor.[165]

Here there is no theoretical difference between drive and instinct. The 'painful dialogue' between drives and conscience turns to a relationship between instinct and internal censor—where both allude to Freud's theory of id, ego and super-ego.

The term 'Impulse' [*Impuls*] also has an eminent place in Adorno's writings. Perhaps there is, then, a meaningful philosophical distinction between impulse, and drive and instinct? However, Adorno appeals to 'impulses' in such varied contexts, that that it makes arriving at a general distinction between drive, instinct, and impulse difficult. Whether that in itself is a problem or not is not a matter I take upon myself to discuss. I will start from a passage where only impulse is employed.

> The system in which the sovereign mind imagined itself transfigured, has its primal history in the pre-mental, the animal life of the species. Predators get hungry, but pouncing on their prey is difficult and often dangerous; additional impulses [*Impulse*]

[164] DE p. 168.
[165] Ibid.

> may be needed for the beast to dare it. These impulses and the unpleasantness of hunger fuse into rage at the victim, a rage whose expression in turn serves the end of frightening and paralyzing the victim.[166]

Here Adorno is engaging in a speculative anthropological history of minds as emerging from distinct animal needs, assessment of which is not my task here.[167] The context of this story perhaps explains the use of impulse, rather than drive or instinct. At a 'pre-mental stage', sub-agentive nature, impulses are generated within a relatively closed psychological unit of a predator animal. In this context, one might entertain a difference between impulses as belonging to strictly non-human or sub-human animal life.

Nevertheless, sub-human life is not the only context in which impulses appear. In this passage drive, impulse and urge are all in play in a social diagnosis.

> [R]ationalizations of "forbidden" impulses, such as the drive for destruction, never completely succeed. While rationalization emasculates those urges which are subject to taboos, it does not make them disappear completely but allows them to express themselves in a "tolerable," modified, indirect way, conforming to the social requirements which the ego is ready to accept.[168]

Here Adorno employs 'impulses', 'drive', and 'urge' in a closely-knit manner. The passage suggests that he thinks impulse and drive are the same phenomenon: both stand for psychic energy which the ego mediates. Furthermore, I think in the below nothing in terms of meaning would be lost if 'urges' would be replaced with 'drives'.

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166 ND p. 22.

167 For a critical engagement of this passage, see Peter Dews, 'Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics: Adorno's Relation to Schelling', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22 (2014).

168 T.W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality*, (Harper & Row Inc., 1950), p. 676.

> It is a basic hypothesis of psychoanalysis that symptoms "make sense" in so far as they fulfill a specific function within the individual's psychological economy—that they are to be regarded, as a rule, as vicarious wish fulfillments of, or as defenses against, repressed urges.[169]

Moreover, there are instances where 'drives' and 'impulses' are used as equivalents. For instance, in the context of commenting on the co-option of the affective and emotional, Horkheimer and Adorno blend the terms: 'self-preservation', the author's think, is 'a natural drive like other impulses'.[170]

As already shown, appeals to impulses have a variety of roles in Adorno's writings. Specifically, in what could be called his moral psychology, Adorno takes some impulses to have a central standing in ways that suggest Adorno takes it as more epistemologically determined as a concept than drive or instinct.

> The impulse—naked physical fear, and the sense of solidarity with what Brecht called "tormentable bodies"—is immanent in moral conduct and would be denied in attempts at ruthless rationalization.[171]
>
> [...]
>
> It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.[172]

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169 ibid. p. 617.
170 DE p. 72. There is some indication that this essay is written by Max Horkheimer ('Editor's Afterword' pp. 221 – 222). However, given that the authors' declared joint responsibility of the whole work, it seems unlikely that, had there been a theoretical disagreement about the use of such pivotal terms, Adorno would have been silent about it.
171 ND p. 285.
172 Ibid. p. 395

In the first claim Adorno gestures towards a materialistic moral theory, according to which impulse responses, such as quivering at the site of another human being in grievous physical pain, are at the core of moral life, but is eroded by narrowly instrumental forms of reason and the attendant social institutions. The second claim situates the view in post-Auschwitz culture. What is, to Adorno, a comprehensive cultural collapse implies that morality survives *only* in some bodily, somatic element, and is available to us only via a special kind of knowledge, some sort of 'impulse knowledge'. Although there is no hard distinction between the terms, here impulse stands for a situational response, which is more directly experiential than drive or instinctual energy.

Let me complicate my proposal by briefly returning to a passage discussed above: "There are instincts [*Instinkte*] spurring men beyond the false condition'. Instincts here stand for some force that underpins motivation in a way that sounds similar to impulses in the passages just laid out. I suggest the following: 'instinct' and 'drive' operate on the level where one tries to explain something about the sub-conscious make-up of bearers of need, and 'impulse' operates on the level where one explains first-personal feelings or conduct through which the energy of the instincts or drives is expressed. For instance, the instinct or drive for self-preservation may receive expression in the impulsive seeking of advantage in social relations.

3.2. The Charge

Spectres of inconsistency loom on the horizon. In the previous section, we already saw some evidence for thinking that Adorno is committed to Freud's terminology. However, it is often assumed that Freud's drive psychology is based on an anthropology of human nature which social and historical experience could not in principle alter. This type of ontological reductionism raises the possibility of a methodological one: explanations of which involve

the appeal to drives could be seen as causally determinism, that is, reducing experience to be an epiphenomenon of a biological dynamic. In general, such a view-point could support conclusions from what we are like to what we ought to be like.[173] Ultimately, if one takes such a view of drives, a notion of need (such as Adorno's as per chapter two) that is in the domain of a historical and dialectical account of essence would be incompatible with it.

The same shape of problem can be located in Adorno's account moral epistemology, where he appeals to seemingly 'naked' impulses in a moral sense.[174] He speaks of 'bodily sensation of the moral addendum' as the necessary aspect of possible moral experience in post-Auschwitz modernity : '[i]t is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.'[175] This appear to commit him to the existence of some kind of unmediated experiential knowledge with respect to the body. But as we have seen, Adorno also denies any epistemic access to immediate experiences.

These objections are not specifically stated in many commentaries on the Freudian influences on Adorno. Those who acknowledge Adorno's commitment to Freud's drive theory in a neutral or positive sense, avoid –perhaps understandably given the dangers I have named – getting into these troubled waters. However, there are two commentators who predicate their *critiques* of Adorno on a conception of Freud's drive concept as 'invariant' and 'biologistic'.

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[173] These are the home turf of conservative social philosophy. For a recent example, see Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation*, (A&C Black, 2006).
[174] Freyenhagen. Chapter 7.; Mathijs Peters, '"The Zone of the Carcass and the Knacker'-on Adorno's Concern with the Suffering Body', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 23 (2015).
[175] ND p. 365.

At this juncture, Jessica Benjamin's early interpretation of Adorno deserves attention.[176] Centrally, she objects to Adorno for following what she takes to be the implication of Freud's drive psychology, that is, taking self-preservation as an unmediated drive: 'individual self-preservation is raised to a category of endopsychic process, of nature'.[177] This involves the assumption that the ego, the agent of self-preservation, can develop only in opposition to external world and internal nature.[178] It is the hostility of internal nature, its 'asocial, regressive core', which necessitates the oppositional and controlling character of the ego.[179]

Centrally, on her reading, both internal nature and the agent required to control it are immutable, part of an invariant biological constitution. Benjamin makes what subsequently became a familiar move: Adorno must be able to critique reason's repressive claims to authority without lapsing into irrationalism. The problem, then as Benjamin sees it, is that it is *this* same ego that is also expected to be the principal agent of critique: 'If reason, reflection and individuation are historically tied to the process of internalizing authority, is not the result that authority is in some sense seen as necessary or even vindicated?'[180] This problem, to Benjamin, is due to Adorno lacking awareness to what she takes to be a key philosophical concept: a normative ontology which grounds human beings in intersubjective relations. [181] These relations, she says, then can account for both healthy and rational intersubjective relations, and dominating urges as pathological cases of recognition, without any appeal to

[176] I say 'early' because this is one of the first interpretations on the issue in the English language, and also because in the past four decades she may have changed her mind about a number of these issues.
[177] Jessica Benjamin, 'The End of Internalization: Adorno's Social Psychology', *Telos*, 32 (1977), 48.
[178] ibid. p. 47
[179] ibid. p. 43
[180] ibid. p. 41
[181] On the basis of my discussion in chapter two, Adorno would not be moved by it, since the upshot is not strictly speaking a *critical* theory, but a humanist ontology.

drive nature. Be that as it may, I focus on the assumptions which inform her objection to drive theory.

What exactly is it that Benjamin objects to in relation to Freud's drive theory? Let us examine a revealing passage:

> As idle as it may appear to be to attempt to subtract all that is "social" from our behaviour in order to determine that the residue is the truth of human nature, it perhaps still more difficult to completely avoid all such assumptions about human nature. The danger, however, is that social relations may be fetishized and seen as belonging to nature, so that the results of a process appear ultimately as the cause.[182]

Benjamin here acknowledges that it is hard to avoid making some assumptions about nature, but the reason why one should thread carefully is the danger of reading cause and effect in the wrong way. Say, for instance we might think that aggression is then inadvertently read back into human nature, *understood as an invariant*, where we ought to think that it is caused by historically contingent forms. That, in her view, places the causation the wrong way around—from nature to the social. What this worry presupposes is that some notion causality, and centrally that whatever the content of those 'nature assumptions', they are thought to be invariant.

In this way, one of Adorno's critics in this area of literature is clearly ascribing a picture to Freud (and to Adorno's Freud reading) that sits uneasily with Adorno's other commitments. While she does not run her objection to Adorno primarily in terms of accusing him of internal inconsistency, we can complete and strengthen the force of this accusation by

[182] Benjamin, p. 46.

recalling chapter two where I discuss Adorno's arguments against thinking of human essence understood as an invariant.

Brian O'Connor's article on freedom and nature in Adorno offers a good basis for a further discussion of the issues. He argues that Adorno's position differs from idealist sense of the autonomy of reason in two ways: Reason is partly a self-preservative force (thus not a capacity for autonomy alone), and that it's not 'a power that is independent of nature'.[183] This is clearly something Adorno has in mind. Things get complicated when we consider O'Connor's interpretation of the following Adorno passage: 'if the nature in reason itself is forgotten, reason will be self-preservation running wild and will regress to nature.'[184] O'Connor's interpretation of this comes out in the way he poses a question and suggests a solution with respect to Adorno's views on nature:

> It may seem surprising that Adorno should make the charge of a regression to nature when he himself urges reconsideration of the natural basis of reason. What he has in mind, though, is that the purely reflexive actions of natural self-preservation are automatic responses. In this regard they make no differentiations between objects. Ironically, reason's indifference to nature recapitulates to original indifference of the reflexes.[185]

I think understanding what is at stake here hangs on the notion of *regression.* As is evident from the above, O'Connor understands Adorno's claim about regressing to nature in terms of a return to an original state (the 'original indifference of the reflexes'). Adorno's passage is

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[183] Brian O'Connor, 'Freedom within Nature: Adorno on the Idea of Reason's Autonomy', in *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought: Volume 2: Historical, Social and Political Thought*, ed. by John Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 208-31 (p. 227).
[184] ND p. 289.
[185] O'Connor, p. 227.

characteristically dense and dialectical. However, I think a better reading is possible. By 'nature' Adorno means something compulsive in both ends of the earlier quoted sentence. Yet, 'nature' in the second part of the sentence, to which reason regresses, is not in my view *a return* to an original.

Regression, as I understand it, is a failure to appreciate what is expected at a certain level of attainment or maturity within a context. It is a contextually situated failure which in itself does not require an account of originals. Rather, regression works on the back of a distorted image, as it were. So when Adorno claims that reason regresses to nature, by which we in this instance mean an automatic responses of reflexes, he is not committed to thinking that this is what nature in itself originally is, and much less that it immutably is like this, but rather that this is the functional image of nature constructed out of the perspective of reason's (illusionary) autonomy.

The point of that was to show that there is no requirement for invariant nature in Adorno's criticism of reason's autonomy in terms of regression. This assumption, however, works as a stake in O'Connor's characterisation of 'natural determinism' which he takes Freud to be committed to (and Adorno to, unfortunately, swallow). As an aid to his interpretation, O'Connor leans on the following passage from Alfred Tauber in a central part of his argument on Adorno's Freudianism.

> Freud argued, on the one hand, humans are subject to unconscious activities (framed within a biological conception), and thus subject to a form of natural determinism. On the other hand, the rational faculty of the ego permits, given proper support and articulation, the means of both understanding the deterministic forces of the unconscious as well as freeing the ego from their authority. Psychoanalysis thus depends on an implicit notion of autonomy, whereby the interpretative faculty would

> free the analysand from the tyranny of the unconscious in order to pursue the potential of human creativity and freedom.[186]

Tauber's reading of Freud's drive theory is committed to deterministic forces—'framed within a biological conception'. This conception, deterministic forces, on the one hand, and creativity and freedom, on the other, faithfully preserves the basic assumptions of Kant's third antinomy. I take it that Tauber's 'Kantian-Freudian' views are the background assumptions that shed light why in the final analysis of his paper O'Connor is convinced that, for Adorno:

> [T]he freedom/nature dualism of that towering conception is not abandoned: it is dialectically reconstructed. Reason is both freedom and nature. Adorno's effort to convince us of that seems to be precariously conjectural.[187]

As a result of his articulation of Adorno's position, O'Connor is clearly not impressed with the pay-off. Suitably so, since if drive nature is understood as mere mechanical chains, it remains mysterious how reason could 'be nature' and still *reason* in some sense recognisable as agency and moral autonomy, and so on. O'Connor then suggests that Adorno's story is far from satisfying. Yet, I think O'Connor's reliance on Hans Tauber is what generates the problem. This is because if Tauber is correct about Freud, then such a Freud commits Adorno to a determinist picture of psychic drives. From this it follows that any conception of freedom must be, as O'Connor argues, not an overcoming of a dualism, but a reconstruction of it.

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[186] Hans Tauber quoted in ibid. p. 228.
[187] ibid. p.229

To conclude this section, I explained the worry that Adorno's employment of Freud's drive concept generates, and have discussed the work of commentators who agree with my exegetical claim about the importance of Freud, but respond critically to Adorno's employment of Freud's drive psychology precisely on the basis of the abovementioned worries (albeit without explicitly formulating these worries in the way I have).

I will briefly mention two related points. For instance, Simon Jarvis thinks that '[p]sychoanalytic insights are deployed in tension with a critical theory of society'.[188] The worry here is about drive theory. Deborah Cook registers the importance of Freud's account of drives for Adorno, stating that Adorno's notion of drive 'stand[s] or fall[s] with Freud's'.[189] Cook also notes that this leads to problems. In Cook's view, Adorno 'criticizes Freud's ahistorical conception of instinct', following Adorno here in treating instinct and drive interchangeably.[190] This would mean that Adorno both relies on and criticises Freud's account of drives. Her reading is perhaps understandable in light of Adorno's comments, such as this: 'No doubt concrete historical components already enter early childhood experience, thereby disproving Freud's crude doctrine of the timeless quality of the unconscious'.[191] Although Adorno does not directly claim that Freud's drives or instincts are ahistorical, the assertion that the unconscious domain of experience is strictly cut off from 'historical components' does raise the question about the status of drives as well. This, worryingly, suggests that Adorno accuses Freud of committing to a type of invariant structure with respect to one of the basic elements of his thinking, while himself relying on

[188] Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction*, (Psychology Press, 1998), p. 82.
[189] Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, (Routledge, 2014), p. 77.
[190] Furthermore, Cook says '[A]dorno thinks that Freud's faulty conception of instinct as timeless and ahistorical had a social origin [...]' ibid. p. 78.
[191] SP p. 90.

the notion of drive in a specifically Freudian sense.[192] It is best to examine Adorno's explicit criticisms of Freud.

3.3. Adorno's critical remarks on Freud

I wish now to consider some of Adorno's critical comments about Freud with respect to the charge of invariant anthropological features. I think that one of Adorno's criticism flagged above, the claim that Freud's unconscious is impenetrable by historical contents, is to be taken with some caution. Freud does think that unconscious mental processes 'are not ordered temporally'.[193] We can understand this also as point of contrast—its 'negative characteristics'—to conscious mental processes.[194] As I understand Freud, the point here negative one about form, but certainly not of content. I take it that by 'temporally' Freud has in mind the structure of what we might take to be the picture of ordinary experience where we tend to experience one event, action or thought following another. However, it would be wrong to conclude that dispensing with this form of experience implies that the content of experiences become insulated from historical contents. Take the hall-mark example of dreams: were it the case that the stuff of our conscious experiences could not enter the unconscious, even the most commonplace dreams (say, what happened to me during the day

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[192] Here I agree with Yvonne Sherrat that Adorno is particularly drawn to Freud's ego psychology (Yvonne Sherratt, 'Adorno's Concept of the Self : A Marriage of Freud and Hegelian Marxism', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, 1 (2004).). This generates a question. A key feature of the Hegelian-Marxist perspective is the form of the change of objects over human history. How does this connect to notion of the natural psyche, as conceived by Freud? However, even in her positive appraisal of Adorno's debt to Freud, the issue of compatibility of the two perspectives remains elusive. The human psyche may be a "natural" object, but that is entirely compatible with its being shaped by social activity. This is true for all kinds of historical determination albeit material, ontological or (historical) "will". In short, the self can be conceived of both through Freud's theory and through Hegelian-Marxism.

[193] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xviii (1920-1922): Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Group Psychology and Other Works*, (1955), pp. 1-64 (p. 28).

[194] ibid.

mashed in an eerie manner) would not be possible. Rather, the distinguishing aspect of dreams and the unconscious more generally—for Freud, that is—lies in their form, which he discovered does not follow that of conscious experience.

Adorno does make another, more interesting comment on the unconscious as a historical register of some sort.

> The time-lag between consciousness and the unconscious is itself the stigma of the contradictory development of society. Everything that got left behind is sedimented in the unconscious and has to foot the bill for progress and enlightenment. Its backwardness becomes Freud's 'timelessness'.[195]

Adorno thinks that Freud is correct in articulating the different dynamics of conscious and unconscious experience. Yet, accordingly, this *atemporal form* of the unconscious should itself be understood as bound to a specific historical dynamic and that it is this further move which Freud, allegedly, fails to articulate.

Furthermore, Adorno claims that Freud's conscious-unconscious pair is itself branded on human beings due to our contradictory social dynamics. This suggestion gives a hint: that within a different society or civilisation even these structural characteristics could *in principle* be different: Adorno is here suggesting that Freud's identification of a divergent temporal dynamic between conscious and unconscious life has to be understood also *in form* as something that is ultimately bound to the current social metabolism.

I do not think that Adorno's comment on Freud are decisive or even that helpful. Adorno can be tacitly committed to Freud's being 'right' in the minimal sense that Freud's vocabulary

[195] SP p. 80.

and their surrounding metaphysical commitments do pick out phenomena in our world as we have inherited it. Adorno's critical theory of society is not in tension with Freud's thinking, but rather *articulated* through an engagement with it. For instance, if Adorno is happy to grant that Freud is descriptively correct about not only Judeo-Christian civilization (to which, as I understand Freud, he limited his ambitions), but even traced Enlightenment correctly (which would then also include Ancient Greek civilization), then it is not clear what more could be asked. So preliminarily, there is not in my mind any reason not to think of Adorno as a 'Freudian', in the same sense as commentators are (for better or worse) willing to think of him as 'Hegelian-Marxian'.

3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the following. Adorno's philosophy of need, and his philosophy more generally, is clearly committed to concepts which are part and parcel of Freudian psychoanalytic theory. Adorno's critical comments of Freud do not give reasons to question this. This raises the doubt that Adorno, despite his intensions to the contrary, appeals to causally deterministic mode of explanation – an explanation, moreover, that is based on an ontologically invariant idea of human nature.

If we wish to defend Adorno's philosophy of need against a threat of incoherence (as I wish to), the onus on us is to show how Adorno's commitment to historical variability of human needs is compatible with the idea of need qua drives, instincts and impulses. If it is not compatible, so much worse for Adorno's need philosophy and the arguments I have advanced on his behalf so far. This problem motivates the next two chapters.

4. Causality and explanation

We have seen that Adorno frequently appeals to Freudian psychology. I have noted the possible inconsistency this may generate. As I have showed in the previous chapter, this question of compatibility of Freudian and historically dialectical viewpoints has also been identified in the commentaries on Adorno. In this chapter, I clarify what is at stake in thinking about this as a problem with respect to the concept of causality in Adorno's writings. (In the next chapter I argue that the problem dissolves by adjusting how we think of the notion of drive-causality in psychoanalytic theory.)

As many terms that are used to signal a position one does not wish to adopt, 'causal determinism' defies any simple definition. Preliminarily, a cause stands for something that brings something else about, changes its condition, or makes something else happen. Effects typically mean these things brought about, changed or created. Causal determinism, then, is the view that the thing that calls for explanations is an effect of something, that it can be explained in reference to its antecedent conditions as its causes from which it must necessarily follow.

Given Adorno's Hegel and Marx inspired arguments about the mediation between the historical and the natural worlds, it is relatively clear that, from his perspective, causal determinism in reductive sense is not a defensible position. The Kantian view, where formal causality is a regulative notion for our experience, making distinctive room for moral freedom outside space and time, is also at odds with Adorno's thinking. The opposition to both can be seen in this passage where Adorno speaks of the concept of the self and perception: 'If it is confined, positivistically, to registering the given without itself giving, it shrinks to a point,

and if, idealistically, it projects the world our of the bottomless origin or its own self, it exhausts itself in monotonous repetition'.[196]

Indeed, Adorno claims that these two determinisms as such speak of a concrete separation of nature and the human domain. Adorno thinks that this separation itself indicates another type of compulsion: which he often identifies in Freudian language as the drive for self-preservation. Yet, as discussed in chapter three, the status of these Freudian causal claims is obscure. Indeed, what is the status of such a drive as 'a cause' in individuals, according to Adorno? In what sense are we to understand his claims that the world is compulsive, or, determined?

In the domain of social critique, commentators tend to focus on Adorno's non-adherence to reductive materialism, but not on the philosophical grounds for it. For instance, Rahel Jaeggi comments on Adorno's social diagnosis in the following manner.

> [H]is diagnosis by no means adheres to a simple deterministic schema of base and superstructure. Rather than a matter of causal relationships, it seems to be a matter of a kind of interaction and of relationships that are also in principle reversible.[197]

Here Jaeggi states that Adorno does not employ a crude version of the so-called base-superstructure model of explanation. Accordingly, this means we should not think of social institutions as the family as a 'direct product', or a 'causal product' or 'bottom-up' consequence *of*, some more basic mechanism.[198] In her reading of Adorno's view, causal relations are equated with simple determinate relations, compulsive in one direction only.

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196 DE p. 156.
197 Jaeggi. On the Critique of Forms of Life p. 79.
198 ibid.

Later in the same work she speaks in her own voice: 'There is no causal force that could prevent the historical events and their actors from adopting a different direction of transformation'.[199] I have introduced this as representative position of a certain common rebuttal of causal determinism, which I presume is targeted against a direction of thought expressed most notably in G.A. Cohen's work on Marx's theory of history.[200]

I have two points to make as to why I think leaving the issue at that stage is not adequate. First, this reading of Adorno (correct at an abstractly general level as it may be) leaves it unclear which philosophical views Adorno's—as exhibited by his social diagnosis—non-adherence to causal determinism are based on. There is a range of positions, some mutually exclusive, which could be the basis of disagreeing with such a view. One could disagree with the base-superstructure model of causal explanation merely on empirical basis, that it fails to account for the facts, for instance. Kantians would insist on moral freedom despite the empirical determination of the world in space and time. Second, it seems to me that the key issue—which should not be a minor concern for critical theory—hangs on the meaning of causality which underpin the connection between technology and relations of production [*Produktionsverhältnisse]*. For instance, Adorno refuses to give priority either to the term 'industrial society' or 'late capitalism', proposing instead that they form a dialectic which is itself in some sense determined, fateful towards the destruction of human beings. [201]

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[199] ibid. p. 378.

[200] Cohen claims that 'productive forces tend to develop throughout history', and that social interaction that relates to production, 'production relations of a society', can be 'explained by the level of development of its productive forces'. Central to Cohen's second thesis is the claim that productive relations correspond to productive forces, and that the correspondence is asymmetrical—relations can be explained by forces, but not vice versa. In that sense, Cohen defends a causal determinism as *explanatory asymmetry* on the level of long historical processes. Gerald Allan Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). pp. 134 - 137

[201] Adorno.

My question is this: if all explanations call for some notion of explanatory asymmetry or priority (which I think they do), but one eschews all claims to causation because of worries about determinism, then what happens to explanations? If no notion of causality can be appealed to, then those aspects of Adorno's social diagnosis which nonetheless appeal to distinctively causal language are mysterious or *prima facie* indications of an incoherence—this time to do with his claims about causality as such (as I will show in later sections of this chapter).

In this chapter, I reconstruct the reasons which, I argue, explain why Adorno does not apply 'causally deterministic' explanations in his social diagnosis, and yet he does not dispense with causal language either. I aim to show his critique of causality is a dialectic and bring clarity to the philosophical and socio-historical reasons that motivate it. As an outcome, the stage for chapter five will be set where I investigate the compatibility issue with Freud identified in the previous chapter from a more robust understanding of the issue. Further still, it becomes clear, I contend, that much more is at stake than is revealed by the sketch Jaeggi offers. In the final analysis, suggest that Adorno's practice of social diagnosis is best understood as presupposing a re-focusing the philosophical language of causality rather than jettisoning it whole-sale.

I begin from the case Adorno makes against a certain type of causal thinking. This, as we will see in the next section, nonetheless presupposes causal terms in some other sense. This calls for a reconstruction of the argumentation he relies on. I then present a brief survey of Hume and Kant, and then proceed to explain Adorno's various criticism of the account of causality that emerges from these figures. Following that, I re-focus on Adorno's diagnostic claims about late capitalism as types of causal explanation. I conclude by making the preliminary proposal that we ought to think of them as relying on a teleological notion of causality.

4.1. No causation in the late modern world?

I now consider the evidence for what I have introduced as the 'common reading' of Adorno on causality: that his social diagnostic claims do not make a positive use of causally deterministic models, and from that implies that causality is redundant concept. I try to make the best case for this reading from the evidence available. My argument in this section is that Adorno's objection to causal determinism is not chiefly an empirical one.

In the lines below Adorno contrasts causation explanations the idea of explanatory 'constellation'. Adorno claims that the

> increasing integrative trend, the fact that its elements entwine into a more and more total context of functions, is precisely what makes the old question about cause—as opposed to the constellation—more and more precarious.[202]
>
> [...] Causality has withdrawn to totality, so to speak. Amidst its system it is no longer distinguishable. The more its concept heeds the scientific mandate to attenuate into abstractness, the less will the simultaneously ultra-condensed web of a universally socialized society permit one condition to be traced back with evidentiality to another single condition. Every state of things is horizontally and vertically tied to all others, touches upon all others, is touched by all others. The latest doctrine in which enlightenment used causality as a decisive political weapon is the Marxist one of superstructure and infrastructure.[203]

[202] ND p. 166.
[203] Ibid. p. 267

In these passages, some premises for an argument for the conclusion of which Jaeggi speaks begin to emerge. Indeed, in the last sentence Adorno casts off the aforementioned base-superstructure causation model, calling it a 'political weapon', which I take here to mean that it does not track reality. *Integration* appears to be the key term. If social worlds are tightly integrated 'totalities of functions', then tracing one condition to a clearly defined other condition would not be adequate. This has a dual meaning: if the power which the social, understood as a totality, exercises over human beings cannot be singled out to be emanating from any particular distinct source, then opposing, breaking-free from, or resisting it directly, as if the power and the opposition were sealed entities, is bound to be trapped in the very same processes of power. (This issue relates partly back to my discussion of Adorno's critique of existential humanism in chapter two.)

Indeed, Adorno thinks that modern subjects experience coercion without being able to pinpoint the source of that coercion. Adorno proposes that the sort of dependence which simple causal explanations speak of, is dialectically relocated and heightened.

These passages explicitly suggest that only single determinate causal links cannot be identified, *and* that modern societies are themselves *a cause*: 'But today's disappearance of causality signals no realm of freedom. Reproduced in total interaction, the old dependence expands'.[204] As a first point, these passages contain an ambiguity about the meaning of causality. In saying '[t]he *more* its [cause] concept heeds' to an abstractly reduced one, the more it fails to explain the kind of complexity is described, Adorno preserves some meaning to it in another (yet to be clarified) sense. A few lines further we read this conclusion: 'It is

[204] Ibid. p. 268

idle to search for what might have been a cause within a monolithic society. Only that society itself remains the cause.'[205]

What I take Adorno to be saying here is that, historically speaking, the complexity of modern life has rendered analysis of specific cause and effect relations irrelevant. The direct and identifiable source as a *single cause* has disappeared, and in that specific sense causality has disappeared. However, in suggesting that 'only society itself remains *the cause*', Adorno quite clearly appeals to the thought that objectively speaking, some type of causal determination is real. What does it mean to say a society is a *cause*? Here is a clue. Several usages of the notion constellation speak to holism, a contextual thinking.[206] The following is particularly interesting: 'Becoming aware of the constellation in which a thing stands is tantamount to deciphering the constellation which, having come to be, it bears within it'.[207] If we grant, that 'a thing' can also stand for a subject, then in that sense, constellation comes close to a character, an internalized pre-disposition. Evidence that this is at least coherent (if not the intended meaning of that very passage) emerges when Adorno mobilizes the notion against existentialists for missing out the 'historical conditions that govern the inner composition and constellation of subject and object'.[208] Preliminarily, this fits quite well with my reconstruction of Adorno's human essence in chapter two.

Yet, the philosophical shape of Adorno's objection to causal determinism is not quite clear. From some of these passages it does appear that empirical evidence about the complexity of modern societies alone makes the case against the causal determinist. But that would leave the question of the suitability of determinist explanations a contingent matter. Adorno, in

[205] Ibid. p. 267
[206] Ibid. pp. 53, 103, 104.
[207] Ibid. p. 163.
[208] Ibid. p. 129.

contrast, appears to suggest something stronger about the problems of such a model. Yet, it is not clear on what the stronger objection is based on. For instance, is it a question empirical evidence whether a given theory is adequate, and a theory is adequate when can explain the facts? Consider a flatfooted objection to a causal explanation: 'you can't explain xenophobia with social class. It's more complicated than that'. In some sense, Adorno appears to take *constellation* type of explanations to be more adequate to simple causal explanations in the sense where a single factor or force counts as a necessary of sufficient condition. Take for instance his claim that 'search for them [constellations] is forced upon us by the *real* course of history'.[209] But is this adequacy merely an empirical question?

I contend that here Adorno does not do himself favours by vagueness. I argue, however, that a more careful interpretation of his objection to causal determinism reveals that the sort of critique here is not solely an empirical matter. To make the case for a more philosophically robust reading, I consider passage where Adorno discusses the notion of freedom in a context of a behaviourist form of explanation. (I am here making the assumption that behaviourist mode of explanation is similar in the relevant respect base-superstructure explanations, albeit otherwise they are quite a different matter). The common logical structure is that they are reductive forms of explanations. In this context, it is enough to that Adorno thinks this type of explanation is deterministic. So, according to this type of deterministic explanation,

> The very mention of freedom, just like the appeal to it, already rings hollow. That is what an intransigent nominalism adjusts itself to. [...] [O]nly the modes of conduct of human beings in various situations would need to be described and classified; any talk

[209] Ibid. p. 166 (italics mine)

> of the will or freedom would be conceptual fetishism. All determinations of the I ought thereby, as behaviorism in fact planned, to be simply translated back into
>
> modes of reaction and individual reactions, which could then be nailed down.[210]

Freedom, Adorno, claims has no meaning for nominalism, only 'modes' do. But here the objection is not that behaviourist psychology is unable to account for the facts of the case: in a specific sense, as he proposes, 'nominalism' *adjusts* itself to a state where people are not free, and the notion appears as meaningless. Thus, in a certain sense it can account the facts (I will comment on Adorno's notion of metacritique later in this chapter). Rather, I think the status of the objection is *a priori* or, at any rate, conceptual, not merely empirical: behaviourism goes wrong at the level of concepts, notably, it goes wrong in the central concepts 'modes', and 'reaction' which support the explanatory enterprise. I take Adorno's point to be that such concepts cannot capture freedom, or the moral will in more than mechanistic terms—so not at all. An analogous point could be made about contemporary terms such as 'synapses' and 'neurotransmission'.

For my purposes, the key issue in the passage is the question whether judgements about human behaviour can be formulated without concepts involving intentionality and consciousness. This is no mere empirical matter, but involves conceptual questions about the suitability of the terms that undergird types of explanation. In other words, determinist causal explanation and, for instance, hermeneutic explanation, do not compete on a same plane trying account for the same facts or phenomenon, but rather conceive of the

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[210] 'Freedom, Determinism, Identity' in Theodor W. Adorno, 'Negative Dialectics, Trans. Dennis Redmond', *Website document available at: www. pataphysics-lab. com/sarcophaga/daysures/Adorno*, 20 (2001), 215-17.

phenomenon to be explained differently from the start. This involves *a priori* assumptions about what entities and kinds are.

As discussed in chapter two, Adorno does not *merely* reverse the assumptions of traditional essentialism. An undialectical reversal would amount to making that which appears immediately the only grounds for truth, the move what he has criticised in under the theme of 'positivism': 'Positivism becomes ideology in eliminating first the objective category of essence and then, consistently, the concern with essentials'.[211] Accordingly, what gets eliminated along with the traditional concept of essence is also the possibility of making qualitative distinctions as such, which presupposes granting some aspects of reality greater explanatory significance than others: 'the knowers lose the primary capacity to separate essentials and unessentials, without anyone really knowing what is cause and what is effect'.[212]

> Unreflecting enlighteners have negated the metaphysical thesis of essence as the true world behind the phenomena with an equally abstract counter-thesis: that essence, as the epitome of metaphysics, is itself mere appearance—as if appearance, therefore, were the same as essence.[213]

Of course, empiricists (which I take it that Adorno is after here) would not be content with their view being labelled in this way. Be that as it may, Adorno's point is that levelling the essential to facts is in this respect similarly metaphysical, in that what appears is granted an absolute status.

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[211] ND p. 170.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid. p. 112

Drawing from this, I think the purported ability of a theory to account for the facts of the case does not decide the validity of the theory, and I propose that Adorno's hesitance about causal determination is not chiefly an empirical objection. We may also at this context recall Adorno's explicit rejection of empiricism as an epistemological theory (section 1.). After all, to think that it is an empirical matter whether causally deterministic explanations are valid, is quite close to just stating the basic assumption of empiricist epistemology—that it is ultimately pre-theoretical data which determines the suitability of a given theoretical vocabulary.

Thus, I think the mere conclusion (as per Jaeggi's reading) that Adorno rejects the base superstructure model of causal determinism leaves a lot to be discussed. This becomes particularly evident in her contrasting of the necessity of economic forces to the 'kind of interaction and of relationships that are also in principle reversible'. This, I think, lacks a key aspect of the dialectic perceptible in Adorno's thought: even if it is true that human behaviour cannot be explained by a crude base-superstructure model, ongoing reproduction of social life nonetheless exhibits entrenched regularity to such an extent that it is not currently alterable in practise (this is what Adorno thought at the time of writing). Rather, the dialectic points to something else, both philosophically and 'socially diagnostically'. If social domination cannot be explained by a simple causal schema, and late modern social life clearly is compulsive, then this compulsion has to be explained in some other manner. In such a task, Adorno appears to think, causal language cannot be quite dispensed with.

In order to understand what this re-deployment of causality might be, I think we are best advised to start from a more thorough understanding of Adorno's critique of causal determinism. If there is something to be said about causality, beyond causal determinism, then we must be as clear as possible about what exactly Adorno does criticise and on what

grounds. I do so by investigating Adorno's detailed comments on the philosophical tradition's understanding of causality which owes much to Hume and Kant.

4.2. The setting: causality as 'subjective' and 'necessity-like'

I will, first, present briefly key elements of Hume's and Kant's views about causality. I will then move to Adorno's criticisms of these thinkers. Ultimately, this discussion will answer the question posed by the previous section – that is, the question whether Adorno in refuting one notion of causality in fact does so whilst leaning on another.

It may be odd at this point to appeal to Hume in a chapter on causal determinism. After all, Hume can be justifiably read as skeptic who did not give much credence to the idea of causal explanations at least in so far as their predictive power concerned. However, for the development of the story about causal determinism Hume provides an important building block.

A rough sketch of Hume's views is in order. According to Hume, impressions are the most basic blocks of experience. All ideas arise from impressions or are traceable to them. Hume's famous example of the sun and the stone is a report about particular events by a particular individual in some specific set of circumstances: whenever the sun has been observed to appear, the stone in question has been observed to warm up. The causal connection is not necessary in any sense beyond these reports. A differently constituted psychological individual is free to dispense with the mental habit of seeing the world in this way. However, what is important is that Hume's skepticism is compatible with, and perhaps predicated on, a particularly demanding view of causality.[214] Accordingly, Hume thinks that in evoking

[214] See G.E.M. Anscombe, 'Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind (the Collected Philosophical Papers of Gem Anscombe), Vol. 2', (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), pp. 134-35).

causality at all, we are evoking a strictly necessary, law-like connection. As Anscombe puts Hume's view: 'to say that an event was caused was to say that its occurrence was an instance of some exceptionless generalization connecting such an event with such antecedents as it occurred in'.[215] Central to this view is that Hume assumes causality in an explanation must be based on some exceptionless, universal quality. According to Hume, such a quality cannot be available through impressions since they cannot warrant generalisation without exception. If we attempt to trace an impression of cause and effect to any qualities of an object involved as the cause of something else, we will find that 'whichever qualities of the object I pitch on, I will find some object that is not possest of it, and yet falls under the denomination of cause and effect'.[216] Therefore, an impression of a thing's causal power could never be adequate, and an idea of a thing's causal power derived from such impressions equally fails to meet this requirement. If so, the idea of causality cannot be sought in objects, but somewhere else (notably on the side of the subject, such as the habits of the mind). So, following Anscoombe here, the significance of Hume to the rest of the chapter is the connection with causation with *necessitation* and, that it is category which does not belong to the natural world itself, but out *subjective* capacities. As Anscombe explains,

> Kant tried to give back to causality the character of a justified concept which Hume's considerations had taken away from it. Once again the connection between causation and necessity was reinforced.[217]

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[215] ibid.

[216] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Reprinted from the Original Ed. In Three Volumes*, (Clarendon Press, 1965).Book I, Part III, Section II

[217] Anscombe. p. 135.

To be clear, Kant disagrees with Hume on how the issue of mind-relatedness of this necessity is to be understood. But he centrally consolidates the view that in taking about causality we are talking about necessitation.

For Kant, causality in the context of experience concerns relations between events in the world of experience more broadly. It retains the aspect of necessity from Hume, but with the addition that experience of it, according to Kant, require causality to be a pure, a priori concept of the understanding. The well-known argument is roughly that observation alone can deliver only sequences of events—say I introduce a dry log in to a poorly burning fire—but it cannot deliver the experience of causal efficacy itself. In other words, no amount of sensory data alone can give rise to the unity of specific events as containing a causal relationship between throwing log and increased combustion. The mind's synthesising activity unifies event sequences so that we can experience them as causally connected, and this to Kant means that causality has to be a transcendental presupposition. We can thus legitimately talk about the 'concept of cause' but do so as 'the mere form of experience, and into its possibility as a synthetic unification of perceptions in a consciousness in general'.[218] The important upshot is that this involves a normative dimension not available for Hume: Kant's account tells us how, formally speaking, any cognitive being *ought to judge*, how to connect representations when presented with similar sensory data.[219] Thus Kant tells us under which conditions judgements can be objectively valid: consciousness as it is *qua* consciousness, not merely to a particular consciousness.

[218] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, with Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004). §29

[219] Henry E Allison, *Custom and Reason in Hume: A Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise*, (Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 207-08.

Before moving to Adorno, I shall highlight the central issues. First, by both Hume and Kant causation is understood as a principle of human experience and not something that inheres in the properties of the objects as they themselves are. To Kant, objects in themselves are formless, and they receive form from us as subjects. Similarly, in this respect, to Hume objects are unrelated particulars from which, purportedly, we assign causal laws as convenient and contingent mental patters. Second, both thinkers identify causation with strict necessitation. This is so despite the obvious difference between Hume and Kant in that Kant distinguishes empirical from transcendental concepts of cause. These two issues, causality as a subjective principle of experience, and causality as necessitation orient my discussion of Adorno's views.

4.3. Adorno's critique of causality as subjective principle

I will now move to discussing Adorno's criticisms of the views that have emerged, starting from the first shared aspect. In this section, I discuss the subjective or strictly epistemological character of causality. Following the textual material means that Adorno's views on Kant will be at the centre.

To gloss over the starting point again, Kant thinks that causality is something that our minds bring into experiences, which means that the force of the causal necessity is a construct of subjectivity. I take Adorno's central claim to be that that causality thus conceived makes the genuine identification of causal patterns impossible, and thus such accounts of causal explanations are in Adorno's view defective. Let us consider the following condensed passage:

> Causality approximates the principle of reason as such, of thinking in line with rules. Judgments about causal connections turn into semi-tautologies: reason employs them

> to determine what it effects anyway, as the faculty of laws. That it prescribes nature's laws—or law, rather—denotes no more than a subsumption under rational unity. [220]

Here Adorno is clearly after Kant's notion of causality. Adorno thinks Kant conflates causality as such with the demand for unity which is characteristic, his assertion goes, of reason's operations. Adorno has not given us an argument for this claim, but the claim rather is merely the conclusion of an argument readers have to reconstruct. The thought seems to be that reason's own operations of synthesising intuitions with categories always involves the formal category of causality, so that, in fact, causality must be prior to all mental operations. For Kant and Kantians that does not mean that it is impossible to genuinely stipulate empirical laws.

Adorno claims that 'causality rigorously insulated against the interior of objects is no more than its own shell'.[221] In the following, I present an argument which, I propose, makes sense of this declaration, which on its own is akin to a conclusion without the premises it relies on. To begin, one can agree with Kant's point against strictly empiricist epistemology. Since sense data does not hit our mental faculties with instructions as to how interpret it, our subjective faculties are necessary in interpreting the world. If we start from sense data, there could be no knowledge were it not for an active involvement of the subject, presupposing some *a priori* faculties. However, the important premise is this: One can endorse Kant's insight in showing that cause and effect are necessarily our categories of thought (that is, they belong to human beings, without which beings like us could not have the kind of experiences we have), but without thereby excluding the possibility that they can also be properties of objects. In saying they can be the object's properties (too), I am thereby

[220] ND p. 247.
[221] Ibid.

thinking beyond what Kant can commit to, since objects as Kant's 'things in themselves' cannot be said to have properties. To put it another way: the indisputability of subjective activity in constructing experiences does not warrant the thought that experience confronts an absolute barrier, unreachable interiority of objects—objects understood as Kant's 'things in themselves'.

Following this thought, it is possible to acknowledge that Kant has made progress from Hume's empiricism, but without endorsing his distinction between our knowledge and the thing 'in itself'. As such, this in only a logical possibility. The argument as to *why* Adorno think we should not follow Kant has to be now clarified. I return to Adorno critical conclusion: 'the expansion of causality into a concept of pure reason negates causality. Kant's causality is one without a *causa.* As he cures it of naturalistic prejudice it dissolves in his hands'. [222] What Kant has achieved, thinks Adorno, is that Hume's psychologistic account of causality as a contingent mental habit does not provide an adequate account of consciousness as such, which arguably is presupposed by any being with any whatsoever mental habits: 'consciousness cannot escape from causality'.[223] The argument as to why Kant nonetheless fails in Adorno's eyes returns us to the denial of inner constitution of objects discussed above.

For clarification, I am not prosing that one requires the further commitment to knowing what exactly these inner properties are like (I will discuss this at the end of the chapter). For now, Adorno relies on immanent argument of the following sort: If there cannot be any inner necessity, inner form, which provides the point of contact for our the categories of cause and effect which are 'ours' in consciousness, it is mysterious how we could have knowledge of the

[222] ND p. 248.
[223] Ibid.

world (I argue exegetically the point that this is Adorno's view—not that it fares well against Kantian scholarship). For instance, if scientific theories reflect broader reality, then this reality has to be described by theory. When the theory partly on the back of those descriptions makes hypotheses about natural laws, the hypotheses must track some regularity that is in the world. Adorno's objection preserves a common sense intuition: If it were not the case that our hypotheses track inherent forms, bridges would collapse more often than they do, and the confidence that scientific experiments work outside laboratory conditions would lack justification. The problem, Adorno thinks, is that Kant can only offer regularity as a subjective form mysteriously connected to the world conceived in itself not as containing kinds or necessities, but as radically separate from us. The entailment of this argument then amounts to something like Adorno's assertion that Kant's causality is merely its 'own shell'. In other words, this epistemology cannot explain why we have knowledge of any causes and effects.

In this sense, Adorno thinks that the transcendental causation is not merely empty, as it were, waiting around for content, as Kant thought, but incoherent as a thought. Some commentators have argued that Adorno conflates Kant's empirical and transcendental necessity.[224] In my view, it is not clear that this is the case. It strikes me as fundamentally as dispute about the 'thing in itself' character of the object in Kant, which serves as the backdrop for the distinction.[225]

To Adorno, Kant's thinking contains both 'identical' and 'non-identical' aspects, employing here the Adorno terminology introduced in chapter two. But, he thinks, Kant's thinking

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[224] Robert B. Pippin, *The Persistence of Subjectivity: On the Kantian Aftermath*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 113.

[225] This is why I think that Jütten's defence of Kant does not quite get the issue in view. Timo Jütten, 'Adorno on Kant, Freedom and Determinism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 20 (2012), 19.

contains these elements in flawed manner. The synthetic a priori application of concepts, such as causality, forges identity between thought and the world, whereas the noumenal reservation in Kant, that we cannot in principle know what essences of things are, enforces non-identity. By positing a gap between appearances (which are *our* world) and things as such, Kant cannot, arguably, get in view a sense in which subjects are agents in the world, how they participate in relationships between concept and objects (as Adorno understood them, not as Kant's 'objects of experience'). Surely enough, the extent to which this is a criticism of Kant depends partly on how one understands the fundamental contours and aims of Kant's project.

I will sum up main lines of the discussion in this section. Kant attempts by means of transcendental philosophy to ground the objectiveness of causality on the requirements of all thinking of possible objects of experience. However, Adorno thinks that Kant's further commitment to a radically separate world devoid of form, makes it impossible to genuinely identify causal relations. What Adorno calls 'the coercive epistemological character of causality' logically cuts out the thing itself own qualities from causation.[226] That being the case, Adorno thinks that both Hume and Kant fail to make sense of our ordinary intuition that 'a state of things might have something essential and , something specific to do with the succeeding state of things'.[227] This brings out well the issue of 'objective', that is, not merely epistemologically constructed, link between causes and effects in explanations. Adorno then proposes that 'Kant's effort to raise causality as a subjective necessity of thought to the rank of a constitutive condition of objectivity was no more valid than its empiricist denial'.[228]

[226] ND, p. 249.
[227] Ibid. p. 248.
[228] Ibid. p. 268.

In that sense, Adorno thinks Kant's grounding of objective validity of cause epistemologically still retains the subjectivism already present in Hume's empiricism.

This concludes the discussion on the first aspect of Adorno's critique. The second aspect follows from this. As a clue, consider again Adorno's assertion that epistemological causality is 'coercive'. I will now discuss this coerciveness, which Adorno bases on Kant specifically, on 'the principle of reason's own identity'.[229]

4.4. 'Necessitarian' causality as 'projection'

The previous section attempted to elucidate and reconstruct an argumentative structure which makes Adorno's claim about epistemologically constructed notion of causality lacking explanatory power more accessible. This section elaborates on the second aspect identified as the common ground between Hume and Kant: the assumption that when x state of affairs is 'caused', we appeal to the idea that in suitable conditions, x follows from antecedents with strict regularity, with necessity.

Adorno also has external reasons to doubt Kant, or perhaps more accurately, modern Kantians on causality. If one has reasons to doubt that even the 'nature' that the hard-sciences investigate actually follows a causally deterministic order, then we can be suspicious of the whole Kant-Hume enterprise as simply not motivated. For better or worse, this is what Adorno thinks. He notes that a philosophical picture of nature that follows Newtonian physics is outdated: 'With theoretical stringency, the evolution of physics since Einstein has burst the visual prison as well as that of the subjective apriority of space, time and causality'.[230] This suggest that Adorno believes physics has made progress in that it

[229] Ibid. p. 247.
[230] Ibid. p. 188.

currently has a picture which no longer supports the a priori view of causality, for instance. Thus, he takes it as a travesty that postulates of Newtonian physics dominate the philosophical imagination regarding causality, although such a view no longer has support from 20th century developments in physics, such as quantum-theory. This, Adorno thinks, leaves philosophy 'fatally split off from the natural sciences'.[231]

However, this only gets us so far. What calls for explanation is the appeal of this picture and perhaps especially so since it appears to lack basis in the development of the hard-sciences. Adorno thinks of it in terms of a 'projection' (for present purposes, let us call projection a 'misplacement'. I will focus later on it in chapter five).The explanation of causality as reason's self-image is tied to a more general issue in Adorno's thinking, which is that some philosophical tensions are more than that, they are 'socially necessary', that they express some significant *interest* or *need*. A priori compulsion, Adorno thinks, hides historical compulsion.

4.5. Causality's natural origin and the paradox of Kantian freedom: metacritique

In rather dramatic tones, Adorno alludes to the whole western history till the present moment as having been, in some sense, compulsive. This section discusses this claim in detail, and deals with some of the methodological implications of such a view. Recall here the notion of 'second nature', where nature in part stands for the compulsive aspects of history. In this context Adorno takes the explanation to be that human beings, in their efforts to dominate nature, have inflated the importance of one particular aspect of their own

[231] ND, p. 187, also ND 265-69, and further MCP p. 75.

historically emerged constitution, instrumental reason, and *misplaced* (projected, that is) an image of what is most amenable to instrumental reason, that is, law-like event sequences, onto the whole of nature: 'Causality, however, is nothing but man's natural origin, which he continues as control of nature'.[232]

A few words on the methodological status of such a critique. In epistemic terms, metacritical thinking, according to Adorno, can be identified as a response and alternative to transcendental thinking.[233] The latter articulates the necessary formal conditions for experience, and the former attempts to articulate the kinds of experiences (in social, historical, and psychological dimensions) that make formal conditions appear plausible (and which transcendental thinking takes to be misleadingly universal). Metacritique is therefore intended to be an articulation of the socio-historical preconditions of a philosophical incoherencies and tensions. A meta-critical reading, from Adorno's vantage point, is both unified but separate from specifically 'philosophical' critique. According to Adorno, Kant is philosophically 'wrong' about causality due to its incoherence *as an account of causality*. This I discussed in the previous section. But, to Adorno, Kant's view is wrong or 'false' in a particular kind of way which is crucial to a second step: his mistaken philosophical position yields a metacritical truth about the logics of social domination. Adorno locates this contradiction socially and psychologically: '[T]he paradoxical character of Kant's doctrine of freedom strictly corresponds to its location in empirical reality. Social stress on freedom as existent coalesces with undiminished repression, and psychologically, with coercive traits.'[234]

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[232] ND p. 269.
[233] Although Adorno certainly extends it to Hegel's idealism as well.
[234] ND p. 232.

So although Adorno's concern is not philosophical error in the standard sense (such as an fallacious inference), but rather the falsity that the philosophy socio-historically expresses, the quality of the 'error' has to be of the suitable sort. If Kant would, for instance, hold Berkeley's position, I take Adorno could argue, he would still be *philosophically* incoherent about the relation between objects and subjects (assuming that Adorno thinks empirical idealism is incoherent). But this error would not yield the particularly *metacritically* interesting aspects about repression that Adorno thinks are available through the tensions of Kant's thought—in the shape of the allegedly transcendentally free subject and real social compulsion. We could say that empirical idealism does not capture the specifically characteristic aspect of social freedom confronted by determinism present in capitalist society which transcendental idealism, albeit that only inadvertently does. If the socio-historical world would really be a very different kind of place, then perhaps Berkeley's idealism would amount the best material for a metacritical reflection. To sum up, there is a relationship between the ideas of philosophical truth in the traditional sense and of meta-critical truth content, although this is an issue Adorno is not very clear about. Nonetheless, there is evidence that at least he intended metacritique not to be taken as a historical narrative which could be provided or assessed independently of the philosophical matters[235]; it is not a 'sociology of knowledge'.[236]

I now turn to the details of Adorno's metacritique of Kant. The latter's notion of causality expresses, one the one hand, a nature in the sense of *origin*, but also, on the other hand, the

[235] I think here Jütten draws the boundary too sharply in thinking that what he calls the 'philosophical critique' can be assessed independently of the meta-critical part. After all, if there is no contradiction in the philosophy, then there cannot be *that* shape of contradiction in the social either. Perhaps 'a metacritique' could still have some sociological value, but it would not be Adorno's understanding of metacritique. Thus, it seems to me that this methodological ambition of Adorno's has to be first interpreted and scrutinised. See, Jütten. 'Adorno on Kant, freedom and determinism'.
[236] ND p. 232.

continuation of a self-imposed natural *condition* on the part of human beings, which involves the controlling of nature. In this sense, causality expresses something more and something other than nature's order. As we have seen, causality understood as a Kantian epistemological category cannot express what nature is actually like, but merely stands for the necessary requirements for experiences for beings like us. From Adorno's critique of Kant, we can then reformulate the key philosophical matter: it is the unwarranted assumption that law-like order, reason's causal necessity, is all there is to order as such—Adorno takes this to be the specific way in which Kant's conception of *reason constructs order*. Bernstein makes a similar observation: 'when so conceived it becomes possible to perceive that causal necessity owes more to reason's self-understanding than to natural fact.' [237]

Adorno further thinks that reason's order as a complete whole is projected on natural causality: 'The end of the coercive epistemological character of causality would also end the claim to totality that will be made for causality as long as it coincides with the subjective principle'.[238] Adorno says, 'in reflecting upon causality, reason—which finds causality in nature wherever it controls nature—also grows aware of its own natural origin as the spellbinding principle'.[239]

In another example, he takes Kant's notion of freedom, agency that is allegedly unconditionally free, a special kind of causality, to contain a contradiction in that it is indistinguishable from coercion. Roughly, Kant's metaphysical postulate of free will corresponds to a psychologically repressive trait:

[237] Bernstein. p. 255 n20.
[238] ND p. 249.
[239] Ibid.

> [T]he paradoxical character of Kant's doctrine of freedom strictly corresponds to its location in empirical reality. Social stress on freedom as existent coalesces with undiminished repression, and psychologically, with coercive traits.[240]

The paradox, according to Adorno, is Kant's idea of the law-like character of freedom, which it has have in order to have a place in the strictly determined empirical world. Adorno does not explain this in much detail, and I try to present the view as I understand it. Here two ways of thinking about freedom are contrasted, a 'contextual' and 'absolute'. In the 'contextual way' (which roughly is Adorno's) any question of freedom only makes sense in relation to specific circumstances, involving experiences of limitations in one's capacities, lack of knowledge and so on. The absolute notion of freedom (roughly, Kant's) amounts to thinking that over and above all empirical considerations, we must still presuppose that the will is unconditionally free. Adorno invites us to consider that such a freedom, despite its transcendental status for Kant, has a place in empirical reality, where subjects can only accomplish it as certain kind of psychological achievement. It is that 'achievement', which he thinks is what Freud understood as repression. On these, lines, as I understand it, Kant's freedom involves a compulsive element– 'extrapolated from real compulsion'.[241] What we are actually threatened by is *not* external to thinking of causality as an event sequence, but something that functions and is conceptualisable (and perhaps conceptualisable only) through this 'mistake'.

The upshot is that the relationship between freedom and necessitation becomes misconceived. I take Adorno to be suggesting that properly speaking human beings are not the sort of *sui generis* causal instigators and our free will is not empty of content—free of

[240] Ibid. p. 232
[241] Ibid. p. 254

desires, needs and interests. But neither are we threatened by passions, emotions and drives thought of as compulsively the causal chains of natural order.

4.6. Teleological causality preliminarily considered

In this section, I examine some diagnostic assertions Adorno makes about social structures and suggest that he employs terms that have some sort of causal status. Consider, for instance, one of the clearest expression of the theoretical issue: 'If causality as a subjective principle of thought has a touch of the absurd, and yet there can be no cognition quite without it, the thing to do is to look in it for a moment that is not cogitative.'[242]

What is this 'non-cogitative' moment? This discussion is pertinent for topic of this chapter because my claim that Adorno consistently rejects causal determination requires showing that within the textual regions where he does appeal to causal terms, his view thus not in the final analysis smuggle in the determinist picture I have argued he denies.

In this section, I make the preliminary for case view that teleological causality can account for the relevant passages, and that it is not excluded by these specific remarks. I make the positive case for this reading in the following two chapters. Elaboration of what teleological causality means in detail discuss in chapter five where I talk about human purposiveness in psychological terms with Freud and Hans Loewald. I begin by surveying the textual evidence to Adorno's positive use of causal terms. At this juncture, it is important to keep in mind that the causal determinism employed by, say, the base-superstructure model of social relations.

[242] Ibid. p. 269

> The economically determined direction of the whole society, which has always governed the mental and physical constitution of human beings, is *causing* the organs which enabled individuals to manage their lives autonomously to atrophy.[243]

Here Adorno unmistakably appeals to an economic cause, 'determined direction', and explains the decline of capacities within individual members in reference to such determination. If we take the arguments discussed in this chapter seriously, then this systemic type of cause does not follow the model of sequences and their necessary and sufficient conditions. In the passage below, Adorno is unusually clear, and points out that causality understood as laws and antecedent conditions are inadequate to understanding social dynamics.

> For if we regard something as necessary we doubtless also have causality in mind, but when we reflect on it we really always think of something more. Thus when we say that crises are a necessary part of the capitalist system, we do not really mean to say that a specific causal sequence at particular points necessarily leads to the symptoms of crisis.[244]

Here Adorno appeals to causality, and explicitly denies that we should think about it as an event sequence model. The 'necessary' is not a question of law-likeness. But there is some necessity. Therefore, it has to be predicated on *some other type of causality*. The passage continues.

[243] DE p. 169
[244] CPRL p. 139

> What we mean is that the system as such, with its mutually conditioned growth of wealth and poverty, necessarily contains the idea of recurrent crises in its actual concept.[245]

What does it mean to say that necessity is contained in its 'actual concept'? Here we are reminded of an earlier passage where Adorno called for thinking causality anew with attention to a 'definition of things themselves'. I propose that this alternative causal thinking can be understood in light of Adorno's essentialism which I have defended in chapter two.

For instance, for Marx the essence of the 'value-form' is an end directed tendency of social exchange—money is the preliminary form of capital.[246] In that sense, 'the system' has an essence, which means that if conditions are favourable, in develops in one direction rather than another. This is what I take Adorno to mean when he says that something about such a system is 'contained' in its 'actual concept'. To understand how social reality is 'a concept', is to take it in Hegel's sense. The potential for category of capital is embedded in its preliminary forms, which, in suitable circumstances develop into this mature form. (I will return to this in more detail in chapter six.)

We also find refences to a psychological disposition as an element in an explanation, which lean of some notion of causation. Consider this passage about genocidal persecution.

> One must come to know the mechanisms that render people capable of such deeds, must reveal these mechanisms to them, and strive, by awakening general awareness of those mechanisms, to prevent people from becoming so again.[247]

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[245] Ibid.
[246] Meikle, p. 10.
[247] CM p. 193.

The psychological propensity to commit certain types of violence has a function of cause in the explanation of genocidal violence. Accordingly, the 'mechanism' is a cause for capabilities—a sort of pathological capacities. Should we attend to those mechanisms, Adorno argues, we have a chance of preventing the capacities from forming, and thus also a chance of preventing the violence associated with these capacities.

As I suggested in chapter two with respect to Adorno's essentialism and Michael Thompson, I think we can understand quite a few aspects of his thinking better with some thoughts we also find in 20th century analytical philosophy of an Aristotelian persuasion. One central tenant of such essentialism is that human beings are end-setting animals, with various degrees of consciousness or awareness of those ends. In this chapter I have suggested that we make the best sense of Adorno's social critique in so far as it contains explanations if we take the attendant notion of causality to be a teleological one. An explanation can be teleologically causal in form, but not to make a reference to a specific end or specific purpose. We ought to instead distinguish between functional explanations where the *explanandum* is thought to exhibit a non-empirical property of 'purposiveness', from explanations which posit an *external* function, such as having '*a* purpose'.[248] This distinction has three advantages. It helps to understand Adorno's appeal to terms such as 'mechanism' and 'direction' without the danger of falling back to causal determinism. Second, it does not fall prey to postulating an external metaphysical purpose or end to living life. And finally, and very tentatively, it allows one to avoid a strict distinction between bodies and minds, which will become crucial for my discussion of the concept of drive in the next chapter.

[248] Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, (Clarendon Press, 2003). Chapter 3.

Among Aristotelians, Alistair Macintyre thinks that the early modern philosophical tradition that has done something peculiar to our understanding of causality, in that in everything to do with reasons, purposes and intentions must be left out.[249] From the way these thoughts are picked up by Kant, follows that the philosophical tradition has mostly held that *reasons* for action, purposes, intentions and ends, are to be sharply distinguished from *causes* of action. The former is the business of the rational minds, the latter is mechanistic process. In Frankfurt School Critical Theory after the linguistic turn, where the notion of 'language' replaces consciousness as the focus, the above distinction is preserved.[250] Centrally, (for reasons that I cannot satisfactorily outline here) Aristotelians typically hold that this distinction between reasons and causes cannot accommodate the basic thought that human beings exist as continuum with rest of nature, including their own biological make-up. What Aristotelians propose is that human nature is not so radically separate from rest of nature. [251]

4.7. Adornian Realism? An Excursus

Generally, it has been noted by commentators that Adorno's philosophy, implicitly and explicitly has a realist bent. Consider Freyenhagen's articulation of Adorno's Aristotelianism: 'the objective reasons which we have qua members of the human life form are part of the fabric of the world in a certain sense.'[252] For these reasons, he claims, 'Adorno is an

[249] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (A&C Black, 2013), pp. 97-98.
[250] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Beacon Press, 1975), p. 10.
[251] In saying 'not so' separate, I am not suggesting that there is no difference but just that it lies elsewhere than the Kant inspired tradition has assumed. Further, of course one does not have to be an Aristotelian to think so. Recent account of these broader issues can be found in Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, (Oxford Up, 2012), p. 201.
[252] Freyenhagen, p. 248.

objectivist, a realist, when it comes to normativity and ethics.'[253] O'Connor in turn underscores Adorno's epistemology as object-oriented '[t]he priority of the object means that the possibilities of what the subject can experience are restricted by the object'.[254] Hulatt emphasises what he takes to be the commanding somatic, bodily element in Adorno's account of knowledge.[255] This account of knowledge perhaps supposes that there are objective constituents of knowledge which all human beings share—at least insofar as their bodies are roughly similar.

Some avowedly realist thinkers have identified in Adorno realist aspects, and call for a substantive realist metaphysics. For instance, Alan Norrie suggests that 'Adorno's strong realist dimension is not pushed far enough, and that in ultimately decisive ways, he reverts to an irrealist standpoint'.[256] Somewhat similarly, Ruth Groff claims that in terms of causality 'Adorno's own ability to see his own line of argument through is limited by his own residual attachment, via Kant, to Humeanism.'[257] And more recently, Craig Reeves has argued that Adorno's ethical naturalism implicitly relies on an Aristotelian powers ontology for its intelligibility and normativity.[258]

I take that the work I have been doing in this chapter touches on these various issues, and thus these strands call for some comment. The term 'realism' is a slippery target. In these comments about Adorno we can identify the following three ways of thinking about realism.

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[253] Ibid. p. 253.
[254] Brian O'connor, 'Adorno's Negative Dialectic. Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality', (2004), 74.
[255] Owen Hulatt, "Sub-Abstract Bodies: The Epistemic and Ethical Role of the Body-Mind Relationship in Adorno's Philosophy," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 23, no. 4 (2015).
[256] Alan Norrie, 'Bhaskar, Adorno and the Dialectics of Modern Freedom', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 3 (2004), 29.
[257] Ruth Groff, *Ontology Revisited: Metaphysics in Social and Political Philosophy*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 63.
[258] Reeves.

Normative commitment: reasons for action are in the world. That is, they are not human constructs. For instance, moral reasons are *not* simply built out of the attitudes, actions, responses, or wold-views of persons.

Epistemological commitment: our knowledge is constrained by what its objects are like, and they are in some specific way independently of the subjective conditions under which that knowledge is possible.

Metaphysical commitment: the world contains objects, values and powers and they exist independently of there being any knowledge or knowers.

These are deliberately rough sketches as the devil is in the detail. As I have presented the issue so far, it is not clear whether or not these individual branches of realism (Adorno's, or in general) require commitment to each of the three dimensions, and in what shape. Of the Adorno commentators, Freyenhagen, O'Connor and Hulatt embrace the normative and epistemological commitments, but not the metaphysical one. Norrie, Groff, and Reeves, in contrast, think that the three-course menu of realisms should be served.

In what follows, I argue that attributing the metaphysical commitment to Adorno in the shape suggested by the latter group of commentators does not convince. I explore this by first introducing the metaphysical realist thesis, and then explore what I call the 'Nietzschean objection' to it. Finally, I comment that Adorno does not reject the metaphysical commitment for the same reasons as one would do, if following the Nietzschean objection.

4.7.1. The metaphysical commitment and the Nietzschean objection

For an articulation of the metaphysical commitment, I am here mainly relying on the work of Rom Harre and E.H. Madden. The authors make an appeal to a distinction between constant conjunctions, i.e, law-like patterns, and the regularities in nature they are based on. On this view, what we observe are patterns of events, Hume's 'constant conjunctions', but these events in themselves are not the same as nature's form on the level of which *powers* are located. Rather, they are an appearance of an underlying structure.

> Events can only be identified as having a role in a causal relation, in fact, if they can be shown either to stimulate a suitable generative mechanism to action, or to be a clearance away of impediments to the activity of a powerful particular already in state of readiness to act.[259]

Accordingly, 'a generative mechanism' and 'powerful particulars' are necessary for the idea of law to make sense. Constant conjunctions of events themselves are neither sufficient (in some sense echoing Adorno's point) nor necessary for causal powers. In this sense, the nature of the thing in question grounds the 'must' of a nomological statement: 'they must behave in the specified way in the given circumstances, or not to be the things that they are'.[260] On these lines, the conversation about causes is a conversation about causal powers understood as a generative mechanism, tied to the nature of the thing in question. There is a link here to a broadly speaking Aristotelian picture, where these causal powers inhere in various species kinds, or in 'powerful particulars', as in the above. According to Harre and Madden, the idea

[259] R Harré and E Madden, 'Causal Powers: A Theory of Natural Necessity', (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), (p. 5). Also, Ted Benton, 'Philosophical Foundations of the Three Sociologies', (1979), 91.

of a generative mechanism denotes capacities, and these cannot be explained at an even more basic level, but are equally fundamental with notions such as power, ability and nature.[261]

Some argue that a metaphysical realism is hard to sustain without revoking a sceptical rebuttal with respect to truth. The objection is essentially that if there, indeed, is a reality independently of any knowers, then some things about that reality must be true independently of what anyone thinks about them. However, one might argue, if such truths exist, how could they ever be known, as the fundamental arbiter of any claim escapes all knowers? If one cannot answer the epistemological question, then it is not clear from which vantage point the metaphysical realist gets to articulate any truths about reality, including the metaphysical thesis itself.[262]

This objection has philosophical roots in Nietzsche's thinking, so I call it the 'Nietzschean objection'.[263] He puzzles over the assumption that 'the definite should be worth more than the indefinite' and proposes that perhaps the notion of a definitive truth should ultimately be understood as having 'regulative importance for *us*' and in that sense 'necessary for the preservation of just such beings as we are'.[264] Something on the lines of this view, which one might also title with the term 'pragmatism', has been notably held by Hillary Putnam. His basic stance is that if any realism is viable, it has to acknowledge that truth is a function of our various interests, priorities and enquiry specific forms on knowledge. To sum up, this objection takes metaphysical realism to be an implausible doctrine of truth.

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[261] Harré and Madden, p. 11.
[262] For a discussion of this objection and Adorno, see Andrew Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*, (Polity, 2013), p. 83.
[263] This is not a comment about Nietzsche as such, and John Dewey could also be cited as a root.
[264] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (New York: Random House, 1966). Aphorism 3.

The realist could at this point protest that their argument cannot be refuted by subjecting it to the demand of full epistemic certainty about truth. There is no general agreement for the view that realism is principally a theory of truth. After all—realists may add—logically speaking, ontological realism does not imply epistemic certainty. The point is precisely to shift the focus from exclusively epistemological matters. On these lines, for any truth claim to exist at all, there must be beings who claim something, but the features of reality (objects, relations, powers) that these claims purport to track exist independently of knowers.

Transcendentally speaking, the realist may add, that reality must be, independently of our specific knowledge about it, categorically in some way and not another, so that it is possible to know anything about it at all. Under some assumptions, we could not coherently speak of objects of knowledge at all. What we do know about it, is always subject to refutation, but to even enter rationally to such a terrain, we must at the very least exclude unsuitable ontological assumptions. In other words, the metaphysical realist will argue transcendentally, that the world must be in some way rather than another, so that it is possible to know anything about it at all.[265] Hence, there is, in my view, an aspect of the metaphysically realist stance which is not moved by the Nietzschean objection.

4.7.2. Adorno and 'critical realism'

This much can be said in favour of the metaphysical realist, and it seems to me that Adorno's claims about Kantian causality at least make room for some type of realism. As I mentioned in the beginning, 'the critical realist' interpretation suggests that Adorno is a realist in

[265] It is interesting in this context that Thomas Kuhn, often cited as the representative of the conventionalist paradigm conception of scientific progress entertains briefly this realist question. Thomas S Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (University of Chicago press, 2012), p. 172.

normative, epistemological *and* metaphysical senses. I begin by building some backdrop to this way of thinking.

The causal realist view I started with relating to the work Harre and Madden at least schematically draw links between biological causality and psychological, that it to say, human agent type of causality. (The motivation for making this point is that the critical realist tradition understands itself to be an extension of Harre&Madden post-Humean notion of causal powers to the human domain).

> When we think of causality and action we look to such images as a springtime plant forcing its way upwards towards the light, ... of a flash of radiation as a positron and an electron meet, ... of the mobility and imaginative control of his own actions exercised by a human being, of the potent configuration of a magnetic field. [266]

While eloquently phrased, it is hard to state what to make of the similarity between plants, electrons and, someone witnessing my boarding a bus in order to go to the university. From taking a daffodil to be the kind of thing it is by it having the propensity to turn towards the light, it is quite a leap say much about human beings. In other words, it is not clear at all whether or not Harre&Madden style realist theory of powers can be extended from the domain of chemistry and biology to human psychology and social theory. Their basic argument is that the world is full of entities with particular essences which are knowable, and these essences shape their behaviour.[267] This is broad enough to be compatible with a plausible account, for instance, of human bearers of need. However, less so is their view that in general essences of organisms are capturable by their genotypes.[268] To be charitable, the

[266] Harré and Madden, p. 7.
[267] ibid. p. 18.
[268] Ibid.

authors do not say much about human beings. But if this general view is to be extended to human beings, it is either too minimal to say anything of explanatory value, or wildly implausible.[269]

I now move discussing the proposal that Adorno's stance could be supplemented with a 'critical realist' ontology (albeit Harre&Madden through the works of Roy Bhaskar). In the context of Adorno commentaries, Craig Reeves has interpreted Adorno's criticism of Kant's notion of causality in this direction, proposing that 'given need to present a coherent picture of natural order', it is the 'critical realist' ontology which fits the bill.[270] As Reeves states, his is a rational reconstruction to meet such a need—a demand which Adorno necessarily did not feel pressing. Nonetheless, we are told, the critical realist stance is intended to capture 'Adorno's basic philosophical intuitions'.[271]

In what follows, I want to first cast doubt whether there is such a *demand* for a positive picture of nature's order for a reconstructed Adornian position. I do this by constructing a debate between Reeves and Freyenhagen. Following that, I challenge Reeves' claim that Bhaskar's theory is indeed the correct direction for a rational reconstruction of Adorno.

Where the motivation to introduce these considerations seems to emerge is the issue of social compulsion and the image of natural determinism. For instance, Freyenhagen has developed Adorno's view of Kantian freedom into a thesis about a 'misattribution' of freedom-excluding causality to the character of nature as such.[272]

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[269] Richard C Lewontin, Leon J Kamin, and Steven PR Rose, 'Not in Our Genes Biology, Ideology, and Human Nature', (1984). Chapter 1.
[270] Craig Reeves, 'Causality and Critical Theory', *Journal of Critical Realism*, 8 (2009), 318.
[271] ibid.
[272] Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Adorno's Negativistic Ethics', (University of Sheffield, 2005), p. 84.

> [N]ature's determination of us need not be seen as necessitation in any strong sense (i.e. as deterministic). For all we know, nature in itself need not be deterministically structured, but we mistake its unconscious teleological structure as causally deterministic.[273]

Freyenhagen thinks that what nature must amount to is some order in which freedom is possible, but that this in itself does not imply a metaphysical commitment about the order of nature (although, suggestively the contrast is made to a teleological structure) —only the negative claim that nature does not have to be causally ordered. Reeves has criticised Freyenhagen's idea of misattribution for withholding a positive account nature's order: 'whether this *is* a *mis*attribution depends on whether or not nature is really deterministic or not'.[274] This objection does not quite capture the issue. It is true that when I have misattributed a statement to someone, what we take that to mean in ordinary speech is that this person has not made *that* statement, *and* we normally also imply that someone else has. In that sense, the misattribution claim depends on knowledge of what the persons involved have actually said, what actually is the case. This is the way, I take it, that Reeves understands the term here.

However, as I understand it, Freyenhagen's point is that the determinist has not justified their belief in the deterministic nature, that is, they are not warranted to make that claim. Misattribution is an *unjustified* and possibly true or false belief. Furthermore, if we also have reasons for thinking that determinism has social origins, that is, in the historically compulsive character of society and in certain philosophical temperaments, then we can claim that *such a compulsion* has been misattributed to nature quite irrespective of what the

[273] Ibid p. 87.
[274] Reeves. p. 222.

character of natural order itself in the final analysis turns out to be (that is, whether it has some kind of determinism or not.) On this reading, the objection does not land.

Perhaps there is another way to keep an aspect of Reeves' objection in play. In light of my three-part division of realism, this move concerns the dependency of normative realism on the metaphysical one. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the coerciveness of Kant's entirely epistemic notion of causality, I take Adorno claim, can be understood as one particular philosophical expression of instrumental reason: viewed through this lens, inert objects have no intrinsic role in causing anything and are merely a vehicle for causal powers emerging from without.[275] The mere object, 'Hume's abolition of the thing', is the flipside of the primacy of the subject that takes the world to be fundamentally malleable to it.[276] Adorno's claim was that causality construed exclusively on the model of epistemic order is characterised by *coercion* [*Zwang*].

Arguably, were Adorno metaphysically agnostic about the question as to whether there are objects that have dispositional properties that, according to him, get lost in the application of a subjective principle of causality (for instance, in Kant's subject's synthesising operations), it is not clear how Adorno could claim the notion of the subjective causality is *coercive*, that it is *violating* objects. In this reconstructed sense, I think Reeves' objection has a certain punch. Applying this point to the human life form in particular, it seems to me that there is a metaphysical 'moment' in the intelligibility of violations of the human form. What I mean is that under certain metaphysical assumptions the idea of harm for living things would not be meaningful at all. Take for instance, psychological manipulation in the human case: such a 'harm', understood on the chemical imbalance model of the psyche, is really just a

[275] I am grateful to Craig Reeves for many conversations about Kant and Hume on this point.
[276] ND p. 187.

subjective value attached to a in itself meaningless 'process'. Human beings, we can instead propose, are objectively brittle, but this objectivity involves the irreducibility of subjective experience, and this aspect is not intelligible under some metaphysical schemas. If someone suffering from heart-ache, it makes little sense to think that their 'brittleness' is categorical of property that human beings share with trees and ice-frosting on cakes. So in that sense, when we are talking about our life-form, we are not metaphysically neutral about which background considerations are apt: some are clearly not. The brittleness has to be specific to human beings, and with some caveats perhaps to other animals.[277] Human brittleness, in some broad sense, is tied to the specific natural historical location of human beings.

However, it is less clear at what point the metaphysics nature's order in general should enter as a *positive* theory when one is concerned with explaining and criticising such violations as Adorno is. I propose a middle way between Freyenhagen and Reeves. While I remain unconvinced about a demand for a positive theory of natural order to support Adorno, I do think a case can be made for a robustly negative one. In that sense, I see false and true metaphysical assumptions asymmetrically—similarly to how Freyenhagen sees ethical normativity. Some metaphysical assumptions about human beings are clearly false, but that in itself does not require knowledge of their true or final character.

I leave that question here and move to my second objection which concerns the plausibility of the critical realist stance with respect to Adorno's philosophy. In other words, *even if* the requirement to qualify the positive metaphysical stakes of Adorno's project can be strengthened (which may turn out to be the case) at any rate—contra the critical realists—

[277] Arguably, the metaphysical treatment of animals as mere matter, and not as *res cogitans*, has quite a lot to answer for when it comes to the actual treatment of other forms of life as mere means for human purposes.

the notion of essence derivable from the works of Roy Bhaskar appears to be of the wrong sort. According to Bhaskar, the underlying mechanisms of nature can only be known 'transcendentally', and they remain 'categorically independent of men'.[278] Problematically, if essences and powers are *categorically* independent of human beings, then some aspects of them must in principle remain outside the domain of possible experience. This is quite evident from a passage also Reeves cites in support of his interpretation: causal laws, to Bhaskar, 'exist independently of *all* human activity'.[279] If this is the case, then any room for human agency towards such laws and their corresponding essences is mysterious. At best, the image of our relationship to nature we are left has the shape of a quasi-Kantian dualism between appearances and unreachable ultimate reality. Hence, there could be no dialectical relationship between concept and thing, knowledge and object, or nature and history.[280] Adorno clearly argues that such 'in itself' status of such truths about reality is untenable: 'Mediation of the object means that it must not be statically, dogmatically hypostatized but can be known only as it entwines with subjectivity'.[281]

There is a realist moment in Adorno, but it is a corrective—the *priority* of the object is 'the corrective to the subjective reduction, not the denial of a subjective share'.[282] It cannot be grounded in first principles as that would break with the materialist epistemology and essentialism articulated in chapter two. Terms mimesis, and mimetic experiences are experiential terms for what the priority of the object stands for in epistemic-theoretical

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[278] Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, (Routledge, 2013), p. 50.
[279] Bhaskar, cited in Reeves. p. 334 Italics added.
[280] For a Hegelian critique of Bhaskar, see Sean Sayers, 'Materialism, Realism and the Reflection Theory', *Radical Philosophy*, 33 (1983), 22.
[281] ND p. 186.
[282] CM p. 250.

terms. As articulated by Espen Hammer, there is a connection between normative and epistemological realisms in Adorno.

> [I]f applied to the issue of intrinsic value, what the notion of mimesis suggests is that a thing, and by extension a body, can, when placed in a relationship of proximity to human beings possessed of a capacity for affection, itself *generate* an ethical demand.[283]

I think this expresses the co-participation of what is, in relation to how it is perceived. This captures the sense in which value does not exist independently of knowers but is nonetheless not their creation ex nihilo. Rather, value is a co-product of the world and the knowers in it. A heap of rubbish in my bin is an exemplar of complexity of nature in that the bacteria multiplies, but we will be hard pressed to call it an exemplar of nature flourishing. A blooming forest in the spring, one might argue, is such an exemplar. The co-constitution of it as an ethical demand requires something from the side of object as well as from the perceiver.

4.8. Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained Adorno's critique of the notion of causality associated with Hume and Kant. I have also explained the meta-critical meaning of such causality for Adorno. Further still, I have shown that despite finding fault in that common view of causation, Adorno does not remain silent on the matter. I have provided some evidence to this implying a shift in perspective with respect to causality. According to my reading of Adorno, we should think of causality dislodged from the idea of *necessitation* and the notion event-chains. I proposed that preliminarily some type of teleological purposiveness to do

[283] Hammer, p. 175.

with living beings might be compatible with his thought. In the excursus I considered whether these issues call for an affirmatively 'realist' theory of nature's order.

I now return to the problem which motivated this discussion. Namely, Adorno's application of Freud's drive psychology in his philosophy of needs introduced in chapter three. It is not clear at this stage how Adorno understood Freud, and whether Freud's implied notion of causality packed within the concept of 'drive' is compatible with my reconstruction of Adorno's critique of causality, or indeed the rest of his philosophy of need. This raises the doubt that Adorno, despite his intensions to the contrary, tacitly leans on to causally deterministic metaphysical picture, and thus a deterministic mode of explanation in applying Freud's drive theory. In other words, now that I have laboured to defend Adorno as a careful commentator on the issue of causality with respect to his need philosophy—that he is not committed to deterministically causal mode of explanation—it would be rather disappointing if his appeal to Freud's concepts would spoil the day. This is the topic of the next chapter.

5. Freud's drives redeemed: neither invariant nor determined

In the context of critical theory and social philosophy complaints about philosophical invariants often signal another worry: namely the status of claims about 'nature' or natural kinds, causes, forces and so on. With respect to the reception of psychoanalytic concepts, as discussed in chapter one and three (and as we see in the case of Benjamin's reading of Adorno), the worry is often articulated as the threat of 'biologism'. The worry about invariants is related to, but not exhausted by a problem of biologism. Biologism is a particular kind of invariantism, which for those who view it as foil takes the natural sciences to be the study of the relevant invariants. And for social philosophers or critical theorists, biologism is a particularly worrying position, since it involves, allegedly, explaining any event from the order of physical nature.

The broader context of this debate is the controversy about the status of Freud's thought in relations to the natural sciences, and by implication also the meaning of the latter. This undoubtedly relates to Freud's ill-fated early effort at arriving at a '[p]sychology which shall be a natural science: its aim, that is, is to represent psychical processes as quantitatively determined states of specifiable material particles'.[284] On the pages of his mature works, Freud distances himself from this view, and declares that the presentation of the mind, ego, id and the super-ego, is not intended as corresponding to a physical substrate: 'psychical topography that I have developed here has nothing to do with the anatomy of the brain'.[285]

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[284] Sigmund Freud, 'Project for a Scientific Psychology (1950 [1895])', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume I (1886-1899): Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts*, (1966), pp. 281-391 (p. 355).

[285] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xx (1925–1926): An Autobiographical Study, Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety, the Question of Lay Analysis and Other Works*, (London, UK: The Hogarth Press and the Institute for Psycho-Analysis, 1925), p. 32.

However, whatever Freud thought of his theory does not matter here, but rather what concerns us is what can be philosophically reconstructed from his conceptual architecture.

One may think that if drive nature is part of any explanation, then the problem of freedom is a paralysing riddle, as we saw via O'Connor's reading of Adorno. My chief claim in this chapter is that, despite the looming dangers articulated in chapters three and four, Adorno is on the right track in appealing to Freud's drive psychology when he speaks needs as impulse-like and drive related, and alludes to the unconscious as a repository of needs.

Crucially, I propose to redeem Freud by excavating *a dialectical structure* at the root the drive. I mean to supply this as a rational reconstruction of the 'Adornian stance', on drives, which will on occasion conflict with some of Adorno's critical remarks about Freud discussed in chapter three. I begin terminological clarifications and by surveying Freud's classic texts in order to make the case for thinking that drives are not innately fixed to specific objects and yield no determinate outcomes (5.1). From there I turn to Hans Loewald's reading of Freud, in which I focus on his dialectical function for the drive (5.2). With these means, I return to the inter-subjectivist objection to Adorno, and show that it can be addressed (5.3). Following that, I strengthen the implicit philosophical links between Adorno and Loewald with respect to drives via return to the notion of teleological causality initially discussed in the previous chapter (5.4). I then briefly consider two alternative non-determinist readings of Freud (5.5). I conclude with an excursus on Adorno's application of psychoanalytic categories in explanation of prejudice (5.6).

5.1. Drive and its object

In this section, I show that Freud's drive theory does not work on the back of a fixed connection between drives and their objects, and, hence, is not invariant at least in the sense of presupposing such a fixed connection. I also discuss the extent to which Freud commits himself to invariant picture of human nature in other respects. By so doing, the section responds to the problems I have articulated, and to the objections and tacit problems commentators have taken Adorno to incur with his appeals to Freud's concept of the drive. I will also discuss passages where Adorno himself points out similar types of worries.

I begin with initial conceptual clarifications, which mirror what I have offered regarding Adorno's use of the terms instinct, impulse and drive. Just how much, if at all, should one distinguish between instinct [*Instinkt*] and drive [*Trieb*] in Freud has been a subject of a long-standing controversy. [286] The translator and editor of Freud's Collected Works, James Strachey, opted to translate the German '*Trieb*' with the English 'instinct'.[287] Among the critics of this decision, Jean Laplanche's influential reading calls for attention. According to Laplanche, translating '*Trieb*' as 'instinct' obscures a central difference in Freud in that a drive need [*Trieb*] is always human and sexual in some way, whereas instinctual needs pertain to non-human and sub-human animal life, and are not exclusively sexual. Furthermore, he thinks, drive need is malleable towards its objects, whereas instinct needs are fixed repetitive behavioural patterns.[288] In recent philosophical commentary, Jonathan Lear's view

[286] Ulrike Kistner offers an interesting and concise summary of this issue. Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality: The 1905 Edition*, (Verso Books, 2017), pp. 46-48.
[287] Sigmund Freud, 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xiv (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, (1957), pp. 109-40.
[288] Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, (Johns Hopkins University Press Baltimore, 1976), pp. 9-10.

is close to Laplanche's reading.[289] Others have disagreed about the theoretical relevance of such a sharp distinction in Freud's original.[290] Presently, the English language custodians of the discipline have opted for 'drive' as the authoritative translation of '*Trieb*'. [291] In my view, the sharp distinction between drive and instinct is motivated if we read the concepts with Laplanche's assumptions. However, if we make no firm claim on the structure of instinct, making no claims about its purported innate determinacy, then the distinction matters less. After all, the meaning of a distinction partly depends on what one aims to accomplish by introducing it, and that partly depends on the surrounding assumptions of the terms employed. Indisputably, in Freud's writings in German, *Trieb* is the pre-dominant concept. Whether one wishes to commit 'instinct' to the domain of repetitive patterns, is not something I offer commentary on. As per my textual survey, Adorno, even when using the term instinct, is *not* doing so in Laplanche's sense.

A brief exegetical account of Freud's theory of sexuality serves to pin down his basic idea about the drive-object relationship. For the sake of keeping such a large issue under some textual control, I have restricted myself to Freud's 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' and one of the so-called meta-psychological papers, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'. This will inevitably lead to the omission of valuable detail as well as philosophically relevant problems and tensions. However, I am not here defending the view that Freud is consistent or denying that other readings are possible. What I am arguing, however, is that *to take the view*, explicitly or implicitly, that according to Freud drives are determined by a fixed link to

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289 Jonathan Lear, *Freud*, (Routledge, 2015), p. 71.
290 Peter Gay, *The Freud Reader*, (Vintage London, 1995).
291 Mark Solms, 'Extracts from the Revised Standard Edition of Freud's Complete Psychological Works', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 99 (2018), 11-57.

their objects, and that Freud is thus a reductive naturalist, one faces formidable problems in reading these land-mark texts.

I begin by questioning the determinist assumption on the broadest possible level. In the *Three Essays* Freud specifically rejects the idea that innate constitution could work to explain what he calls sexual perversions.

> The conclusion now presents itself to us that there is indeed something innate lying at the basis of the perversions, but that it is *something innate in all human beings*, though as a disposition it may vary in its intensity and may lie dormant, waiting to be brought to the fore by life experiences.[292]

What matters here is not so much what the disposition is in detail (in this context his examples are sadistic cruelty and homo-sexuality but that has no bearing on the logic of the argument). The passage indicates that Freud thinks that innate constitution is shared by all human beings. Innateness, in this minimal sense, does not function – at least not on its own – to explain actual behaviour that varies among human beings. The innateness of certain dispositions is posited here broadly to all human beings, allowing degrees of intensity, but one requires a concrete account of specific circumstances, life-experiences, in order for to say something about its relation to manifest behaviour.

While Freud makes the claim that there is *something* innate in all human beings, he equally points to variation when it is manifested as *dispositions*, 'its intensity', as he puts in the above passage. The function of specific experiences as bringing 'to the fore' such dispositions is also underscored. This, while somewhat general, at least excludes the conclusion that

[292] Freud, p. 77.

perversion could be explained simply on the back of innate drive traits that determine behaviour irrespective of the specific context (or that some individuals or cultural groups are innately, by birth, perverted). Therefore, as far as the idea of innate constitution is concerned, the drives are underdetermined. Thus, as Freud declares: 'We are thus instructed to loosen the bond that we had imagined between drive and object.'[293]

In this context it is important to keep in view that sexuality for Freud is not just about the 'erotic'. Freud's notion of the drive is intrinsically sexual, and thus his views on human sexuality are at the same time commitments about drives in general. According to Freud, drives are in principle not determined to seek specific objects. As he explains,

> The object [*Objekt*] of an instinct [*Trieb*] is the thing in regard to which or which the instinct is able to achieve its aim. It is what is most variable about an instinct and is not originally connected with it, but becomes assigned to it only in consequence of being peculiarly fitted to make satisfaction possible.[294]

In this way, drives are underdetermined aims, in that they are not originally or strictly assigned the 'correct' connecting objects. Freud comments on the fit that makes satisfaction possible being 'peculiar'. Accordingly then, there is an excess in the aim, that it can be met in various ways, through various objects, and that innate constitution does not determine the specific object or even the range of objects through which satisfaction can be achieved.

The 'peculiarity' of the fittingness of the object is a striking insight which takes to the core of psychoanalytic thinking. For instance, I can engage in what for an external observer appears to be a successful sexual encounter between two individuals, while all along fantasising

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[293] ibid. p. 62.
[294] Freud. 'Instincts and their vicissitudes' p. 112

about a third person not present. Further, this imaginary object can very well be necessary for the completion of the sexual act, read from a strictly procreational perspective. The point here is that an imaginary mental object can enter in relations that yield a neurophysiological outcome. What this implies philosophically is that the *aim* of the sexual drive does not provide criteria for the *act* through which the *aim* is realized. This view also makes it implausible to attribute any crude physicalism to Freud. This an example to make the case for thinking that philosophically human needs are extremely malleable with respect to their objects, and still be structured teleologically, that is, as aims.

The conceptual space of *aim* is both difficult to be clear about, and central to psychoanalytic thought. I here appeal to Sebastian Gardner, who argues that central to Freud's view of the mind is a distinction between 'motivational states' and 'propositional desires'.[295] The former co-constitute the latter along with specific beliefs about our world. Motivational states are understood as a kind of propelling force, but the exact manner in which this propulsion happens is inaccessible to consciousness. A 'motivational state' is close to the drive in general, in that it is understood to be *aiming*, a force with coherency in some difficult to clarify sense co-constitutive of meaning (not raw sub-personal level biology). But this aim is under-determined, without a specific propositional meaning or 'target'. Propositional desires, in contrast, have specific aims and goals, which are accessible to consciousness. (This distinction proves to be central also for Adorno, as I will explain below.)

So far I have shown that, according to Freud, drives are not determined, fixed or invariant forces, but some types of malleable energies, which sit underneath conscious desires as *aims*.

[295] Sebastian Gardner, *Irrationality and the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 117.

Given that drives are neither causes, nor reasons for action—following the common distinction, then what are they then? In the following section I explore one of Freud's proposals, namely, that the drives are 'representatives'. This will prove to be the decisive issue with respect to making drive psychology suitable for Adorno's dialectical philosophy.

5.2. Drives as 'representatives'

In this section, I will outline the reading of Freud which takes the drives to be 'representatives'. In recent decades it has received growing attention from philosophical commentators. This reading has been strongly influenced by Hans Loewald's interpretation of Freud's notion of the drive, so I will keep his work as a reference point throughout the rest of the chapter. His reading, in my view, gives a detailed expression of the possibility of understanding Freud in a dialectical manner, thus bringing relief to the tension between psychoanalytic and historically dialectical concepts which motivates this chapter. With respect to this direction and Adorno, Joel Whitebook is, in my view, correct to appeal to Loewald and emphasise the link between a specific reading of Freud as a 'frontier thinker' and Adorno's dialectic.[296]

The central idea for Loewald is Freud's suggestion in his seminal 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' that drives are 'psychical representatives', operating on the border of the mental and the physical. Here is central textual evidence for this claim in Freud.

> If we now apply ourselves to considering mental life from a biological point of view, an instinct [*Trieb*] appears to us as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the

[296] Joel Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects. On Adorno's Kant-Freud-Interpretation', *PSYCHE-ZEITSCHRIFT FUR PSYCHOANALYSE UND IHRE ANWENDUNGEN*, 57 (2003), 56.

> organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.[297]

We have already seen how drives, according to Freud, are not deterministic mechanisms, and that the aim of the drive and its object of satisfaction are not fixed. This on its own leaves it unclear how drives then exert 'demand', and how the connection between the soma and the psyche is to be thought of philosophically.

The idea of 'a representative' is an attempt to make sense of that. Drives, according to Freud, are not strictly biological sub-personal forces, but rather some kind of *representations* of the somatic body. Freud distinguishes drive, 'the psychical representative' from representation in the standard sense of an *idea.*[298] This is difficult since 'representation' in philosophical language usually means an idea, something conscious.[299] Here psychic and mental are used interchangeably, but this has to be taken with some care in that 'mental' does not mean necessarily 'conscious'. Drive as 'representative' is a *border* concept between the mental and the somatic, but not exclusively either. As Paul Ricoeur explains, 'we cannot say simply that instincts are expressed by ideas—this is only one of the derived aspects of the representative function of instincts … it must be said that instincts themselves represent or express the body to the mind'.[300] In other words, drives (or, as the translation of Ricoeur has it here, instincts) have a double role as, on the one hand, residues in ideas that have taken distance from them, and, on the other, as 'representations' of the body.

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[297] Freud, p. 122.

[298] Freud's preferred German term for what is translated as "psychical representative" is *Triebrepräsentanz*, and not *Vorstellung*, which is the usual sense of 'representation'. See editor's note pp. 111-2

[299] One could here complicate the story by saying that *eidos* in Plato's theory of forms does not depend upon consciousness, at least in the modern sense.

[300] Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, (Yale University Press, 1970), p. 137.

A mediated relationship is secured by the thought that drives are representatives, – they do not simply assign some physically scripted instruction to the mind, but represent the organic energy to the mind.[301] Centrally, the idea of drive as a representative does not mean the physical body determines psychic outcomes: 'the meaning of the representative is left open, and the nature of the connection between the mind and the body is left undetermined.'[302] This construal avoids naïve realism, in that we cannot speak of bodily force directly, but only as represented in some way. The project is, Freud says 'a study of instinctual life from the direction of it consciousness'.[303]

Drives 'represent' organic needs on a higher level. Aside from the interpretative and textual issues, the philosophical position here is that drives are not properties of organic tissue, and they do not have a single source. Yet, drives are not entirely cut off from the organic body either. This is of course very underdeveloped and calls for further thought. What 'representation' means in this context, that it is not determined by organic matter, but rather that the psychic entity is understood as a mode of relating, which distinguishes it from other sorts of entity, living or non-living. It is precisely because the psyche is *not* unstructured, but rather a specific mode of relating, that it can mediate bodily demands, social and cultural settings, rather than being constituted them.

There are instances where Adorno specifically appeals to Freud's ego, without spelling out the theoretical basis on which his claims are intelligible within the language of psychoanalytic thought. While Adorno here speaks of the ego more in terms of a faculty, he

[301] Hanna Segal attributes this view also to Klein. For my argument it does not matter ultimately if Klein also holds this view. I use Loewald's account since it appears he has articulated this view further. Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, (Karnac Books, 1988), p. 12.
[302] Hans W. Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs*, (University Publishing Group Hagerstown, MD, 2000), p. 117.
[303] Ibid. p. 125.

does speak of it in terms that presuppose a notion of the drive. Here is a prime example: 'The concept of the ego is dialectical, both psychic and extrapsychic, a quantum of libido and the representative of outside reality.'[304] It is noteworthy that Adorno here employs the language of 'representation'. It would be hard to make sense of representation in this context in the standard sense as an idea. I claim that at least implicitly or perhaps accidentally, Adorno in this case is reading Freud insightfully.

Since to Freud one of the key functions of the ego is reality testing—in this way it 'represents' outside reality to inner psychic life—it must per definition break out from its immanent structure. Following Freud's topographical view, the ego is also partly in the terrain of the unconscious, through the ego's mediating role other unconscious processes become entwined with these external materials – for instance, socially dominant ideas and goals: 'the ego that withdraws back into the unconscious does not simply cancel itself out but retains several of the features it had acquired as a societal agent.'[305] If we follow along this thought, Adorno's reading of Freud in turn clearly requires the drives to have the 'border' function which both represents the external world to the psyche, but also to the body. This can be exemplified by instances where one is physically repulsed by acts of callousness, witnessing other living beings in physical pain, or overcome by feelings of shame.

5.3. The 'charge' again

In chapter three I highlighted a problem which commentators have wrestled with, and in that connection raised issues with respect to the 'somatic' and the 'psychic'. Ultimately, at stake for the present thesis is the possibility of aligning Freud's drive theory with the sort of

[304] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology', *New Left Review*, (1968), 86.
[305] ibid. p. 87.

account of human essence I argued Adorno's philosophy of need presupposes. I return to Jessica Benjamin's argument. According to her, Freud's allegedly biologistic drive theory ought to be replaced by an inter-subjectivist ontology—a view against which Adorno's adherence to Freud can be criticised. Her argument can be condensed as follows:

(i) Adorno thinks aggression is part of nature.

(ii) Nature is immutable.

(iii) Therefore, in Adorno's eyes aggression is ever-present.

(iv) Therefore, radical transformation of social life beyond aggression is off the cards according to Adorno.

For the purposes of this discussion, I suggest we accept her major premise, but deny the second. Accepting (i) can be understood in light of the dialectical account of nature in Adorno, investigated in chapter two. In other words, there is 'nature' in Adorno's notion of human essence. What matters here is the commitment to Freud, which appears to motivate (ii). However, this can be denied. Insofar as Freud's drive theory is concerned nature is not immutable, an invariant.

With respect to such ontological foundationalism, Freud is *not* committed to a general a priori thesis about nature at all: what he deduces from explorations to sexual drives, is that it makes sense to postulate that human beings have an innate propensity to malleability with respect to drive aims and their objects. But this does not by itself imply that something like aggression is an immutable part of their nature – in contrast, it speaks against proclaiming this trait to be immutable (and thus premise ii).

Let me clarify this further: in my understanding, Freud, at the end of the essay on theory of sexuality, where he discusses 'constitution and heredity' of sexuality, he says

> *innate diversity of the sexual constitution*, upon which the principal weight probably falls but which, can understandably only be inferred from its later manifestations, and even then not always with great certainty.[306]

As we see, the metaphysical assumption of innate diversity is a provisional one, based on evidence, and to be taken with some caution. Furthermore, the explanatory role of innate immutable elements (assuming that there are any) is always, in his view, an element in a constellation of causes. On these lines, he comments further that,

> The causation is shared between a compliant constitution, precocity, the quality of the increased pertinacity of early impressions, and the chance stimulation of the sexual drive by extraneous influences.[307]

Clearly then, Freud understands causality in explanation as multifaceted, not based on thinking merely biological processes as primary.

So much for the ontologically determinist assumption about Freud which the charge takes as a starting-point. Benjamin's second criticism, which derives from the one discussed, amounts to the claim that Adorno's Freudian position lacks an *intersubjective dimension*. As an alternative, she evokes a normative ontology of a basic need, that of mutual recognition. Against Adorno's 'individual psychology of internalization' she calls for an intersubjective theory of personality.[308]

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306 Freud. p. 111.
307 ibid. p. 115.
308 Benjamin. p.43

However, it is not obvious why drive theory should have this difficulty of lacking an intersubjective dimension. Moreover, it strikes me as difficult *how* it could be understood at all in a way cuts off the relations to other human beings. It seems to me that were Freud committed to entirely atomistic individual psychology, an important aspect of the notion of the structure of the ego, super-ego, and id would make no sense. I illustrate this with a brief conversation about the concept of repression as Freud understood it. Simply put, repression is a mental 'activity' in which ideas, thoughts, and feelings are kept from reaching consciousness. Freud thinks this is just a pre-requisite for any coherent consciousness: it would be impossible hold onto thoughts if one would be burdened with onslaught of desires and anxiety. However, according to Freud, human beings are stuck with an inescapable difficulty of being in a position to bring to consciousness just how much such repression is necessary, justified, or 'healthy'. According to Freud, repression typically works as introjected early authority figures which are necessary in the steps towards maturity. Yet, the problem of repression, and the agency of the super-ego, is that the demands of both *past* reality and *current* reality are entwined: 'the individual punishes itself (and then is punished) for deeds which are undone or which are no longer incompatible with civilized reality, with civilized man.'[309] Consider for instance the punitive parental figure, whose black and white moral codes may have functioned in a 'self-preserving' role in early childhood, but if internalised too deeply, leave the adult poorly equipped to navigate the ambiguities of adult relationships. Our experiential reality is populated by fictive figures through which past reality lives on, and in that sense constantly hinders 'realistic' consciousness. In other words, the 'reality principle' in Freud does not stand as straightforward representation of the objective demands of a given situation. To answer Benjamin's objection—yes, Freud's the ego is not directly or exhaustively

[309] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, (WW Norton & Company, 1989), p. 41.

mediated by any given set of intersubjective relationships—but it could not come about at all were in not in some manner also outwardly relational.[310]

I now comment on a problem which the intersubjectivist stance has internally, and propose that here drive theory of the Loewaldian kind can be helpful. The stance and Benjamin's commitment to it can be evidenced as follows.

> The apparent necessity of ego development through opposition to the external world and internal nature could be countered by the supposition of the subjective need for mutual recognition.[311]

Accordingly then, ego development does not require a tension between internal and external (the necessity being only apparent), but can be explained with the supposition of *subjective need for recognition*. This is tricky, since if we are concerned with ego development, we are at the basis of what is to become a subject as bearer of needs, but is not yet such a subject. Prior to there being an ego, it is not clear to *whom* or to *what* such a *need for recognition* can be attributed. As far as I understand her, Benjamin seems to think of the subject as intersubjective all the

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[310] Marcuse's critical employment of Freud is based on this ambiguity. Marcuse proposes that this dynamic of being beholden to demands of past situations that have lost their bearing on the changed reality (to Marcuse, chiefly the denial of sensuous pleasure) takes place on an intersubjective and social level—and this is not in conflict with drive theory. To Marcuse, this allows the postulation of relatively independent and specific forms of the reality principle. From this Marcuse draws that thought that late modern capitalism autonomously and irrationally perpetuates both material scarcity and emotional parsimoniousness under he calls the 'performance principle'. Thus, Marcuse exploits the ambiguity in Freud about irrational scarcity (that is, scarcity not justified by existing conditions). This goes back to the appreciation of Freud's point: in repression, the unconscious demands of past and current necessities overlap in a way that makes excessive repression an inherent possibility. Modern human beings are not in a self-aware, transparent, rational relationship to the sacrifices made allegedly for the sake of civilisation. This rational condition would become actual if the organism exists 'as a subject of self-realization' which he qualifies as freedom, available 'if socially useful work is at the same time the transparent satisfaction of an individual need.' Marcuse, p. 149.

[311] Benjamin, p. 47. I emphasize Benjamin's work partly since these thoughts came to exercise considerable influence in Frankfurt School Critical Theory. See, Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, (1996).

way down: 'ego development is explained through interaction with other subjects'.[312] Now, we can grant that quite a lot of actual ego development can be explained in this way once the dynamic has started. However, a problem about its initial origin emerges if the only supposition we can make is the need for mutual recognition. This is because the origin of self-consciousness cannot be *purely* an outcome of recognition by another, since how is it that it is *me* that I experience as recognised by that another unless I already possess a rudimentary self-awareness?[313]

For drive theory there is no such paradox, and this is where the idea of 'representation' or 'border' is an advantage. With this thought, we can look at Loewald's views on the emergence of the experience of the internal and external from the mother-infant situation. According to Loewald, at these early stages, the infant is not understood as a separate psychic entity, but taken to be existing in a 'matrix' from which it begins a project of differentiation. This initial moment Loewald calls *interactional, not intersubjective*. The 'infant-mother matrix' is not a sphere in which relations exists in the sense of formed subjects, in a field of autonomous psyches. Indeed a matrix[314] is a structure in which both the mother and the infant are, from which some activity emerges, but which is for that reason not already itself that activity in its developed stage: neither full-blown inter-subjectivity, implying separate subjects, nor a completely undifferentiated fusion. This activity is based on the *aiming* of the drive energy. This implies a turn to talking about 'emergences' of things, rather than their identities or initial states.

[312] Benjamin, p. 46. p.

[313] The commitment to the subject as intersubjective as an *ontological ground* generates a problem, which has a well-established pedigree with respect to its logical form. Peter Dews has articulated this paradox in the context of Fichte's notion of the 'I' as supposedly self-generating. Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory*, (Verso, 2007), pp. 20-21.

[314] In addition to 'the womb', OED includes a definition to 'matrix' as generally 'the environment in which a particular activity or process begins; a point of origin and growth'.

Loewald understand this work of differentiation from this stage as an ongoing work, a maintenance of tension between excessive distance and complete merging.

The logical shape of Loewald's thinking is that that soma and psyche are *not* two distinct ontological domains, but two logics of experiencing the world that can only be analytically separated.[315] What that amounts to ontologically is a shared space:

> I do not speak of biological stimuli impinging on a ready-made "psychic apparatus" in which their psychic representatives are thus created, but of interactional biological processes that find higher organization on levels which we have come to call psychic life.[316]

This is rather underdeveloped and must remain so for the purposes of the present conversation. I am not taking on the burden of defending this view as such. What I am pointing out is that drive psychology, conceived in this way, is not vulnerable to the charge from the inter-subjectivist. Further still, the positions that underpin these objections have their own problems.

One might well object at this point the idea of drive as 'border' or 'representative' is sort of terminological avoidance of a genuine issue. If the drive acts as a mediation between soma and psyche, does this not simply mean that the bridging of these two realms must be somehow internal to the drive, meaning that one still has the same problem under a different term. This would require committing to a split within the drive, but with the same consequence requiring a further 'third' term doing the mediating.

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[315] Hans W. Loewald, *Sublimation: Inquiries into Theoretical Psychoanalysis*, (Yale University Press, 1988), p. 34.
[316] Loewald, p. 208.

In my understanding, Loewald's type of view avoids this problem since the starting point is not understood as two separate ontological domains. However, there are other questions that this stance in turn raises. Underneath Loewald's stance runs the notion of *Eros* as a fundamental force of nature as a whole.[317] Loewald thinks that what is at stake in *Eros* is not nature's activity, but rather *nature understood as activity*. Loewald's thinking here follows Freud's late drive theory.

Freud proposes a dual teleology, where the forces *Eros* and *Thanatos* (or the 'death drive'), structure human psychic life, but are also part of broader living nature.[318] Eros is understood as involving ongoing tension, a perpetual complexity. Here satisfaction is understood as emerging from boundedness to more complicated unities, but never reaching an end state. Rather, it aims at 'bringing about a more and more far reaching combination of the particles into which living substance is dispersed, aims at complicating life, and at the same time, of course, at preserving it'.[319] The view is metaphysically demanding, as the two forces Thanatos and Eros, are thought to be present 'in every particle of living substance'.[320]

5.4. Loewald, Adorno and teleology

In the psychoanalytic picture, needs can be understood as mental states, aiming for some end state, but underneath explicitly propositional attitudes. Let us return to one of Adorno's

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[317] The Marcuse's notion socio-historical sublimation presupposes this notion of *Eros*, and he refers to Loewald. Marcuse, p. 230 n 5.

[318] In his early works, satisfaction is a climactic phenomenon, ones in which satisfaction of urge takes the form of discharge, 'by removing the state of stimulation'. This thought then goes through various alterations, culminating to the notion of the death drive in his mature works. In these mature works, Freud revises the notion of satisfaction, under the term Eros. Eros' satisfaction is not climactic, but ongoing.

[319] Sigmund Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xix (1923-1925): The Ego and the Id and Other Works*, (1961), pp. 1-66 (p. 38).

[320] ibid.

passages about need: 'A thought without a need, a thought that wished for nothing, would be like nothing'.[321] Here need is fused with motivation, and both are preconditions for thought. This, I argue, corresponds to one of the basic pillars of Freud's project: propositional desire does not create consciousness, but rather consciousness itself follows something more primary, what is in Freud's terms is *wish*. These wishes constitute the aim of the drive, but the aim of the drive is not the same as conscious propositional desire or preference. This makes possible a clarification with respect to the previous section. Drive as 'a representative', or a motivational state is a space of meaning captured neither by direct bodily givenness, nor by its being construed internally within consciousness. I here follow Gardner's reading of this point.

> [W]ishes are a sort of hybrid: they have the *force* of pre-propositional states of instinctual demand, whilst being able to draw on the *complexity of content* of propositional states.[322]

According to Gardner, wishes are pre-propositional motivating states, which *demand*, that is, exercise some type of causal force, which is nonetheless open to bi-directionality in that it makes use of explicit content of propositional states (dreams being the most obvious example). As discussed preliminarily in the previous chapter, Adorno's thinking about causality can accommodate a teleological understanding of the human form, as well as broader living nature. For our discussion of the drive energy this means that the organism's form tends to propel it from a nascent stage to a mature form. As preliminarily suggested in

[321] ND p. 93.
[322] Gardner, p. 124.

section 4.61, Adorno in relying on Freud's drive psychology, leans on the teleological form of drive-nature.

Much of this has to be left underdeveloped and for another occasion. What I am chiefly concerned is the opening of the conceptual space for these thoughts. That calls for defending it against the way teleology in nature is often understood. Consider the usual manner in which teleology is understood and seen as an dead end. For example, here is Carlisle on 'habit'.

> The formation of the self occurs not, primarily, in relation to a final cause, but through the momentum of accumulated, contracted patterns. Adopting habit rather than teleology as the basic principle of nature implies that beings are formed from behind, as it were, rather than with reference to a goal.[323]

The worry seems to be that a teleological account nature would equal a bizarre view of causation. The silent premise it this: Namely, that some known, definite endpoint would exercise from its state realisation, as it were, a sort of backwards reaching pull in generating its own antecedent conditions as 'effects'. Against such an admittedly strange view, Carlisle proposes that we are better off in thinking of nature broadly, and hence also the self, in terms of accumulated patterns of behaviour, that is, habits. However, as contemporary Aristotelians have pointed out, this common reading superimposes the efficient causality model onto Aristotelian teleological causality.[324] If one does so, then it appears as if the end-goal is pulling the present with a strange inevitability, as if governed by a purpose set by a divine creator.

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[323] Clare Carlisle, 'Creatures of Habit: The Problem and the Practice of Liberation', *Continental Philosophy Review*, 38 (2005), 24.

[324] Jonathan Lear, *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 40.

In contrast, teleological causation, in the sense discussed in this chapter in reference drives, does not depend on some positing of definite 'end', or 'goal', and neither does teleology *necessitate* (in the efficient causation sense) the reaching of any given level of complexity or maturation. Rather, the 'telos' is manifested in its striving to move from potentiality to actuality, where this actuality is under-determined, and deeply co-determined by the environment.

I have not offered a freestanding defence of Loewald's views.[325] Neither have I suggested that all aspect of his thinking, or the all the aspects of the Aristotelian picture I have broadly speaking summoned to clarify its intelligibility would cohere with Adorno's thought. In this context it should be mentioned that Joel Whitebook has argued that Adorno remains too negative towards the resources within psychoanalysis, which in Whitebook's view is due him having 'identified the obsessional ego with the ego as such.' [326] In other words, Whitebook thinks that the failure of the bourgeois ego is mistakenly seen as the failure of the ego as such. Thus, accordingly, Adorno 'never allowed himself to examine new possibilities for psychic synthesis– for integration of the self – after the dissolution of the classical bourgeois subject.'[327] Whitebook's suggestion is that the logic of sublimation is implicit in Adorno's aesthetic theory, althought he never drew the conclusion for a theory of subjectivity: 'Adorno was unwilling to do for the modern subject what he did for the modern work of art, although he had a similar analysis of both.'[328] I think Whitebook's account is exegetically correct. The degree to which this is a problem depends on whether one is

[325] Recent philosophical treatment of this issue which is influenced by Loewald's thought can be found in Jonathan Lear, whose argument is more transcendental: 'It is in response to a loving world that a human is able to distinguish himself from it'. Lear, p. 177.
[326] Whitebook, p. 71.
[327] ibid. p. 59.
[328] ibid. p. 70.

looking for such resources in Adorno's writings on psychoanalysis, or for a positive account of the subject in his works in general. One might wonder if one can find compelling reasons in Adorno's social diagnosis for thinking that a search for positive model for alternative ego-structures is not motivated.

My claim has been that with respect to his application of psychoanalytic concepts, Adorno's philosophy is under-developed, and this generates the space for the 'biologism' objection. My proposal, I contend, works to usher away the charge of 'biologism', since there is a logical structure for drive theory which is neither ontologically or explanatorily 'biologistic'. I close with this passage from Loewald on the issue.

> Can we agree that Freud had in view the human passions when he spoke of instincts and of their vicissitudes? Was his use of "scientific" language not his attempt—still valid, I believe—to find a language neutral enough to avoid metaphysical or theological preconceptions and implications, although this language inevitably implied other preconceptions which at present we are trying to sort out in our attempts to get away from "physicalistic" notions?[329]

In raising this question Loewald proposes that we read Freud charitably, keeping in mind the context of his trying to find a vocabulary to the meta level assumptions of the therapeutic practise without evoking traditional metaphysics or theology. The language chosen now has different connotations given the dominance of physicalist sciences of the mind and their underlying assumptions of their subject matter. But it is perhaps these contemporary reductive intuitions that we should be resist and not read them back to Freud.

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[329] Hans W. Loewald, 'Reflections on the Oedipus Complex: Oedipus Complex and Development of Self', *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 54 (1985), 442.

In the final section of this chapter I engage with an example of how drive theory, so conceived, helps to make sense of Adorno's thinking about the structure of political prejudice. However, before that I briefly consider two alternative readings of psychoanalytic terms in the context of critical theory which, in their own ways, are also responses to the perceived problem of Freud's biologism. I do this in order to recognise that there are alternative readings of Freud, but, as per the reasons I outline below, I am not compelled to follow them. In this way, their shortcomings provide indirect motivation for further examination of the direction I am suggesting.

5.5. Hermeneutic and Kleinian alternatives

In the context of Frankfurt school Critical Theory, Habermas' early work is an example of the so-called 'hermeneutic' reading. I consider it because at the face of it, it appears as less metaphysically demanding as it avoids appealing to notions like *Eros*, and the surrounding issues which follow from Loewald's reading. However, I argue that Habermas' reading has serious shortcomings of its own. I then consider a recent entry to this discussion from Amy Allen, who's account is a return to drive-psychology.

I do not attempt an overall survey or assessment of Habermas' reading of Freud, but rather comment on the issue of causality which appears in his early work. According to Habermas, Freud laboured under a 'scientistic self-misunderstading', meaning that he mistook his work to have natural scientific status, where in fact, it has none. this being a question of.[330] In brief, while Freud understood his project was not *ontologically* deterministic he nonetheless—claims Habermas—retained an *epistemological* determinism. In other words, the language

[330] Jurgen Habermas, 'Knowledge and Human Interests', (1971), 246.

which Freud applies keeps him methodologically close to the causal explanations familiar to the psychical sciences, even if Freud was aware that his psychology does not presuppose an order of nature which is continuous with order of nature the physical sciences commit to.

To avoid such determinism, I take Habermas to argue, one has to scrap drive-theory altogether in favour of a semantic theory of the psyche. At the core of it, accordingly, psychoanalytic therapy works on the connection between 'language deformation and behavioural pathology.'[331] In certain sense, Habermas does agree with Freud as he says psychoanalytic explanation 'does grasp causal connections, although not at the level of physical events.'[332] Along these lines, motives for action are 'comprehended as linguistically interpreted needs.'[333] When repression sets in, it represses 'instincts', but which are already 'rooted in the meaning structures of the life-world', and their compulsion 'is the causality of fate, and not of nature'.[334] For Habermas, one's 'life history' is understood as a text, a narrative, and repression ruptures this narrative. Centrally, the below passage captures Habermas' re-location of the key concepts of psychoanalytic therapy.

> For the causal connection between the original scene, defense, and symptom is not anchored in the invariance of nature according to natural laws but only in the spontaneously generated invariance of life history, represented by the repetition compulsion, which can nevertheless be dissolved by the power of reflection.[335]

The implications of this way of thinking about the efficacy of psychoanalytic therapy deserves comment. One the one hand, Habermas here thinks that the efficacy of the cure is a

[331] Ibid. p. 255.
[332] Habermas, p. 271.
[333] Ibid. p. 255.
[334] Ibid. p. 256.
[335] Ibid. p. 271.

vindication of the hypothesis about there being a 'causal connection' between a given repressed trauma and behavioural pathology (albeit that it is hard to make sense of 'spontaneous invariance'). Habermas' view is to capture freedom from compulsion of neurosis as 'power of reflection' as an *undoing* of the causal link. He goes on to say,

> Psychoanalytic therapy is not based, like somatic medicine, which is "causal" in the narrower sense, on making use of known causal connections. Rather, it owes its efficacy to overcoming causal connections themselves.[336]

Taken together these statements are puzzling. We are told that psychoanalytic therapy does not operate with the alleged narrow sense of causality, but with some other sense, and yet, it works as a cure when it *overcomes* causal connections—presumably in this other sense. If that were the case, we would have to account for a rather mysterious kind of therapeutic success, as such therapy could not make use of 'known causal connections' at all. The image that comes to mind is one of erasing one's memory.

Alistair Macintyre has commented on a parallel issue about the causal significance of one's past in cases where a patient has been 'cured' as a result of psychoanalytic therapy. He comments that if we read that transformation in Kantian terms between heteronomy (being in the grips of trauma), and autonomy (being cured) we struggle making it clear in what sense, after being 'cured', the patient's childhood and past dispositions are relevant at all. It would be 'in a way no longer to have a past.'[337] To the extent that Habermas is relying on those assumptions (which 'dissolving' the causality suggests) he is liable to answer this question.

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[336] Ibid.

[337] Alasdair Chalmers MacIntyre, *The Unconscious: A Conceptual Analysis*, (Routledge, 2004), p. 11.

I think Macintyre's question can be pushed further. If the past, in a sense, 'is no more', it becomes obscure how there could be such a thing as a therapeutic outcome in the psychoanalytic sense. It seems to me that rather than dissolving the causality, the therapy itself depends on there being *an ongoing causal nexus*. In other words, the therapy brings to light the causal relationship and allows one to gain conscious access to it, but this relationship, and thus the therapeutic cure, are not intelligible at all if the success of the therapy means *dissolving* the relevant causal nexus. Perhaps it would be more plausible to think that in a successful therapeutic outcome there is something about *the symptom* which is overcome or dissolved, but that does not mean the causal link between trauma and symptom has disappeared. Furthermore, even if nothing about my proposed view of the therapeutic situation is relied on, it is still a logical point, as pointed out by Grunbaum, that overcoming an effect does not entail the dissolution of the link between cause and effect.[338] Finally, as the basis of these difficulties lie Habermas' own theoretical commitments to an exclusively linguistic model of the psyche. However, as argued by Whitebook, arguments for reading of Freud with such commitments fail to convince. To mention one basic problem, it is false to conclude from the fact that since the unconscious can be affected by discussion ('the talking cure'), that the unconscious is intra-linguistic to begin with.[339]

I contend that Habermas' non-determinist Freud does not so much offer help thinking about psychoanalysis beyond the determinist charge, but rather ends up in a muddle. The outcome is highly rationalistic account of psychoanalytic thought. I suspect that this follows from Habermas signing away the right to provide the underpinnings of explanation of nature to

[338] Adolf Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique.*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 14.
[339] Joel Whitebook, 'The Marriage of Marx and Freud', in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. by F. Rush (Cambridge University Press, 2004), (p. 94).

the hard sciences.[340] Freud is thus taken to be guilty of a biologistic determinism at least in the epistemological sense. However, replacing the notion of drive with some sort of intra-linguistic force is difficult to make sense of, as the above discussion about therapeutic efficacy demonstrates.

In this context, perhaps Amy Allen's recent proposal for a 'version of psychoanalytic theory that has not given up on the concept of drives fares better.[341] I agree with her starting point, the acknowledgement that 'not all versions of drive theory can be integrated with the basic philosophical commitments of critical theory with equal ease'.[342] Her view is that Melanie Klein's work contains the correct resources. Whether that is compelling depends on what one thinks *are* the basic philosophical commitments of critical theory. Unpacking the distance between her conception of critical theory to those of Adorno and Horkheimer would be interesting, but cannot be attempted here. Rather, I focus on the immanent claim: that is, how Klein fits *her* conception of critical theory—at least as far as I understand it.

As her proposal concerns the theoretical image of the human being we can derive from Klein's work—'a realistic conception of the person'[343]—my comments also concern the meta-level, and not the therapeutic and phenomenological sides of the Kleinian project. This is how she takes the argument to work.

> Given the fundamentally relational nature of the drives for Klein, it seems to me that it is perfectly possible to connect up her account of drive with a more historicized

[340] I here mean Habermas' three separate interests of knowledge. Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, (John Wiley & Sons, 2015).
[341] Amy Allen, 'Are We Driven? Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis Reconsidered', *Critical Horizons*, 16 (2015), 313.
[342] ibid. p. 313
[343] Ibid. p. 325

> understanding of how inherently inchoate, amorphous, and unstructured drives can be shaped in very different ways by different social and cultural circumstances [...].[344]

This is a slippery statement. Relationality does the major work here. That secures, she claims, what 'perfectly possible to connect' means. At least the standard reading of Klein by Greenberg and Mitchell (to which Allen also relies on) suggests that Klein's drive theory rests on the assumption of innate and unchanging elements which play a formally invariant function. According to Klein, they say,

> It is as if each of us begins life by being born into the same play, in which the cast of characters is standard and the script well-established and unchanging. The parents as real people are of central importance, but in tightly circumscribed and unidimensional ways. They are important as representatives of universal human attributes—a mother with breasts, a father with penis. The actuality of their anatomy both corroborates and transforms the child's inherent a priori imagoes and phantasies.[345]

Accordingly, Klein thinks that the anatomical features of the actual parental male and female bodies fill in the content of universal primal images which the infant, as it were, already possesses. My point is immanent to her reading: If Klein's drive theory rests on such a postulate of 'universal human attributes', then it is not clear how it is compatible with Allen's claim that for Klein drives are 'inherently inchoate'. What follows from this, contra her application of Klein, it would also appear that for Klein social circumstances can impact the content of inherent images (like replacing an actor in a play but not editing the script for the role) but not affect the fundamental set up of their form. On this reading, the shape of the

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[344] Ibid. pp. 311-328

[345] Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen A. Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory*, (Cambridge MA. London: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 53.

relation is an invariant, so it cannot vary depending on historical and social circumstances. From that it seems to follow that, philosophically speaking, the formal relationship between Eros and the death drive is an invariant, even if their objects can differ.

Perhaps this is something Allen is ultimately happy to grant, a lot hangs on what one thinks the basic philosophical commitments of critical theory are—and I leave open the possibility that I have misunderstood hers. In so far as I do, however, Klein's quasi-Platonic notion of form does not fit Allen's highly historicised version of critical theory. If historical content can only fill in a role of content for pre-circumscribed psychic imagery, then one has to accept a flat view of history, a return speculative metaphysics she sought to avoid by moving away from Freud. It seems to me that only a dialectical distinction between form and content can avoid this. And if one is keen on a dialectical version of drive theory, then Loewald's reading of Freud is more apt.

5.6. Adaptation and prejudice in social explanation: A second excursus

For the remaining part of this chapter, I focus on an application of Freudian categories in historically concrete example of social explanation. As a stage-setting clarificatory remark, the larger issue touched upon is the fruitfulness and plausibility of Freud's drive psychology as resource within a historically situated explanation, involving a holistic view of what is to be explained. This is distinct from the currently dominant 'implicit biases' research. The underlying conceptual architecture of 'implicit bias' research is articulated in terms of 'mental processing' and 'association'.[346] It obscures the socio-historical dynamic within the

[346] The approach is strongly empiricist, commonly taking reaction speeds of test subjects to images and adjectives as evidence of the strength of given 'bias'. For defense of the broader agenda, see. Jennifer Saul, 'Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and Women in Philosophy', *Women in philosophy: What needs to change*, (2013). For a detailed account and critique of the underlying philosophical

phenomenon it aspires to explain, and may then evoke justified consternation about the role of psychological categories in social explanation altogether.[347] This obviously would warrant a longer conversation, but for my purposes here its sufficient to note that the strongly empiricist epistemological orientation of implicit bias research is fundamentally at odds with the commitments discussed here in relation to Adorno and Frankfurt School Critical Theory.

The more specific issue discussed here relates back to chapter one, where I raised the issue of *ontological needs* and their satisfaction. I begin from the assumption that we should accommodate the general thrust of Adorno's views that the specific problem with ontological needs is that pursuing their satisfaction is *wrong* because they are implicated in the 20th century horrors that feature so prominently in Adorno's whole corpus.

The worry about this is implicit in most of Adorno's writings, but in his late essay 'Sociology and Psychology' he is unusually clear. I'll start from here:

> experiences of real helplessness are anything but irrational—and they are actually hardly psychological. On their own they might be expected to prompt resistance to the social system rather than further assimilation to it.[348]

Adorno here suggest that what he calls real experiences of helplessness are not specifically psychological. By this, he means 'psychological' as the diagnostic accounts of neurosis and anxiety. Rather, these experiences are socio-historical (albeit in that way also receive a psychological expression). The trouble is, according to Adorno, that subjects do not

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assumptions the operative notion of 'association', see Eric Mandelbaum, 'Attitude, Inference, Association: On the Propositional Structure of Implicit Bias', *Noûs*, 50 (2016).

[347] Lorna Finlayson, 'The Third Shift: The Politics of Representation and the Psychological Turn', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 43 (2018).

[348] SP p. 89.

experience helplessness in a way which would facilitate resistance. Adorno explains the working of this non-experienced helplessness in transparently psychoanalytic sense.

> This repression of their powerlessness points not merely to the disproportion between the individual and his powers within the whole but still more to injured narcissism and the fear of realizing that they themselves go to make up the false forces of domination before which they have every reason to cringe. They have to convert the experience of helplessness into a 'feeling' and let it settle psychologically in order not to think beyond it.[349]

The thought here is that powerlessness works in a double sense. In one sense as being blocked from meaningful social action (such as by financial forces or direct discrimination and coercion). Adorno suggests that the experience of powerlessness also implies a mischaracterisation of powerlessness. What is presupposed is that a truthful manner of experience equals the kind of experience which embodies a norm to resists.

I further explore how Adorno tries to explain how not to experience truthfully is an accomplishment of a kind, which leads to social assimilation. Narcissism, Adorno thinks along with Freud, is ego-weakness: 'the ego experiences its frailty in relation to the instincts as well as its powerlessness in the world as 'narcissistic injury".[350] So the specific manner in which repression works is the self-directed 'repression of their powerlessness' in which assimilation works to remove the sting of the personal feeling and transform it to a social integration.[351] Accordingly, because what could be experiences of helplessness, are in fact experienced 'through' or *as* a narcissistic injury, they do not provoke socially or politically

[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid.

emancipatory forces. Instead, feelings of individuated victimhood, being hard done by, are experienced, not the social dynamic without which these psychological dimensions would lack basis. Adorno's suggestion is that narcissistic feelings of hurt are prone – especially in persons with a weak ego – to motivate further assimilation to the social system as 'a strategy' of making amends or 'healing' the ego itself.

In the backdrop, I argue, is story about the ego and its relations to the unconscious and the external world. The assumption is that to have an adequately realistic appreciation of the boundaries between self and other, one requires a relatively strong ego (I return to this in chapter six.). Adorno and Horkheimer employ Freud's notion of narcissism to argue that to be adequately aware of one's lack of agency in a situation to be a consequence of powers that are beyond one's individual control, one requires a relatively strong ego. To put it another way, to squarely face up to one's diminished agency is demanding. In cases where the ego is lacking (in cases where narcissistic tendencies dominate), where the boundaries between the self and others is already shaky, another possibility opens. A motivated misunderstanding of structural domination takes place. It is predicated on omnipotent feelings (that is, an unrealistic conception of the boundaries between oneself and others). Then the feeling of powerlessness which potentially could involve a critical insight, transforms into a festering feeling of personal failure, which calls for alleviation.

This ego-weakness, the argument goes, is a social tendency which Adorno and Horkheimer propose reflects the epochal changes in the capitalist mode of production. Along with the 'abolition of the independent economic subject by big industry' [...] the basis of moral decisions, reflection, too, must wither'.[352]

[352] DE p. 164. The authors posit a quasi-sociological notion of 'monopoly capitalism', see for instance DE p. 123. The notion is elusive, often used interchangeably with 'late capitalism' [*Spätkapitalismus*] or

On the back of this type of story, Adorno thinks he can explain the disposition towards social and political adaptation as no mere accident of history. Subjects, on the back of their essence, are unconsciously motivated to seek compensation for such feelings in a way that has social and political implications. This is how the Freudian sense of the working of the ego as a 'self-preserving', is employed to explain how human beings, paradoxically, protect themselves by committing epistemic errors about the real causes of their situation.

In this sense, Adorno's social explanations are shot through with rather radical thoughts about how domination and ideology function. In principle, this means that our intersubjective worlds are populated by projections, 'fictional characters' (victims and culprits) partly derived from our internal worlds. Here is how Adorno thinks projection works in understanding anti-Semitic prejudice.

> It is not so much that such people react originally against the Jews as that their drive-structure has developed a tendency toward persecution which the ticket then furnishes with an adequate object.[353]

The passage is directed at dislodging the assumption that there is such a thing as an 'original' innate type of hatred of Jews as pertaining to some essential quality of Jewishness. Neither is the object, the Jewish people, hard-wired within the persecutory tendency itself, but rather provide a suitable object. Adorno uses the term 'ticket' here, and further comments that 'it is not just the anti-Semitic ticket which is anti-Semitic, but the ticket mentality itself.'[354] The idea of *ticket mentality* stands for the tendency to rigid categorisation, perhaps akin to what

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'total society' [*totale Gesellschaft*] where 'monopolized needs' [*monopolisierte Bedürfnisse*], pertain to both the objects of needs and their form TN p. 393.

[353] SP p. 71.
[354] DE p. 172.

Adorno later would call identity thinking. The scope of the claim is broad: 'The Jewish masses themselves are no more immune to ticket thinking than the most hostile youth organization.'[355]

The key to the psychoanalytic view is that the pressure to integrate and adapt works on the level of motivational state, in which case it is not directly accessible to evaluative reasoning. Preliminarily, this assumption can accommodate transparently contradictory political behaviour. Even if the specific propositional desires one has (say, political figures) do not appear to offer any relief if unpacked as arguments, the very fact that they offer some elements which speaks to the motivational state is enough to propel behaviour.

The unconscious drive structure works to explain why prejudice sits deeper than 'propositional desires'. i.e. specific views about the Jews—it is predicated on a 'motivational state' as a persecutory tendency. And as, according to Freud, the connection between a motivational state and propositional desire is unconscious, it therefore is unlikely to be dislodged by a more rational, more fact-based debate. In specific sense, to even start to think about it as a question facts, is to miss the point.[356] By this I mean that the question is not about characteristics of Jewish life. Rather, anti-Semitism's *falsity* has to do with quality of the underlying motivational state of the prejudiced person. The category of the Jew secures something for the non-Jew identity, which is entangled with this motivational state. In this sense, I argue, that anti-Semitism for Adorno is a version of the ontological need for secure

[355] DE p. 154.

[356] On these lines, even to begin a debate about the motivation behind anti-Semitist prejudice as a question of facts (what Jews are actually like) would misconceive the issue. Take, for instance, the anti-Semitic trope of a Jewish agenda controlling public debate through powerful positions of individual journalists. The nub of anti-Semitic thinking is not primarily dependent on a misunderstanding of the facts involved (say, relative high representation of Jewish persons in higher echelons of the media, banking ect..). Indeed, some of these things may well be factually accurate, and in that sense, Jews are an 'adequate object' for the mind which seeks conspiracies.

foundations within one-self. Adorno evokes this telling image: 'The enraged man always appears as the gang-leader of his own self'.[357]

This helplessness, so the argument goes, is particularly prone to be experienced as an injury where narcissistic tendencies dominate the ego. This turns the helplessness into a sense of personal failure. One then makes 'retribution' by working on the self by way of further acceptance of social demands. The philosophical upshot is a distinction between a genuinely experienced helplessness and false consolations type of helplessness. Moreover, the latter can also be called ontological needs, and they block an honest appraisal of one's situation. This is a precursor for transformative activity aimed at changing the circumstances which generates it. On a first personal level, this requires first facing up to this feeling of alienation qua helplessness without a narcissistic response, and ultimately without a recourse to passive reintegration.

A question now arises: is there a difference between an innocuous projection and a projection involving persecutory tendency? The latter is somehow similar, but distinct from 'benign' projection: infatuation, wishful thinking, absent-minded judgement and the like. Adorno and Horkheimer distinguish between false projection and projection as such.

> Anti-Semitism is based on false projection. It is the reverse of genuine mimesis and has deep affinities to the repressed; in fact, it may itself be the pathic character trait in which the latter is precipitated. If mimesis makes itself resemble its surroundings, false projection makes its surroundings resemble itself.[358]

[357] MM p. 45.
[358] DE p. 154.

> The pathic element in anti-Semitism is not projective behavior as such but the exclusion of reflection from that behavior. Because the subject is unable to return to the object what it has received from it, it is not enriched but impoverished. It loses reflection in both directions: as it no longer reflects the object, it no longer reflects on itself, and thereby loses the ability to differentiate.[359]

Accordingly, projection as such is something ordinary experience involves. In this text Adorno and Horkheimer apply a quasi-anthropological reading of the idealist thesis about the necessary involvement of subjective faculties in experience, taking mimesis to stand for true or genuine relations. In that sense, the narcissistic injury is pathological not chiefly because it involves projection, but because it lacks a reflective moment within or among projections. This reflective moment is a rudimentary ability to make distinctions between self and others.

Although the relevant notion of 'reflection' in these passages is not elaborated on much detail, it stands as intellectual distance and also reciprocity—return of the received—which, they argue, is required for a minimally adequate view of the self. This is at least a partial answer to our question. It seems that for Adorno and Horkheimer, a mundane drifting in one's fantasies is perhaps not so harmless after all, since it rather resembles the inability to be receptive to the world, which they argue characterises cases of aggressive prejudice. The false projection equals a broken dynamic of recognition, a thought which the authors give indirect evidence by appealing partly to Hegel: 'Only the self-conscious work of thought—that is, according to Leibnizian and Hegelian idealism [...] can escape this hallucinatory power.'[360] If

[359] DE p. 157.
[360] DE p. 160.

we follow this train of thought the terms 'true' and 'false' projection are not stark opposites, but rather stand for different types *enabling* in the relationships between the subjects. I turn to this topic in more detail in the following chapter.

For the purposes of this dissertation as a whole, the main argument of this chapter is that Freud's drive psychology is not a deterministic mode of explanation. As I have shown, this follows from the open-ended character of Freud's classic texts, and the interpretative possibilities they leave open. One such possibility for which I am trying to make a compelling case for is thinking of drive energy as a dialectical border between two logics of experience—the somatic and psychic. Such a resource is available within Hans Loewald's works. By reading such an account into Adorno's use of 'drive', I argue dissolves the implicit and explicit objections commentators have made. Further still, a significant upshot for philosophy of need from this account is that, impulses, drives and the body in general are not strictly separated from *ends*, and relegated to *mere* 'causes'. From the excursus to adaptation and prejudice, I now turn to the final chapter of this dissertation.

6. Critique of false life: interpretation and defence

The three main problems motivating this dissertation were: the possibility of a notion of essence which does not depend upon invariants; the metaphysical status and explanatory role of drive psychology without causal determinism; and finally, the coherence and justification of Adorno's appeal to needs in evaluative senses when considered together with his 'indistinguishability thesis' (IT). I devote the present and final chapter to this third issue. Indeed, Adorno describes our condition as a pervasive confusion about needs, with the result that the concept seems to lose all its bearings. Given such a statement, how is Adorno *justified* in appealing to the concept of need at all, and especially criticising some needs as *false*? (At the end of the last chapter I discussed the need for adaptation as an example). Given IT, Adorno's philosophy of need does not appear to contain resources for the kind *normative purchase* it explicitly relies on.

To frontload the news, I argue that these difficulties can be partly mitigated. I will first explore IT under two aspects: as a critique (6.1.1) and diagnosis (6.1.2). I then introduce a key notion which will be the at the core of my reading IT, antagonism (6.1.3). I reconstruct this viewpoint with reference to Marx's labour theory of value. I then show that Rahel Jaeggi's interpretation of Adorno's notion of false life can further help in undercovering the type of immanent normativity his position can accommodate. In the final analysis, her account of Adorno and her broader project of 'critique of forms of life' clashes with some aspects of my interpretation of Adorno. I bring the discussion to a close by unpacking some of the intuitions for why that might be, and defend the notion of false need in the shape presented against certain resistance to it within contemporary discussion.

6.1. The 'indistinguishability thesis'

Various comments on needs, interests and false needs appear throughout Adorno's corpus. The key texts in which IT appears are Adorno's 'Theses on Need' (1942), and his essay 'Aldous Huxley and Utopia' (1967). One of the central critical themes of both texts is that, in Adorno's view, common variants of normative distinctions between true and false needs are not convincing. Adorno rejects the following variants of such distinctions: natural and social, superficial and deep, genuine and manufactured, good and bad, right and wrong, primary and secondary, static and changing. One of the key thoughts in these texts is that while the distinction between true and false needs may be impossible to justify in any neat fashion, the social system has a tendency to produce spurious distinctions of that sort. I start from these.

6.1.1. IT as critique of ideological distinctions

But what are Adorno's reasons for thinking that these distinctions are indefensible? Instead of discussing the content for each pair of terms, I focus on a common structure which underpins Adorno's hostility towards them. I here take the distinction between superficial and deep needs.

> The distinction between superficial and deep needs is a semblance that arises in society [*gesellschaftlich entstandener Schein*]. So-called superficial needs mirror the labour process that makes human beings into "appendages of the machine," and compels them simply to reproduce the commodity of labour power [*Arbeitskraft*] even outside the domain of labour.[361]

[361] TN p. 392.

Accordingly, positive assumptions about need hierarchies fail to acknowledge what Adorno took to be the essence of capitalist societies, which I began discussing in chapter two. The positive distinction, as it puts it here, is a 'semblance' [*Schein*]. I think the meaning of is close to that of 'socially necessary phenomenon'.[362] I discuss the needs in the same order as in the passage. The so-called 'superficial needs'—are not unnecessary or of no interest, since they perform a function. According to Adorno, the superficial needs, 'entertainment films' being Adorno's example, perform a necessary function in 'reproducing' the worker. Presumably the idea has something to do with sense of consciousness fitting to the productive tasks, a surrogate sense of meaning, and social order.[363] Something similar applies to the other side of the distinction, 'deep needs' [*Tiefenbedürfnisse*]. Adorno's example is similarly from surrounding culture of the time, 'Beethoven symphony as conducted by Toscanini'.[364] The issue here is not Beethoven's work or Toscanini, but rather what Adorno has elsewhere discussed as declining ability to listen. The implication is that even great works of art are consumed, engaged with as tokens. Such needs, he claims, 'perform the function of a diversion'.[365]

The reasons why the distinction between proper art and shallow commercial culture does not convince is the shared status and function of both: 'capitalism has long since appropriated the "deep" as effectively as it has appropriated the "superficial"'.[366] And this

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[362] In a recent translation of the 'Theses', 'gesellschaftlich entstandener Schein' is translated as 'socially necessary illusion'. I haven't used 'illusion' here because Adorno also often uses 'delusion' in similar contexts. My reason for hesitation is that in psychoanalytic thought the two terms are distinct, and I think it is best not to make a judgement about them here. I think 'semblance' here captures the meaning in a way the preserves the ambiguity in the original. I am grateful to Nicholas Walker for many discussions about these terms, and here follow his advice.

[363] From the textual context and the fact that Adorno lived in Los Angeles at the time of writing, he most likely has in mind contemporaneous melodramas and war-films of the Hollywood studio era.

[364] TN p. 393.

[365] TN p. 393.

[366] ibid.

coheres also with Adorno's assertion that theoretical thinking of all needs 'must recognise the existing needs in their present form [*Gestalt*] as products of class society'.[367] In more contemporary terms, this thought about totalising appropriation has similarity to what behavioural economists have tried to capture with the term 'human capital'. At the core of their theory is that seemingly non-economic behaviour (such as altruism, education or marriage) can be (and should be) understood as economically rational if such rationality is defined broadly enough—as investments to oneself.[368]

As I discussed in the previous chapter, like Freud and Marcuse, Adorno also thinks that human beings are liable to pick up externally required renunciation and turn it into self-directed renunciation in a way in which becomes self-legitimizing in the sense that the purposefulness and link to the original demand is lost: 'The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice'. [369] There is further evidence to the connection between satisfaction, appropriation and denial: 'Were men to abolish the 'principle of denial', then 'the cycle of fulfilment and appropriation would also vanish in the end—so very intertwined are metaphysics and the arrangement of life.'[370] Currently existing need satisfaction relationships are predicated on conditions of scarcity, and Adorno thinks they could be transformed with it: 'If the lack were to disappear then the relation between need and satisfaction would change.[371] The thought is that it is needs as they appear that one should attend to, as the evaluative questions will merely lead to riddles: 'the question of immediate satisfaction of need

[367] TN p. 394.
[368] Gary Stanley Becker, Ramón Febrero, and Pedro Schwartz, *The Essence of Becker*, (Hoover Inst Pr, 1995).
[369] DE p. 43.
[370] ND p. 379.
[371] TN p. 395.

is to be [...] considered together with the question of the suffering of the vast majority of mankind'.[372] He explores some kind of transformative possibility more directly here.

> The solution to the contradiction of needs is itself contradictory. If production is redirected to the unconditional, unlimited satisfaction of needs, including especially those produced by capitalism, the needs themselves will thereby be decisively altered.[373]

These passages support reading IT as a descriptive thesis, tracking an ideological function of the categories of true and false needs. As Adorno states, the solution to such a contradiction is itself contradictory. For Adorno's philosophy of need, this appeal to satisfaction means that we have two options. If we qualify 'suffering' to mean something like the most vital needs for organic life, the stance looks close to one associated with humanitarian aid.[374] In claiming that '[t]here is tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one should go hungry anymore', Adorno does propose certain primacy to the satisfaction of such a basic bodily needs.[375] However, philosophically this is undialectical, and oddly modest. Adorno's critical theory does not amount to the message that if the capitalist system managed to feed and shelter everyone, the principal aims of social critique would have been achieved. Such a position might be satisfactory for liberal humanitarians, but would be hard to reconcile with Adorno, whose micro-level phenomenological analyses aim to convince the reader of the proto-fascist tendencies in, for instance, the replacement of 'gentle latches' with 'turnable handles'.[376] On the other hand, if suffering is understood as expansive, including amorphous

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[372] TN p. 396.
[373] TN p. 395.
[374] This way of thinking about may seem obvious to us now, but the essay was written before the founding of the UN.
[375] MM p. 100.
[376] MM p. 40.

and idiosyncratic experiences of pain and anguish, then there seems to be no good reason to exclude spiritual, political resentments and their attendant ontological structures from the category of the suffering. That poses another problem: Surely Adorno cannot suggest the 'unlimited and unconditional' satisfaction of such demands as straightforwardly legitimate? I return to this specific issue at the end of the chapter.

I have in this section focused on reading IT as critique of the very idea of distinctions between true and false needs. In other words, this is the view that such a distinction cannot be made because the very idea is incoherent: there are only needs as they appeal through lacks and scarcity. It also seems as if Adorno gives normative authority to a rather loosely conceived notion of suffering. We must now turn to more details of what the implications of IT are in light of further passages.

6.1.2. IT as a diagnostic

To think that all needs as they appear could claim legitimate satisfaction jars with Adorno's quite explicit concern with the pursuit of what he calls 'false needs'. One important aspect should be considered from the start. In the *Theses on Need* it is relatively clear that Adorno makes reference to needs and their satisfaction as they exist on the marketplace. He mentions specific objects as satisfiers (Campbell soup), as well as types of experiences (Hedy Lamar's acting and Gerschwin's music). What these share is the fact that what meets the need is a product. I discuss cinema as an example below (section 6.41).

An 'ontological need' is at least preliminarily speaking something quite different. What motivates them are questions of meaning; religious intuitions, worldviews, existential standpoints and the like. Satisfiers for ontological needs are also a different matter. Namely,

ontological needs are purportedly met, according to Adorno, by various types of philosophical undertakings.

Adorno proposes that there is a connection between the two types of need, and perhaps then also on the sense in which they are 'false'. I preliminarily suggested in chapter one that Adorno's argument follows the logic of Marx's criticism of religion. On these lines, a need which could in principle be met is *inverted* to a longing for a *substitute*, which it turns out, is not really a substitute at all.

> Not only the primitive wish fulfilments which the cultural industry feeds to the masses— who do not really believe in them—are generally substitutes. Delusion is boundless in the field in which the official culture canon deposits its assets, in the supposedly sublime field of philosophy.[377]

In this passage, Adorno connects commercially mediated needs to academic ones by virtue of their common function as substitutes. Noteworthy is the notion 'delusion' [*Verblendung*], which he claims is deeper among the 'learned' as it is among the 'masses'.[378] I will comment on the concept further below. Clearly then, there is a critical application for the idea of false need as a yearning for a spurious substitute.

As I have mentioned in chapter one, in part Adorno denies the plausibility of need distinctions in terms of isolated classifications. I take it that if the claim about function is true, then one does cannot not observe such function on the level of the isolated needs (although Adorno does not offer an argument to that effect). There are two formulations of the 'indistinguishability thesis' which however both point to this direction.

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[377] ND p. 93.
[378] Ibid.

> The indistinguishability of true and false needs belongs intrinsically to class domination. In them the reproduction of life and its suppression form a unity law of which is indeed transparent on the whole, but whose particular manifestations are however impenetrable. [379]

And,

> The indistinguishability of true and false needs is an essential part of the present phase. In it the reproduction of life and its suppression form a unity which is intelligible as the law of the whole, but not in its individual manifestations.[380]

With slight difference is wording, both formulations contain some implicit assumption about the 'law of the whole'. In the first passage, the issue is articulated as class rule [*Klassen-herrschaft*], and in the second, put more ambiguously as 'the present phase' [*gegenwärtigen Phase*]. It is not entirely clear if the meaning is the same. In *Negative Dialectic*, Adorno refers to class rule as specifically that which is reproduced in bourgeois society, a 'class relation that reproduces itself by way of the exchange of equivalents.'[381] Centrally to my purposes, both formulations centre on the idea of a social whole characterised by an antagonism, involving some sense of 'life' and its 'suppression'.

6.2. Structural antagonism: commodity, labour, and the law of value

In chapter two I defended a materialist notion of human essence as a necessary presupposition undergirding Adorno philosophy of need. I argued that Adorno's philosophy of need and his critique of capitalism presupposes a notion of human essence, which

[379] TN p. 394
[380] P p. 109.
[381] ND p. 166 translation amended.

skeletally speaking means human beings have the potential to set conscious ends. The notion of antagonism was initially introduced therein. This gives an initial clue to the implicit norm underpinning a 'false need'. To support my reading of IT as a diagnostic, this section explicates the notion of structural antagonism by borrowing terms from Marx's critique of political economy.

In this Hegelian manner of thinking, the 'antagonistic whole' is characterized by a type of contradiction. To analytical philosophical temperaments a contradiction suggests propositional logic—the principle of non-contradiction. In a rudimentary sense, this is the view that a proposition *q* and its opposite *not-q* cannot both be true. Adorno is not speaking about that kind of contradiction. Rather, he speaks not of propositions, but the sorts of objects propositions are about. To speak of contradictions and need is not to speak primarily about incompatible claims, e.g., 'I need shoes', 'I do not need shoes'. The contradiction is in the substance of the need itself. He gives further context to this notion contradiction in the following.

> With the development of the economic system in which the control of the economic apparatus by private groups creates a division between human beings, self-+preservation [...] had become the reified drive of each individual citizen and proved to be a destructive natural force no longer distinguishable from self-destruction.[382]

Why survival needs are contradictory in such a system—why such survival is indistinguishable from self-destruction—follows from the thought that what is subjectively necessary (and thus rational) for survival works to entrench the system as a whole, which Adorno thinks, works to objectively intensify such conflicts and make survival ultimately also,

[382] MM p. 71.

subjectively speaking, harder. In other words, the need for self-preservation, insofar as it takes the form of atomistic instrumental rationality, is in conflict with itself.

What type of antagonism is a unity of reproduction and suppression via exchange of equivalents? What is the 'whole' and what is the 'law'? In the passage I began with Adorno gives an important textual clue. The quoted passage contains citation 'appendages of the machine' which is a reference to Marx's *Capital*: 'In the factory we have a lifeless mechanism which is independent of the workers, who are incorporated into it as its living appendages.'[383] The term 'appendage' is slightly ambiguous since in the human body the appendage has strictly no function, but according to Marx the workers surely do have a function in the production process. What I take the idea to be that the production process as a whole is ('the machine') such that the workers become a homogenous mass where their intrinsic characters are irrelevant (and this also how I think Adorno understood it). Individuals are functionaries, 'mere agents of the law of value.'[384] Or similarly: 'the law of value comes into play over the heads of formally free individuals.'[385] Adorno in fact gives further hint as to what might be the logic of the argument underlying these assertions when he speaks of the 'metamorphosis of labour power into a commodity'[386], and explicates the idea further in the following.

> [E]arning a living, which commandeers [...] activities as mere means, reduces them interchangeable abstract labour time. The quality of things ceases to be their essence, and becomes the accidental appearance of their value.[387]

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[383] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. 1*, (London: Harmondsworth Penguin, 1976), p. 799.
[384] MM p. 229.
[385] ND p. 262.
[386] MM p. 229.
[387] MM p. 227.

Following this reading, the function of needs and their satisfactions is to reproduce the category of labour power as a commodity, but not to reproduce the human beings in any sense beyond that, but only is so far as they are means to the former end. Agency then, it is claimed, merely reflects the 'abstract labour time'. I argue by considering the positive side of these accusations, we can say more about the positive side of Adorno's philosophy of need.

If we consider the flipside of these statements—activity not as 'mere means', essence which is not 'accidental appearance of value'—we get something close to the notion of a human essence qua conscious relationship to our ends, which I argued stands for the notion of human essence in Adorno. How does that relate to needs? Because ends here stand for serious involvement and activity in our world, we can derive needs from ends. Human essence, then, is conscious relationship to one's needs. As Adorno puts it directly, the problem of capitalism is its character as a production process which 'determines subjects as means of production and not as living purposes.'[388]

I now move to the details of Marx's critique of political economy. What motivates the presentation is Adorno's claim that the IT is compatible with an understanding of needs as true or false has something to do with the whole, and the laws of such a whole, which Adorno further relates to the concept of value and abstract labour time. Unfortunately, Adorno does not explain what exactly he means by these concepts in any detail, other than that he refers to Marx.

I now clarify this issue, which requires some exegetical presentation. Commodities, claims Marx, have a curious dual existence. They are simultaneously 'use value' and 'value'—a term

[388] MM p. 229.

which expresses a specific mode of capitalist social organization.[389] When labour power is bought and sold it becomes a commodity—and in that sense it is no different from the commodities (physical objects, services) it produces. Labour power is unique as a commodity, however, in the sense that it is necessary for the creation of new commodities. Because commodities come to existence via human labour, and human labour must take the form of commodity, Marx thinks that human labour also contains the same split between 'use value' and 'value'.[390] In way, labour is split between concrete and abstract parts.

These terms require some unpacking. Use value is the more intuitive part because it can be expressed in terms of the properties of objects. Use values are directly related to the satisfaction of human needs, aims and ends. In principle, use values can exist in isolation. For instance, the planned use value of my chair is revealed in my sitting on it, but I can also use it as a dumb servant. Marx's point, as I understand it, is that in practice the independence of use value is highly circumscribed. Use value must be expressed through commodities which constitutively have also the 'value' side to them. This 'value' is the measure of quantified labour time spent on any given activity which is commodified (be it manufacturing physical objects or immaterial services). In other words, Marx's claim is that within capitalism use-values and the well-being associated with them necessarily must be have a split character, containing both use value and abstract value. The latter, however, has priority (within capitalism) as it is the principle which guides the manufacturing, exchange, and use of commodities. As Adorno puts it above, human activity to be functional for self-preservation

[389] The issue is often presented as being between use-value and exchange value. In my understanding, exchange value for Marx is a derivative category of 'value' as such.
[390] Karl Marx, 'Capital Volume I. Marx-Engels Collected Works. Vol. 35', (New York: International Publishers, 1996), pp. 45-48).

within the capitalist social system, it must become a commodity, and thus must assume the form of 'interchangeable abstract labour time'.[391]

Now that this structure is in view, we can turn to some suggestive similarities between Adorno's claim that capitalism reproduces itself as an antagonistic unity, expressed in contradictions in needs, and Marx's view of capital itself. Marx argues that living human beings and more traditional or local social relations, technology, and 'outer' nature appear to capital as means: 'Forces of production and social relations – two sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere means'.[392] Consider this with Adorno's assertion that modern capitalism can be characterized as a 'world in which something is produced not for the satisfaction of need but for profit and the establishment of domination [...]'.[393] And as Marx puts it, the very reproduction of life requires the 'sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end'.[394]

This externality of ends does not leave the means unaffected as *means*. This is so because for reproduction of capital use-values are subservient in peculiar way: it makes no difference whether human beings produce shoes, block-buster films or petrochemicals, as long as labour power is put to abstract value yielding production. In a specific sense, the opposite is the case: if no questions are asked about intrinsic aims and *intrinsic* value of their 'needs' and the objects that meet those needs (or relate to any question of need in the form of self-evident preferences and desires), the market functions better for the reproduction of value. As

391 MM p. 292.
392 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 706.
393 TN p. 394.
394 Marx, p. 488.

Adorno cuttingly asserts: 'Relativism is a popularized materialism; thought gets in the way of moneymaking'.[395]

However, in what sense is this unity of two values in labour and its products pose a dialectical contradiction? In this context, Marx (and Adorno) use the notion of contradiction not as a contradiction between propositions *about* an object, but a contradiction in the constitution of the object itself. In it, needs can appear, be shaped and met only in the form in which their satisfaction contributes to the selling and buying of commodities. In the form of the exchange, value and abstract labour, are disconnected from any concrete manifestation. The same applies to any need as it is understood from the perspective of the market. What regulates need satisfaction is an abstract form of need which has implication to what concrete needs actually are like. Adorno comments on the 'compulsion to produce for the form in which they are mediated by the market'. In same sense as distinct objects as commodities are commensurable, the needs which motivate their production and consumption taken on a commensurable form. Marx suggests that this does not leave the needs themselves unaffected: 'the need for money is the [...] true need produced by the modern economic system', whereby needs are extended to 'unnatural and imaginary appetites'.[396] Yet, the sense in which this is a *contradiction* (rather than just a necessary tension, loss of particularity to do with complexity of modern society) is not clear, and it is to this issue that I now turn to.

The above distinction between use value and value has to be further explained as resulting to domination—of the actual over the possible. According to Marx, the capitalist economy advances by producing more efficiently, and by so doing it increases existing use values. Yet,

[395] ND p. 37.
[396] Marx, p. 93.

these advances in use-value are not in any straightforward relationship to human needs and interests, but rather tied to the logic capital itself. This is based on the qualitative difference between the two types of value, from which it follows that increases of use-values does not perpetually lead to increases in value. As Postone explains,

> increasing productivity increases the amount of use-values produced per unit of time, but results only in short term increases in the magnitude of value created per unit of time. Once that productive increase becomes general, the magnitude of value falls to its base level. The result is a sort of treadmill dynamic.[397]

Here the distinction between 'use value' and 'value' is employed to explain the unstable character of the capitalist mode of production. Driven by competition to stay afloat, capitalists generally push forward technological advances, which initially result to greater accumulation of both use value and value. However, as technological advances become widely shared, the overall raise in use-values starts to jar with the only short-term increase in value. To keep accumulating value, individual capitalists must seek to outdo competitors by increasing previously acquired levels of efficiency even further. As a result, the advances in saving labour-time expenditure cannot be realized as a social good: a domination of the actual over the possible.

But why not? Key to the argument is the premise that capital can only preserve itself when it is reinvested to activities through *labour time* expenditure, put to use through the labour of human beings. In other words, capital is condensed social relationships. Marx calls this the contradiction within capital itself.

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[397] Moishe Postone, 'Critique and Historical Transformation', *Historical materialism*, 12 (2004), 59.

> Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side as sole measure and source of wealth.[398]

According to Marx, capitalism in incompatible with technological utopia of solving humanity's productive problems while realizing universally increased free-time. Instead, a historically specific antagonism is in place. Capitalist production by its own logic increases use-values, and reduces the 'socially necessary labour time'— that time which would be objectively necessary from the perspective of what it would take to reproduce produce the subsistence of human beings at a given time and place. However, capital's own essence requires the expansion of value, which means labour time cannot be reduced, but needs to maintained, expanded or intensified. To repeat, Marx assumes that only human labour can generate surplus value in the long term, and thus capital can preserve itself only by being re-invested in human activities from which this surplus can be extracted. This in turn requires maintenance of the unit of measure (labour time) which it depends on, and thus demands social institutions which enforce it. Here is Postone again on this point.

> [H]igher socially general levels of productivity do not proportionately diminish the socially general necessity for labour-time expenditure (which would be the case if material wealth were the dominant form of wealth). Instead, that necessity is constantly reconstituted. Consequently, labour remains the necessary means of individual reproduction and labour-time expenditure remains fundamental to the process of production (on the level of society as a whole), regardless of the level of productivity.[399]

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[398] Marx, p. 706.
[399] Postone, p. 63.

According to Postone, the dominant form of wealth, that is, value, demands the social institutions of labour. This blocks the independent creativity of labour, and the realisation of the potential for new types of social order brought about advances in increased use values.

From the reading of Marx, I have provided, the preliminary answer is how we are to the peculiarity of Adorno's application of 'falseness' as an evaluative category. Namely, read this way, the relevant 'whole', or 'law of the whole' which is deemed to self-preserving human beings in a contradictious form, gives us a basis for criterial structure Adorno's critique of false needs requires. In terms of explanatory structure, this reading of Marx fits well with Adorno's appeals to 'objective necessity', understood as social form which stands in an explanation as a teleological cause. Centrally, as a reading of IT, it fills in what Adorno only alludes to, using different formulations such as the 'law of the whole'. As articulated by Bonefeld, capital 'is the name of a peculiar form of social reproduction. Capital therefore really is the 'autonomic subject' of bourgeois society [...] as an impersonal subject that asserts itself as if by force of nature'.[400] This is reminiscent of Adorno's thinking of second nature as a spell, something that capitalist life is yet to rid of itself from, despite having already historically superseded the compulsion of 'first' nature.

6.3. Immanence, critique and limits

So far in this chapter I have presented the problem with the indistinguishability thesis in reference to the notion of antagonism— a dialectical contradiction—by way of Marx's economic categories. As I indicated earlier, the contradictions discussed here are not propositional contradictions. There is a similar, if not entirely parallel issue to do with

[400] Werner Bonefeld, *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason*, (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014), p. 66.

Adorno's use of the term false [*falsch*]. In general speech the meaning of 'false' swings between a categorical sense as 'error' or 'wrong', and an immanent sense, as 'poor' in terms of quality, while still being an instance of the relevant kind—my example in chapter one was a corrupt politician. The difficulty in interpreting Adorno lies in no small part, I argue, in his appeal to both registers. Thus, he is and is not a practitioner of immanent criticism. As an instance of a commitment to immanent critique, he comments that critical theory 'must dissolve the rigidity of the temporally and spatially rigid object into a field of tension of the possible and the real'.[401] Yet, more ambiguous is the status of his critique of the market mechanism, charged because it fails to provide 'adequate housing', understood as an objective human interest.[402] There are further passages where Adorno breaks with immanent criticism altogether. He thinks that 'false consciousness of [...] needs aims at things not needed by subjects.'[403] In the closing lines of *Minima Moralia* he writes that philosophy is only 'responsibly practised' if it contemplates 'all things as they would represent themselves from the standpoint of redemption'.[404] A standpoint of redeemed humanity does not make reference to immanent standards. That such a standpoint is not achievable to human beings does not change the demand that, Adorno writes, this impossibility must be 'comprehended for the sake of the possible'.[405]

Preliminarily, Adorno's need philosophy is dialectical in method—even though its status as immanent must be taken with some reservations. Consider this as evidence: 'There can be no talk of socially necessary delusions [*Schein*] except in regard to what would not be a

401 Adorno. 'The positivist dispute in German sociology', p. 69.
402 Adorno. 'Late capitalism or industrial society?'
403 ND p. 92
404 MM p. 153.
405 Ibid.

delusion—although, of course, delusion is its index'.[406] Furthermore, in the *Dedication* of *Minima Moralia*, Adorno declares that Hegel's 'method schooled' the work, meaning the dialectical method.[407] Further still, on the same pages Adorno writes that [o]ur perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer'.[408] Consider these passages for support.

> Dialectical theory must stand fast against [...] all the contradictions inherent to need. It is able to do so only by recognizing each and every question of need in its concrete interrelation with the whole of the social process, as opposed to appealing to need in general, be it to sanction, regulate, or even to suppress the legacy of its badness.[409]

Here Adorno is speaking affirmatively about the kind of philosophy of need which can do critical work. The emphasis on 'each and every question' suggests a thinking which mediates the particular immanently within the social process, instead of externally classifying 'need in general' and then evaluating specific needs. So, this passage supports reading Adorno to mean that some individual needs as false in the immanent sense—at least if the alternative is an external evaluation. Here is a similar one.

> The social mediation of need –mediated in capitalist society– has reached a point in which need becomes a contradiction with itself. It is at this point, and not in any pre-given hierarchical relationship between values and needs, that critique must properly begin.[410]

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406 ND p. 197.
407 MM p. 16.
408 MM p. 15.
409 TN p. 394.
410 TN p. 392.

According to Adorno, critique must begin with making sense of the relevant contradictions within need. In *Minima Moralia* we find an example of how private possessions are necessary for the avoidance of dependency (here related to need).

> The trick is to keep in view, and to express, the fact that private property no longer belongs to one, in the sense that consumer goods have become potentially so abundant that no individual has the right to cling to the principle of their limitation; but that one must nevertheless have possessions, if one is not to sink into that dependence and need which serves the blind perpetuation of property relations. [411]

Perhaps the objective good is just in the state in which one is *not* in grips of dependency—that much is 'true' (as in real) of a need for private property. However, such a need is also 'false' in two senses. First, in Hegel's sense, the truth of any isolated aspect of our world is one-sided. My *need* for a mobile phone as an isolated demand is abstract, and in that sense 'false', unless it is understood concretely in the web of relations in which central aspects of social interaction and even material goods are only accessible via it. Possession of a phone as an expression of my self-conscious agency then becomes a need which deserves the status of 'concrete'. But second, Adorno suggests in the manner of Marx, that if we concretely locate the need object to its relevant whole in a capitalist society, we also witness a general principle of possessiveness mediating needs and society as a whole. Even if it lacks justification, as he says, as individuals we nonetheless ignore it at our peril. This lack of justification is the systemic contradiction between the possible abundance of phones for all, and the existing limitation of access to them. Thus, not just the atomistic need claim is false,

[411] MM p. 39.

not just the standard Hegelian way to find in it the concrete is adequate, but the world is irrational, 'the whole is the false'.[412]

Now that we have more material on the canvas, I propose the following three points as an interpretation of the indistinguishability thesis.

1. Any distinction whatsoever between true and false needs is ideological. IT is a descriptive thesis to that effect.

2. The restriction does not prevent us from thinking of need both as suppressed by, and a function of, capitalist society. Thus, it only preliminarily appears that true and false needs are strictly indistinguishable.

3. Despite IT applying to isolated needs, we can identify individual *false needs*, if we understand them in their socio-historical function, with a diagnostic image of the whole—which it turns out, is also *false*.

Point one is partially coherent with the textual material. It captures Adorno's critique of ideological uses of evaluative distinctions, and the evidence to his stance on the immediacy of suffering, as well as the transformative hope placed on unconditional satisfaction of needs. The above presentation of aspects of Marx critique of political economy, speaks to point two. While this does not render the textual material on needs entirely coherent, I think this reading makes good overall sense of Adorno's philosophical project. Therefore, while IT is a critique of ideological distinctions between true and false needs, it is also a diagnostic of a condition in which are at least in a conceptual sense 'true needs' and 'false needs' but are not practically neatly separable. The grounds on which Adorno thinks they are not neatly

[412] MM p. 50

separable follows, I argue, from his indebtedness of Marx's analysis of capital as a social logic. Accordingly, as a runaway dynamic it appears to empty out any possibility of criticism—'[i]n situating all otherness merely as a moment of its own absolute reality, capital achieves a self-identical totality'.[413]

I now move to spell out in more detail what point three entails. As I briefly outlined at the end of last chapter, I propose that psycho-analytic concepts help clarifying some of the underlying aspects of Adorno's philosophy of need. Rahel Jaeggi's reading of Adorno as a social critic is of interest to my purposes, primarily because of her emphasis on psychoanalytic concepts. In the remaining part of this section I first elaborate on these themes by drawing parallels with her work and my reading. I then suggest that her attempt at evaluating Adorno from the perspective of her broader project of critique of life-forms is based on a set of questionable assumptions. In summation, I attempt to make use of the psychoanalytic aspects of her reading, independently of the thrust of her broader project which I comment on in the following section.

According to Jaeggi, Adorno's *Minima Moralia* contains an 'immanent-reconstructive procedure'.[414] Jaeggi's account relies on a version of methodological negativism which grants a notion of the 'good' as a question of 'asymmetrical reciprocity'.[415] This variant of negativism allows for 'images of happiness or success', but only as 'indeterminate and vague'.[416] This argumentative strategy has a place for the good as, 'situationally defined counter-images' but denies that 'the success of a form of life can be measured by whether it allows social practises

[413] Christopher Arthur, *The New Dialectic and Marx's Capital*, (Brill, 2002), p. 244.
[414] Jaeggi, p. 68. '"No individual can resist": Minima Moralia as critique of forms of life', p. 68.
[415] Ibid. p. 75.
[416] Ibid.

of that kind'.[417] Rather, in her view, the 'good' in substance is in the determinate negation of the bad, sparing room for 'what the object may come to be'.[418]

Moreover, the negative can be experienced only by virtue of the positive which it contains submerged—in the shape of 'indetermined longing'.[419] She identifies in Adorno several senses of such 'inappropriateness', as 'argumentative figures'.[420] Correspondingly, marginalised theoretical resources and 'untimely remnants of the past' (as dispositions and habits) can be understood as 'correctives to a corrupted present'.[421] These terms indicate various types of immanent falseness.

In detail, Jaeggi appeals to unmistakably psychoanalytic concepts, such as 'self-deception', 'displacement' and 'compensation', as well as the notion 'regressive consciousness'.[422] These terms overlap. For instance, 'displacement', 'compensation' and 'regression' could all be argued to involve 'self-deception'. I focus on the concepts in two pairs, 'self-deception and regression' and 'displacement and compensation'. In late capitalist societies, Adorno claims, there is no 'culture that arises spontaneously from the masses themselves'.[423] The 'mass' and their expressed needs are not 'primary', but 'secondary', and 'object of calculation'.[424] Yet, even these needs which are manipulated and, in that sense, artificial, cannot be flatly denied, as discussed before. Adorno thinks that failing to deliver on such needs is still a failure,

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[417] Ibid. pp. 75-76.
[418] For a similarly Hegel inspired reading, see Deborah Cook, 'From the Actual to the Possible: Nonidentity Thinking', *Constellations*, 12 (2005), 33.
[419] Rahel Jaeggi, '"No Individual Can Resist": Minima Moralia as Critique of Forms of Life', *Constellations*, 12 (2005), 75.
[420] Jaeggi, p. 78.
[421] Ibid. p. 78.
[422] Ibid. pp. 78-79.
[423] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered', *New German Critique*, (1975).
[424] Ibid.

dependent on the quality of the satisfaction itself measured against the need which it promises to satisfy.

> It is not because they turn their back on washed-out existence that escape-films are so repugnant, but because they do not do so energetically enough, because they are themselves just as washed-out, because the satisfactions they fake coincide with the ignominy of reality, of denial.[425]

In this passage Adorno appeals to a type of immanent standard. Escapist cinema is not bad because it does not incorporate reflectively its sociological and political context (it 'turns its back' to it), but rather because it, properly speaking, does not deliver the escape which is promised.

Adorno is speaking in an immanent register: the satisfier for the need for escape is false as fails to live up to the promise contained in it. The reason for that failure being that mass-produced culture products are carefully fine-tuned to meet accepted standards of taste as a very condition for their production in the first place. Entertainment, Adorno writes, only deceptively grants escape, but in fact plunge the subject ever deeper in the dominant ways of thinking and feeling '[i]t is indeed escape, but not, as it claims, escape from bad reality bur from the last thought of resisting that reality.'[426]Contradiction in this sense is an immanent mark of falsity—since the 'compensation' (escape offered in exchange for labour-time) is false, that is, not delivering the respite as promised.

I now examine what Jaeggi calls 'compensation', and I offer some commentary. Her example is a situation 'where leisure activity can be decoded as "substitute enjoyment" for

[425] MM p. 202.
[426] DE p. 116.

meaningless alienated work".[427] The wrongness, to Jaeggi, is based both on the 'disposition' itself and the 'false alternative to which it is forced to respond.'[428] In her view, this functions as a displacement and compensation. To Jaeggi, the 'false alternative' to a substitute, I gather, is not to have the substitute, but simply experience the emptiness of the lack of meaning. Assumed here is some ability and truth *qua* minimal correspondence, the ability to respond realistically and honestly to one's situation: 'right action reflects on its effects and realizes the context in which it occurs'.[429]

I argue that this line of interpretation can be productively expanded by way of the notion of unconscious motivation I touched upon in the previous chapter – namely, that such displacements can themselves be, in a certain sense, motivated.[430] Let us consider this passage from Adorno.

> The phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended. People are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer clung to satisfactions which are none at all.[431]

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[427] Jaeggi, p. 79..
[428] Ibid.
[429] Ibid. p. 78.
[430] The stronger version of the claim would be that it *presupposes* that possibility. However, Jaeggi's account is not detailed enough to pass judgement on that question.
[431] Adorno.

The problem is that these satisfactions are bad in an emphatic sense, and despite knowing that they are, people engage with them as a kind of intentional self-deception. This variant of the 'false' raises an interesting idea, in that the *confusion* between need and desire can itself be motivated. In other words, in that sense we are not motivated solely or even primarily by the object which is involved in the confusion, but rather we are motivated by the *self-deception* itself. What particularly interest me is this claim: 'if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification, they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them'.[432] On first reading, this puzzling. How could a deception work as a deception if it is transparent? I propose that there are two aspects of self-deception here: on the one hand, the claim is that I am aware of the film I am watching is just a film (this would be a pre-requisite to engaging with that kind of object in general) and I am also aware that it is poor in quality, and I am aware of its genesis and function as a product (its manifest ideological content). In these senses, I am engaged in self-deception which I am aware of.

However, I think we can read from this another aspect of self-deception which is deceiving because while the content is transparent, the *desire* that propels engagement with it is not. This fits with the quoted passage above where Adorno draws a contrast with between admitting something and subterranean awareness of it: 'without admitting', he thinks 'they sense' something about the function of such a desire. I suggest that the psychoanalytic distinction between propositional content and motivational state suits well to clarify this. For example, I can fully appraise the view that I merely desire x, that x is not good for me, that I don't genuinely need x. In Adorno's words, I may *want* to be deceived. However, in thinking that all I do is engaging in some mere desire which I can articulate, I pay insufficient attention to the possibility that my desire is in fact motivated by an underlying need, which gets mistaken for my explicit appreciation of something *as a mere desire* (For

[432] ibid.

instance, I can think that I do not actually in any sense of the term need to gamble or watch pornography—this are merely problematic desires). In truth, I might be satisfying underlying *needs* for esteem and human contact, which are not raised to transparent consciousness because to confront them would be emotionally unbearably demanding. False need relations in this sense be understood as cases where one is confusing underlying need with what appears as mere transparent desire.

So thus, the subject in Adorno's passage is motivated by the anxiety about 'that thing' which the self-deception allows the subject not to confront. Such a relation to need is false on the account that it thwarts an understanding of the function of some need satisfactions in one's life. What I do not clearly perceive is what engaging with it allows me *not to confront*. There is a sense of motivated, poor agency or complicity involved. Consumers, claims Adorno, 'force their eyes shut and voice approval.'[433] I suggest that Freud's notion 'anxiety defence' has a similar logical structure as unconscious motivation, which is simultaneously an *expression of* and *hindrance to* one's emotional life. As Jonathan Lear has condensed the issue with a comment on one of Freud's patients, 'he is afraid of the development of his own emotional life [...] he is too afraid to be afraid'.[434]

Let us examine one further psychoanalytic notion, echoing Jaeggi's construal. She is right to pay attention to 'regression' which Adorno frequently uses. As I understand him, regression is employed in an extended sense, not in the exclusively psychological manner of a relapse within a person's psyche, but also as an experiential aspect of second nature, the spell-like character of social relations. Jaeggi uses the following passage from Adorno to make this point.

[433] ibid.
[434] Lear, p. 38.

> [consciousness] throws away the hard-won knowledge of itself, in the midst of a society which, by the all-encompassing exchange-relationship, eliminates precisely the elemental power the occultists claim to command.[435]

Jaeggi reads regression in terms of lapsing 'behind the condition', and a failure to live up to a 'given level of complexity'.[436] I have a few thoughts to add. When human beings had their livelihoods and physical survival threatened by failing harvests, the rituals concocted to please the weather gods were, in their falsity at least, rationally motivated by real danger of starvation. By contrast, for instance, the persistence of the forces of nature metaphors in 21st century economic discussions (frosty downturns, turbulent stock-markets) are arguably false in a distinctively difference sense. Human capacities have historically tamed the forces of nature to such an extent that hunger could be effectively eliminated. And yet, alienated social relations remain 'natural-historical', produce outcomes where such vital needs are not met. The succumbing is not a lapse to an earlier level of understanding, since the earlier level was tied to objectively different level of productive capacities. Adorno's argument seems to be that the modern myths are irrational in a distinct way compared to the old myths, since they fall short from realising the already acquired current level of human capabilities.

This has so far been a cumulative and complementary discussion. Now I turn to issues of disagreement with Jaeggi's account. On her reading the strengths of Adorno are also bound to what she takes to be his two central philosophical weaknesses. The first is the assumption that in order to criticise a life-form immanently, but beyond reference to explicitly available values, requires that reality as a whole is understood to contain some sort of rationality (a

[435] MM p. 151.
[436] Jaeggi, p. 79.

thought which in her view leads us to Hegel).[437] The second problem, accordingly, is that Adorno's critique involves necessarily a muddled use of the concept of contradiction: 'it is hard to say how the (logical) relation of contradiction is to be carried over to (practical) contradictions in social reality'.[438]

With respect to the first problem, Jaeggi thinks that Adorno's mode of criticism depends on 'situationally defined counter-images', and that 'their profile is sharpened by the fact that they are *counter*-images that acquire their shape from their opposition to existing disposition and practises'.[439] With these ideas, 'immanence and determinate negation', she claims, Adorno remains indebted to Hegel.[440]

She presents us with two alternatives. Either an Adornian critique maintains its strong sense of historical and social contradiction, and this necessitates a commitment to 'reason charged with the philosophy of history'; or, it deflates such a holistic claim to contradiction and appeals instead to 'different forms of inappropriateness'.[441] The contrast being that in the first variant there is a unifying principle at play while there is none in the second. Her choice is the latter option.

To zoom out for a moment, according to Jaeggi critique can only appeal to what we can philosophically flesh out as the meta-level assumptions which a given social order latently contains. What critique aims at is a 'successful, non-deficient form of this frame of reference', or 'the positive universal'.[442] I contend that these options are unsatisfyingly narrow, both

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[437] Here Jaeggi appeals to a reading found in Theunissen, M. 'Negativität bei Adorno' in Jürgen Habermas and Ludwig von Friedeburg, *Adorno-Konferenz: 1983*, (Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 41-65.
[438] Jaeggi, p. 77.
[439] ibid. p. 76.
[440] Jaeggi.
[441] Jaeggi, p. 80.
[442] ibid. p. 74.

interpretatively (which concerns her reading of Adorno) and philosophically (which concerns her broader project) .

As I have indicated earlier, I agree with her that Adorno's thinking is strongly influenced by Hegel's dialectic. Where my view differs is that I do not think that a dialectical reading of Adorno involves subscribing to all the assumptions Hegel makes. (I am conscious of presenting a small, but an important aspect of it). As a vehicle I present a contrast Max Horkheimer draws between Hegel and his own thought on the topic of dialectics and transcendence. I then propose that Horkheimer's view is in this case the same as Adorno's. Horkheimer cites a famous line from Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*: 'no-one knows, or even feels, that anything is a limit or defect, until he is at the same time above and beyond it', and further that, 'our knowledge of a limit can only be when the unlimited is *on this side* in consciousness.'[443] According to Hegel, coming across an obstacle in knowledge or feeling, always simultaneously means that the grip of it (the limit) has been loosened, and some grasp of the what would transcend it (the unlimited) is in principle reachable by our consciousnesses. I am going to disregard the original historical and scholarly context of this view, and only focus on what Horkheimer makes of it. To him, the view that consciousness of a defect in and of itself implies its transcendence is dependent on a more fundamental assumption about concepts and being—an identity between thought and what the thoughts are about. Horkheimer retorts in the following manner.

> As much as thought in its own element seeks to copy the life of the object and adapt itself to it, thought is never simultaneously the object thought about, unless in self-

[443] G. W. F. Hegel, cited in Max Horkheimer, *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, (MIT Press, 1995), p. 189.

observation and reflection and not even there. To conceptualize a defect is therefore not to transcend it.[444]

Thought, by its own character, has to get as close as possible the content, become its object, as it were. But this is a task of ongoing striving because, Horkheimer says, the object remains separate from thought. Acts of self-reflection, he proposes, are the closest resemblance to Hegel's assumption of their achieved seamlessness. I take Horkheimer to mean that Hegel's view is most plausible where one's thought have thoughts about the self as their objects (to which he adds without explaining that even then there is no full merging). He goes on to say that to think that the mere accomplishment of naming a problem is to transcend it depends on a narrow view of thinking itself, as well as transcendence.

I argue that Adorno holds the same view as Horkheimer does on the relationship between thought and objects. The strongest evidence for that emerges from his repeated emphasis on the non-identical relationship between concepts and world discussed in some length in chapter two. At this point it is important to recall essences as 'non-identical' elements in consciousness and conceptualisation (which at least, if Adorno and Horkheimer are correct, Hegel misses out on). If Hegel's view of positive movement of determinate negation necessitates such a view about concepts and their contents, and if this is precisely the view Adorno repudiates, then it is not convincing to think that he embraces Hegel's immanent transcendence.

Not all commentators take the line I am proposing, but still depart from Jaeggi's stance. For instance, O'Connor reads Adorno not from the direction of Horkheimer's materialism, but

[444] ibid.

rather from what he takes to be Adorno's Kantian moments.[445] He thinks we ought to appreciate a Hegelian element: 'a moment of insight into our failure to encapsulate an object may be the basis of a more complex knowledge'.[446] Yet, as he puts it, we should not follow Hegel's notion of determinate negation: '[t]here can be no assurance that anything more than a consciousness of our failure to encapsulate the object is possible. No forward step is guaranteed.' I think O'Connor is on the right track in thinking that Adorno's notion of transcendence is minimal, consisting of just 'our ability to think against what is given.'[447] Gordon Finlayson has traced various aspect of Adorno as an immanent critic, and shown that his notion of critique, at least in Adorno's mature works, cannot run on the fuel of Hegel's determinate negation.[448]

There are indeed some passages where Adorno is quite explicit about what he took to be the limits of immanent transcendence and critique.

> No immanent critique can serve its purpose wholly without outside knowledge, of course—without a moment of immediacy, if you will, a bonus from the subjective thought that looks beyond the dialectical structure. That moment is the moment of spontaneity [...][449]

I take this to meant that 'non-identical' elements, such as those in the shape of drives, enter language and consciousness, and that such elements can partake in a critical impulse. In that

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445 Brian O'Connor, *Adorno*, (Routledge, 2012), p. 66.
446 ibid. p. 65.
447 ibid. p. 88.
448 James Gordon Finlayson, 'Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22 (2014).
449 ND p. 182.

sense, immanence always involves a moment of 'outsideness', and arguably immanent critique could not get going should it miss such a moment of externality.

In the final chapter of *Negative Dialectics* 'Meditations of Metaphysics' we can pick up a tacit distinction between 'affirmatively posited transcendence'[450], and another, indeterminate sense—'transcendence as non-identical'.[451] This may be confusing, since transcendence is commonly understood in Hegel's sense, that which is positively over, above, and beyond. Here, however, Adorno turns this the traditional meaning of transcendence (that which lies beyond the current possibilities of experience and yet somehow guides it) towards particularity and materiality. In this way, the point is to find transcendence from the forced immanence of capitalist life. In this way, immanence is not attributed to society as but to this particular kind of society which enforces conformity and identity. I think Natalie Baeza is entirely correct in putting it as follows.

> Adorno [...] finds in the immanent structure of reality a principle of order that corresponds only to the capitalist relations of exchange, which in his view have become entrenched despite their failure to meet the human needs that could be objectively met.[452]

There is, she reads Adorno to think, an immanent principle of order in reality, but that is the order called capital—cast here under the term the exchange relation. If this is correct, then a critique which runs exclusively on the basis of immanence, cannot get in view the sense in which the structure of immanence fails human beings. So in that sense, transcendence as

[450] ND p. 361.
[451] ND pp. 406-7.
[452] Natalia Baeza, 'The Normative Role of Negative Affects and Bodily Experience in Adorno', *Constellations*, 22 (2015), 356.

non-identical would be to call for the satisfaction of not only the needs contained in capitalism and its promises, but also a consideration of those aspirations that only barely arise because they deemed irrelevant or threatening for the existing order. Thus, we can surmise that the case against thinking that Adorno's notions of immanence and transcendence are straightforwardly Hegel's is quite strong. I agree with Jaeggi that the above Hegelian commitments are problematic, but the good news is that Adorno does not in fact make them, and more importantly we can philosophically expand upon the reasoning for not making them.

One might object and point that Jaeggi's reading of Adorno as endorsing a strong sense of Hegelian immanence does appear have textual evidence in his psycho-analytically inflected social-analysis. At least on the face of it, these concepts point to an immanent standard of what it is to be a healthy adult, to maturity and self-determination. In that sense, Adorno's need philosophy as Jaeggi's work has shown us—is indeed incoherent with central aspects of his theoretical thought.

My claim in this chapter is not Adorno's writings can be rendered entirely consistent. I propose that the best overall case of reading his philosophy of need is in taking him to embrace Hegel's dialectical procedure, but in a way which incorporates Marx's critique of Hegel. Moreover, I am not convinced that making use psychoanalytic concepts should imply what Adorno above calls 'affirmative posited transcendence'. The notion of agency in psychoanalytic health is the bourgeois notion health, nothing more nothing less: 'negation of the negation is not simply the positive, but that it is the positive both in its positive aspect and in its own fallibility and weakness, in other words, its *bad* positivity.'[453] Thus, there is a

[453] NDL p. 28.

limited benefit from 'negation of the negation': for instance, overcoming anxiety defence and dealing with trauma is to at least lead a life which pushes the bourgeois notion agency to its limits, and faces those limits squarely. We can also think about this in terms of Adorno's statement 'one must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly'.[454] Emotional responses—hate being one—can be more or less apt to their object, to their particularity. To be critical of something calls for immersion in the object of critique, and not merely projecting one's fantasies or narcissistic wishes upon it.

And yet, I take Adorno to mean that even if one manages to hate properly, this does not provide any direction, no positive counter-image, and no positive is guaranteed by insight alone. Failed attempts at emancipation may be failures to even correctly identify the complexity of problems that one faces. Such project of seeking awareness of psychological pitfalls fits well with Adorno's calling for elucidation: 'There is no remedy but steadfast diagnosis of oneself and others, the attempt, through awareness, if not to escape doom, at least to rob it of its dreadful violence, that of blindness.'[455] The question is whether one faces horrors with honest appraisal of the them, rather than succumbing to projections, narcissistic wishes and delusions. In psychoanalytic thought, I think, Adorno does not seek its integrative therapeutic aim to heal individuals. 'Dialectics is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion [*Verblendungszusammenhang*]'[456], he writes. Let us read this together with his cryptic remark about the truth content of psychoanalysis being in its speculative excesses [*Übertreibungen*].[457] In dialectical self-scrutiny the erratic and the

[454] MM p. 52.
[455] MM p. 33.
[456] ND p. 406. A brief note on the terms, as the German is also a moving target. Ashton translates both 'Verblendung' and 'Schein' as 'delusion', and I have noted earlier that the translators of the 'Theses on Need' go with Schein as 'illusion'.
[457] MM p. 49/77.

otherwise private and marginal may be precisely what brings to light socially shared pathologies.[458]

I now comment on the second problem Jaeggi identified, which follows from these alleged Hegel commitments. She writes, 'immanent critique as determinate negation', she writes, 'depends on an overburdening (or unclear use) of the concept of contradiction'.[459] In so doing, the 'logical relation' is carried to 'contradictions in social reality'.[460] Her considered stance is then that Adorno's social diagnosis should be seen as 'different forms of inappropriateness—no less wrong, but perhaps less compelling than contradictions'.[461]

I agree with Jaeggi that Hegel's notion of contradiction, leading to immanent critique as determinate negation, is an odd blend of a logical and ontological types of contradiction. However, I think here we do well to consider the reading I have suggested above. Namely, Adorno's adherence to Marx's late mature critique—a resource Jaeggi does not so much as note. To build on the previous section, according to Marx, the logic of capital is Hegel's dialectic made social practise. Thus, contra Jaeggi—it is not that Hegel was merely philosophically wrong about history having a logical form, but rather that he inadvertently

[458] According to Freud, both illusion and delusion are distinguished from ordinary errors due of the element of wish they depend on. Illusion, accordingly, is a belief that need not be false. Delusion is always so: 'in the case of delusions, we emphasize as essential their being in contradiction with reality.' Planning my personal finances on the basis of winning the lottery is believing in an illusion (but not necessarily incongruent with reality), whereas believing in an omniscient being governing all life strictly at odds with reality, delusional. This, to Freud, involves some kind necessary contradiction 'with reality' at the base of the wish. Certainly, Adorno's 'delusion' is not Freud's, but I think the idea that with delusion we are talking about a contradiction of a sort is important. Sigmund Freud, 'The Future of an Illusion', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xxi (1927-1931): The Future of an Illusion, Civilization and Its Discontents, and Other Works*, (1961), pp. 1-56.
[459] Jaeggi, p. 77.
[460] ibid.
[461] ibid. p. 80.

sanctified the real character of social domination specific to the modern as objective true universal history.

The Marxian notion of antagonism is not the same type of concept as contradiction between propositions, stated values and their expressions in reality. As for the model I am appealing to here, recall Marx on the notion of the commodity. It is not the case that use-value and exchange value contradict one another in the sense that logical propositions can contradict one another. Rather, use value and value are two essences which co-exist in the same matter. What immanent critique of the commodity form amounts to is to say that the two values do not exist harmoniously, but while requiring one another, they pull to different directions; they form an antagonistic unity.[462]

This thought is not as mysterious as it may first sound. For instance, in the current climate of marketization of higher education, a university teacher typically must inhabit two incompatible expectations in the same role. On the hand, according to the ethos of the teaching occupation, one relates to its recipients as students, along with the family of concepts that come along with it, such as values inherent to the and subject and scholarship, fostering independent thought, emotional maturity and so on. On the other, the employer of this teacher—the management of the university and their enthused functionaries—demand that the recipients should be treated as customers, and the teacher's role is, properly speaking, that of a service provider. From this follow a second and an incongruent set of concepts: student rights, satisfaction, retention and the like. This is obviously a rough sketch. But we can see here that the pressures from the logic of exchange value and that of

[462] Scott Meikle, 'History of Philosophy: The Metaphysics of Substance in Marx', in *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. by Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 296 pp. 313-15).

the implicit end of education (its 'use-value') co-exist in the same practice, at the same time, embodied in the same individual. They are not merely conflicting alternatives, since the only way to maintain one's job (at least in the long run) is to play along with these demands, and thus realise the implicit ends of teaching whilst also eroding them.

In my view Jaeggi's discussion of Adorno's notion 'objective powers' and 'alienation' overplays the Weberian tenant of Adorno's thinking, whereby alienation just is a 'characteristically modern experience'.[463] This muddies the waters with respect to the 'different forms of inappropriateness' which she offers as her own reading, which she says are 'no less wrong' than the one's traced to social contradictions. I think this defensive formulation draws attention away from the really important issue. Of course, genocides are not 'less wrong' even if one cannot explain them in terms of dialectical tensions. The central issue is not about comparative moral weights. Instead, the manner in which one understand the causes of the instances of wrongness matters for critical theory. The assumption that the notion of alienation means an existential malaise of any industrial form of life—which we learn for instance from Durkheim and Weber–gets one to a very different type of critique than the assumption that late modern alienation has to be understood involving the ways in which human beings produce, exchange and possess.

Because both Adorno and Marx think that the bearer of need lives by the virtue of such antagonistic unity, the contradiction takes place on the level of needs. As argued in chapter two, human essence is both reproduced and confronted with the essence of the social world: 'Ideology [...] rests upon abstraction, which is of the essence of the exchange process.

[463] Jaeggi, p. 70.

Without disregard for living human beings there could be no swapping'.[464] Here Adorno articulates this issue as reification of human beings on the model of 'things'.

> If men no longer had to equate themselves with things, they would need neither a superstructure of things nor an invariant picture of themselves, after the model of things. The doctrine of invariants perpetuates how little has changed; its positivity perpetuates what is bad about it. This is why the ontological need is wrong.[465]

Invariants on the model of 'things', connects here with positive ontology. Adorno claims in the 'Theses' that needs have a 'static character', which he qualifies as, 'reproduction of the ever-same'.[466] The attendant type of wrongness is in part due to the perpetuating quality of ontological needs. But as I have argued in chapter two, this wrongness is only intelligible when read together with the equation of human beings to things. This fits well with Adorno's reflection on philosophy of history where he recommends we keep two thoughts simultaneously in view, 'that of discontinuity and that of universal history.'[467] In this vein, Adorno is against the affirmative view of history as either epochal or universally continuous. The universality lies in the continuing struggle and despair, but as I understand him, the universality has validity only if conceived retrospectively, not as a positive counter ideal of another type of totality.

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[464] ND p. 354.
[465] ND p. 96.
[466] TN p. 394.
[467] HFL p. 92.

6.4. Objection one: 'there are no false needs, only false methods'.

I will carry on the investigation by reconstructing an objection against my reading of Adorno, from the resources of contemporary critical theory, keeping Jaeggi as the standard position—albeit that the fundamental issue is about the credibility of pragmatism as philosophical underpinnings for critical social theory. Very briefly: I think the objection is not compelling. First, as I will show, the repudiation of the notion of false needs in the literature is based on a cursory engagement. Second, the pragmatist commitments lead to logical and substantive difficulties. Third, these problems are inevitable if one tries to pass over questions about human ends in silence.

To begin, a repudiation of epistemological givens leads Jaeggi to reject the category need, which to her stand only for 'uninterpreted and ahistorical basic needs'.[468] This is perhaps no surprise, and leaves several types need philosophies viable, including Adorno's. But more surprising is her appeal to a highly subject centred evaluative standpoint. She asks how it could be 'possible for something to count as objectively good for someone without him subjectively valuing it as such'.[469] In the context of this comment she thinks Marcuse's notion of false needs (as representative of a whole tradition) his notion of false consciousness, is dogmatic—'immune to refutation'—and therefore should be abandoned.[470]

I proceed by examining Jaeggi's alternative, theory of life-forms and the resources for their critique. So, to begin, in Jaeggi's work on life-forms her preferred terms are 'problems' and 'crises'. Jaeggi understands 'life forms' as relatively enduring 'bundles' of social practises, and

[468] Jaeggi.
[469] Rahel Jaeggi, *Alienation*, (Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 28.
[470] ibid. p. 29

instances of problem solving to which some sort of evaluative standards apply. To her, evaluative terms 'false' and 'wrong' have an application when they pertain to the quality of relations within a life form, whether on the first personal level, or on the level of historical collectives with respect to problem solving. Following Jaeggi's broader research project, life-forms as a whole can be deemed failing should they 'suffer from a collective practical reflexive deficit'.[471]

As I understand her, her view on evaluation, experimentation and truth are intended to strike a middle ground between strictly transcendental criteria of success, and the evaluative stakes we could draw from a substantive notion of ethical life. For instance, a life-form embodies, in its own way and in its own context, an ability to carry on experimental question asking and problem solving. In that sense, the good for any life form is predicated on the strength of it as a 'process of learning', [*Erfahrungsprozess*].[472] The criteria for success and failure is here is quasi-formal, not substantively about the content of what a form of life expects from itself. Evaluation can only concern the 'how' and not the 'what' of human ends.

However, the problems which are the basis of such learning are 'historically situated and normatively predefined', meaning that the substance of the dominant social tendencies is assumed to be culturally and historically immanent. She writes,

> Forms of life become problematic when they fail to meet certain normative expectations that they themselves set up. And these expectations, again, have a history; they evolve out of a historically-informed dynamic of establishing problems and their solutions.[473]

[471] Jaeggi. On the Critique of Forms of Life p. 387.
[472] ibid. p. 14.
[473] Ibid. p. 11.

Jaeggi does keep in play the possibility of comparatively evaluating life-forms in the sense of how the cope with unavoidable challenges, 'problems confronting humanity'.[474] The key issue the is the meaning of 'a problem'. She writes, 'a problem does not exist unless it is perceived *as* a problem—that is, it does not exist without the process of inquiry that detects it and makes it tangible as such.'[475] And yet, 'the problem' [...] 'lies on the side of reality, not with us'. [476] This is ambiguous. Perhaps the first claim about an existence of a problem is tied to the notion of tangibility. Problem as tangible would be something more than the realisation that for some unknown reason I 'cannot go on'. She uses another term, *conceiving* in close connection to perception and inquiry. The existence of a problem (in her sense) is equally basic to an insight to a solution: the process of 'how a problem is conceived determines the possible solutions and their nature.'[477]

I am not convinced that under these assumptions there can be a genuinely normative constriction from, as she puts it, 'the side of reality'. The notion of 'problem' obscures a genuine philosophical difficulty. Putative 'problem' only becomes *a problem*, in the proper sense, if it has been conceived as such, and that process determines the parameters of solutions. Yet, then the appeal to 'humanity' is unwarranted and asserted to establish a mood of value objectivity about human problems which is not obviously available from her construct. The central normative issue, problem constitution, is question begging. This in turn matters for her project, aim of which is to convince us of its tools for evaluating the successes and failures of life-forms as problem-solvers. I illustrate the problem with examples.

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[474] Jaeggi, p. 218.
[475] ibid. section 4.2
[476] ibid.
[477] ibid.

In terms of her version of immanent critique, a good life form is one that 'can be understood as the result of a successful transformation dynamic'.[478] That implies resolving 'problems', meaning that a badly functioning life form cannot do so: 'there are also (obviously) wrong and regressive forms of life whose wrongness can be shown by their inability to deal with problems and crises'.[479] But to who is the wrongness obvious, and on what grounds? Given that perception and conceiving a problem have such a primordially constructive role—despite Jaeggi's denial that they do—then an agreement that a life form is failing in this functional sense depends on agreement on problem constitution. But is not common that social and political tensions are predicated on disagreements on that very issue? Here one has to have historical and sociological spectacles on, but I find it rather compelling to think that political crises are not exclusively or even primarily Deweyan functional crises, but conflicts between mutually incompatible problem constructions. Philosophically, these are questions about human ends, not primarily questions about means.

This worry arises from another direction as well. If only questions about the rationality of a life-form can be raised which concern their internal quality as self-reflective, could not a technologically advanced and problem-solving, but oppressive form of life pass as rational? For instance, a life from can from its own historically situated perspective determine that the cause of a problem of social-disintegration are migrants. Thus, a life form has perceived the world, and thus conceived 'the problem of migrants'. If hostility towards outsiders is a part of their 'ethically predefined problem description', along with their 'previous attempts to solve problems' then imprisonments, deportations, and much more are clearly reasonable, that is, as continuous between means and ends.[480] It is not clear how authoritarian life-

[478] ibid. p. 314.
[479] ibid. p. 389.
[480] ibid. p. 177.

forms which pass the functional test could justifiably be criticised from Jaeggi's vantage point, since problems to her account are exclusively 'second order'.

In the above I presented an internal problem and two upshots from it. I now try raise a few thoughts about the wider issues as to why these problems occur for this type of philosophy. An objector can argue that this is a way out of having to decide between realism and idealism— which is often understood as question about meaning and their 'substrates'.[481] My suspicion is that such optimism is unwarranted.

Be that as it may, I gather that one underlying issue here involves an undialectical refutation of naïve realism—often presented as a foil, meaning un-interpreted, invariant and ahistorical notion of human needs. Consider this as evidence: 'human needs are in principle unlimited and indeterminable and [...] they are changeable and dynamic'.[482] Here a pause is called for. These are two separate claims that do not necessarily support one another. The first, with respect to needs being 'unlimited' is more metaphysically demanding than the second, that needs are 'changeable'. There is no difficulty in maintaining that something is changeable and still *not* unlimited. That we know needs objects or even need forms change remarkably (which we can empirically ascertain) does not indicate that neither change infinitely so. None of this presupposes a final word on the matter.

Despite her hostility to making assumptions about human nature, Jaeggi's own stance presupposes at least one substantive premise about human nature. This is the belief that human beings are infinitely malleable, and yet such creatures which come up with only more

[481] In my understanding this relates to Charles Taylor's influential account about how meaning is related to the objects to which meaning is assigned. Charles Taylor, *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2, Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, (Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 22.
[482] Jaeggi. Section 4.1

and less palatable ends. I think such a faith is inherent in her employment of concepts like 'deepening of experience', 'transformative dynamics', and 'path for further experiences'—which are action terms, and also indistinguishable from value. Crucially, if activity as such is the basis of value, then in principle there is no gap between technical progress and advances in moral, social and political senses. It is not clear what to make of such a view.

As a final point, as way to gather these difficulties in Jaeggi's account under one issue, I return to my earlier point about the missing categories of production, consumption and exchange. To put it in Marxian language, there is no conceptual space for 'relations of production' [*Produktionsverhältnisse*]. The lack of such a cluster of issues is apparent when Jaeggi discusses the problem of unemployment uninformed by any robust social theory about property interests, division of labour and commodity production.[483]

I have here presented Jaeggi's account, that is, her version of pragmatist critical theory. My assessment is limited to that, although my worries speak to issues that others have noted with respect to the pragmatist tradition.[484] On the backdrop is a major dispute between pragmatist-experimental and dialectical notions of inquiry.[485] Independently of an assessment of that debate, a conceptual space for the question of human ends avoids at least the problems presented here (if some version of pragmatism ultimately delivers on that front,

[483] Family is used as an example of ethical life, but the social integration is cast in terms borrowed from Hegel and Adam Smith. Ibid. Chapter 4.

[484] Andrew Feenberg, 'Pragmatism and Critical Theory of Technology', *Techne: Research in philosophy and technology*, 7 (2003).

[485] Horkheimer's work contains the most sustained engagement with the pragmatist tradition found among the first-generation thinkers. He takes pragmatism to be thoroughgoing version of positivism, in which no distinction between fact and value is viable, the latter being reduced to functional terms. See, Max Horkheimer, '*Traditional and Critical Theory*', (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 188-243.; Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, (2004), pp. 28-39.; Also, drawing on similar arguments, Herbert Marcuse, 'Dewey, John, Theory of Valuation', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 9 (1941), 144-48.

then that would be a benefit). If the question of ends is granted space, then at least in principle then we can speak of falsely identified problems, or better still, *false needs*, which these problems are based on. In such analysis the questions of what (human needs) and how (institutions, technology, ect.) are not separated, but rather kept in a dialectical relationship. Marcuse's proposal is worthy of consideration here. In speaking of the question of needs, he writes,

> "False" [needs] are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice. Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease.[486]

In this passage heteronomy, functionality to externally posited ends, stands as quasi-formal categories of falsity. But they are equally basic to the content of aggressiveness, misery, toil and injustice. To think that individuals have false needs is not to commit to ahistorical invariants, but rather to take seriously the possibility that need-relations are malleable to the degree that individuals develop strong attachment—'euphoria in unhappiness'—to types of pleasure that cruelty and authoritarianism can afford.[487]

6.5. Unmet needs as critical affects

I have suggested that IT can be understood as a restriction applying to evaluative claims about individual needs, untutored by the holistic viewpoint provided by critical

[486] Marcuse. One-dimensional man p. 7.
[487] Ibid.

consciousness. Once such a viewpoint has been achieved (I have examined Marx's labour theory of value as a basis for Adorno's 'procedure'), the restriction on evaluation is lifted, at least in principle. These types of wrongness or falsity have a formal dimension, but as I have argued in the previous section, the project of building a critical theory entirely out of second-order evaluative procedures is unconvincing.

As introduced in chapter one, Adorno thinks that knowledge of domination (albeit a very loose term) requires sensuous experiences, and perhaps is available only through them. In experienced needs there is an affective and normative moment. Here is the relevant passage again.

> [I]n the needs of even the people who are covered, who are administered, there reacts something in regard to which they are not fully covered–a surplus of their subjective share, which the system has not wholly mastered.[488]

This is puzzling as the 'something' seems to suggest the existence of some element of non-social 'first' nature. Negative anthropology, or, 'negative Aristotelianism', is initially an attractive lens for reading the passage.[489] Accordingly, we make the assumption that there is some anthropological residue on the basis of which human need can resist co-option to the social totality—the 'not fully covered'. For instance, Freyenhagen articulates the issue as follows: 'there are substrates on which social mediation gets to work and this leave some residues that social constitution processes do not reach'.[490] I take that social mediation and constitution are terms for different degrees. For instance, the modern epoch mediates the

[488] ND p. 92.
[489] Freyenhagen, p. 250.
[490] Fabian Freyenhagen, 'Reply to Pickford: On Social Mediation and Its Substrates', *Critique*, (2018).

practice of gift-giving which pre-dates it, but does not fully constitute it anew, meaning that some aspects of it remains as unshaped by the new mediation-constitution.

This interpretation of the passage is not without difficulty. There are other passages in which Adorno directly denies this possibility of affects which escape the current social order in the sense that they pre-date. He says that they too are constituted by history, just a previous set of circumstances, 'merely relics from older historical epochs.'[491] In terms that appear to undercut any critical normative role affects in the above unaffected sense, he declares '[w]hat persists are the stale remnants left over once the process of identification has taken its share'.[492] This is clearly an interpretative tension since there are other passages where he writes: 'reflection on difference would help towards reconciliation.'[493] There is more at stake that textual coherency, however. Why would some modernity escaping impulse be a *critical* affect? Surviving elements from the past can be different from the presently dominant, but that alone cannot warrant citing them as sing-posts for critical insight. Think, for instance, the urge that calls for direct vengeance of harm done by violent acts.

I propose we read the notion 'surplus' (in the passage above) in another fashion. This means to take the experience 'surplus' as a potential for transcendence, in the sense of surfeit and alterity. This does not rely on there being a residue untouched or unreached by socio-historical mediation. Rather, the appeal is to a sense of the different *through it*. As a vehicle for exploring this assumption, I offer some commentary on Adorno's essay on Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. The essay contains a sustained conversation based on a function of Lenina, a

[491] HFL p. 96.
[492] HFL p. 97.
[493] HFL p. 98.

figure in the novel. She is thoroughly constituted by conscious human aims (because she is also modified as an embryo, according to the story). In this sense, there is nothing which is untouched by social constitution. She is the confident, well-groomed, and sexually charged heroine of the novel, who is the object of affections of John, 'the savage', an outside to the dystopian world because he was raised in a special location reserved for people who practised 20th century moral codes (representative of normality at the time of publishing). In the narrative, John is moralistically disappointed to Lenina's free-wheeling embrace of sexual pleasure. Adorno takes this to be ultimately Huxley's moral message. The defence of objectivity of happiness at the cost of subjective happiness has hitherto always been central to the ideological justification of the powers that be. Against Huxley, Adorno defends a hedonistic stance on impulsive needs.

> He [Huxley] believes that by demonstrating the worthlessness of subjective happiness according to the criteria of traditional culture he has shown that happiness as such is worthless. Its place is to be taken by an ontology distilled from traditional religion and philosophy, according to which happiness and the objective good are irreconcilable. A society which wants nothing but happiness, according to Huxley, moves inexorably into insanity, into mechanized bestiality.[494]

'Surplus', on this reading stands for abundance, the under-examined potential, that which is thoroughly socially mediated, but over and above what the state of affairs can contain. In this sense, Adorno argues that undialectical opposition to reification (Huxley's voice) misses out the possibility of thinking and experiencing through reification as a site of a qualitatively different future.

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[494] P p. 110.

> humanity includes reification as well as its opposite, not merely as the condition from which liberation is possible but also positively, as the form in which, *however brittle and inadequate it may be, subjective impulses are realized*, but only by being objectified.[495]

Adorno appeals here to a qualified notion of the possibility of liberation. The opposite of reification is shot through objectification—realised *only* by being objectified. The passage goes on.

> Were Lenina the imago of Brave New World, it would lose its horror. Each of her gestures, it is true, is socially preformed, part of a conventional ritual. But because she is at one with convention down to her very core, the tension between the conventional and the natural dissolves [...] Through total social mediation, from the outside, as it were, a new immediacy, a new humanity, would arise.[496]

The heightened dystopian image, where human beings are literally socially constructed by intentional manipulation is employed to as a contrast a romantic past-directed protest against reification. That state of freedom, it appears, is beyond the dialectics of nature and history, a breaking through to a new humanity.[497]

As a first observation, Adorno seems to be entirely unmoved by the possibility of this view being relativistic. One could think 'convention to the very core', (as he says in the middle of the paragraph) would destabilise the objectivity in the appeal to *humanity* in the last sentence. This has relevance to how we think of the notion of surplus. I now return to the passage about 'surplus', which the negative anthropological reading, where it assumes function as a

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[495] P p. 105.
[496] P pp. 104 - 105
[497] For a systematic development of the idea of transcendence of dialectics, in another context, see Dews. 'Dialectics and the Transcendence of Dialectics: Adorno's Relation to Schelling'

residue from the past. In contrast, on this reading the surplus is understood literally as that which is superfluous, an *excess* brought about by 'total social mediation' itself. Thus, on this reading the need affects which escape social domination are not dependent on anthropological nature as their *origin* or *source*, but nature as a mode of experiencing difference.[498]

I now arrive at some conclusions about the contrast between these two readings. Regardless of whether urges or impulses have their basis in humanity pre-existing modern capitalism, or in a new humanity emerging out of the excess of it, there is still a question as to why think there is anything normatively critical about the knowledge they deliver. As to the surpluses as transcendence, Adorno relies on a version of immanent transcendence—which could be understood to be thin type of transcendence, as discussed in the previous section on the limits of immanent critique. If we understand this as a dynamic between Lenina and John, the 'critical' knowledge is a historically situated reflection. Lenina can experience sensuous pleasure without the shame characteristic of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This dovetails with a thought we find in the *Theses on Need*, where Adorno comments on the reconciled state a condition in which 'the useless is no longer shameful'.[499]

Both readings are coherent with Adorno's emphasis on the satisfaction of material needs—in conditions of scarcity (which relies of course on the context). Adorno views material needs as asymmetrical to all else, insofar as we live in conditions in which they go unmet. He

[498] On the idea of 'nature as difference' in Adorno and more broadly, see Steven Vogel, 'Nature as Origin and Difference: On Environmental Philosophy and Continental Thought', *Philosophy Today*, 42 (1998).
[499] TN p. 396.

appeals to directly Horkheimer which supplements his critique of Huxley's moralising standpoint:

> there is no doubt that the fulfilment of material needs must be given priority, for this fulfilment also involves . . . social change. It includes, as it were, the just society, which provides all human beings with the best possible living conditions.[500]

In conditions of physical suffering, material needs (while not strictly speaking 'true') have a priority which undercuts any question of evaluation, In that sense, we can keep IT with the caveat that '[m]aterial needs should be respected even in their wrong form, the form caused by overproduction'.[501] In content, this must be left vague, since different contexts will call for different types of material objects. I now consider a second objection to my interpretation and to Adorno's philosophy of need more generally.

6.6. Objection two: everybody hurts

Raymond Geuss has suggested that Adorno's appeal to normativity of human suffering is 'undialectical', too undifferentiated and potentially itself liable to ideological co-option.[502] Geuss' worry about Adorno's placing of 'the abolition of suffering in a rather unqualified sense one of the central motifs of his philosophy', can be supported by passages where human suffering is the most immediate register where one should pay attention—for instance, his call for an *unlimited* satisfaction of all existing needs does give to this objection.[503]

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[500] Horkheimer Max, quoted in P p. 107.
[501] ND p. 92.
[502] Geuss. Outside ethics, p. 130
[503] ibid.

In response, I think the Adornian project does not have to throw out its diagnostic orientation to the tight connection between human *suffering* and *need*, but something has to be said in order to allay this worry. First, there is something off about Geuss' objection with respect to the danger of ideological co-option. Every central concept which critical theory relies on is liable to potentially turn ideological—that is just what is the case for those concepts which capture the imagination, express something about shared experiences. That should not be a cause for special concern, and it is just the task thought to be self-reflective about such things. For instance, Geuss references 'identity politics' as a potential example of ideological co-option of Adorno's allegedly inflated motif of suffering.[504] I interpret identity politics to mean chiefly claims for recognition in terms of rights. I think Geuss is uncharitable here. Adorno's writings also give resources for a trenchant criticism of the kind unity of individual consciousness and self-evident cultural authenticity which are both presuppositions for identity politics—at least in so far as it stays within the liberal rights-framework.

Perhaps Geuss' objection can be sharpened. I take it that his worry about Adorno's emphatic claim to alleviate suffering amounts to something similar: to take expressed suffering in the shape of demands at face value, and presumably to think that our duty goes to provide satisfaction in the form that the sufferer demands. The problem is a move from identifying *expressed demands* to thinking that these demands themselves directly communicate the need which calls for a response. While my focus here is on the ontological needs, even some physiological needs may have these dimensions (say, I may feel hungry and infer that I need food, but if I have an inflamed stomach, in fact all things considered I need medicine).

[504] ibid.

In this sense, *suffering* expresses some underlying need, that the suffering is an index of a lack. However, this does not imply the further commitment that the sufferer's *expressed demand* is directly connected to an underlying lack. This is both a conceptual and a practical point: expressed demands may be confused and misleading, not manifesting an underlying lack.[505] Thus, *responsiveness* to suffering does not entail the claim that it is the self-assessment of individuals or groups that warrant a claim for satisfaction. In this sense, we ca still hold Adorno's claim that all needs, especially those generated by capitalism itself should be met, but not necessarily in the uninterpreted self-expression sense.

At the end of the previous chapter, I was drawing attention to the notion repressed helplessness and the possibility of it being channelled as a *false* need for prejudice-driven agency. That was understood as need for social adaptation to heal the ego's wounded narcissism. The thought here is that such a motivational state is connected to spurious compensation for the real lack of agency. Social critique would have to begin from an interpretation of those feelings of helplessness and their causes.

[505] See also, Freyenhagen. Chapter 8.

7. Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have defended the claim that there is a relative coherence between Adorno's writings on need and other fundamental aspects of his work. In so doing I have also elucidated aspects of the latter by means of the former. In this brief conclusion, I draw some comparisons and contrasts between Adorno and the broader literature on needs.

Due to his influence in the social sciences, one of the best-known accounts of human needs is that of Abraham Maslow. I expand on some points of similarity and contrast with Adorno's critical theory by reference to Maslow's 1943 *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Very briefly, in this essay Maslow aims to show that human needs exist on a scaffold, a 'hierarchy of pre-potency' involving five steps: physiological relating to subsistence ; safety; of belongingness; esteem or self-respect, and finally to self-actualisation.[506] Accordingly, need satisfaction works as an ascendancy from physiological to spiritual, where the lower level has to have been properly satisfied before the full emergence of the higher. There are several theoretical postulates which call for attention. Maslow thinks human beings are a certain type of organism: 'If all needs are unsatisfied, and the organism is then dominated by the physiological needs, all other needs may simply become simply non-existent or pushed to the background.'[507] The evidence for this is taken to be empirical: 'most people with whom we have worked seemed to have these basic needs in about the order that has been indicated'.[508] As far as I understand him, the status of this is supposed to be both descriptive and predictive. There is some indication that the dynamism of the need-hierarchy is bolted on pragmatist philosophy, according to which the human-organism simply 'knows' problems as those

[506] Maslow, p. 370.
[507] ibid. p. 371.
[508] ibid. p. 386.

challenges that are immediate and solution prone, and is thus is able to shut down 'capacities which are not useful'.[509]

Maslow's theory shares with my interpretation of Adorno the commitment that human beings are intentional animals, meaning that an explanation of what they get around to has to be articulated in, broadly speaking, teleological terms. In thinking that unmet material needs threaten the very formation of other needs, Maslow's thinking has some parallels to Marx and Adorno, as well Erich Fromm. Regarding social diagnosis, Maslow's essay contains some speculative moments (which to my mind are not dependent on much of the theory as a whole), where Maslow points interestingly to 'neurotic adults' and their 'desire for safety' and a surrogate parent, perhaps a political demagogue.[510]

However, Maslow's views contain several problematic assumptions and internal tensions which warrant discussion. Motivation is thought to be an innate aspect of human nature, explainable independently of political and social conflicts, or moral questions.[511] In other words, we are asked to accept that workings of drive-based motivation is given to us by immutable biology. Further still, we are expected to accept needs in the specific order given. Despite the above, Maslow also supplies 'immediate pre-requisites' for even the most basic needs: 'freedom to speak, freedom to do as one wishes so long as no harm is done to others [...] justice, fairness, honesty' are all thought to be 'preconditions for basic need satisfactions'.[512] The status of these meta-level preconditions is unclear. If they are intended as developmental pre-requisites, as education all human beings must undergo in order to properly form and satisfy their other needs, then they should be accounted for as part of the

[509] At this point Maslow notes William James and John Dewey as his philosophical influences. Ibid. p. 373.
[510] Maslow. p. 379.
[511] ibid. pp. 388-89.
[512] ibid. p. 383.

so-called basic needs on the hierarchy. That option is, however, closed given Maslow's appeal to innate biology as the basic workings of motivation. On the other hand, if notions such as justice and fairness are 'preconditions' in a transcendental sense (e.g. only an honestly and freely acquired loaf can properly satisfy hunger) then Maslow's account is 'a hierarchy of needs' only in a circumscribed sense. Indeed, it amounts to saying that all the characteristics of the needs on the allegedly biologically grounded hierarchy properly exist only as mediations of a higher need, which is not itself a part of the hierarchy, a need for a type social freedom.

Such an upshot is a problem for the coherence to Maslow's theory, but an important admission towards a dialectical theory of needs. Adorno's need-based materialism is 'imageless', by which he means that while bodily needs have a certain rationality of their own, even the 'priority' of material needs is mediated by a historically situated subjectivity.[513] A dialectical theory of needs, Adorno claims, must relate 'each and every question of need in its concrete interrelation with the whole of the social process'.[514] Dialectical thought is akin to an expansive description which does not provide fixed points of orientation, such as a biologically given hierarchy. Rather, by showing in needs previously unnoticed emotional, cultural, and political dimensions it possibly reveals something about the condition of their bearer. In the spirit of this line from Kropotkin, its aim is not materially distributive social reform, even if it is obviously true that some vital material needs must be met if possible: '[w]hat we want is not a redistribution of overcoats, although it must be said that even in such a case the shivering folk would see advantage in it.'[515] While it certainly should be possible to identify a physiological sustenance baseline under which an average person

[513] ND p. 204.
[514] TN p. 394
[515] Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread and Other Writings*, (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 41.

cannot go on, it is quite a different matter to derive from such knowledge general motivational priorities.

I have largely steered clear from the Kantian tradition, including discourse-ethics based political philosophy. Since there is already ample commentary on such work, I have ruled it out of focus. For instance, Lawrence Hamilton defends a Hegel inspired notion of civil society—which by definition includes 'the system needs'—against views which draw from Habermas and Kant. The crux of Hamilton's criticism is that *a priori* conceptions of rational human conduct exclude the possibility that 'the state and economy affect the needs and values of civil society'.[516] Much of his own position is relevant for a critical conception of needs. For instance, his emphasis on 'causal significance' of institutions practises and roles could be re-directed by way of Adorno's notion of the causal fatefulness of institutions tied to the logic of capital.[517] Further still, Hamilton's discussion of paternalism is relevant, as he rightly points out that not all forms authority are direct coercion of informed individual choices.[518]

The issue of paternalism maps onto a common (liberal) repudiation of the notion of false needs. Taking Patricia Springborg as a representative, this strand of critique takes the distinction between true and false needs as a categorical one, and that the 'false' signals frivolity, which in turn implies knowledge of true or genuine needs.[519] Should one have such knowledge, it is thought, paternalisms follows. A version of this worry penetrates the contemporary Frankfurt School debates. For instance, the backdrop of Jaeggi's views is spelled out her recent *Alienation*, where she gives credence to Rawlsian political philosophy

[516] Hamilton, p. 109.
[517] ibid. p. 172.
[518] ibid. pp. 165-67.
[519] Marcuse in particular. See Springborg, pp. 6-9, 160-81.

about the undesirability of substantive conceptions of the good, and thinks Althusserian anxieties about the concept of essence are self-evidently worthy of adhering to.[520] I have already discussed in length what I find wanting in these criticism.

It has to be said, however, that the concern about paternalism had (and quite possibly still has) a special weight in the context of gendered power dynamics. Nancy Fraser's paper on 'administratively defined criteria of need' brings to view that policies of the welfare state have relied on the notion of true needs. The image which she portrays involves middle aged men sitting around tables deciding welfare policies targeted to women, thinking that their unexamined assumptions of normative femininity pass as knowledge of women's 'true needs'.[521] Indeed, administrative allocated of true needs obscures 'the politics of need interpretation', to use Fraser's terminology.[522]

However, it seems to me that *politics* of interpretation can also easily obscure other dimensions of interpretation. One can recognise Fraser's concern, and still be alive to the problem involved in assuming that administrative authority has to be confronted with 'the interpretive sovereignty of the person' as an already achieved state of affairs.[523] If we keep open the option that ideological prejudices and confusions are pervasive, then critical philosophy cannot rely on such interpretative sovereignty as an alternative to bureaucratic authority.

We are perhaps, more often than not, obscure to ourselves. On the topic of obscurity in human motivation, Jon Elster's notion of 'adaptive preferences' has some resonances to my

[520] Jaeggi, pp. 2, 28.
[521] Nancy Fraser, 'Women, Welfare and the Politics of Need Interpretation', *Thesis Eleven*, 17 (1987), 114.
[522] ibid.
[523] Jaeggi, p. 33.

discussion about social adaptation in chapter five. These are, very briefly, rationalisations, downgrading one's expectations to fit a restricted set of possibilities.[524] Centrally, Elster's point is anti-utilitarian: If freedom is thought solely in terms of satisfaction and avoidance of frustration, then 'spiritualising' restricted conditions is a more readily available route to freedom than changing those conditions. Adornian notion of 'an ontological need' could possibly be interpreted as an outcome of aggregated and entrenched 'adaptive preferences'.

Furthermore, David Wiggins has suggested that the 'overspecificity in a 'needs' sentence makes it false.'[525] False need in Wiggins' sense is a strongly entrenched pattern thought or action in a situation where other means are in principle available. Usually it requires that the relationship between the need and its object has been established with some strength. This is often the case with addictions, but I think the logic be applied to the interpretation of other issues as well. [526]

As a final entry to this discussion, I turn to Alistair Macintyre. Standing back from desires and choosing how to direct them, he writes, involves necessarily the recognition of the 'goods internal to each practice'.[527] In this sense, freedom in so far as it involves sovereignty, presupposes a prior capacity for the recognition of objective values. For instance, as a teacher I may be tempted to teach an entry-level class according to my research interests, which may please me narrowly, but miss the point about the internal goods of the teaching situation.

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[524] Jon Elster, 'Sour Grapes – utilitarianism and the genesis of wants' in, Sen and Williams, pp. 220-27.

[525] Wiggins, p. 22.

[526] For instance, it is initially difficult to characterise an addict *needing* heroin, rather than strongly desiring it. If anything, use of heroin can probably be shown in most cases to be harmful—and in that sense the opposite of an object of need. However, if needs are separated from desires with the assumption that needs are such things non-satisfaction of which leads to harm (however difficult it may be to command agreement about 'harm') then to an addict the heroin qualifies as a need (The withdrawal symptoms from it are clearly such that a person's well-being or even life is under threat).

[527] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, (Bloomsbury 2009), p. 92.

Macintyre thinks that an ability to judge and act in those situations is dependent of having character, that is, on the ability to 'give to those others who are now in need of what formerly we needed'.[528] Further, he asserts that [d]efective systems of social relationships are apt to produce defective character'.[529] Following, Macintyre it is possible to think that defective social conditions raise defective adults, who then cannot satisfy the needs of their peers as their own needs were not properly met.

As I understand him, this is not so much a hierarchy of needs, but rather attempt to understand the often-self-reproducing character of need-satisfaction relationships by means of psychoanalytic thought. From the perspective of critical theory, it is noteworthy that Macintyre's earlier work also contains some suggestions as to how to understand sociological ramifications of such failing systems of social relationships. We learn that '[t]he fetishism of commodities has been supplemented by another just as important fetishism, that of bureaucratic skills'.[530] In that sense, we might think that a failing adult does not merely inherit their failures from their parents, but in is 'called upon' to entrench these failings, for instance, in the workplace. As far as I am aware, these strands of thought are not clearly connected between Macintyre early and later writings. Perhaps they could be brought to a productive synthesis by making use of themes from Adorno's philosophy of need.

[528] ibid. p. 99.
[529] ibid. p. 102.
[530] MacIntyre, p. 124.

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