

# ADORNO AND FREEDOM

Jessica Tupova Feely

UCL

Mphil Stud.

Philosophy

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

#### Abstract

My thesis forms a critical examination of Adorno's treatment of the idea of freedom. I claim that, despite the pessimism of Adorno's views concerning the unfreedom of the individual in contemporary society, he nonetheless offers a novel way of thinking about the possibilities of both individual and social freedom. In particular, I focus on his suggestion that impulses play an integral part in our experience of freedom, and I seek to show the way in which this relates to Adorno's moral philosophy. I end with a consideration of how we should read his claims pertaining to the realisation of a wider social freedom. Throughout my examination, I identify aspects of Adorno's account that are less feasible than others, and how, if at all, Adorno could meet any objections.

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## INTRODUCTION

‘Reflections on freedom and determinism sound archaic, as though dating back from the early times of the revolutionary bourgeoisie. But that freedom grows obsolete without having been realised – this is a fatality not to be accepted; it is a fatality which resistance must clarify.’<sup>1</sup>

This passage reveals several fundamental aspects of Adorno’s examination of the idea of freedom. By suggesting that reflections on freedom appear to us as somehow archaic, Adorno at once puts in to doubt the value of discussing freedom at all. The idea is that, while the question of freedom might have been *au courant* in previous centuries, it is of little significance in contemporary society. This might be because freedom has either been instantiated, and therefore that there is no point in devoting theoretical energy to contemplating it, or, alternatively, that the realisation of freedom has become such a dim prospect that we may as well give up on thinking about it altogether. Given that Adorno goes on to say that ‘freedom grows obsolete’, it is clear that he does not think that the idea of freedom has been realised in actuality. But Adorno then claims that ‘resistance’ must clarify the reasons why freedom *grows* obsolete. The idea that freedom grows obsolete suggests a process, and perhaps one that is reversible. Secondly, the statement entails that we cannot comfortably dismiss the question of freedom as one that is somehow outmoded. In this passage, then, Adorno simultaneously alerts the reader to the possibility that the question of freedom might appear to us to have become of little significance in contemporary society whilst urging us to continue to reflect on it.

Many questions arise from this passage, not least, the question of how it is that Adorno can conceivably think that the idea of freedom has grown obsolete without being realised. In actual fact, there are two parts to this question. The first is *what* does Adorno think freedom is such that we can say of it that it has not been

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<sup>1</sup> ND 215

realised or that it is obsolete? The second is what does Adorno hold to have occurred in the world such that it makes sense to talk of whatever we mean by freedom becoming obsolete? In other words, what is it about contemporary society that Adorno thinks could render freedom obsolete? Whilst the two questions are inextricably linked to one another, this work will principally seek to answer the first question, and not attempt to answer the second which necessitates an independent analysis. But, in order to make some sense of Adorno's treatment of freedom, I will give a crude sketch of Adorno's views concerning contemporary society.

Thus, in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno famously claims that 'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly' and that 'The Whole is the false.'<sup>2</sup> This is because he thinks that, as a result of certain propensities in human thought and the historical developments that have arisen as a result of these tendencies, the social world has become entirely corrupted. Society no longer provides the conditions under which a meaningful or ethical existence can be had. Importantly, the second claim is an inversion of Hegel's famous claim that the truth is the whole, in which 'truth' has both an evaluative and an epistemic function. For Hegel, therefore, the 'whole is true' because we can conceive of how things ought to be, and the totality is a perfect instantiation of this conception. Adorno thinks that, contra Hegel, contemporary society itself is radically evil and irrational, and, given the degree of our implication in the insidious mechanisms of contemporary social life, we cannot even begin to conceive of how things ought to be. Society is in fact a totality which obscures its own basic functioning, and any claim to objective knowledge on the part of the individual is a sign of reified consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

This is in part the result of the human proclivity throughout history to seek to dominate nature and other men, and the kind of thought that accompanies forms of domination; that is, what Adorno refers to as 'identity-thinking', in which we subsume particular instances of phenomena under general concepts and come to view everything as though it is in some sense interchangeable. Adorno holds that the horror of much modern history, in particular, events such as the Holocaust, are not aberrations but are themselves the culmination of these forms of thought. Processes such as commodification and the capitalist system of exchange are also based on a model by which that which is non-identical is regarded as identical, and

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<sup>2</sup> see MM 18, MM 29

individuals come to be viewed as abstract entities that are interchangeable. The individual comes to be entirely subsumed under the totalising system, in which no sphere of life is left untouched. The individual becomes only a function of the economy, and goods come to be produced independently of their use value and satisfy desires ‘only very indirectly.’<sup>4</sup> The supposed freedom that the individual possesses remains only ‘part of the cherished private life’<sup>5</sup>, which is itself subject to the homogenising aspects of the whole.

Given the bleakness of Adorno’s views concerning the present condition of society, and the extent of our own unfreedom, we might well ask why freedom remains something that we can meaningfully discuss at all. After all, according to Adorno, we live in an age of ‘universal social repression’<sup>6</sup> in which individuals are ‘merely appendages’ in the process of production.<sup>7</sup> There are several answers as to why Adorno thinks that it is meaningful – and in fact, necessary – to continue to talk about freedom. Firstly, Adorno holds there to be a ‘genuine possibility’ of freedom in contemporary society.<sup>8</sup> It is thus not to be dismissed precisely because it remains something that *can* be realised. Secondly, morality hinges on the question of freedom, and, while Adorno might think that we cannot live an ethically good life in society, this does not entail that he thinks that questions of right and wrong should not be entertained. If anything, this is exactly the moment at which we ought to do our utmost to engage with questions of moral philosophy. Finally, Adorno also thinks that individuals in contemporary society are constantly being told that they are free when they are in fact not free at all.<sup>9</sup> An examination of the way in which we think of freedom, then, might enable us to begin to distinguish between the false freedom that we are accorded as economic subjects, and the kind of self-experience that might actually lead to some form of free agency. It is also worth noting that some of Adorno’s strongest and arguably less convincing claims are intentional exaggerations that he conceives of as ways of momentarily breaking through false consciousness. These kinds of claim point to the truth, but are not to be taken literally.

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<sup>3</sup> ND 205

<sup>4</sup> HF 6

<sup>5</sup> HF 5

<sup>6</sup> ND 265

<sup>7</sup> See MM 15, HF 6

<sup>8</sup> HF 265

<sup>9</sup> ND 285

My intention in this thesis, then, is to show that, despite Adorno's more negative claims concerning the unfreedom of contemporary society, he does in fact offer an important and novel account of freedom. In order to do this, I will seek to answer three questions. Firstly, how plausible is Adorno's conception of the self-experience of freedom? Secondly, how does Adorno's account of the self-experience of freedom relate to moral action? Finally, does Adorno make any suggestions as to the changes that would have to occur in order that social freedom could be achieved? I will argue that Adorno's re-orientates the concept of freedom away from more traditional models via the notion of the impulse that he thinks moves us to action. I go on to defend the notion of the 'additional factor' against several objections. I then seek to clarify the relation that holds between self-experience of freedom and aspects of Adorno's moral philosophy, and analyse how successfully the notion of the impulse can be deployed in these contexts. Finally, I will argue that Adorno does provide some suggestions as to what social changes would have to occur such that some form of social freedom can be realised. Thus, the thesis is largely constructive in that I seek to show how Adorno can be read such that he provides coherent answers to all three questions. However, there are certain aspects of his treatment of freedom that are less feasible than others, and along the way I will identify what these may be, and how, if at all, Adorno could meet them. Of course, Adorno is famously anti-systematic, and at no point seeks to arrive at a theory of freedom. But this does not mean that Adorno's claims concerning freedom cannot be evaluated or analysed, or understood in relation to other aspects of his thought. Adorno himself talks of the possibility – and desirability – of identifying the permanent components of concepts whilst remaining sensitive to the way in which they are liable to change.<sup>10</sup> What Adorno deems problematic is the search for straightforward solutions to questions of the freedom of the will and the problem of freedom in society.<sup>11</sup>

There are two distinct approaches that can be taken in examining Adorno's model of freedom. The first is to focus on Adorno's idea that real freedom would require reconciliation. The second is to examine what could be regarded as his agent-centred account of freedom. Whilst neither idea can be satisfactorily examined in isolation from the other, this thesis is principally concerned with Adorno's account of freedom as it relates to the individual agent. Ostensibly, this might seem

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<sup>10</sup> HF 180

puzzling. After all, Adorno holds that it does not make sense to think about freedom only on an individual level, which as will be discussed, is a criticism that he levels at Kant's theory of freedom. Like both Hegel and Marx, Adorno holds that individual freedom could only be achieved in a society in which all of its members are free. In 'History and Freedom' he states:

'Freedom can only ever be defined in [social] contexts or, depending on circumstances, as freedom from them. We may also express it by saying that, without the freedom of the species...there is no such thing as individual freedom.'<sup>12</sup>

Thus, according to Adorno, to talk of freedom only on an individual level amounts to little more than an abstraction from the actual empirical conditions that either allow or deny the subject freedom. However, while this is the case, Adorno in fact says very little about what societal freedom would look like. This is because he thinks that, as a result of the way in which society has developed, it is almost impossible from our present vantage point to say anything at all about what real freedom would be. It is therefore difficult to extract anything substantial from the notion that freedom would consist in reconciliation, and attempts at understanding the idea remain speculative. However, in the last chapter I will consider several passages found in the lectures 'History and Freedom' and examine how they might be understood.

On the other hand, Adorno's discussion of the self-experience of freedom is lucid and detailed. This is in part because he thinks that social freedom itself can only be discussed from the point of view of the freedom of individuals in a particular society as it is they who are in fact the 'touchstone' of freedom.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in both *Negative Dialectics* and his lectures 'History and Freedom', Adorno devotes considerable attention to outlining what the self-experience of freedom might consist in. In a society in which the causes of unfreedom are obscured, we cannot simply hope to make sense of what freedom might be by looking at existing social structures. It is the individual in contemporary society that is the locus of wider societal tendencies, and by examining subjective experience we can begin to gain access to wider societal tendencies:

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<sup>11</sup>See ND 212, ND 283, HF 191

<sup>12</sup> 'History and Freedom', p.179

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.180



‘He who wishes to know the truth about life in its immediacy must scrutinise its estranged form, the objective powers that determine individual existence even in its most hidden recesses.’<sup>14</sup>

The idea is that, by examining the ways in which the subject can be said to be free or unfree, it might be possible to begin to understand the ways in which society as a whole prevents or allows for freedom. In the dedication Adorno also warns against the ‘large historical categories’, as they are themselves borne out of – and reproduce – the nefarious elements of the social totality. What is problematic is when we start to treat concepts such as freedom, equality, and justice as if they are permanent concepts with unchanging features that can be spoken of removed from the relations that hold between the particular and the universal. Thus, while it is true that actual freedom would require a form of societal reconciliation, in the present conditions in which we live, such freedom is neither realisable nor conceivable. However, in the meantime, we *can* start to think of how something like freedom might be available to the subject experientially.

It is important also to briefly outline the way in which Adorno’s model is situated in relation to other kinds of approaches to the question of freedom. There are two questions that might structure such an inquiry. First, how does Adorno’s model relate to other thinkers in the history of philosophy who arrived at a theory of freedom? Second, what aspects of the philosophical question of freedom does Adorno himself seek to answer? After all, the notion of freedom is broad, and we may wish to distinguish between on the one hand the metaphysical concern with freedom of the will, and on the other hand the question of what constitutes moral or political freedom.

First, Adorno’s conception of freedom cannot be removed from a consideration of the Hegelian critique of Kantian freedom. As Bowie points out, the principal conceptual framework from which Adorno’s discussion of freedom derives is precisely the tension arising between the Kantian and Hegelian conception of freedom and moral agency.<sup>15</sup> While the first chapter will examine two aspects of Adorno’s critique of Kant’s notion of freedom, this should not lead us to the conclusion that Adorno is a proponent of Hegel’s theory of freedom. Thus, in

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<sup>14</sup> MM, p.15

order to frame Adorno's model of freedom, it is useful to briefly examine Hegel's critique of Kantian freedom.

For Kant, the exercise of autonomy on the part of the subject requires both freedom from the laws of nature and the agent giving itself practical laws in accordance with reason. He states that: "Autonomy of the will is the property the will has of being a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)."<sup>16</sup> Thus, autonomy – and therefore, moral agency – requires that the individual is capable of rationally reflecting on their actions and thereby being able to give reasons for them. Whilst Hegel accepts that freedom requires rationality on the part of the individual, he famously accuses Kant of 'empty formalism'. For Hegel, Kant's conception of self-determination wrongly suggests that these sorts of reasons are available to the subject removed from the particular context in which he finds himself. By contrast, Hegel argues that the agent chooses in a given environment, the latter of which contains various pre-existing norms and commitments that themselves provide the framework for the individual subject's reflections and rational deliberations. Thus, for Hegel, freedom is in fact actualised through the various commitments and obligations that occur through partaking in *Sittlichkeit*. *Sittlichkeit* denotes the sphere in which one leads one's ethical life through assuming a social role within an institutional framework. In order to lead an ethically good life, the individual must fulfil their allotted role, and by so doing, involve themselves in the rational structure underlying society. Yet Hegel makes a further claim; that is, that freedom is in fact something that is realised in history and, moreover, in the society of his day. Adorno characterises the Hegelian intertwining of freedom and history in the following way:

'History becomes a radical movement in the direction of freedom. 'Consciousness of freedom' does not refer to an individual, subjective consciousness of freedom, but to the spirit that objectively realises itself through history, thus making freedom a reality.'<sup>17</sup>

As will be discussed in chapter one, Adorno follows Hegel's criticism of Kant's view that freedom is a subjective quality possessed simply by virtue of the possession of an abstracted reason. Yet this does not mean that Adorno thinks that

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<sup>15</sup> Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy*, p.98

<sup>16</sup> (G 4:440)

<sup>17</sup> 'History and Freedom', p.5

anything like freedom is available in our current ethical life, or that it is something that is necessarily realised historically. In the second and third chapter I will examine why it is that Adorno thinks that the idea of freedom as something that is realised by an agent's involvement in the institutions of modern societies does not provide a suitable alternative to the Kantian picture.

It is important that Adorno's project should also be situated in relation to questions that continue to arise in philosophical discourse on freedom. In particular, we might wish to know whether Adorno believes in free will, or whether he is a determinist. In fact, as will be discussed in the first chapter, Adorno contentiously claims that this question is, if not irrelevant, certainly not the only one of importance, and furthermore, that this form of approach can lead to an obfuscation of what is really at stake when we talk about freedom. By extension, contemporary debates between compatibilists and incompatibilists on the question of whether or not we can be free and consequently morally responsible whilst subject to the deterministic laws of nature have little to do with what Adorno thinks should be the chief source of reflections on freedom. We can begin to gain a clearer understanding of what Adorno *does* think should be the starting-point of reflections on freedom from a passage found in the first lecture of 'History and Freedom';

'Objectively, such a progress [towards freedom] is impossible because of the increasingly dense texture of society in both East and West; the growing concentration of the economy, the executive and the bureaucracy has advanced to such an extent that people are reduced more and more to the status of functions...Goods are not produced for their own sake and their consumption satisfies people's own desires only very indirectly and to a very limited extent.'<sup>18</sup>

What this passage might prompt us to think is that focusing only on the question of whether or not we can be free whilst being determined by the laws of nature wrongly ignores the real social conditions that in fact determine us. This passage might lead to a further question. That is, should we understand Adorno as being principally concerned with political freedom, or with the metaphysical question of the freedom of the will? As I mentioned, a large part of this thesis will be an examination of Adorno's response to Kant's account of willing. But the above

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<sup>18</sup> HF, p.5

passage might suggest to us that Adorno's principal concern is not so much the question of what constitutes freedom of the will but a more concrete inquiry in to the actual socio-economic conditions that hold under late capitalism. In fact, it is one of Adorno's strengths that he thinks that the two questions are inextricably linked, and that it does not make sense to posit them as separate issues. In many ways the aim of this thesis is to attempt to understand and show that such a way of proceeding should not be viewed as a conflation of two separate philosophical problems, but rather the way in which we should properly think about freedom.

Thus, to briefly outline the structure of thesis, in the first chapter, I examine two aspects of Adorno's critique of Kant with a view to establishing a set of constraints on Adorno's own conception of freedom. Adorno's critique of Kant is extensive and fragmentary, and a detailed assessment of Adorno's objections to Kant is beyond the bounds of this work. I will focus principally on Adorno's socio-historic deconstruction of the antinomy, and secondly, his discussion of Kant's theory of the will. The second chapter will begin by discussing why Adorno thinks that the individual experiences himself as both free and unfree in contemporary society, but why he is in fact unfree. I will then argue that this should not lead us to conclude that Adorno holds that there is no possibility of freedom. I will outline what Adorno thinks that the self-experience of freedom does consist of; that is, in the interplay between ego and impulse. The third chapter will seek to ascertain how it is the self-experience of freedom might relate to the somatic impulse that Adorno thinks that morality requires of us. In particular, I will examine the possibility that Adorno arrives at an ethics of resistance, and outline certain objections that might arise. In the final chapter, I will distinguish between Adorno's negative freedom, and what he might take 'autonomy' to consist in. This will then lead me to an analysis of Adorno's suggestions as to what social changes would be necessary in order for freedom to be instantiated, and how this might relate to the other arguments that he advances in his discussion of freedom. I will not examine Adorno's conception of freedom and its relation to identity-thinking and what Adorno refers to as the non-identical, because this would require more attention than would be possible in this work. For the same reason, I will not look at Adorno's aesthetics and its relation to his account of freedom.

# I

## ADORNO, KANT, AND FREEDOM

According to Adorno, Kant's philosophy ends up 'dispensing with freedom entirely' and the idea of freedom 'dwindles to the point of extinction' in his thought<sup>19</sup> We might then wonder why Adorno thinks it is worthwhile devoting much of the 'Freedom' chapter of *Negative Dialectics* –and his lectures 'History and Freedom' – to a critique of Kant. If it is true that Kantian philosophy fails so miserably at arriving at a plausible or coherent account of freedom, why not focus instead on Hegel or Marx? Firstly, Adorno thinks that Kant articulates the contradictions inherent in the concept of freedom that subsequent philosophies gloss over. Secondly, certain elements of Kant's account of freedom do have potentially progressive elements. In this chapter, I will examine two aspects of Adorno's critique of Kant's theory of freedom. The first is Adorno's claim that both the idea of freedom and the thing itself are historic. One way in which Adorno shows this is via his socio-historical deconstruction of Kant's third antinomy. I will examine this deconstruction in greater detail, with a view to showing what implications this has for Adorno's own account of freedom, and why this is a good way of thinking about freedom. I will then examine Adorno's critique of the Kantian conception of the will, and what this implies for his own account of freedom. This chapter is not intended as an assessment of the accuracy of Adorno's extensive critique, which would require an independent analysis. Rather, the objective is to delineate certain constraints that should be met if Adorno is to go beyond only a negative critique of Kant's notion of the will.

### **1. The Third Antinomy**

In the third antinomy of *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant poses the question of whether or not it is possible to conceive of there existing a causality that is not

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<sup>19</sup> PMP 133

only ‘causality in accordance with laws of nature.’<sup>20</sup> The thesis of the antinomy postulates the existence of another type of causality – a causality of freedom – which must be assumed in order to explain appearances.<sup>21</sup> In formulating the antinomy, Kant does not set out to prove that freedom understood as the other form of causality exists, but rather seeks to demonstrate that freedom and nature are not necessarily opposed to one another.<sup>22</sup> In the proof of the thesis, Kant argues that there must be a sufficient a priori determined cause that occurs ‘without its cause being determined according to necessary laws by some other cause preceding.’<sup>23</sup> If there is only causality in accordance with laws of nature, there would be no absolute beginning, and instead an infinite regress of causation. Yet the laws of nature require there to be a beginning, and thus, the proof posits the existence of an ‘absolute spontaneity of cause’ that begins the series of phenomena that then continue according to the laws of nature. This spontaneity is referred to by Kant as ‘transcendental freedom.’<sup>24</sup> Thus far, the proof claims that freedom is a necessary concept to employ in order to understand how it is that the world originated. But, there is a further step that Kant takes in his elaboration of transcendental freedom. He points to the act of raising himself from his chair. Kant suggests that the act that he performs is not simply the result of causes of nature, but rather that, by getting up from his earlier position on the chair, he performs a free act that is itself the originator of a new series of phenomena that then proceed according to the laws of nature.

The antithesis holds that ‘there is no freedom’, and states that ‘everything in the world takes place solely in accordance with the laws of nature.’<sup>25</sup> The transcendental freedom that the thesis postulates as necessary is in fact opposed to the laws of cause and effect and therefore natural laws, and the introduction of freedom conflicts with the ‘unity of experience’ that is articulated in the law of causality. Thus, the antithesis holds the possibility of there existing such a freedom to form a contradiction with the established laws of nature. But Kant seeks to resolve the supposed antinomy between the thesis and antithesis, and does so with reference to transcendental idealism. We can in fact conceive of freedom as being possible in the realm of things-in-themselves, whilst still maintaining that the

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<sup>20</sup> Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p.484

<sup>21</sup> CPR 282

<sup>22</sup> CPR 282

<sup>23</sup> CPR 282

<sup>24</sup> CPR 282

<sup>25</sup> CPR 282

antithesis holds true in the world of appearances. Kant draws a distinction between the empirical and intelligible realm, and claims that it is possible to conceive of an empirical causality that is the effect of a ‘non-empirical and intelligible causality’<sup>26</sup>. What this would amount to is an event – such as that of Kant rising from a chair – that is not itself conditioned empirically, and that is rather the effect of an intelligible cause that is then empirically determined. By resolving the antinomy in this way, Kant seeks to demonstrate that freedom is at least not theoretically at odds with existent laws of nature, and that, by extension, we can hold freedom to be at least a possibility.

## **2. Freedom as Historical**

A few preliminary remarks should be made about the importance Adorno accords Kant’s antinomy. Adorno thinks that the antinomy expresses a contradiction that remains central to the notion of freedom;

‘Kant perceived that...on the one hand, freedom is the only possible defining feature of humanity, but that, on the other hand, freedom cannot be treated as something present, as a fact.’<sup>27</sup>

For Adorno, freedom is – for the most part – conspicuously absent from modern societies. This means that an integral aspect of our humanity is largely unavailable to us. Secondly, Adorno *also* thinks that the antinomy points to two erroneous alternatives – or, as he puts it, two types of slogan – with which we are currently presented in modern societies. Thus, there is the ‘hollow pathos’ of political rallies to freedom in ‘official declamations’, and at the same time there are empty and ‘abstract’ deterministic views that do not even accurately identify *how* individuals are determined.<sup>28</sup> On the one hand, then, there is the ideological misuse of the idea of freedom employed by propagandists, and on the other, generic deterministic claims that arise in part from scientific methodologies. Yet while the third antinomy points to these contradictions, according to Adorno, Kant himself attempts to ‘purify freedom’, which leads to a vague and shadowy conception of freedom, in which freedom comes to reside in an intelligible realm removed from actual, empirical conditions.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

<sup>27</sup> HF 177

How, then, should we begin to think about freedom such that we are neither guilty of sloganeering nor abstraction? Firstly, Adorno states that reflecting on the question of free will turns it into a question for the ‘philosophy of history’, and then asks ‘why have the two theses, ‘The will is free’ and ‘The will is unfree,’ become an antinomy?’<sup>29</sup> Contra Kant, Adorno holds the contradiction expressed in the third antinomy to arise only at a given point in history; more precisely, as the result of socio-economic developments in the early modern period. For Adorno, both the concept of freedom and the ‘thing itself’ are historical, and he claims that ‘whole epochs, whole societies lacked not only the concept of freedom but the thing.’<sup>30</sup> Both the idea of freedom and freedom itself thus depend on the state of the world, and in particular, the formation of the modern individual, and are not constants in the way Kant envisages.<sup>31</sup> Adorno contends that Kant himself is aware of the ‘historical origin’ of *reflections* on the idea of freedom, and quotes a passage found in the *Groundwork* in which Kant seems to confront the historicity of the concept; ‘Man was seen to be bound to laws by his duty; but it occurred to no one that the only legislation to which man is subject is his own...’<sup>32</sup> Kant does imply in this passage that there were historical times in which man was not aware of his freedom, and rather, unquestioningly assumed himself to simply be tethered to duty by laws that he himself did not make. Yet Kant still regards freedom itself to be something eternal, rather than historic both as a concept and as an ‘empirical substance’.<sup>33</sup> Thus, on Adorno’s reading, Kant accepts that it is only at a given point in history that man begins to conceive of himself as free, but Kant neglects to then carry this idea through and understand that *both* freedom as an idea and the thing itself arise only at a given point in history.

According to Adorno, the social conditions that lead to the apparent contradiction that reason experiences when confronted by the antinomy occur when the bourgeoisie seek to emancipate themselves from feudal power structures and gain independence from earlier hierarchies. Adorno’s central idea is that the bourgeois class in the early modern period must assert their freedom by emphasising the critical rationality possessed by the individual if they are to successfully break away from earlier social structures. The thesis of the third antinomy expresses this

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<sup>28</sup> CM 85

<sup>29</sup> ND 218

<sup>30</sup> ND 218, see also ND 259, ND 262, CM 43

<sup>31</sup> HF 243

<sup>32</sup> Kant, *Groundwork*, p.432

<sup>33</sup> ND 218



attempt by the bourgeois class to theoretically ascribe this form of freedom to themselves. Yet this comes into contradiction with developments that are inextricably linked to the first occurrence. That is, alongside attempts at emancipation via the use of critical rationality, there is also ‘progressive scientification’<sup>34</sup>. The prevalence of the sciences – in particular, psychology – is accompanied by increasingly deterministic explanations of human behaviour. The bourgeois class, intent on ascribing to themselves freedom derived from their critical capacities, simultaneously gain their actual newly found power from their increased economic independence. They thus seek to promote the productive capacities that require scientific progress. But scientific progress is indissolubly bound to a deterministic conception of events and humans based on causal explanations that seems to deny the possibility of an existent freedom.

The contradiction found in the antinomy, then, derives from the moment at which ‘The bourgeois class is in league with [progressive scientification]...insofar as it promotes production, but it must fear scientific progress as soon as the progress interferes with the belief that its freedom...is existent.’ In the socio-political quest for freedom, the bourgeoisie seek to arrive at a philosophical conception of freedom to bolster their bid for emancipation.<sup>35</sup> But this then alters the way in which the question of freedom is conceived. It ceases to be regarded as something located in the empirical world, and is rather considered to be a metaphysical property of the human being; ‘This rational justification of man as free proceeds from man’s actual liberation, but attempts to ground this actual liberation in his own nature, that is to say, in man’s nature as a subject’.<sup>36</sup> Freedom comes to be regarded as something removed from the actual, socio-empirical world, and is conceived of in a ‘highly external, objective sense.’<sup>37</sup> Kant himself claims that, whilst we cannot know anything about the intelligible realm, it is at the same time the extra-temporal location of our freedom. Yet how can freedom, which Adorno thinks that we should view as an ‘attribute’ of temporal action, be predicated of something ‘radically non-temporal’<sup>38</sup> that we also do not know anything about? Adorno states;

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<sup>34</sup> ND 214

<sup>35</sup> HF 193

<sup>36</sup> HF 194

<sup>37</sup> HF 194

<sup>38</sup> ND 254

‘In the abstract universal concept of things ‘beyond nature,’ freedom is spiritualised into freedom from the realm of causality. With that, however, it becomes a self-deception.’<sup>39</sup>

Adorno thinks that such a conception of freedom is not only an instance of self-deception, but that it also has certain pernicious consequences. Given that freedom comes to be regarded as something on the other side of an ‘ontological abyss’, whose mode of influencing any actual empirical conditions becomes increasingly difficult to gauge, the result is a certain kind of political apathy and disengagement on the part of the subject. When freedom is viewed in abstract terms as something that exists outside of time and beyond existing empirical conditions, it becomes an empty and only formal concept, devoid of practical significance yet simultaneously a legitimisation of the kind of freedoms offered by modern states. Furthermore, the idea that we possess intelligible freedom corresponds to ‘empirical individuals’ being held to be morally accountable and therefore also punishable.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, Adorno claims that the idea that freedom exists in an intelligible realm – and that we are all free – is coupled with ‘repressive practice’.<sup>41</sup> When individuals are regarded as possessing an intelligible freedom that is not located in actual empirical conditions, given the unfreedom of society, they are accorded a responsibility that they in large part lack.

Why, then, is it important that Adorno thinks that freedom is a historical concept, whose existence can be dated to the emergence of the bourgeois individual desirous of emancipation from tutelage? Kant problematically admits that while historical man was simply not aware of his freedom, he nonetheless was free. In contradistinction to this, like Hegel and Marx, Adorno thinks that idea of freedom itself only arises at a given point in history with the emergence of the self-conscious modern individual. Medieval serfs possessed neither the concept of themselves as free, nor would anything that we recognise as freedom be a concrete reality for them. Adorno’s deconstruction of the antinomy points to the possibility that the idea of freedom and its actual realisation are inextricably linked to socio-economic developments. Furthermore, for Adorno, Kant’s antinomy expresses the fact that the notion of an economic subject free to partake in a capitalist system of exchange is, from the very outset, a contradiction. The bourgeoisie might regard

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<sup>39</sup> ND 220

<sup>40</sup> see ND 215, ND 221, ND 232

<sup>41</sup> ND 215

themselves to be free, as economic agents but also in more general terms, and yet the basis of their freedom relies on the deterministic explanations of science that cannot be eliminated if the economic system that accords them their freedom is to continue. It is the actual social impotence of the bourgeoisie that then results in their attributing to themselves an increasingly abstract conception of freedom that has no basis in the empirical, temporal world.

Adorno credits Hegel with what he regards to be the crucial insight that, while we may think that freedom is a subjective quality possessed by the individual, it is in fact something that is dependent on the 'objective reality' that the individual alone is incapable of influencing.<sup>42</sup> However, Hegel wrongly conceives of freedom as something that is realised in the ever more rational social structures of *Sittlichkeit*, and in fact instantiated in the society of his day. He thereby offers a false reconciliation to the problem of freedom by suggesting that freedom has in fact been realised via social forms of rationality. Thus, on the one hand, viewing freedom as a historical idea and substance could have progressive implications. Rather than assuming that freedom is something we possess by virtue of our rationality, we will begin to look at the socio-historic conditions in which we find ourselves, and question whether or not they might allow for something like freedom. However, on the other hand, it can lead to a Hegelian type conception of freedom as something that has in fact been realised at a certain point in history, and thus possibly to an affirmation of the actually unfree status quo. For Adorno, the whole is the false, and not the location of a socialised freedom, but rather the seat of irrationality and repression. More will be said about this in chapter two.

### **3.The Will**

Thus, what has so far been suggested via an examination of the socio-historic deconstruction of the third antinomy is that Adorno thinks that freedom arises at a particular point in history. However, while Adorno views the idea of freedom as historical, this should not lead us to conclude that he regards it to be simply a relative concept that is no longer of relevance or of which nothing concrete can be said. As was mentioned in the introduction, Adorno would hold such a summation to be quite obviously erroneous; the possibility of morality and ideas such as

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<sup>42</sup> HF 204

justice and punishment hinge on the question of freedom.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, even if freedom is a historical idea that undergoes changes through time, this should not lead to the formulation of crude, historicist conceptions of freedom that suggest that nothing whatsoever can be said of it. The point, for Adorno, is to simultaneously hold on to the ‘permanent component’ of freedom without treating the concept itself as if it were unchangeable and ‘universal’.<sup>44</sup> One question, then, in assessing Adorno’s own account of freedom is whether or not he manages to identify the unchangeable elements in the concept of freedom whilst remaining sensitive to the historically shifting forms freedom might take. In Adorno’s analysis of Kantian willing he highlights what he regards to be the *wrong* way of thinking about what might be viewed as the permanent component of the concept of freedom; that is, the Kantian notion of free will.

In *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals*, Kant equates the will with reason, and the possibility of ‘determining oneself to action in accordance with the idea of certain laws’.<sup>45</sup> For Kant, the will is a kind of *causality* that only belongs to rational beings that can determine themselves in this manner. While other beings are subject to natural necessity, rational beings have wills understood as a causality that possesses the ‘property’ of freedom, in the negative sense of being ‘able to work independently of determination by alien causes.’<sup>46</sup> Adorno’s critique of Kant’s notion of willing underscores his own account of the self-experience of freedom that will be discussed in chapter two. He levels a number of different objections at Kant’s notion of willing, and yet he does not think that the Kantian conception of the will should be dismissed. Rather, Kant’s account – although theoretically wrong – does begin to point to the way in which we ought to think about how it is that we make decisions. I will not here examine Adorno’s more positive claims concerning freedom, but rather aim to mark out what his own account must respond to given his own critique.

First, then, Adorno thinks that even thinking about freedom and willing on only an individual level as Kant does is problematic. The idea that we could conceive of ourselves as possessors of something like a free will in the first place is in fact continually undermined by existing reality; ‘countless moments of external – notably social – reality invade the decisions designated by the words ‘will’ and

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<sup>43</sup>see ND 221, HF 188,

<sup>44</sup> HF 181

<sup>45</sup>*Groundwork*, p.90

‘freedom’.<sup>47</sup> Our decisions are *invaded* by the external and heteronomous in a way that Kant’s definition of free will ignores. Kant’s efforts to show that a truly free and rational agent is the ‘author of its own principles independently of alien influences’<sup>48</sup> ignores the extent to which we are in fact determined by the external world. But Adorno’s thesis in this passage is not simply that we are determined by empirical cause and effect as traditional philosophy has understood it. He emphasises the extent to which *social* reality invades our decisions.

This has several implications. Firstly, any conception of freedom that we may have should be inextricably linked to considerations about the social conditions in which we find ourselves; and further, that we should be concerned with the extent to which we are determined by the social realm.<sup>49</sup> Adorno suggests that we become aware of the bounds of our freedom not only because we are ‘part of nature’, but also because we are ‘powerless against society.’<sup>50</sup> For Adorno, unfreedom has its roots in societal coercion rather than natural necessity. In this way, he moves the grounds of the discussion away from the question of how we can be free given our determination by natural cause and effect, to instead emphasise the way in which actual societal processes block the possibility of freedom even in individual decisions that we might otherwise regard to be in some sense free standing.

Adorno uses the word ‘vermittelt’ to signify what has been rendered ‘invade’ in the 1973 translation of *Negative Dialectics*. But other translations of ‘vermittelt’ could be to ‘mediate’ or ‘interfere’. This is important, because in the original translation, the use of ‘invade’ suggests the idea of society as *necessarily* existing as a kind of hostile force that determines the individual in a coercive way. But what Adorno seems to in fact be suggesting is something more subtle. That is, our decisions are mediated by society, and as such, cannot be regarded as stemming only from our own powers of self-legislation via the use of our reason. This could mean that society has the potential to determine us against our interests, as it does in modernity, but it is also the less strong claim that decisions that we make cannot be detached from their social context. Further, Adorno thinks that the experience of the antagonisms of sociality is in fact necessary for the very formation of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Groundwork*, p.107

<sup>47</sup> ND 213

<sup>48</sup> *Groundwork*, p.9

<sup>49</sup> see ND 219, ND 221, ND 297

<sup>50</sup> ND 221

concept of freedom. This is the Hegelian idea that freedom only *arises* from sociality and the encounter between the subject and the other; like Hegel, Adorno thinks that ‘it is only from that which has been divided from the I, from that which is necessarily against it, that the subject acquires the concept of freedom...which it will then relate to its own monadological structure.’<sup>51</sup> Adorno has in mind Hegel’s master and slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in which the subject only forms a sense of its self in relation to the other who limits the subject. Equally, the individual only forms a sense of its own freedom when it is presented with the other which it encounters as an obstacle to his own determination.

However, we should not take this to mean that no sense can be derived from the idea of the existence of something like an individual will. In fact, Adorno clearly thinks that the Kantian conception of the individual will does, from a phenomenological point of view, make sense; there is some truth to the idea of the will as the Kantian moment of unity; ‘When we look at the individual impulses, the will is indeed independent, quasi-thinglike...’<sup>52</sup> Importantly, however, Adorno conceives of the will as something which forms the unification of *impulses*, rather than something that equates with pure reason. Thus, Adorno does concede that Kant is at least right to talk about something like an individual will as a unifying moment given the way we experience ourselves as acting in the world. However, when it comes to thinking about what the actual process of willing requires, Adorno is at odds with the Kantian picture. The problem for Adorno is that Kant equates the will with reason and consciousness; he regards the will to be solely directed by reasons, where the will becomes ‘nothing other than ...a kind of activity...that has wholly purified itself of all dependency on pre-existing objects.’<sup>53</sup> Why is it significant that Kant equates freedom only with rational insight and theoretical consciousness? Adorno claims that, because Kant equates reason with the ability to follow rules or laws, freedom itself becomes ‘necessarily reduced to obedience to laws’.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the individual comes to be regarded as being free only when following his reason, which is conceived of as rule-following. Adorno claims that this ‘turns freedom into something that might be termed unfree because of the need to obey laws.’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> ND 219

<sup>52</sup> ND 38

<sup>53</sup> PMP 131

<sup>54</sup> HF 247

<sup>55</sup> HF 247

I will not here examine whether or not Adorno is right to equate unfreedom and obedience to laws, but it is important to note that such an argument requires a great deal more substantiation than is here offered by Adorno. In fact, Adorno himself does not think that what he refers to as the ‘abstract protestation that the law is the negation of freedom’ suffices as an objection to Kant. He also thinks that a state of complete lawlessness would equate with unfreedom; it would lead to a Hobbesian state in which everyone ‘would be exposed to oppression at the hands of everyone else.’<sup>56</sup> In fact while Adorno clearly thinks that freedom cannot simply be understood as an obedience to laws flowing from one’s use of reason, and that such an equation would lead to a state of unfreedom, it also has certain progressive implications for the subject. By equating the will with reason, Kant thereby renders the will as something separate from external material. This allows the subject of Kantian philosophy to become an autonomous moral subject; one that is not judged by heteronomous standards and is instead able to self-legislate, and is thus in some sense removed from the arbitrary and coercive norms of hierarchical societies:

‘Kant’s relegation of ethics to the sober unity of reason was an act of bourgeois majesty despite the false consciousness in his objectification of the will.’<sup>57</sup>

By being conceived of as able to self-legislate according to reason, the individual is no longer ‘weighed by standards that are inwardly and outwardly...alien to the subject.’<sup>58</sup> Thus, Kant’s equation of freedom and theoretical consciousness has the potential to be *both* repressive and progressive. On the one hand, freedom comes to be seen to be equivalent only to rule following, and on the other, it enables the subject to be *viewed* as able to self-legislate by their use of reason.

But why, then, is it problematic that freedom comes to be seen as a form of law following? Adorno thinks that the law *also* ‘encompasses...the instinctual energies of human beings.’<sup>59</sup> While Adorno concedes this to be in some sense necessary, rather than only containing these energies, the law ends up by ‘sublimating [the energies] out of existence.’<sup>60</sup> Even if it is true that Kant’s conception of freedom might have progressive implications for the way in which the subject comes to be

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<sup>56</sup> PMP 122

<sup>57</sup> ND, 239

<sup>58</sup> ND 239

<sup>59</sup> PMP 122

<sup>60</sup> PMP 122

viewed, it rests on what Adorno holds to be a false premise; that is, that the will is equivalent only to reason, and independent from any kind of external determination. This latter point is where we come to what Adorno regards to be the fundamental problem with the way in which Kant conceives of the will. That is, he suggests that the will as pure practical reason is something that is entirely independent of any external determinants. But what if certain external determinants are in some way necessary for the act of willing, and therefore for freedom itself?

For Adorno, Kant's conception of the will does not encompass what is actually required of the individual such that he can be moved to action. It is not that we should simply disregard the role of consciousness in the act of willing, because Adorno *does* hold it to be a necessary aspect of the will.<sup>61</sup> Adorno thinks that an account of willing that detaches the will from reason leads to blind irrationalism and 'stands ready for every misdeed.'<sup>62</sup> But importantly, Adorno thinks that the process of willing requires something more than just theoretical consciousness or rational thinking. Rather, willing *also* requires 'something physical which consciousness does not exhaust.'<sup>63</sup> The idea is that we might experience the will as the 'centralising unit' of the self, without which no freedom would be possible given that we would cease to be a unit of self-consciousness, but in order that we will anything at all, what is needed is an irrational, physical element left out by the Kantian account. The notion that decision making – and therefore, freedom – requires a physical element could be viewed as an obscure thesis that requires considerable substantiation. This will be the subject of chapter two.

Thus, Adorno thinks that, by omitting the role of a non-rational element in our decision-making, Kant arrives at a formulation of willing that seeks to 'cleanse' the will from its external determinants that are in fact necessary for the will's very formation, and thereby, Kant's conception of the will is 'falsified' by the 'absolute separation of the will from its material...'<sup>64</sup>. We then come to view *nature* as something that is separate from reason, and as something that is opposed to, and must be controlled by, the will. Kant's equation of will and reason thus has far reaching consequences. Not only is it impossible that a will removed from external determinants could exist, but also, when we seek to 'cleanse' the will from these

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<sup>61</sup> HF 230

<sup>62</sup> ND 242

<sup>63</sup>see ND 229, HF 219



determinants in the way in which Kant does, we come to take on the wrong attitude towards both ourselves and external nature. For Kant, the will can only be free if it is not determined by the realm of nature. Yet, this results in an abstraction and ignores the extent to which the subject is an ‘empirical, natural, individual creature’<sup>65</sup>, and thus neglects the degree of our dependence on nature. As will be discussed in chapter two, Adorno does not think that this is solely a theoretical error, but rather something that has implications for our relation both to externality and to ourselves.

### **Conclusion**

It is my contention that Adorno does in fact provide an account of freedom that forms, if not a comprehensive theory, a re-orientation of freedom away from the Kantian model. Having considered two aspects of Adorno’s critique of Kant, it is possible to begin to formulate a requirements for Adorno’s own treatment of freedom if he is to go beyond only a negative critique. To begin with, unlike Kant, Adorno views the idea of freedom and the thing itself to only arise at a given point in history. Thus, if Adorno’s own treatment of freedom is to succeed, he must be at once sensitive to the changes the concept undergoes in history, and yet simultaneously identify what might be regarded as the permanent component both of the concept and the thing itself. The extent to which he does provide a convincing historical orientation of freedom will be discussed in the third and fourth chapter. A further question that arises is that, even if we accept that Adorno’s socio-historic deconstruction of the third antinomy could be viewed as pointing to the way in which the idea of freedom arises at a certain stage in economic development, we might object that the third antinomy remains a contradiction beyond this particular historical juncture. Thus, the question is whether Adorno conceives of his socio-historic deconstruction as an exhaustive explanation of the third antinomy, or whether there is another explanation that points to its continuing philosophical significance. In the next chapter, I will suggest that Adorno does in fact conceive of the third antinomy as *also* possessing phenomenological truth-content from the point of view of the subject’s actual experience in contemporary society.

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<sup>64</sup> HF 251

<sup>65</sup> ND 293

Secondly, Adorno must show that his own account of willing – and therefore, the self-experience of freedom – requires something other than the possession of a theoretical consciousness. Adorno must offer what he refers to as a ‘dialectical definition’ of the will.<sup>66</sup> According to Adorno, a proper definition of the will cannot omit the role of reason in the decision-making process; without consciousness there would be no will. Yet simultaneously, we cannot detach from the will sensuous determinants in the way that Kant seeks to do. For Kant, the sensuous, external determinants are deemed to be heteronomous and result in the subject’s unfreedom. For Adorno, a subject’s freedom must involve precisely the elements that Kant views as heteronomous, because they form aspects of our natural, embodied selves. Freedom would require not the suppression of the empirical, natural elements of our existence, but rather the correct attitude towards them. Initially appealing, these sorts of claims must be approached with some scepticism. How can we arrive at an account of willing that does not neglect these elements, but still resembles something that is not only involuntary? In other words, how can Adorno show that an inclusion of the determinants that Kant’s account seeks to repress could be the source of freedom, and not its opposite?

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<sup>66</sup> ND 241

## II

### THE SELF-EXPERIENCE OF FREEDOM AND UNFREEDOM

In the first section of the chapter, I will show that Adorno does not hold the socio-historic deconstruction of the third antinomy discussed in the previous chapter to be an exhaustive explanation of the contradiction. I will then discuss *why* Adorno thinks that we simultaneously experience ourselves as both free and unfree in modern societies. This will then lead me to a possible impasse in Adorno's thought. That is, if we are both internally and externally unfree, and deeply entrenched in a deceptive system from which we cannot escape, we might question whether or not such an account of the modern social world allows for any possibility of freedom. I will argue that Adorno's account of willing shows that the self-experience of freedom remains open to us, but that it requires a radical alteration in the way that we conceive both of ourselves, and our relation to externality. I go on to examine several objections to Adorno's account, and offer some possible rejoinders.

#### **I : The Self-experience of Unfreedom**

In the first chapter, I discussed the way in which Adorno holds Kant's third antinomy to express the contradictions of a particular time in the early modern period in which individuals sought to escape tutelage and thus regard themselves as free, and yet whose productive capacities – and thus their actual means of emancipation – were based on increasingly deterministic views of the world. One problem is whether or not we would agree that Adorno's deconstruction is an exhaustive explanation of the third antinomy, and if it *was* found to be exhaustive, whether this would result in an occlusion of the philosophical content of Kant's formulation. In fact, Adorno also holds the antinomy to be accurate from a phenomenological point of view. That is, Adorno claims that the contradiction

expressed by the antinomy is also the result of the ‘objective contradictions between the experience which consciousness has of itself and its relation to totality.’<sup>67</sup> This claim suggests an alternative conception of the experiential truth of the antinomy, which focuses rather on the conflict between the legality present in society on the one hand, and the individual’s sense of his own freedom ‘against society and other individuals’ on the other.<sup>68</sup> While the first understanding of the antinomy occurs at a particular point in history with the increasing prominence of the bourgeois class, this second interpretation rather focuses on the actual phenomenological experience of the subject in society that is not specific to the early modern age.

Thus, according to Adorno, the third antinomy is expressive of objective conditions that hold sway in society that result in the subject’s experience of themselves as simultaneously free and determined. This is because we possess a sense of our own freedom insofar as we can pursue ends that ‘are not directly and totally exhausted by social ends.’<sup>69</sup> In other words, we think of ourselves as being able to opt to do things as *individuals* able to pursue private interests.<sup>70</sup> However, this experience is in large part delusive. In fact, in ‘bourgeois society’ – by which Adorno seems to have in mind a society based on a capitalist system of exchange – both freedom and individuality become mere component features of ideology, rather than ideas that have any substantial truth or which correspond to actual social reality. Thus, the notion of free individuals choosing to pursue their own ends is patently false. I will not here examine the reasons why Adorno holds modern societies to be structured in such a way as to deprive the individual of freedom, as the subject is vast and has been treated in great detail.<sup>71</sup>

Actual society prevents freedom and yet the existence of what Adorno refers to as ‘organised’ society is justified with recourse to an abstract Kantian-type freedom that has no basis in existing empirical reality. Importantly, this formal and abstract idea of freedom ‘coincides’ with individuation.<sup>72</sup> In other words, freedom only becomes an attribute of the subject once individuals exist ‘in the modern

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<sup>67</sup> ND 261, see also ND 299

<sup>68</sup> ND 261

<sup>69</sup> ND 264

<sup>70</sup> ND 219

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, Bernstein’s *Disenchantment and Ethics*

<sup>72</sup> ND 261

sense'.<sup>73</sup> By the 'modern sense' of the individual, Adorno has in mind the subject as both a biological entity and a being constituted by self-reflection.<sup>74</sup> Adorno is again emphasising the historicity of the concept of freedom. It makes no sense to attribute freedom to humans *before* they become self-reflective and aware of themselves as individual entities. But Adorno then makes a further claim that is suggestive of a broadly Marxian conception of the origins of our idea of freedom. That is, he argues that the concept of individuality itself only comes to the fore under a capitalist system of exchange in which the idea of individual independence becomes a *function* of the way in which economic transactions play out:

'The individual was free as an economically active bourgeois subject, free to the extent to which the economic system required him to be autonomous in order to function. His autonomy is thus potentially negated at the source.'<sup>75</sup>

If Adorno is right, freedom comes to be attributed to subjects in order that they can engage in capitalist economic practice in the appropriate way. But this passage further suggests that this is in some sense *necessary* in order to further perpetuate capitalist systems. Thus, the attribution of freedom to human subjects is not only a kind of harmless additional quality that we come to regard ourselves as possessing in a particular system of economic exchange. Rather, it is an attribution that is necessary for the system to maintain itself. In this sense, the attribution of freedom to the subject is not only false, but also morally pernicious as it contributes to the continuation of a system in which individuals are in fact forced – and therefore not free – to participate in a mode of exchange in order to secure their own self-preservation.

The Kantian question of whether or not individuals have free will thus misses the point entirely, as it treats the individual as if they were an 'original phenomena' who could be ascribed or denied freedom removed from the socio-economic dynamics of their situation.<sup>76</sup> But the alternative response to this should not be simply an endorsement of determinism, social or otherwise. There are two reasons why this is not the correct stance to uphold. Firstly, the consequences of viewing everything as determined culminates simply in an endorsement of the status quo.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> ND 218

<sup>74</sup> ND 218

<sup>75</sup> ND 262

<sup>76</sup> ND 253

<sup>77</sup> ND 263

Secondly, such a view is guilty of treating the individual as if he simply *is* only the function of the economic system. But human nature cannot simply be reduced to its ‘merchandise character’ in this manner. Adorno does not in this passage enlarge on what he regards human nature to be comprised of, but the problem with determinism is that it views subjects only as component parts of an economic system. Whereas there is a sense in which Adorno holds this view of human nature to be true under the conditions of late capitalism, determinism wrongly suggests that this is *necessarily* the case.<sup>78</sup> Contrary to this, Adorno suggests that men have ‘yet to become themselves’.<sup>79</sup> This more hopeful suggestion corresponds to Adorno’s idea that even in age of universal repression, a ‘picture of freedom’ remains in the ‘crushed, abused individual’s features...’<sup>80</sup> There is some sense in which the individual can still in some way position themselves against society, and as such manifest some *resistance* to it, an idea that will be the subject of examination later on. Yet caution should be exercised in attributing to Adorno the view that it is in the individual alone that some remnant of freedom remains. In fact, there are situations in which it is *society* that must stand for freedom in opposition to individual interest.<sup>81</sup> Thus, Adorno does not hold the crude view that freedom manifests itself as the lonely individual pitched against the unfreedom of a coercive society. The relation that holds between the universal and particular is more complex than this; the individual, as an *agent* and ‘prototype’ of an unfree society, is implicated within universal unfreedom; the principle of ‘unreflected self-preservation’ is ‘hypostatized in the individual’.<sup>82</sup>

The idea that the individual is an agent or prototype of society goes some way in explaining why Adorno thinks that we experience ourselves as both free and unfree. It seems that there are different ways in which the individual can experience their unfreedom. The first kind of way relates to external processes. Thus, we feel ourselves to be unfree in modern capitalist societies when faced with the impossibility of determining our economic and political lives. We cannot choose how it is that we involve ourselves in the processes by which society constitutes itself, and we experience ourselves only as appendages of society’s

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<sup>78</sup> In fact, at various points in his work, Adorno suggests that men have yet to become themselves [see for instance, ND 278]. For a discussion of what this could mean for Adorno’s moral philosophy, see Freyenhagen, p.238

<sup>79</sup> ND 278

<sup>80</sup> ND 265

<sup>81</sup> ND 265

<sup>82</sup> ND 283

objective tendencies.<sup>83</sup> As a result of this, we come against the dominant social norm and feel ourselves to be helpless and unfree. Secondly, we experience unfreedom internally, because the processes of society come to be in some way *objectified* in our own inner lives. Thus, the tendencies of an unfree society play out in the psychology of the individual. Yet we exist in a ‘web of delusion’, and in fact experience our unfreedom as if it were freedom. We take the fact that our ego ‘operates coercively on the external world’ as proof of the existence of our own freedom.<sup>84</sup> However, this experience is not the manifestation of freedom but its opposite: it is the ego imitating the coercion that it is itself subjected to by external determinants.<sup>85</sup> Secondly, we tend to regard ourselves as possessing inner lives that are free from external determinants. Again, this is little more than a delusion; we find in our inner lives ‘elements of external life that take flight into the imagination only because...they have no prospect of being put into practice in the real world.’<sup>86</sup> However, Adorno does also think that we experience ourselves as unfree internally as well as externally. We often fall prey to compulsive internal processes such as neuroses that are experienced as if they are alien and heteronomous. Such inner states possess truth content, because they demonstrate the fallacy to which we fall prey when conceiving of our inner lives as free and removed from external determination; ‘they teach people that they are not simply what they are in their own intrinsic nature’.<sup>87</sup>

## **2. Self-Experience of Freedom: The Addendum**

Thus far, Adorno’s diagnosis is bleak. We are free neither internally nor externally. Accorded an abstract and formal freedom, we are repressed by society, and also by our own internal processes. Any thoughts to the contrary are instances of delusion. At this point, there are many objections that could be made to what appears to be an extreme – and possibly reductive – depiction of the human lot in modern society. It might be objected that in some situations, there may be a very real sense in which we do not simply *feel* free, but are free. We could, for instance, point to historical developments that suggest our freedom from oppressive systems that existed at earlier points in history. Secondly, we may wish to begin to

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<sup>83</sup> MM, preface

<sup>84</sup> HF 220

<sup>85</sup> HF 220

<sup>86</sup> HF 221

<sup>87</sup> HF 218

question what Adorno himself wishes to achieve by presenting us with such a desolate picture of the possibilities of mankind. In much of his work, he suggests that we should aim for human freedom, yet, given the delusive nature of any experience of freedom that we have, the idea that it is something that we ought to strive for seems to be oddly optimistic. This second worry will be examined later. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine whether or not Adorno could meet the first objection by examining the role the addendum – or additional factor – plays in his conception of freedom.

The objection could run as follows. Adorno suggests that, when we experience ourselves as free, we are simply deluding ourselves and mistaking instances of what is in fact internalised societal coercion as the ability to be self-determining. The implication of this is that there is no hope for any kind of freedom in our decision-making, and we must accept that we are at the behest of heteronomous powers over which we have no control. It seems, then, that we reach a dead end: both our internal and external existences are subjected to a system ‘from which everything follows.’<sup>88</sup> If this is the case, it is unclear that Adorno’s critique of Kantian freedom leaves open the possibility of anything resembling an alternative conception of free agency.

However, Adorno does not in fact hold such a diagnosis to be right. Freedom remains a possibility. Yet there must be a considerable shift in the way in which we understand how we experience something like freedom in the first place. Adorno suggests that the idea of freedom can at least in part be understood with reference to Kant’s notion of spontaneity. While Kant intends the concept to refer to ‘consciousness’s faculty for the activity of thought’<sup>89</sup>, Adorno claims that, in fact, the concept – even as Kant uses it – is comprised of a duality between the ego or ‘active, thinking behaviour’ and ‘involuntary’ activity.<sup>90</sup> This implies that spontaneity is necessary for the unity of consciousness, or the ego; ‘it is the true determining factor of the fixed ego, identical with itself.’<sup>91</sup> Yet, contra Kant, Adorno suggests that, spontaneity – understood as an activity – contains an involuntary, pre-theoretical moment. He argues that this is further borne out by examining the everyday usage of spontaneity:

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<sup>88</sup> DE 7

<sup>89</sup> HF 214

<sup>90</sup> HF 214



‘A person is spontaneous if he performs an action in a particular situation; but we only call his action spontaneous if it does not follow logically from prior considerations but instead has something abrupt or sudden about it...’

Spontaneity thus points to the existence of a duality between ego and some other element, that contains within it a physical or somatic element. The way in which this duality relates to freedom is best understood by what Adorno names the ‘Addendum’ [‘Additional factor’] or ‘Das Hinzutretende’, a term that has no philosophical precedence. In a lecture, Adorno states that;

‘The concept of freedom could not be formulated in the absence of a recourse to something prior to the ego, to an impulse that is in some sense a bodily impulse that has not yet been subjected to the centralising authority of consciousness.’

What this statement suggests is that our idea of freedom derives from something that precedes the formation of the ego or unified self. It points to the possibility that the notion of freedom itself has its origins in the experience of an *impulse* that is at least in part somatic. Yet there is an ambiguity in Adorno’s statement: he does not say that that this impulse, without which freedom would be unimaginable, is purely corporeal, but rather that its origins are in some measure physical rather than only mental. Yet what has this to do with freedom? To begin with, Adorno explicates the addendum phenomenologically. Thus, he points to the way in which we make decisions. Contra Kant, he suggests that decisions do not take place in a smooth and uninterrupted chain of cause and effect. In fact, Adorno argues that willing requires that we ‘experience a sort of jolt’ that is itself a kind of physical impulse when we make decisions.<sup>92</sup> On this view, a free act requires more than only consciousness, but a somatic element. Adorno claims that Hamlet is an example of the ‘chasm...between consciousness and action’; Hamlet both knows himself to be under an obligation, but can only carry out his intention with the experience of a ‘violent, sudden impulse’.<sup>93</sup> He is able to avenge his father’s death only when he experiences the additional factor; the ‘element in his taking action that goes beyond rationality.’<sup>94</sup> Without this experience, Hamlet would never be able to escape the confines of theoretical consciousness.

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<sup>91</sup> HF 214

<sup>92</sup> ND 226, HF, 228

<sup>93</sup> HF 223

Adorno further claims that impulses are closely connected to mimetic behaviour, which he describes as behaviour that is not ‘causally determined by objective factors, but involves instead an involuntary adjustment to something extramental.’<sup>95</sup> Adorno’s comparison between the addendum and mimetic behaviour raises various questions. If certain impulses are not causally determined by objective factors, they thereby seem to possess an element of independence. But this is also problematic. What is it about mimetic behaviour and impulses that allows them to exist in a realm somehow removed from objective factors? Secondly, this claim also suggests a certain moment of compulsion in the decision-making process: the adjustment is *involuntary*. How can something that is involuntary simultaneously be free? Finally, the comparison between the addendum and mimetic behaviour will prove to be of importance in establishing a possible link between Adorno’s notion of freedom as impulse and his moral philosophy, which in part advocates a mimetic response to suffering.

Adorno further argues that impulses themselves are in fact ‘proofs’ of freedom, and that they point to a time at which the inner and outer, or internal and external, did not suffer strict demarcation.<sup>96</sup> The self-experience of freedom requires a somatic element, but it cannot be reduced to only pure physicality; freedom also needs a theoretical consciousness; ‘our entire experience of freedom is tied up with consciousness.’<sup>97</sup> Our experience of freedom is linked to memory and a process of anamnesis of an earlier stage of development in which we had yet to become a fully integrated consciousness. To even derive an idea of freedom we must recall an ‘archaic’ impulse that is somehow untamed.<sup>98</sup> What Adorno means by ‘archaic’ is not immediately apparent. One possible interpretation is that an archaic impulse could be regarded as something that is broadly irrational. However, Adorno suggests that the addendum is not simply irrational, although it might be considered to be so from the point of view of rationalist theories of the will. More precisely, the addendum is – as the name itself suggests – an element that is added to rationality.<sup>99</sup> It comes to exist when consciousness participates in decisions that ‘were originally blind and reflexive in nature.’

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<sup>94</sup> HF 234

<sup>95</sup> HF 213

<sup>96</sup> see HF 234, ND 228

<sup>97</sup> HF 230

<sup>98</sup> ND 221

<sup>99</sup> ND 229

Adorno's conception of the will is thus of something that has both a rational and irrational moment; it possesses both 'modern, bourgeois, unified qualities', as well as 'archaic features.'<sup>100</sup> Yet the archaic features of the will come to appear to the subject as increasingly chaotic when the ego gains control over itself and nature, and the subject thus comes to find the basis of his own freedom questionable because of its uncontrolled aspect.<sup>101</sup> In fact, the mistrust with which we begin to perceive these uncontrolled responses to stimuli leads to forms of regression<sup>102</sup>. What Adorno has in mind here seems to be roughly borrowed from Freud; that is, the idea that, in subjecting our impulses to increased control via the ego, the impulses are no longer able to occur in their natural context. Rather, they are repressed, which then leads to various forms of regressive behaviour, instances of which, for Adorno, include such phenomena as identification with fascist ideologies and passive and uncritical enjoyment of various cultural products.

By contrast, the additional factor allows us to escape the 'spiritual prison of mere consciousness' and instead enables us to enter into a 'realm of objects that is normally barred to us by our own rationality.'<sup>103</sup> We cease to be something that is divided and are instead 'overcome as in a flash'. The impulse thus contains a remnant of the 'union of reason and nature' because it allows us to momentarily break away from a self that is driven by a predominantly theoretical and rational consciousness<sup>104</sup> This suggests that we must review how we conceive of the relation that holds between freedom and nature. In Kant the natural is that which is subjected to deterministic causal laws, compared to the freedom that we enjoy by giving ourselves laws. But this implies that nature is simply something to be overcome by the subject in its bid for self-determination. Yet, as was mentioned earlier, Adorno holds the addendum to in some sense point beyond this diremption that has taken place between reason and nature. Impulses could provide a way of experiencing reason and nature as in a certain sense unified, and the latter ceases to be regarded only as that which is dominated by the former;

'With that impulse freedom extends to the realm of experience; this animates the concept of freedom as a state that would be no more blind nature than it would be oppressed nature. Its phantasm – which reason will not allow to be withered by

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<sup>100</sup> HF 235

<sup>101</sup> HF 213

<sup>102</sup> HF 236

<sup>103</sup> HF 236

<sup>104</sup> HF 236

any proof of causal interdependence – is the phantasm of reconciling nature and the mind.’<sup>105</sup>

The idea is that, rather than attempting to suppress or subordinate our impulses, we must understand them as constitutive of our agency. This in part explains how Adorno can regard something which is involuntary as simultaneously being free. In experiencing certain impulses, we thereby accept that we are to an extent determined by nature. Yet, this does not necessarily, at least according to Adorno, mean that we should consider ourselves to be fully determined by nature. As Bowie points out, subjectivity comes to be viewed as simultaneously based in nature and what comes to transcend it.<sup>106</sup> The notion of impulse thus points to a freedom that could be empirically experienced, rather than contained within an intelligible world removed from the physical realm. Adorno suggests that the examples that Kant employs to demonstrate the existence of transcendental freedom themselves point to the occurrence of a jolt in our decision-making process, yet he neglects to convincingly show this to be the case. But Adorno’s suggestion is that traditional philosophy wrongly holds that ‘the subject’s reflection alone is able, if not to break through natural causality, at least to change its direction by adding other motivational chains.’<sup>107</sup> Yet the notion of a jolt contradicts this view; for Adorno, the existence of an additional factor in the process of willing shows that reflection alone is not sufficient for the self-experience of freedom.

Importantly, Adorno’s contention that freedom requires an interplay between the ego and impulses that are otherwise repressed involves and depends upon a particular conception of the way in which the individual self is structured. In large part Adorno accepts the Freudian analysis of the relation that holds between the ego and the id. Freud regards the ego as the ‘agency of adaptation’ that seems to be unified relative to what is described by Pontalis and Laplace as the ‘anarchic, fragmentary functioning’ of our instinctual energies.<sup>108</sup> For Freud, the ego emerges from the id as the result of external pressures, and it comes to allow the individual to gain control by the mastery and repression of these instincts. It is clear that Adorno follows Freud firstly in his understanding of the ego as something that itself derives from bodily sensations and that is formed only after contact with the

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<sup>105</sup> ND 29

<sup>106</sup> Bowie, p.116

<sup>107</sup> ND 227

‘interhuman’ world. Secondly, like Freud, Adorno also holds that the ego comes to repress the id or impulses. Adorno thus by and large accepts Freud’s conception of the self as formed by the libidinous energies of the id that come to be repressed by the centralising authority of the ego, that is itself formed from these energies.

If Adorno for the most part accepts the Freudian theory of the self, what implications does this have for his conception of freedom? Firstly, it is interesting to note that Freud himself does not appear to have much faith in the idea that we are free. In fact, in his essay ‘The Uncanny’, Freud goes so far as to dismiss freedom as a kind of fantasy that we have that arises from thwarted wish-fulfilment:

‘There are also...all those strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed, and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish us in the illusion of Free Will.’<sup>109</sup>

Given that Adorno thinks that we do have a potentiality for freedom in the impulses, how can this be reconciled with his acceptance of Freud’s analysis of the self? In other words, what distinctions can be made between Freud and Adorno’s theory of the self such that Adorno can claim that something like freedom remains possible? Firstly, whilst Freud holds that the repression of our libidinal energies is necessary for there to be any form of social cohesion, Adorno regards this to be the case in a situation whereby societal repression already holds. In other words, in a differently structured social world, our libidinous energies or impulses could be expressed in such a way that they would not only be aggressive. This will be discussed in more detail in the fourth chapter. Thus, for Adorno, the problem with classical psychoanalysis is the following:

‘On the one hand, it criticised the authority of moral autonomy...the super-ego...as, in origin, a mental equivalent of unfreedom...but at the same time, psychoanalysis was terribly afraid of what might happen if people no longer had a super-ego.’

This passage suggests that Adorno regards Freud as not following through with his analysis by his lack of recognition of the potentially emancipatory nature of our

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<sup>108</sup> Laplace and Pontalis, ‘The Language of Psychoanalysis’, p.

libidinous energies. While Adorno agrees that repression and the mastery of the instincts is necessary for self-preservation and the existence of society, this need not be the case at all points of human history. Rather, the idea that the expression of libidinous energies is something to be feared is something that is socially and historically contingent rather than a timeless fact of human existence. The reason, then, that Adorno can continue to claim that something like freedom might be available to us whilst still working within the framework of a Freudian conception of the self is because he leaves open the possibility that our drives could in different social circumstances manifest themselves as forms of liberation from the repressive and cohesive ego. One possible response to Adorno's use of Freud is to question his treatment of the ego. While he clearly views the ego as being a necessary component of the self-experience of freedom, in his final analysis it remains the organon of repression. But as will be discussed later in the chapter, there are alternate ways of conceiving of ego processes such that these processes could be viewed as in themselves liberating. This would in turn leave open the possibility that the potentialities of free agency are greater than Adorno himself suggests.

### **3.Objections to the addendum**

There are many questions and concerns that arise from Adorno's notion of the additional factor. It is appealing precisely because it provides a possible way of understanding free agency that does not neglect corporeality. Yet there is a danger that the addendum remains a whimsical notion that does not in fact achieve what it sets out to do; that is, to show a way in which mind and nature could be reconciled in an account of free agency. Firstly, Adorno relies heavily on the notion of impulses. We may wish to exercise a certain amount of caution in unquestioningly accepting this to be a convincing alternative to more traditional theories of agency. No distinction is made between the plethora of different types of impulse that we might have, some of which would seem to be entirely opposed to freedom. If Adorno is to be convincing, it seems that a more refined account of impulse ought to be arrived at. There is also a sense in which more work must be done if it is to be successfully shown that impulses are not to be regarded only as reflexes or instances of blind nature.

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<sup>109</sup> Freud, 'The Uncanny',

Even less clear is how the addendum can be translated into a convincing account of social freedom. Freyenhagen suggests that Adorno's emphasis on physical impulse in his account of freedom has a normative, ethical import, and that the addendum has direct implications for social theory.<sup>110</sup> Yet even if this is shown to be true, it is not clear how impulses can be viewed as leading directly to a rational social order. This need not trouble Adorno in that he does not think that we are able to say much from our current vantage point about what a rational society might look like. Yet this latter view does not exempt him from the task of showing how his own re-orientation of the way in which we conceive of freedom might begin to relate to our concern with the question of how we ought to live in the modern social world.

The intention of the rest of this chapter will be to show that Adorno's account of impulse should be regarded as constituting a plausible re-orientation of the concept of freedom away from the Kantian model. In order to do this, a variety of objections – mostly centring on the role played by impulse in Adorno's account – will be considered. I will first examine the possibility that the contention that impulses are constitutive of freedom is in fact inconsistent with other aspects of Adorno's philosophy. While Adorno often intentionally contradicts himself in order to take up a dialectical standpoint in the treatment of a given concept, it might be argued that the inconsistencies present in his analysis of freedom substantially weaken his account. I will suggest several responses to these objections, and will argue that Adorno is not in fact guilty of inconsistency. Secondly, I will examine more general worries that we might have with the addendum, and again offer some possible responses. However, while it is important to arrive at a clearer conception of what the addendum might mean for our conception of freedom, it must not be hypostasised. Adorno does not intend to arrive at a comprehensive theory of freedom, but rather provide a new model by which we can begin to think about human freedom. What needs, then, to be established is *why* the addendum is a good way of thinking about freedom,

To begin with, then, we might worry that, in arriving at the idea of an additional factor that occurs when we act freely, Adorno in fact falls in to territory that cannot be squared with the rest of his philosophy. In one of the lectures in which

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<sup>110</sup> Freyenhagen, p.269

he discusses the addendum, he suggests that, in allowing ourselves to experience certain forms of impulsiveness we ‘feel that we are ourselves.’<sup>111</sup> As was discussed earlier, he also suggests that there is a moment in which we somehow enter in to a realm of objects that is otherwise not open to us. However, as O’Connor points out, Adorno most often finds claims to immediacy to be suspect in a world that he regards to be thoroughly mediated.<sup>112</sup> What is puzzling, then, is that Adorno would claim of impulse that it allows us to directly experience the world of objects that he usually regards to be barred to us, when he would be the first to dismiss such claims as instances of false consciousness. It seems that, in the lecture in which these claims are found, he is himself aware of the possible problems implicit in his account when he talks about the difficulty of discussing such matters without reifying them.<sup>113</sup> Yet this does not answer the objection but rather suggests that it is difficult to talk of this kind of experience. Thus, it could be objected that, we might *feel* that we are ourselves in these sorts of experience when our freedom supposedly manifests itself, but who is to say that this is not simply another instance of the falsity of self-experience in the ‘web of delusion’ that Adorno thinks that we inhabit in modern capitalist societies?

Two answers can be made on Adorno’s behalf. Firstly, in response to the latter question, what could be said to differentiate the impulses of which Adorno speaks from delusive experiences of freedom is precisely their physical element. Thus, it seems that Adorno holds it to be the case that somatic impulses allow us to experience ourselves and externality in such a way that affords us a momentary respite from a world that is otherwise thoroughly mediated as a result of the kind of jolt that occurs, which presumably cannot be mistaken for anything else. Secondly, in an aphorism found in *Minima Moralia* on the subject of love, Adorno suggests that immediacy is possible even in a system in which everything is determined and mediated. The idea is that there is a tendency to think of feelings like love as involuntary or immediate, but, given the present economic determination of society, the very possibility that such a feelings can take place removed from other determinants is doubtful. Yet, importantly for the discussion of impulse, Adorno does suggest that the existence of immediacy in fact remains a possibility; he equates the act of loving as ‘not letting immediacy wither under the

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<sup>111</sup> HF, p.237

<sup>112</sup> O’Connor, p.122

<sup>113</sup> HF 237



omnipresent weight of mediation and economics...'<sup>114</sup> Thus, while it is true that Adorno holds claims to immediacy to in general be suspect, he does not hold that such claims cannot be made at all. Rather, immediacy cannot simply be assumed, and it is something that is always on the cusp of being reified and mediated.

But if it is true that impulses can be immediate, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish impulses from the reflexes that take place in the individual on an unconscious level. The problem is that, throughout his work, Adorno repeatedly speaks of reflexes as a symptom of damaged agency within modern societies; he talks of human beings 'regressing to the reactions of amphibians.'<sup>115</sup> Paradigm instances of reflexes in a fully integrated society is the experience of boredom when faced with 'objective dullness'<sup>116</sup>, or the passivity with which we absorb cultural products. But how is the impulse different from such reflexes? In what sense does it avoid the unfreedom that characterises these kinds of situational responses? Adorno seems to anticipate this worry:

'It is quite possible that this impulse was originally a kind of reflex, too. In that case, it was only through the participation of consciousness in actions that were originally blind and reflexive in nature that this additional factor...[that is] a constitutive element of the will came into being.'<sup>117</sup>

This is a clear explanation of why impulses cannot simply be equated with reflexes. Whilst impulses might have originated as a form of reflex, unlike the latter, they come to interact with consciousness. As was discussed earlier, freedom requires *both* a somatic element and theoretical consciousness. Thus, Adorno can maintain the distinction between reflexes and impulses; whilst still admitting the possibility that impulses have their origins in reflexes, he can claim that, unlike reflexes, impulses are in some sense constitutive of freedom.

Yet while Adorno may not be guilty of inconsistency, there are several objections that must be addressed if it is to be successfully demonstrated that the concept of freedom could plausibly be re-oriented in this manner. As was pointed out earlier, Adorno is at odds with the rest of philosophical tradition with such a thesis, which is something that he is well aware of; he points to the 'astonishing fact' that

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<sup>114</sup> MM 110

<sup>115</sup> HF 235

<sup>116</sup> CM,172

philosophers throughout history have largely regarded instincts as things that are in need of being ‘controlled and suppressed.’<sup>118</sup> But what reason is there to follow Adorno in his contrarian assessment? In fact, there are several objections that might prevent us from accepting his claim. Firstly, the notion of impulse itself carries with it various problems that could be said to prevent us from substantially revising our conception of freedom. Secondly, Adorno’s analysis depends on a dichotomous distinction between the ego and impulse. Yet it could be argued that this distinction that is assumed throughout the examination of freedom is in fact questionable and unconvincing. Finally, even if these first two objections are met, the notion of the addendum remains somewhat inchoate, particularly when we begin to look beyond only isolated moments of decision-making, and instead at the relation that holds between freedom and moral philosophy and a more general concern with social freedom.

Firstly, then, Adorno’s contention that freedom requires both reason and impulse tells us little about impulses. So far, it has been established that impulse is not simply the same thing as a reflex, because unlike the latter, Adorno conceives of impulses as interacting with consciousness. Adorno further claims that there is something involuntary about impulses, which he equates with irrationality;

‘Because of its involuntary nature there is something irrational about this adjustment that theories of freedom generally refuse to acknowledge but which is part of the definition of freedom.’<sup>119</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, the idea that our experience of impulse has an involuntary moment need not be viewed as incompatible with the notion of freedom. Rather, the experience of involuntariness demonstrates to us the way in which we are dependent on – but not necessarily wholly determined by – nature. In this way we can begin to move away from the idea of a free individual who is able to somehow exist as a rational and self-determining agent removed from other influences, and rather understand the way in which we are determined by actual empirical conditions. What Adorno regards to be the narcissism implicit within the Kantian notion of the freedom as existing in an intelligible realm can thus be

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<sup>117</sup> HF 236

<sup>118</sup> PM 136

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p.213

overcome.<sup>120</sup> Adorno asserts that an ‘intractable’ problem of Kant’s conception of human nature lies in his attempt to ‘differentiate it...and mark it off from animality’<sup>121</sup>. According to Adorno, the notion of freedom as it has been developed by Kant and others is motivated by a particular urge; that is, to provide substantial theoretical evidence to show humanity as being distinct from mere animals. As we have seen, in Kant’s bid to arrive at a conception of human freedom that aims to demarcate human qua rational beings from mere animality, anything pertaining to the natural world is cleansed from the will. Adorno’s emphasis on the involuntary moment of the impulse thus need not signify a form of unfreedom but rather the acceptance on the part of the subject of the way in which they are – to an extent at least – a part of the natural [and social] world.

Furthermore, according to Adorno, the problem is that we have come to view reason as entirely distinct from our natural drives and impulses. In fact, however, he regards reason itself to have its origins in drives.<sup>122</sup> Given this, something like the impulse only appears to us as ‘otherness’ because of the abstraction of Kantian-type conceptions of the will. Thus, in fact, the addendum itself is not ‘as alien to reason as it would seem’.<sup>123</sup> This is important because it shows that Adorno does not conceive of impulses as necessarily opposed to reason. It might be, that, given the way certain forms of rationality have developed, instincts and drives come to appear to be increasingly separate from our rational capacities, but this need not – and should not – be the case. However, it could be objected that, while freedom might indeed entail the experience of impulse, surely the experience of certain impulses would not lead to anything resembling freedom. It is easy to think of various impulses that we experience that are in no clear sense free. This would suggest that, in order to be convincing, Adorno would have to say more about which particular impulses are compatible with freedom, and which are not, yet no such elaborations are made in his treatment of the subject. The rejoinder could be that theoretical consciousness could perhaps weed out inappropriate impulses that would lead to unfreedom. What we would then require is an account of the way in which impulses can be controlled or restricted by theoretical consciousness. Of course, Adorno’s idea is that, in a world in which real freedom was actualised, the impulses could be integrated with reason, and

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<sup>120</sup> For Adorno’s discussion of the link between narcissism and freedom, see ND 230 and HF 211

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*

<sup>122</sup> ND 229

<sup>123</sup> ND 229

they would therefore not have to be controlled or dominated.<sup>124</sup> This then suggests the possibility that impulses could only lead to freedom if the social conditions were different.

However, Adorno should not be understood as viewing freedom to consist in the untrammelled and chaotic expression of instinctual responses to the world that occur with no unifying, centralising authority. Following traditional psychoanalytic theory, Adorno conceives of the ego as having the function of controlling impulse. Yet what is problematic is that, whilst Adorno seems to hold the ego to be in some sense necessary in order that the subject can be said to be free, he simultaneously presents the ego as something that ought to be regarded as possessing a largely repressive function. We are left with a problematic conception of the role of the ego in relation to freedom. On the one hand it is a necessary unifying feature, and is in fact the reason the subject begins to ascribe to himself the attribute of freedom in the first place, yet on the other hand it seems to be the source of the unfreedom of the subject. If Adorno is to be convincing in his analysis, this contradiction must be examined in greater detail.

Adorno offers his clearest examination of the role of the ego in a lecture entitled ‘Antinomies of Freedom’. Firstly, he returns to the idea found throughout his work that, as the ego obtains increasing control over the subject, it begins to find what would constitute freedom – the archaic impulse – questionable precisely because of its instinctual element. This would then seem to imply that there is a correlative decline of freedom when the ego gains mastery of the diverse impulses. In fact, however, it is not so simple. Adorno states;

‘while something like freedom becomes possible only through the development of consciousness, *at the same time* this very development of consciousness effectively ensures that freedom is pushed back into the realm of archaic, mimetic impulse that is so essential to it.’<sup>125</sup>

Thus, the very concept of freedom contains a conflict. While something like the ego is necessary for the concept itself to arise, the actual development and strengthening of the ego results in the experience of less freedom. What is not

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<sup>124</sup> ND 285

<sup>125</sup> HF 213

clear about this passage is what Adorno means by freedom being in some sense ‘pushed back’. One possible interpretation is that, rather than there being properly integrated, the archaic or mimetic impulse is wrongly separated from consciousness, which results in freedom itself being inaccessible to the subject whose vigilant ego keeps in check anything that it deems to be chaotic in order to secure self-preservation.<sup>126</sup> This is the idea that the concept of freedom has its roots in a narcissistic urge on the part of the subject as a result of the fact that the ego ‘has enormous difficulty in grasping the elements of its own dependency.’<sup>127</sup> In order to become an individual, it is necessary for the subject to ‘insulate against the consciousness of its own entanglement in general’ and thus arrive at a conception of itself as free and independent from other subjects.<sup>128</sup> Adorno thus seems to think two things are going on. Firstly, the ego – fearing that the expression of impulse will culminate in a dissolution of the self – suppresses impulses by subjecting them to a centralising control. It thus prevents the subject from experiencing those aspects of itself that would in fact be at least in part constitutive parts of a possible freedom. The actual experience of freedom is thus to an extent prevented by the ego. Secondly, however, in order to regard itself as somehow removed from the plethora of other beings that in fact determine the subject, the ego instead arrives at a narcissistic and abstract conception of itself as being free from the actual social context in which it finds itself and ‘obscures the fact of its own dependence.’<sup>129</sup>

Adorno’s conception of the ego, then, is of something that works coercively on the external world and the subject in order to secure for itself some semblance of the independence that the social context in which it exists denies it. Yet it is simultaneously unconscious of its own coercive nature. Furthermore, the ego did in fact originate as a ‘counterweight’ to social coercion, yet eventually ends by dominating the subject and blinding him to his actual dependency on social externality. This is the dialectic of freedom, then, in which what originally serves to protect the subject against social domination actually ends up by dominating the subject. The addendum is thus in part conceived of as an answer to the ego’s dominion over the subject. This is why Adorno characterises the experience of the additional factor as a kind of ‘anamnesis’; what must be recalled is an earlier time

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<sup>126</sup> HF 220

<sup>127</sup> HF 217

<sup>128</sup> HF 217

<sup>129</sup> ND 219

at which the self was not only dominated by the centralising authority of the ego whose intention is to subject the impulse to strict control.

A possible rejoinder to Adorno's conception of the relation that holds between freedom and the ego is to dispute the idea of the ego as possessing only a repressive function. While it is not within the scope of this examination to arrive at an alternative conception of the role of the ego, it is useful to bring to bear several considerations that might lead us to reconsider the persuasiveness of Adorno's account. Firstly, it seems that Adorno's conception of the interplay between the ego and impulses is somewhat simplistic. We might wish to challenge the dichotomy that Adorno establishes between the idea of the ego as a centralising force that dominates and suppresses natural impulses. Instead, we might think that the ego itself has natural origins, and that Adorno wrongly opposes reason [the ego] with nature [the impulses]. Yet Adorno foresees this objection and actually speculates that the ego itself might have its origins in libidinous energy, which means that the ego is not itself 'absolutely alien' to the additional factor.<sup>130</sup> After all, Adorno regards the ego itself to be the product of 'material existence'<sup>131</sup> and to have evolved from human drives.<sup>132</sup> The implication of this is that, while there is no necessary dichotomy between impulses and the ego, and the ego might have originated as an impulse, over time the ego develops in such a way as to take on the role of a kind of overseer of impulse. This is highly speculative metapsychology, but importantly, it does suggest that Adorno does not view the ego as something which is necessarily entirely removed from impulses.

Yet Adorno's characterisation of the ego can be further challenged, in particular, his suggestion that the ego has developed in such a way that its function is largely coercive. While it might be the case that the ego *does* act coercively on the external world and the subject by expunging or suppressing the experience of impulse, it might not always operate in this way. This is a point made by Whitebook, when he suggests that the problem lies in the way Adorno conflates the 'obsessional ego' with the ego as such.<sup>133</sup> The idea is that Adorno treats the ego *as if* it were by its very nature something that is coercive, and he thus neglects to consider ways of understanding the ego as something that often is integrated with impulse. Whitebook cites the psychoanalyst Loewald, who distinguishes

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<sup>130</sup> see HF 237, ND 271

<sup>131</sup> DE 87

<sup>132</sup> see for instance ND 230, ND 289

between 'psychic processes that dam up, counteract instinctual life and processes that channel and organise it.'<sup>134</sup> What this points to is the necessity of making a distinction between ego activity that suppresses instincts, and ego activity that rather seeks to structure instincts. This points to an understanding of the ego – and therefore of the subject – that does not involve a clear dichotomy between impulse and ego, but rather the possibility that there are different ways by which the ego interacts with impulse. It could then be argued that Adorno is wrong to view the ego only as a source of unfreedom, and it would further point to an increased potentiality of freedom for the subject. A more nuanced account of impulse could then be formulated that would go beyond the dichotomy that Adorno posits. This would imply that Adorno's diagnosis of the potentialities of freedom is more pessimistic than it needs to be.

However, it is possible to arrive at a response on Adorno's behalf. After all, Loewald's distinction between processes that dam up instinctual life and processes that channel and organise it can be accepted by Adorno. Yet he could still claim, that, while it might be the case that the ego need not *only* act coercively on the instincts and that it thus has the potential to integrate more harmoniously with impulse, because of the way in which it has developed as a result of contingent socio-economic factors in human history, the ego is most often experienced as damming up instinctual life. Thus, while it is not *necessarily* the case that the ego acts coercively on the subject and therefore prevents the self-experience of freedom, because of the way in which society has come to exist, this is the way in which it tends to operate. It is the coercive aspect of society that is mirrored by the ego when it seeks only to repress instincts rather than integrate or channel them. Thus, the ego ought to be regarded as a source of unfreedom as a result of our current social structure, rather than because it is intrinsically coercive. The only problem with this rejoinder is that it ignores the way in which Adorno does seem to hold that the duality by which the ego is both necessary for freedom and yet eventually prevents the subject from experiencing freedom, is in fact 'integral to the concept of freedom'.<sup>135</sup> This suggests that the contradiction is not simply a contingent fact, but rather a contradiction that cannot be eliminated: the conflict is inherent within the notion of freedom. This is borne out in remarks found in *Negative Dialectics*, in which Adorno claims that freedom only arises concurrently

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<sup>133</sup> Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects', p.71

<sup>134</sup> Loewald cited in Whitebook, p.71

<sup>135</sup> HF, p.214

with repression.<sup>136</sup> Without a unified self, there would be no entity that could experience freedom, yet this unified self, in order to remain unified, must then curb actual freedom.

#### **4. Concluding Remarks: The Addendum & The Self-Experience of Freedom**

Adorno's bid to re-orient freedom thus centres on the idea of the existence of a physical impulse in the act of willing itself. Contra Kant, the self-experience of freedom must involve both a somatic moment *and* a theoretical consciousness. This leads to a re-evaluation of the relation that holds between reason and nature. Adorno's contention is that freedom entails an awareness of our dependency on nature, rather than viewing nature as something to be dominated. This explains why he holds that the addendum itself contains a moment of involuntary adjustment to that which lies outside the subject. However, many forms of involuntary adjustment are not instances of freedom but the opposite: Adorno holds that, in modern societies, we continually conform to social pressures in such a way that is entirely unfree. By contrast, the addendum entails a new kind of relation to externality in which subjects are able to go beyond the limits of a purely theoretical consciousness. I have argued that Adorno can successfully maintain that the addendum can be regarded as distinct from a reflex and yet still immediate without falling in to contradiction. I have also suggested that, while it is true that Adorno does not provide a clear assessment of *which* physical impulses could be constitutive components of free agency, he does not conceive of freedom as consisting in the expression of any impulse without the existence of a mechanism by which these impulses are vetted. Rather, he views the ego as a necessary component of the historical development of freedom, without which freedom could not exist, and yet also as something that in fact limits the self-experience of freedom by the subject.

However, while Adorno can be said to begin to point to an alternative conception of free agency, many ambiguities and problems remain. It seems that whilst the notion of a jolt is suggestive of a new kind of way of understanding agency, it remains unclear how this would help us in thinking about the relation between freedom and *moral* agency. This is particularly true when we look beyond the self-experience of freedom in decision-making, and instead at how we can begin to

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<sup>136</sup>see ND 223, ND 232



reconcile the addendum with a concern for social freedom. Adorno seems to hold the experience of physical impulses to be integral to a new understanding of the way in which we should act upon the world. Yet it is not clear what relation this holds to the physical impulse that is constitutive of free agency. This needs to be explored in greater detail if the addendum is to be a candidate for a new model of freedom. Furthermore, what is confusing is that Adorno's remarks on *social* freedom tend to focus on economic and technological factors rather than impulses. If Adorno is to re-orient our conception of freedom, a link between these two approaches must be outlined.

### III

#### IMPULSE, RESISTANCE, AND FREEDOM

At the end of the last chapter, I suggested that it is unclear how the addendum relates to moral agency, if at all. In this chapter, I will examine what Adorno refers to in *Negative Dialectics* as ‘the moral addendum’, and its relation to the account of willing found in the last chapter. I will begin by establishing how we ought to view the connection between the two. A concern that arises is that, what may seem appealing in speaking of the *self*-experience of freedom – that is, the moment at which we experience the impulse – becomes more troublesome when discussing moral agency. In particular, I will argue that we may find Adorno’s emphasis on the immediacy required for moral action to be problematic for a number of reasons. This will lead me on to discuss the role played by the notion of resistance in Adorno’s moral philosophy, and the way in which resistance could be understood to be a form of negative freedom. In recent literature, the idea that Adorno arrives at an ‘ethics of resistance’ has gained currency, yet little has been said about how this relates to his understanding of freedom.

#### **I The Moral Addendum**

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno famously claims that a new version of Kant’s categorical imperative has been ‘imposed’ by Hitler upon an ‘unfree’ mankind;

‘to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.’<sup>137</sup>

Adorno’s re-formulation of the categorical imperative has been the subject of extensive discussion, and a detailed examination of its import is beyond the bounds of this work. However, several things should be noted. Firstly, Adorno’s imperative is historically oriented and as such opposed to the supposed timelessness of Kant’s categorical imperative. Morality – like freedom – can only be meaningfully discussed with reference to actual historical events. Like Hegel,

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<sup>137</sup> ND 365

Adorno is precisely critical of the formalism of Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative, and its neglect of actually existing socio-historical conditions. However, Adorno suggests that *because* of the formalism and universality of Kant's categorical imperative, there remains in it something substantial; what Adorno refers to as the 'egalitarian idea.'<sup>138</sup> It is universally binding and, as such, treats individuals as equal unlike subsequent philosophies or ideologies that base themselves on what Adorno refers to as 'substantial-qualitative differences.'<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, events such as Auschwitz show that Hegel's critique of Kantian formalism – bound up as it is with the idea that an ethical life has in fact concretely been realised – does not offer an alternative way of conceiving of morality or freedom. Whilst Hegel is in a sense right to denounce the formalistic aspect of Kantian morality, Adorno thinks that supposedly rational social institutions do not in fact offer the forum for ethical existence, and nor do forms of communality necessarily avoid the perpetuation of horror.

A further striking feature of the imperative is that Adorno claims that the imperative is imposed on an *unfree* mankind. This again forms a direct inversion of Kant, who claims that the categorical imperative is an expression of the freedom of humanity. However, the unfree mankind on whom this imperative is imposed also has the potential to arrange its thoughts and actions. Thus, a state of unfreedom for Adorno does not entail that individuals have no possibility whatsoever of determining the way in which they exist.<sup>140</sup> What these possibilities consist in will be the subject of discussion later in the chapter. To return to the reformulation of Kant's categorical imperative, Adorno goes on to state that;

'Dealing discursively with it would be an outrage, for the new imperative gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum – bodily, because it is now the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed...It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.'<sup>141</sup>

Morality, like freedom, requires the experience of an impulse or sensation, and resides in the subject's sympathetic response to the suffering of another that is in part somatic. In another passage Adorno suggests that imperatives such as 'No man should be tortured' are only *true* as impulse. In fact, he equates the impulse

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<sup>138</sup> ND 236

<sup>139</sup> ND 236

<sup>140</sup> For a discussion of the possibility that Adorno articulates moral demands that we cannot fulfil given the lack of a corresponding freedom see Freyenhagen, p.139

<sup>141</sup> ND 365

with ‘naked physical fear’ and solidarity with physical bodies.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, he argues that these sorts of claims should not be rationalised, because this would compromise the urgency with which they are felt, and render them in to questions for theory. Adorno’s point is that we must precisely be able to momentarily suspend our theoretical consciousness in order that we can take on the kind of attitude that would allow us to experience the bodily sensation of the moral addendum.

What is unclear is the connection that holds between the freedom impulse and moral impulse if, that is, Adorno holds such a connection to exist at all, a question posed by O’Connor.<sup>143</sup> Importantly, Adorno refers to a ‘moral’ addendum. But is this the same addendum that was the subject of discussion earlier? Adorno accords the physical moment that we experience when confronted by suffering a normative dimension that is not clearly present in the self-experience of the freedom impulse. In the section ‘Concepts and Categories’ of *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno states that, when we are faced with suffering, the physical moment that we experience ‘tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different.’<sup>144</sup> The moral addendum has a normative dimension because the physical experience that we undergo gives us the reason to arrange our thoughts and actions to prevent the recurrence of Auschwitz. Morality involves a responsiveness to suffering that is both physical – it is a *bodily* sensation that involves the ‘practical abhorrence of...unbearable physical agony’<sup>145</sup> – and yet also involves the arrangement of our conscious thoughts in the face of horror with which we are confronted. As with the freedom impulse, there is a clear interaction between the physical and the mental, or inner and outer. But can anything more be said about the connection between the experience of freedom and morality beyond this rudimentary outline?

Firstly, it should be pointed out that the centrality Adorno accords to suffering in his moral philosophy bears a significant resemblance to Schopenhauer’s ethics of compassion. This similitude in fact goes some way in elucidating what the freedom impulse and the moral impulse might have in common. Thus, following his critique of Kantian morality in ‘The Foundation of Ethics’, Schopenhauer claims that, a ‘true’ incentive for justice requires something that is not only

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<sup>142</sup> ND 286

<sup>143</sup> O’Connor

<sup>144</sup> ND, 203

abstract and concept-based, but rather ‘something resting merely on intuitive apprehension’ that forces itself ‘immediately on us out of the reality of objects.’<sup>146</sup> As with Adorno’s conception of the self-experience of freedom, the suggestion is that, in order to have a moral response to something, what is required is a certain kind of heteronomous and alien element that is external to the subject somehow forcing itself on to them, an experience which would entail the subject’s possessing the right kind of receptivity to this externality. Furthermore, Schopenhauer suggests that we are moved by the suffering of another through a process of identification with them. He states;

‘...the barrier between the ego and non-ego is for the moment abolished, only then do the other man’s needs...directly become my own.’<sup>147</sup>

Schopenhauer argues that the subject’s identification with the suffering of another requires a momentary overcoming of the ego. In his own account of the moral addendum, Adorno does not explicitly state that our experience of the impulse when faced with suffering would involve this type of overcoming. Yet the way in which Adorno describes the self-experience of freedom is reminiscent of Schopenhauer’s claim; as was discussed earlier, Adorno suggests that freedom originates in the experience of an ‘archaic impulse’ that precedes the existence of a ‘solid I’. Furthermore, the idea that we experience a bodily sensation when faced with the suffering of another would imply that a momentary suspension of the ‘solid I’ would also be required in order for the subject to be fully able to temporarily suspend their usual concerns and instead immediately respond to the suffering of the other. Thus, both the experience of morality and the experience of freedom require a moment – brought about by the impulse – at which the subject no longer distinguishes rigidly between the I and the not I, and allows itself to be flooded by externality.

It should be pointed out that Adorno does not advocate a Schopenhauerian-type ethics of compassion, and he follows Nietzsche’s assessment of the pitfalls of such an ethics. While it is true that Adorno’s re-formulation of the imperative does require of individuals a responsiveness to suffering that involves a momentary suspension of their usual, rational concerns, Adorno does not think that this is

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<sup>145</sup> ND, 365

<sup>146</sup> Schopenhauer, ‘The Foundation of Ethics’, p.121

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p.166

sufficient. An ethics of compassion wrongly suggests that this kind of immediate, non-egoistic response should be the ‘main foundation’ of a moral doctrine, and as such, Adorno thinks that the idea of compassion ‘tacitly maintains and gives its sanction to the negative condition of powerlessness in which the object of pity finds himself.’<sup>148</sup> As in Mann’s ‘Tobias Mindernickel’, in which the character Tobias is only happy when he can respond to the suffering or plight of another, and seeks to maintain the conditions under which his dog suffers in order that he can respond compassionately<sup>149</sup>, Adorno thinks that advocating an ethics based on compassion might serve to perpetuate the conditions in which suffering is inflicted. Thus, while we should inculcate this kind of responsiveness in ourselves, compassion cannot in itself be the source or grounding of an ethics, as it only leads to the perpetuation of the sources of suffering.

To return to the similarities between the moral impulse and the freedom impulse, it seems that both involve a form of mimetic behaviour, which, as was briefly mentioned in chapter two, Adorno defines as behaviour that is not ‘causally determined by objective factors, but involves instead an involuntary adjustment to something extramental.’<sup>150</sup> It seems that a kind of mimesis occurs in both the self-experience of freedom, and in the experience of the physical impulse that moves us to action as a response to suffering. Adorno often employs the notion of mimetic behaviour in his philosophy, which he defines as a form of ‘archaic comportment that as an immediate practice...is not knowledge.’<sup>151</sup> Free and moral practice requires a pre-theoretical attitude on the part of the subject that would enable them to escape the confines of the fully rational self, and instead allow for a moment in which there does not exist a subject/object dualism, and instead what Jay refers to as a ‘non-coercive relation of affinity between non-identical particulars.’<sup>152</sup> Jay further claims that Adorno conceives of mimesis as necessarily entailing a role for the body in the interaction between the self and the world.<sup>153</sup> Both the self-experience of freedom and the experience of morality seem to be forms of mimesis, as both require the individual to have a kind of ‘archaic openness’<sup>154</sup> to what is other to it, and precede strictly cognitive attitudes on the part of the subject towards the object via the experience of an impulse. This has a

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<sup>148</sup> PMP 173

<sup>149</sup> Mann, *Collected Stories*, p.62-70

<sup>150</sup> HF 213

<sup>151</sup> AT 111

<sup>152</sup> Jay, ‘Mimesis and Mimetology: Adorno and Lacoue-Labarthe’, p.32

<sup>153</sup> *ibid*

further implication. That is, that what blocks freedom – the strict individuation of the ego –also blocks what Adorno holds to be the appropriate moral response to suffering; that is, ‘the practical abhorrence of the unbearable physical agony to which individuals are exposed...’. This is not only because the ego acts coercively on what is other to it, although this is one reason. It is also because the strict demarcation of the ego from what is other to it prevents the subject from being able to have the kind of relation to externality that would allow it to experience the bodily sensation of the moral addendum. Such a sensation would precisely require the suspension of the claims of the ego, and an adjustment to the extramental that in Schopenhauer’s ethics is termed ‘the reality of objects.’

One question that might arise that was briefly mentioned in chapter two is whether or not Adorno is right to lay heavy weight on the notion of mimetic forms of behaviour. What is striking is that Adorno suggests that mimetic behaviour can, to an extent, be understood as somehow removed from the objective conditions at play in society as a whole. However, given how entrenched we are in the pernicious forces at play in contemporary society, it seems hopeful to suggest that mimetic behaviour is something that could remain independent of these forces. There are two responses that partly allay this objection. Firstly, as Bowie points out, Adorno is sometimes guilty of overplaying and exaggerating the totalising aspect of modern society.<sup>155</sup> Thus, as I suggested in chapter two, Adorno can still be read as holding some non-mediated responses to be possible. Of course, this is not a fully satisfactory answer to the question, but, it does seem that Adorno’s emphasis on the physical and immediate derives from his sense that, in mimetic behaviour, there is still a possibility for forms of responsiveness to the plight of others open to the subject. Secondly, forms of mimetic behaviour are, it seems, largely possibilities rather than actualities. Otherwise, we would not have *need* of a new formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative. The point, then, is that, while responses to suffering should simply occur as aspects of our natural, bodily agency, as a result of the dominance of instrumental rationality, of which Auschwitz is the terrible culmination, we must be reminded that actual morality – and freedom – has a physical, natural origin. Thus, mimetic behaviour is to a large extent blocked by objective conditions, and should not thus be conceived of as a mystical force at play in society that allows subjects to transcend their rational selves.

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<sup>154</sup> *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, p.7

What more can be said about the connection between the experience of impulse and moral action? In chapter two, I briefly discussed Adorno's re-interpretation of Kant's concept of spontaneity, which he claims inadvertently points to the duality that exists between ego and impulse and further suggests that freedom requires both the unity of consciousness and an involuntary response to the external. In 'The Problems of Moral Philosophy', Adorno suggests that spontaneity is *also* a key element to understanding what occurs in moral practice, which requires the 'immediate, active reaction to particular situations.'<sup>156</sup> He illustrates this with a story of a man involved in the July 20 plot, whose motivation for taking part in the assassination attempt lay in the intolerability of the situation in which he found himself. Regardless of any consequence, he felt himself compelled to take action. Adorno suggests that this is illustrative of the moment of moral action that contains an 'irrational' aspect that is experienced additionally to the subject's theoretical consciousness of the situation.

However, we might wish to exercise caution before accepting the role of the additional factor in our moral lives. Firstly, there is the obvious concern that the experience of the physical, irrational moment<sup>157</sup> that moves one to action might not be a good way of deciding questions of morality. It is easy to envisage situations in which we might experience an impulse that causes us to respond disproportionately, or to elect the wrong course of action. Yet this objection ignores the crucial role that theoretical consciousness plays for Adorno. Moral practice requires both a theoretical consciousness and the experience of a moment that goes beyond this consciousness and is instead a direct response to the situation at hand. It is not the case that a moral response to situations manifests itself only as an immediate reaction to events without the involvement of the subject's critical capacities; this would amount to 'activity for its own sake' that remains 'stuck fast within a given reality.'<sup>158</sup> Knowledge is necessary to bring the subject 'to the point of action' yet the additional factor that is 'alien' to matters of moral philosophy is required to *move* the subject to action. The irrational aspect of moral action occurs as an addition to theory; the man involved in the assassination

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<sup>155</sup> Bowie, p.104

<sup>156</sup> PMP 7

<sup>157</sup> In the context of the discussion of the additional factor found in 'The Problems of Moral Philosophy', Adorno suggests that it is irrational. In other parts of his work, notably in his lectures 'History and Freedom', he is more cautious and rather terms the additional factor as something that is added to rationality.



plot is only brought to his action by the knowledge that he possesses; 'if he had had no knowledge of the vile evil...he would quite certainly have never been moved to that act.'<sup>159</sup> By suggesting of moral action that it requires an irrational moment, Adorno thus does not have in mind that moral action is solely guided by impulsive responses to suffering. The principle idea is that theoretical insight alone does not lead to moral practice, just as theoretical consciousness alone does not constitute freedom.

However, even if we accept that Adorno's re-interpretation of Kantian spontaneity, this does not eliminate the sense that such a notion is insufficiently rigorous as a way of re-conceptualising our experience of the moral. When it comes to moral action, it might again strike us as problematical that Adorno places emphasis on the kind of situational immediacy of response that he otherwise holds to be suspect. Even if we accept that the irrational aspect that spurs us on to action is coupled or experienced with a theoretical consciousness, in a wholly integrated and radically evil society, it is difficult to place much faith in this form of situational response. The danger is that Adorno begins to treat moral practice as though it were in some sense self-evident by over-relying on the moment at which the individual is moved to action by the additional factor. Yet Adorno is opposed to the idea that the moral is in some sense given; he often suggests that the complexity with which we are confronted in modern society in the realm of practice makes any action that we take mired in ambiguity as his repeated emphasis on the lack of moral certainty demonstrates.<sup>160</sup> Thus, given the extent to which Adorno thinks that we are victims of false consciousness in modern day societies, how can we trust the fact that we are even capable of the right kind of impulse? A turn to what Adorno describes as the 'true primal phenomenon of moral behaviour'<sup>161</sup> is dangerously close to simply advocating the kind of irrationalism that Adorno supposedly opposes.

This worry is coupled with the fact that Adorno uses as an example a situation that is 'intolerable', in which the subject is compelled to act because of the horror of the Third Reich. Yet most situations in which we find ourselves do not possess this intolerable quality. In fact, this latter point leads us to a further concern. It can perhaps be accepted that, in circumstances resembling the example employed by

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<sup>158</sup> PMP 6

<sup>159</sup> PMP 8

<sup>160</sup> ND 242

Adorno – a situation in which the subject is confronted with the perpetuation of horrifying acts – we would experience a moment at which we were moved to action by something resembling an additional factor. However, it is more difficult to understand how this moment would manifest itself in more commonplace and quotidian circumstances that might still call for moral action, or in situations that call for subtle and long term change, where suffering might not be of the kind to elicit a somatic response. How, if at all, does the notion of the addendum – both in the experience of morality and the experience of freedom – lead to the kind of radical social change that Adorno quite clearly holds to be desirable? If it cannot be shown that there is a convincing connection to be drawn between the subject's experience of the additional factor and a concern for social freedom in general, then, contrary to Adorno's aims, the idea of the addendum – and his conception of freedom more generally – becomes increasingly ineffectual and abstract.

The first question, then, is whether or not Adorno can retain the primacy of the addendum in his account of freedom, whilst offering a convincing way of thinking about social freedom. This brings us to a second, more general question. That is, does Adorno offer a convincing way of thinking about social freedom at all? Of course, it can be responded that Adorno need not provide an account of social freedom precisely because he holds that such a thing is not possible in contemporary society, and given the prevalence of false consciousness, it is not even possible to imagine a society that would be free. Yet this response is not only unsatisfactory from the point of view of moral philosophy in general, but it also ignores the fact that Adorno does, throughout his work, provide remarks that suggest a way of understanding how he might conceive of social freedom. However, in order to evaluate Adorno's claims, a distinction should be made between on the one hand, how it is that he thinks freedom manifests itself in an unfree society, and on the other hand, what actual social freedom or autonomy would require. It is the first question that the rest of the chapter will focus on via an examination of the notion of resistance.

## **II Resistance as negative freedom**

In recent literature, it has often been argued that Adorno's idea of resistance is crucial to his philosophy as a whole. For Adorno, the right kind of art exhibits

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<sup>161</sup> HF 240

resistance to the negative whole, and individuals themselves can exhibit resistance by pursuing certain modes of behaviour. The term ‘ethics of resistance’ has been coined in order to denote the negative yet [arguably] normatively binding injunctions that appear throughout Adorno’s philosophy. This is a useful way of thinking about Adorno’s moral philosophy, because it rightly defends Adorno from the charge that his philosophy leaves us with no practical guidance as to what we can and ought to do in the modern social world.

Furthermore, a passage from *Negative Dialectics* points to the idea that resistance is also central to Adorno’s conception of freedom; ‘Freedom turns concrete in the changing forms of repression, as resistance to repression.’<sup>162</sup> However, the risk is that – without a good deal of explication – this claim amounts to little more than a slogan. I will begin by suggesting a way in which the concept of resistance can form a bridge between the addendum and social freedom in general. I will then examine in greater detail Adorno’s conception of negative freedom, and what resistance to repression might look like. I will end by considering a concern that arises from the notion of an ethics of resistance that suggests a problematical tension within Adorno’s philosophy.

In the previous section, I suggested that an objection to the additional factor is that it is unclear how it relates to a more general concern with social freedom. One kind of response might be that, given that the addendum involves forms of behaviour that are receptive and open to externality, it is clear that it necessarily has a social dimension. But this response remains inchoate, and tells us nothing about the way in which the addendum might if not point to an account of social freedom, at least point to a way in which it relates to social concerns. A more promising answer lies in Adorno’s conception of resistance. To return to the passage in which Adorno discusses the assassination attempt, Adorno holds the man’s action to manifest spontaneity, because it is comprised of an active and immediate response to the situation, and contains an involuntary moment. Yet there is also something else going on, that is, that through this spontaneity, the man exhibits *resistance* to the situation. It seems that, for Adorno, the moment of individual resistance when the man acts spontaneously entails the aspect of the moral that is left out by theory. He claims that this is the ‘precise point at which

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<sup>162</sup> ND 265

the irrationality, or better, the irrational aspect of moral action is to be sought...'<sup>163</sup> The connection between spontaneity and resistance could be construed as follows, then. An individual is able to resist certain situations by performing acts that are both informed by a theoretical consciousness and yet retain an immediacy to them, and are in this manner spontaneous. This goes some way in explaining what Adorno means when he claims that freedom is now experienced as resistance to repression. In acts of resistance, we might experience a freedom that is otherwise denied to us via the involuntary moment that compels within us a response to the situation. One question is whether resistance *always* requires spontaneity or the additional factor. In many passages, Adorno seems to say that resistance can be displayed without any action at all, and it is enough to develop a theoretical consciousness that focuses on the bad. Yet perhaps the forms of thought in which a highly developed theoretical consciousness partakes in could also be understood to possess a kind of impulse that moves them to criticise the existing status quo. This is highly speculative, but it does seem that Adorno might hold such a view given that he characterises thinking as a form of behaviour.<sup>164</sup>

Another important aspect of freedom understood as resistance to repression is that, contra Kant, it entails that freedom is necessarily located within the empirical realm of practice, and is thus directly opposed to the idea of an intelligible realm beyond the empirical in which we are free. As was discussed in the first chapter, Adorno holds that an adequate account of freedom must show the way in which freedom alters throughout history rather than attempting to isolate timeless features of the concept. However, as was mentioned earlier, while Adorno does think that freedom is above all a historical category, and thus an idea that undergoes a variety of shifting forms throughout history, this does not mean that freedom becomes a relative concept with no 'permanent component'.

For Adorno, the concrete possibilities for freedom in late capitalism are limited to forms of resistance, and thus a freedom that can be 'defined in negation only, corresponding to the concrete form of a specific unfreedom.'<sup>165</sup> Freedom is inextricably linked to its opposite; that is, unfreedom or repression;

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<sup>163</sup> PMP 8

<sup>164</sup> see for instance, PMP 4, HF 259

<sup>165</sup> ND 231

‘The subject would be liberated only as an I reconciled with the not-I, and thus it would be also above freedom insofar as freedom is leagued with its counterpart, repression.’<sup>166</sup>

Just as the self-experience of freedom actually requires the coercive ego, the individual can only be said to act freely if he opposes himself to forms of heteronomy. Free action does not exist as an independent phenomena, but materialises only as a response to existing forms of repression. This passage points to a further aspect of Adorno’s account; that is, that he holds actual liberation to require ‘reconciliation’ rather than freedom. The idea seems to be that, unlike freedom, a state of reconciliation, would not require a concurrent state of repression or unfreedom. Little else can be said about what a state of reconciliation would look like given that nothing close to it has materialised in human history.

As Freyenhagen points out, in arriving at a freedom that can be defined in negation only, Adorno thereby in part accepts Kant’s distinction between negative and positive freedom.<sup>167</sup> For Kant, negative freedom is ‘independence from all material of the law’, whilst positive freedom is the ‘intrinsic legislation of pure and thus practical reason.’<sup>168</sup> As has been shown, Adorno accuses Kant’s conception of negative freedom of wrongly suggesting both that we can be free from determination by our own desires and impulses, and that such a state would be desirable. The addendum as an account of the self-experience of freedom opposes precisely this view. However, Adorno does think that, while we cannot currently achieve anything resembling positive freedom or autonomy, a kind of negative freedom might exist in the subject’s attempts to preserve some infinitesimal independence from *societal* heteronomy via resistance.

If it is true that negative freedom resides in our ability to resist, more needs to be said about the way in which Adorno conceives of these modes of resistance, and to further point out what might be deemed questionable about such an approach to freedom. Firstly, then, resistance in general for Adorno denotes the possibility of individual opposition to the evil that characterises contemporary society; it means opposition to heteronomy and forms of thought and belief that are imposed from

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<sup>166</sup> ND 283

<sup>167</sup> Freyenhagen, p.87

<sup>168</sup> ND 231

without.<sup>169</sup> To exhibit this form of opposition, the individual must possess a highly developed critical consciousness;

‘We need to hold fast to moral norms, to self-criticism, to the question of right and wrong, and at the same time to a sense of the fallibility of the authority that has the confidence to undertake such self-criticism.’<sup>170</sup>

In order to resist and be at least negatively free, then, the individual must be vigilant in two senses. Firstly, they must be critical of existing forms of unfreedom and social heteronomy that are transmitted by ideologies through cultural mediums and various institutions. There are numerous forms that such resistance could take.<sup>171</sup> Secondly, however, the individual must also be *self*-critical and not consider himself removed from societal heteronomy and thus able to undertake a free-standing critique of society. In a sense negative freedom then entails an awareness of the limits of its own grounds. This is interesting because it recalls the earlier discussion of unfreedom of the individual within society in chapter two. To recap, the subject is externally unfree because of the way in which he is unable to determine his political, economic, and social existence. The subject is doubly unfree because of the way in which the ego internalises social coercion and mirrors this in both his internal processes and in the mode by which he acts on the world. The subject wrongly takes aspects of his ability to act coercively on the world to be illustrative of his independence from the rest of society.

Thus, a key element of resistance is the need for the subject to be conscious of the way in which he is himself the product of a heteronomous social reality, and dependent on the context in which he finds himself. Without this kind of self-knowledge, there can be no hope of undertaking the kind of criticism that could lead to a change that might signal the start of something resembling a positive self-determination. Individuals stumble at the first block by regarding themselves to be able to undertake forms of critique without first realising the extent of their own entanglement and unfreedom. By claiming that the subject must be aware of the ‘fallibility of the authority that undertakes self-criticism’, Adorno thereby implies that freedom is to be found precisely in the subject’s consciousness of the limits of his own ability to satisfactorily get outside of that which he seeks to criticise and

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<sup>169</sup> PMP, p.170

<sup>170</sup> *ibid*, p.169

in instead gaining a critical insight in to why there is so little freedom; Adorno states that the fact that freedom ‘grows obsolete’ is a ‘fatality which resistance must clarify.’<sup>172</sup> Adorno suggests that the intellectual might possess more freedom than others because he at least has a ‘glimpse’ into his own entanglement in the unfreedom of society.<sup>173</sup> Whether or not this is true, the idea is that a certain amount of freedom can be found by being conscious of the multiple ways in which we are entangled and dependent on society. Just as the self-experience of freedom requires an anamnesis of our dependence on nature, negative freedom as resistance requires of us that we bring to consciousness our dependence on the social nexus.

This illustrates one aspect of what has recently come to be known as Adorno’s ‘ethics of resistance’, a term which has been used to refer to the various injunctions and prescriptions found throughout his works that involves what Finlayson describes as ‘strategies of self-conscious non-cooperation with institutionalized forms of social unfreedom and with prevailing norms and values.’<sup>174</sup> The idea that Adorno arrives at a kind of ethics, despite his own scepticism about what the term ‘ethics’ implies, is a response to critics who have accused Adorno of quietism in the face of his negative claims concerning the potentialities of individual existence in contemporary society. The advantages of such an approach to Adorno’s philosophy is that it collates together disperse claims and injunctions found throughout his work, that do in fact point to the possibility of moral practice in the contemporary world and thus the exercise of a negative freedom. Finlayson argues that Adorno implicitly holds that, in order for the individual to be able to partake in an ethics of resistance, three qualities are necessary; *Mündigkeit*, humility and affection.<sup>175</sup> Importantly, the term ‘Mündigkeit’ – translatable as autonomy – is a Kantian term that implies the capacity to use one’s understanding.<sup>176</sup> Finlayson suggests that Adorno uses ‘Mündigkeit’ to refer to a refusal by the subject to capitulate to heteronomously imposed norms. He points to a passage in ‘Education after Auschwitz’ in which Adorno states;

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<sup>171</sup> For an extended discussion of which activities are examples of resistance see Finlayson, ‘The Ethical and the Ineffable’ and Freyenhagen’s *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*, Ch.6

<sup>172</sup> ND 215

<sup>173</sup> MM 6

<sup>174</sup> Finlayson, ‘The Ethical and the Ineffable’, p.8

<sup>175</sup> *ibid*, p.7

<sup>176</sup> *ibid*, see footnote 17

‘The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use a Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating.’<sup>177</sup>

One way that Adorno thinks that we can foster or cultivate ‘Mundigkeit’ is precisely via education, by which he means both children’s education, but also a ‘general enlightenment’ that would aim at changing the ‘state of consciousness.’<sup>178</sup> The aim of education is to make clear to individuals the way in which their consciousness might be manipulated, and demonstrate how the ego ‘is replaced in the name of bonds by...authorities’.<sup>179</sup> This type of education would foster the individual’s awareness that could then lead to resistance. Reflection and non-cooperation are thus crucial components of opposing the principle of Auschwitz, and ways in which our negative freedom is manifested. Non-cooperation might further entail spontaneity and the experience of the atheoretical moment of practice present in the attempted assassination plot. What this suggests is that Adorno’s account of negative freedom can be filled in with reference to certain patterns of behaviour that the subject is still able to undertake in contemporary society. More problematically, however, the claim suggests something else; that is, that some level of self-determination is a pre-requisite for preventing the forms of thought that led to an events like Auschwitz from occurring. Yet, as has been shown, in many parts of Adorno’s philosophy, the idea that we even can be self-determining or autonomous is emphatically denied. The idea of autonomy has become a component part of ideology<sup>180</sup>, so it is puzzling that Adorno uncritically utilises it in the context of a discussion of Auschwitz. What should be made of this inclusion?

A further objection that we might have to the idea of an ethics of resistance is that, by only emphasising the possibilities of individual resistance in society, Adorno thereby neglects to arrive at a conception of freedom that is sensitive to actual societal conditions. Given that he holds the Marxian view that freedom can only be achieved via the emancipation of the whole of society, and no individual freedom is possible, it could be objected that the focus on individual resistance obscures what should be of most importance; that is, the achievement of social freedom. What is problematic is that, Adorno claims that freedom can not be

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<sup>177</sup> CM, 195

<sup>178</sup> CM, 194

<sup>179</sup> CM, 195



understood as something ‘purely individual’; he regards such a view to be an ‘abstraction.’<sup>181</sup> In the same passage he goes on to say that thinking about freedom without reference to the rest of society has ‘no meaning at all’.<sup>182</sup> Yet, for Adorno, the form that resistance takes is almost always only individual. Of course, it could be objected that, in order to partake in an ethics of resistance at all, the individual must be responsive to the general social context. Freyenhagen points to Adorno’s claim in ‘The Problems of Moral Philosophy’ that suggests that morality becomes the search for the right kind of politics<sup>183</sup> to show that Adorno is principally concerned with social freedom. Yet, while this might be the case, we might still feel that more needs to be said about the kinds of conditions necessary for a freedom that would go beyond individual forms of resistance, and involve more widespread social change. Adorno is by no means unaware of this tension in his conception of freedom, but whether or not he offers any plausible suggestions will form the subject of examination in the next chapter.

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<sup>180</sup> ND 219

<sup>181</sup> HF 178

<sup>182</sup> HF 178, see also ND 264, ND 275, ND 276, ND 299

<sup>183</sup> PMP 176

## IV

### INDIVIDUAL AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL FREEDOM

In the last chapter, I identified two possible problems with Adorno's account of negative freedom. The first centered on the ambiguity surrounding Adorno's use of 'autonomy'. In certain passages Adorno talks about the possibility of individuals exercising autonomy in contemporary society. Other passages suggest that autonomy is not open to the subject at all. I will try to make sense of what Adorno might mean by autonomy. This will then lead on to a discussion of the social conditions under which autonomy understood as the subject's positive self-determination *might* be fully realisable. I will argue that, for Adorno, the fundamental difference between negative freedom and autonomy is that the latter is only fully realisable under economic conditions that are radically different to those found in late capitalist societies. This in turn might begin to answer the second worry raised in the last chapter; that is, that Adorno's notion of resistance is problematically individualistic. I will further show how impulse might relate to Adorno's broader claims concerning the realisation of a social freedom, and explicate the role played by Adorno's notion of *want* in his account of social freedom.

#### **I: Autonomy in contemporary society**

There are two different ways of interpreting Adorno's treatment of autonomy. The first is to read Adorno as claiming that autonomy in contemporary society consists in the exercise of negative freedom. On this view, resistance can be understood as a limited form of autonomy. This approach is found in O'Connor, who reads the passage in which Adorno claims that autonomy is the sole power by which the principle of Auschwitz is opposed as showing that Adorno holds autonomy to manifest itself in maintaining an oppositional attitude to various socio-cultural norms.<sup>184</sup> However, O'Connor also claims that autonomy remains an objective in the development of a rational society that has yet to be fully realised.<sup>185</sup> A second

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<sup>184</sup> O'Connor, p.133

<sup>185</sup> *ibid*, p.130

approach is to interpret Adorno as holding autonomy to be a positive freedom of self-determination that is unavailable to us in late capitalist societies.<sup>186</sup> It seems that the latter interpretation is broadly correct; not only does Adorno tend to think that the idea of autonomy is largely used in contemporary society for ideological purposes, as has been discussed, he does not think that we can hope for anything resembling positive self-determination. However, while this is true, passages like the one found in ‘Education after Auschwitz’ do seem to suggest that Adorno holds some [limited] autonomy to still be open to the individual. This is echoed in Adorno’s essay on ‘Free Time’, in which he suggests that full societal integration has yet to occur, and that, rather, the ‘real interests of individuals are still strong enough to resist...their total appropriation.’<sup>187</sup>

The passage in which Adorno discusses the principle of Auschwitz is largely concerned with what Adorno holds to be the formation of pernicious social bonds, which he claims come about as a result of ‘heteronomy, a dependence on rules, on norms that cannot be justified by the individual’s own reason.’<sup>188</sup> Autonomy is then invoked in contrast to these behaviours, as something that is opposed to the principle of Auschwitz and the unreflective formation of these bonds. What is striking is that, in this passage, Adorno implicitly accepts something bearing a close resemblance to a Kantian definition of autonomy; that is, autonomy stands opposed precisely to the norms that cannot be justified according to the individual’s own reason.<sup>189</sup> If this is the case, perhaps Adorno takes ‘autonomy’ to denote a limited form of freedom; after all, given the importance of impulse, freedom understood as positive self-determination would require more than only the individual’s ability to justify norms by his use of reason.

However, while it may be true that Adorno holds that the individual in contemporary society possesses some of the attributes that might be involved in the notion of autonomy, we should not thereby conclude that Adorno holds the ideal of autonomy to be something that is realisable under present circumstances. Rather, we are only *accorded* in theory an autonomy that has no bearing to actual moral practice;

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<sup>186</sup> See, for instance, Freyenhagen, p.87, who suggests that the negative freedom of resistance falls short of autonomy

<sup>187</sup> CM 175

<sup>188</sup> CM 195

<sup>189</sup> CM 195

‘The more freedom the subject...ascribes to itself, the greater its responsibility; and before this responsibility it must fail in a bourgeois life which in practice has never yet endowed a subject with the unabridged autonomy accorded to it in theory. Hence the subject must feel guilty.’<sup>190</sup>

Thus, individuals are ascribed an autonomy that they in large part lack, which has the further consequence that they falsely view themselves as possessing moral responsibility. Yet, interestingly, this passage is equivocal in that it suggests that the individual has never obtained an *unabridged* autonomy. What this points to is the idea that autonomy might be something that is possessed in degrees, and that, while subjects have not yet been fully autonomous, this is not to say that autonomy is only a utopian ideal that is entirely unrealisable. Elements of what constitute autonomy – such as the possession of a critical self-consciousness – might manifest themselves in acts of resistance on the part of the subject, but it seems that something more would be required in order for the subject to be able to ascribe themselves the attribute of autonomy understood as positive freedom.

What, then, would positive self-determination consist of? Firstly, it would go beyond the Kantian conception of autonomy as the ‘property the will has of being a law to itself (independently of every property belonging to the objects of volition)’<sup>191</sup>. For Kant, an autonomous will is a will that can act independently of the subject’s sensuous needs and inclinations by giving itself the law. As was discussed in chapter two, the notion of the addendum suggests an alternative way of thinking about needs and inclinations such that they are not conceived of as sources of heteronomy, but rather as in some sense *necessary* for the self-experience of freedom. In fact, it seems that something like autonomous living would only be possible if the ego and impulse became integrated with one another in a way that under present conditions is unachievable. Adorno terms the impulse the ‘addendum’ precisely because *currently* it is only experienced in addition to the theoretical consciousness. Autonomy might thus be a condition in which the impulse was not experienced as only additional, but rather as fully integrated with the ego. This seems to be borne out by suggestive comments made throughout *Negative Dialectics*. Thus, Adorno talks about the possibility of a self delivered from the ego and a subject whose liberation depends on the reconciliation of the I

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<sup>190</sup> ND 221

<sup>191</sup> Groundwork, p. 108

with the not I.<sup>192</sup> Actual autonomous living might further entail that drives would not to be ‘expressed in destruction.’<sup>193</sup> Importantly, if this interpretation is right, it points to a clear distinction between autonomy as positive freedom and Adorno’s conception of negative freedom as resistance. While in the latter, the impulse is still regarded as the moment in which something *additional* is experienced to theoretical consciousness and the subject’s use of reason, fully autonomous action might not suffer this distinction and instead would involve an agency in which the diremption between theoretical consciousness and impulse did not exist. Yet this remains largely a reconstruction of how Adorno might begin to conceive of autonomous subjectivity, and one that is at risk of remaining somewhat utopian and flimsy.

While little can be said about Adorno’s conception of autonomy as positive self-determination, it is clear that – unlike negative freedom – it could not occur only on an individual level and would require radical social change. Adorno’s conception of autonomy – and his notion of a state of actual freedom – is inextricably linked to economic factors; we lack autonomy in part because we lack economic self-determination; ‘life’ has become a ‘mere appendage of the process of material production’ that lacks either ‘autonomy’ or ‘substance’.<sup>194</sup> Actual autonomous individuals would no longer assume a ‘role’, a concept that Adorno uses to denote the ‘bad, perverted depersonalisation of today’.<sup>195</sup> Adorno thus holds there to be a distinction between the process of depersonalisation, in which subjects must rid themselves of their particularity in order to better assimilate themselves in an exchange society, and the liberation that would occur if the ego and impulse were to become integrated with one another.<sup>196</sup> Adorno contends that, in modern societies, the term ‘role’ hints at the fact that ‘society is not identical with what [the people] are in themselves or what they could be.’<sup>197</sup> But whilst the notion of a role points to the idea that the subject is assuming an identity that allows him to partake in the economic system of exchange from necessity, the role in fact ‘extends deep into the characteristics of people themselves...’<sup>198</sup> Given the extent to which people have moulded themselves to keep afloat in capitalist

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<sup>192</sup> see ND 277, ND 283

<sup>193</sup> ND 285

<sup>194</sup> MM, p.15

<sup>195</sup> ND 278

<sup>196</sup> see, for instance ND 278

<sup>197</sup> CM, p.167

<sup>198</sup> *ibid*, p.166

economies, it seems unlikely that they would have the requisite energy for anything like autonomous action.

The idea that autonomy could only be achieved if the subject gained some form of economic self-determination is ostensibly obvious, yet the danger is that it is this aspect of Adorno's treatment of freedom that is obscured when focusing on the potentialities of individual resistance in contemporary societies. Crucially, then, positive freedom in which the subject has the potential to be self-determining could only occur in a society that is economically structured in a radically different way. What is actually the case is that;

'The economic order...now...renders the majority of people dependent upon conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity. If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt...to the given conditions; they must negate precisely their autonomous subjectivity...'<sup>199</sup>

Importantly, later in the same passage Adorno states that 'reality does not deliver autonomy', which implies that the actual socio-historic conditions in which we find ourselves block autonomy understood as positive self-determination.<sup>200</sup> Autonomous subjectivity is thus not open to the individual because of the way in which he must comport himself and the roles that he must adopt in order to preserve himself within a capitalist economy. While the situation in which he finds himself just about leaves open the possibilities for the development of a theoretical self-consciousness, and thereby a negative form of freedom, his actual material dependency on the system of exchange prevents this from being accompanied by any positive self-determination. Autonomy would thus require a change in the subjective individual life that could only follow from a radical restructuring of society. Thus, it is the conditions in which we currently find ourselves that result in a conception of freedom as involving individual acts of resistance. A positive and more substantial view of free agency could only arise once there is radical social change. This in part shows that Adorno does not unreflectively arrive at an individualistic and abstracted conception of freedom that unproblematically grants a form of free agency to the individual without taking into account the need for social change.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> CM, p.99

<sup>200</sup> *ibid*

<sup>201</sup> HF 178

I will now examine several claims that Adorno makes that go some way in elucidating what would be required such that a more positive freedom would be possible, and how they might relate to the earlier discussion of the self-experience of freedom as impulse. The problem is that Adorno does not do much by way of explicating these claims, and because of their insubstantiality, relatively little has been said about them. It could be objected that, because Adorno himself does not attempt to arrive at a coherent theory of social freedom, his claims will inevitably be vague and unsatisfactory from the point of view of social theory. This is right, but in order for his account of free agency to be convincing, it is important to try to understand what they might mean and to establish a link between these claims and others that concern themselves with the individual self-experience of freedom.

Firstly, Adorno holds that unimpaired freedom could only occur ‘under social conditions of unfettered plenty.’<sup>202</sup> The basic idea is that under conditions in which resources are scarce and not everyone has enough either to subsist, or to comfortably subsist, positive self-determination is not possible. Instead there exists homo economicus, who must precisely adopt a role and therefore relinquish any remnants of an autonomous subjectivity in order that he is able to subsist under the conditions of capitalism. However, Adorno does not think that freedom would *necessarily* be achieved under conditions in which plenty obtained. Adorno holds the Marxian view that self-determination would further require that the process of production would be both ‘transparent’ to the subject and determined by him. Only then would the individual not be ‘passively buffeted by the ominous storms of life.’<sup>203</sup> It thus becomes clear what Adorno means by the *concrete* possibilities of freedom; goods and production are material aspects of the world in which we find ourselves, and it is only in relation to them that something like freedom can be achieved.

Interestingly, in his lecture ‘Transition to Moral Philosophy’, Adorno makes more explicit statements concerning the actual realisation of freedom. Firstly, he suggests that the possibilities of freedom are in fact *growing*.<sup>204</sup> What is meant by this is that the actual historical conditions of contemporary society increasingly allow for the realisation of freedom in a way that was not the case in earlier

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<sup>202</sup> ND 218

<sup>203</sup> see ND 263, ND 284

<sup>204</sup> HF 182

epochs. Yet, for Adorno, the fact that there is a greater possibility of the realisation of freedom does not correspond to the actual existence of freedom. In fact, the factors that *might* produce social freedom are those that also have the capacity to be used to make man more unfree. Adorno then goes on to make a highly significant claim;

‘The concrete possibilities of making freedom a reality are to be sought – and I think this is a very important point – in the way in which we define the locus of freedom, namely, in the forces of production. By this I mean the state of human energies and the state of technology which represents an extension of human energies that have been multiplied through the growth of material production.’<sup>205</sup>

He then goes on to state that;

‘The potential for freedom ...consists in the fact that the state of the forces of production today would in principle allow us in principle to free the world from want.’<sup>206</sup>

The achievement of freedom, then, as a historical reality, depends on whatever Adorno means by ‘human energies’ and technology, understood as an outgrowth of these energies. If these two factors were arranged in the right kind of way, individuals would no longer *want*, which, Adorno holds would lead, if not to a state of complete freedom, at least to an ‘imperfect’ freedom.<sup>207</sup> The idea is that, oppression exists in societies in part because individuals have no choice but to involve themselves in the structures of society if they are to be provided with the kind of material resources that they require in order to maintain themselves. A society in which individuals no longer materially wanted for things would eventually signify the end of the need by the individual to adapt themselves to oppressive structures and point to the emergence of a positive freedom in which they were able to be self-determining.

Ostensibly, this account of the possibilities of the actual realisation might strike us as an extremely reductive depiction of what would have to occur in order for there to be social freedom compared to the complexity of traditional Marxist accounts of

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<sup>205</sup> HF 182

<sup>206</sup> HF 182

<sup>207</sup> HF 183



the conditions under which societal emancipation could be achieved. Furthermore, it seems largely unrelated to Adorno's more specific arguments concerning what constitutes the self-experience of both freedom and morality in a problematical way. It could be objected that these sorts of passages – and the claims discussed earlier that alluded to production and scarcity – leave Adorno open to the charge that he arrives at a radically negative assessment of freedom as it exists in contemporary society, that is coupled with a simplistic and utopian account of the possibilities of freedom. To meet this type of objection on Adorno's behalf, I will examine the claims in greater detail, and suggest a way of construing them such that the connection between the possibilities of freedom and his treatment of freedom discussed in earlier chapters becomes clearer.

## **II: The Locus of Freedom**

What is the significance of in part locating the possibility of freedom in technology? Firstly, it demonstrates the extent to which Adorno holds freedom to be something that requires change in the actual empirical world, and secondly, like both Hegel and Marx, something that *can* be achieved in the process of historical development. As was discussed in chapter two, it is only at a certain point in human development that the idea of freedom arises. Furthermore, like Hegel and Marx, Adorno also holds that it is only when certain conditions are in place is it possible that freedom can actually be realised. Unlike Hegel and Marx, however, he holds that history does not constitute a march to progress, and is often irrational.<sup>208</sup> Thus, technical developments *could* be the source of our liberation but equally could be the source of an even greater unfreedom.

Importantly, in contemporary society, technology has made self-preservation 'easy'<sup>209</sup>. Adorno holds that technical development has reached a point at which it would be possible for humans to cease to labour as extensively as is still required of them by society. It is useful to here turn to Marcuse, whose clear delineation of the relation between technology and autonomy seems to be close to Adorno's own contention. Like Adorno, Marcuse suggests that technology has the potential to signal a newly found autonomy in contemporary society; he argues that *currently* an insubstantial individual autonomy is only found in the realm of production. He then claims that technology tends to 'eliminate individual autonomy' in these

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<sup>208</sup> see HF 5, HF 8, ND 319, ND 320

areas, with the result that the ‘force’ of this autonomy could be ‘released in a yet uncharted realm of freedom beyond that of necessity.’<sup>210</sup> Like Adorno, Marcuse think that, so far, the circumscribed freedom that we possess has been limited to the freedom required of the individual in order that he is able to partake in a capitalist system of exchange as a labouring, economic subject<sup>211</sup> Technology could signal the end of this pernicious freedom, and instead point to an actual autonomy in which the individual no longer had to expend his time and energies in modes of production and could instead determine these processes. Marcuse also suggests that, in contemporary society the opposite tends to be true; that is, that ‘the apparatus imposes its economic and political requirements...on the labour time and free time of man, on the material and on the intellectual culture.’<sup>212</sup> Yet Adorno’s prognosis seems to be bleaker than Marcuses’. Technology not only increases our unfreedom and potentialities for brutality<sup>213</sup>, but it is difficult to envisage a world in which this relation could somehow be reversed given that technologies develop independently of their use value, and come to themselves be autonomous.<sup>214</sup> In fact, Adorno suggests that, for the most part, technology raises the standard of living whilst cutting off the possibility of actual fulfilment.<sup>215</sup>

Given the latter claim, we should not take Adorno’s contention that the locus of freedom lies in the forces of production to mean that, in order to be instantiated, freedom requires only that human energies and technology to be at a certain level, which, if reached would allow for societal and therefore individual freedom. As we have seen in chapter two, it is one of Adorno’s chief arguments that human energies are often misdirected and serve only to reinforce unfreedom, rather than be the source of liberation. Adorno’s argument is that human energies and technical development in modern society could in theory prevent everyone suffering from privation or want, which, being achieved could then lead to a kind of freedom. However, Adorno also holds the Marxian view that it is the relations of production in capitalist society that block this. In an earlier lecture he states that, the fact that millions of individuals still suffer from hunger is the result of the ‘forms of social production...not the intrinsic difficulty of meeting people’s

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<sup>209</sup> ND 349

<sup>210</sup> Marcuse, *Towards a Critical Theory of Society*, p.50

<sup>211</sup> Marcuse, p.50

<sup>212</sup> Marcuse, p.50

<sup>213</sup> MM 19

<sup>214</sup> MM 76

<sup>215</sup> MM 77

material needs.<sup>216</sup> Thus, it is the irrational structure of society – not its actual technical and material capabilities – that blocks freedom and maintains the individual under a repressive system.<sup>217</sup> It is only by changing this irrational structure that we can hope to effectuate anything that might lead to the realisation of freedom. One question that arises from this, is, given the unfreedom of the individual explored in chapter two, how could anyone begin to have the appropriate energies to begin to remedy the situation? It seems that negative freedom understood as resistance would not be sufficient to achieve anything like the kind of radical overhaul required for the instantiation of even an imperfect freedom.

### **Freedom, Want, Impulse**

So far, it has been established that Adorno does offer a way in which we might begin to think of the social changes necessary for a state of [imperfect] freedom to be reached. Unlike in the discussion of the addendum in which freedom is discussed with reference to the interplay between the ego and impulse, the claim that the locus of freedom resides in the productive forces of a society shifts the grounds of the discussion. The question, then, is how to bridge the gap between Adorno's conception of individual freedom in his discussion of the addendum, and his account of the social conditions under which freedom can be achieved?

After a brief discussion of the fact that the forces of production could eliminate want, Adorno states;

‘...If want could be banished, all the instruments of oppression would come to appear superfluous, to the point where the machinery of oppression would be unable to survive in the long run. This process would ultimately extend to the unfreedom of human beings, in other words, to their so-called adaptation to their social situation, in the absence of want they would no longer need to conform.’<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> HF, 144

<sup>217</sup> see HF 133, ND 284, ND 201

<sup>218</sup> HF 183

Importantly, Adorno suggests that freedom would require the absence of want, rather than the absence of need. The implication is that mere survival is thus not enough for there to be freedom, and individuals must be above the material level required for only self-preservation. It is unclear whether or not Adorno uses 'want' to refer only to material things, or whether it might also refer to psychic processes. One question that arises is how, in a radically false world in which individuals are for the most part deceived about the society in which they find themselves, we could ever hope to identify instances of want, in both ourselves and others. Want might be more difficult and less obvious to identify than need. Instead, as a result of the prevailing false consciousness, we might pick up on the wrong kinds of want. Thus, it is possible to envisage individuals wanting for a new technological device, and even to an extent 'suffering', because they were unable to obtain it for whatever reason. Yet this kind of scenario is clearly not the kind of want that Adorno has in mind. How, then, could we understand 'want' such that it does not involve a response to these kinds of situation, and instead is focused on the right kind of deprivations, that, if eliminated might then lead to something resembling freedom?

One way in which we might be able to begin to appropriately identify and respond to instances of want that should be eliminated would be precisely by the development of the right kind of theoretical self-consciousness. Such a critical consciousness would be capable of discerning instances of want that would require attention from those that would not. Further, we could say certain instances of want would elicit within us the experience of the additional factor that would then move us to action. What this points to is the fact that Adorno can claim both that we live in a radically false society in which we are often deceived about sources of suffering, whilst still allowing for the correct identification of instances of want, given the earlier discussion of impulse and negative freedom. However, even if it is the case that it is possible to identify the types of 'want' that should be responded to and eliminated, what remains unclear is that actual relation that holds between wanting and freedom. In fact, we could object that it is perfectly conceivable that, in a hypothetical society in which no one wanted for anything, there could still exist a state of complete unfreedom in which individuals and society as a whole existed under oppressive structures.

This objection can be met on Adorno's behalf. Firstly, while the elimination of want would be necessary in order to remove the sources of oppression and

repression, Adorno would not hold this to be sufficient for the realisation of freedom, but rather the first step in a process. The point for Adorno is that the absence of want would mean that individuals would no longer be required to *adapt* or *conform* in order to procure the material necessary for existence. Currently, individuals have to both ‘prove themselves through the work ethic’ and display ‘independence, autonomy and initiative’, and yet simultaneously mutilate themselves through the process of adaptation.<sup>219</sup> As we saw in chapter two, the independence and autonomy required of the individual as economic and rational subject is contradicted by the fact that the individual is dependent on the system for his self-preservation, and thus neither independent nor autonomous. Thus, Adorno’s point is not that the absence of want would itself spell the end of the individual’s repression, but rather that it would allow the subject to cease to take on the ‘role’ and undergo the multiplicity of humiliations prevalent in late capitalist societies, and instead perhaps be in the position to become a self that would not be ‘locked up in its identity.’<sup>220</sup>

Adorno’s idea that the absence of want might spell the end of the need for the individual to conform could be construed as a somewhat utopian, even naïve suggestion. In fact, it leads to a concern that resembles an objection that was raised briefly in the second chapter. That is, that perhaps, to an extent at least, some level of conformity in a complex society is necessary, just as some control over the impulses must be exercised. It could then be argued that, by suggesting the a state of freedom would be one in which no one had any need to adapt to societal mechanisms, Adorno ignores the extent to which some adaptation through conforming could be viewed as necessary and even in part beneficial on the part of the subject. We might wish to distinguish between modes of conforming and adaptation that are necessary for the continuation of life and even positive, and modes that serve only to coerce the individuals.

However, in Adorno’s defence, he does not think that an absence of conformity is in itself an intrinsically valuable phenomenon. After all, he claims that ‘Society is in the wrong against the individual in its general claims, but it is also in the right against him, since the social principle of unreflected self-preservation...is hypostasized in the individual.’<sup>221</sup> While the right kind of non-conformity *could*

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<sup>219</sup> HF 211

<sup>220</sup> ND 278

<sup>221</sup> ND 283

potentially be a source of liberation because it would free up the constrained ego and allow for the expression of impulses that are suppressed in a society in which we have no control over the powers of production, historically nothing resembling this kind of state has been achieved, and currently the individual is a ‘microcosmic copy’ of the social mechanism.

Given this latter point, one can perhaps start to question whether a state of freedom could ever be realised given that Adorno thinks that modern individuals are becoming increasingly identical with their roles. It appears that we are left at an impasse, in which society cannot be free because the individual does not have the requisite energies to bring about the necessary changes, and, without the freeing up of society as a whole, the individual cannot hope to have these energies. But this again highlights the importance of the negative freedom that we can exercise through resistance. The individual may not currently possess the kinds of energies required to signal a real, positive freedom of self-determination, but there is some room for change if he can hold fast to his critical consciousness and also the possibility discussed earlier of spontaneous action in the face of those situations that require of us an immediate response. This may not itself be enough for the radical social overhaul that is required for true freedom, but it points to a way in which we might begin to effectuate change in society.

However, throughout my examination of Adorno’s conception of freedom, I have repeatedly pointed to the fundamental role that Adorno accords to the cultivation of critical consciousness in the exercise of negative freedom. Yet the danger is that continual appeals to ‘critical consciousness’ and ‘education’ come to themselves possess a somewhat formal and empty aspect, devoid of any concrete philosophical significance. Of course, it could be argued that Adorno envisages critical consciousness to be one possessed by individuals capable of critical theory, and thus able to undertake immanent forms of critique or negative dialectics. But it seems that this must be elaborated further if it is really to be viewed as the source of [negative] freedom. The same is true of Adorno’s appeal to education. Examples of what he envisages such an education to consist in are provided; he suggests that children are to be shown television programmes and then questioned in such a way as to bring them to consciousness of what the intentions of the programmes might be.<sup>222</sup> But, as O’Connor points out, Adorno’s idea that the

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<sup>222</sup> CM 196

objective of a rational society is a community of autonomous individuals is never examined in a philosophically substantial way, and remains separate from his more theoretical examinations of freedom.<sup>223</sup> This points to a gap in Adorno's account of freedom. That is, he rather uncritically conceives of a society in which want would be eliminated as one in which individuals could be free from the need to adapt and conform. Yet rather than saying anything further about how this might relate to freedom as it stands, we are left to formulate tenuous links between earlier discussions of impulse, and how these impulses might express themselves differently in a free society.

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<sup>223</sup> O'Connor, p.130

## CONCLUSION

What, then, should be concluded about Adorno's account of freedom? Firstly, I argued that Adorno's own treatment of freedom must be sensitive to the shifting forms freedom takes given his contention that freedom both as an idea and the thing itself is historical. It is quite clear that Adorno's treatment of freedom is inextricably tied to historical considerations throughout. Thus, an ethics of resistance – in which we can exercise our negative freedom – must change according to the shifting forms of heteronomy imposed on the individual subject. Equally, Adorno holds that something resembling a more positive freedom can only be achieved by the removal of want, which depends on human energies and the state of technology. This entails that the grounds of freedom are located in the forces of production, which themselves depend on the historical conditions of a given society. However, importantly, unlike Hegel and Marx, Adorno does not view the march of history as inherently progressive, and there is thus no necessary connection between historical developments and the attainment of freedom. Rather, while the *possibilities* of freedom grow with increasing technical advancement, technology has in fact made us more unfree. Adorno's analysis of the historical nature of freedom has potentially progressive implications: freedom is not regarded as a timeless, abstract quality that we possess by virtue of our rationality, and it is rather something that depends for its realisation on actual socio-historic and economic conditions. But nor is freedom something that is necessarily achieved through history; rather, it is conceived of as a fragile possibility that is always in danger of turning into its opposite; that is, unfreedom and repression.

Secondly, I suggested in the first chapter, that, Adorno must propose a coherent account of willing in which he showed that willing requires something other than only consciousness or reason. Thus, a great deal rests on the extent to which the 'additional factor' is found to be a convincing alternative to a purely rational will. I argue that the addendum does point to a new way of thinking about freedom and our relation to the world. Thus, what is regarded as heteronomous in Kant becomes something that is conceived of as in some way *necessary* for any self-experience of freedom. This would suggest that free agency would necessarily



involve a novel relation to our corporeality and impulses that would entail a sense of our dependency on nature. I suggested that one possible problem for Adorno's account is the way in which Adorno conceives of the impulse – and therefore, of freedom – as being something that is both immediate whilst being more than only reflexive. We might well ask, given the extent to which we are victims of false consciousness, how any such spontaneous willing is possible. I suggested that Adorno *does* think that some immediacy remains open to the subject, and it is precisely the physical aspect of the impulse in which immediacy could manifest itself. Further, unlike reflexive actions, the impulse is not identical only to physical responsiveness, but requires the interplay between impulse and theoretical consciousness.

However, several problems remain with Adorno's notion of the additional factor. Firstly, while we might accept that certain impulses might be necessary for the experience of freedom, we might also wish to claim that the experience of other impulses would rather be the source of unfreedom. Yet Adorno does not distinguish between different types of impulse. One response is to turn to the idea that the self-experience of freedom would in large part depend on the interaction between impulses and a highly developed theoretical consciousness. Yet, as I pointed out in chapter four, the notion of a theoretical consciousness itself remains a crucial and yet relatively philosophically insubstantial and undeveloped concept in Adorno's work. Secondly, I claimed that Adorno unconvincingly arrives at a dichotomous characterisation of the interplay between ego and impulse, in which the former is viewed as something that is necessarily coercive. Yet, we might hold that more nuance is required in arriving at a characterisation of the ego that does not omit its potential for acting non-coercively. What this points to is that Adorno is himself guilty of treating nature and reason as if they are opposed to one another. He would respond that, under current conditions, we cannot help but experience them as a dichotomy. But we might perhaps argue that, in fact, even under present conditions that the perceived diremption is less clear than Adorno suggests. A final problem raised in my examination of Adorno's account of willing is that it is not immediately apparent how the addendum relates either to the moral addendum discussed at a later point in *Negative Dialectics*, or how it relates to a concern with social freedom more generally.

Ostensibly, the relation between the somatic experience of freedom and of moral impulse is clear. Both, after all, require a physical moment that is somehow

mediated by theoretical consciousness. However, there are two questions that arise. Firstly, can anything more be said about the relation that holds between the two beyond this? Secondly, might the experience of impulse be more problematical when it comes to discussing questions of morality than in contemplating lone instances of the self-experience of freedom? I suggested that both the self-experience of freedom and the moral require an openness to externality that requires mimesis on the part of the subject. Importantly, Adorno re-interprets Kantian spontaneity to point to the duality necessary for the right kind of response that would be both free, and allow the individual to experience the moral in the appropriate way. We can then understand how it is that Adorno envisages a negative freedom to manifest itself in contemporary society; through spontaneous actions that comprise acts of resistance on the part of the subject against existent forms of heteronomy. Yet the idea that Adorno arrives at an 'ethics of resistance' often glosses over what is problematical about such a conception of the relation between freedom and moral action. Thus, Adorno seems to require of the individual an autonomy that he does not in fact possess to be able even to partake in resistance. Secondly, we might question the individualistic nature of such a conception of freedom. Thus, while the individual is negatively free in his resistance to societal forms of heteronomy, such an account occludes any possibility of grounding freedom in any form of sociality. It is not surprising given Adorno's mistrust both of solidarity movements and existent forms of collectivism, but we might wish that Adorno's focus on resistance was oriented to some degree by the possible social forms negative freedom could take.

This last objection could in part be met by an examination of Adorno's conception of autonomy, which shows clearly that positive self-determination can only be achieved by a wider societal emancipation. While Adorno sometimes confusingly claims that autonomy is in part realisable even under present conditions, in order to be positively self-determining, there would have to be a change in the actual empirical and economic conditions in society. However, Adorno's account of the conditions under which a societal freedom could take place can be construed as utopian and philosophically flimsy. While this is wholly intentional on Adorno's part given that he thinks that little else can be said from our present perspective, this does not exempt him from the task of at least pointing to a way in which we can begin to think about societal emancipation. Adorno does in fact make some remarks concerning the objective changes that would have to take place such that an imperfect freedom could hold. Thus, he situates the locus of freedom in the

forces of production, by which he means both the state of human energies and technology. Both could potentially allow for the elimination of 'want', which would in turn signify the end of the individual's assumption of the role in contemporary society. The suggestion is that, if the individual is both materially secure and capable of determining processes of production, this might allow for the formation of a new kind of identity. Such an account is deeply speculative, and in order to be fully plausible, it would require theoretical development that is not possible given our entrenchment in present conditions. But while this is true, we might still query the extent to which Adorno rather unproblematically connects the removal of want with the achievement of freedom. However, I suggested that the removal of want would be a necessary but not sufficient condition for the realisation of freedom. Yet, while this is true, more needs to be done in order to substantiate the notion of 'want'. There is an extensive philosophical literature on the subject of what constitutes both material want and need, and it is a shame that Adorno does not himself adequately broach the question. His statement could perhaps be viewed as having a suggestive function, yet given the complexity of existing empirical conditions, we might remain dissatisfied with such a summation of the changes necessary for imperfect freedom.

However, while we might find Adorno's claims concerning a wider societal emancipation to be lacking, this is wholly in keeping with the negativism of his thought in general. Yet, as I have sought to show in this work, Adorno's pessimistic views concerning the conditions of contemporary society do not preclude Adorno from *also* suggesting a new way in which we can think about freedom. The point for Adorno is that we must begin by altering the way in which we conceive of freedom in the first place by taking in to account those elements of our experience that theories of freedom have tended to ignore. But crucial to Adorno's account is that freedom necessarily has a material basis in existing conditions, and as such, it cannot be realised *only* by the solitary subject's attitude towards his self..

Finally, one of the most important aspects of Adorno's treatment of the idea of freedom is to point out the limitations of the idea itself. By this I mean, firstly, Adorno's contention that, in modern society, the concept of freedom is often invoked on ideological grounds, and unquestioningly assumed to correspond to a reality that is not in fact present. One of Adorno's strengths is to point out that the idea of freedom is deployed and misused in numerous contexts, and comes to be

both meaningless and – in some cases – a legitimisation of existing forms of unfreedom. But secondly, by referring to something over and above freedom — that is, reconciliation — he suggests that the idea of freedom must not be hypostasised. Rather, it is something that should be aimed for and is currently precluded by current societal conditions, but simultaneously, the notion of freedom itself is historical, and as such the product of imperfect forms of sociality. While little can be said about how Adorno conceives of reconciliation, or whether or not such an idea is feasible or philosophically justifiable, it *does* point to the fact that we should not regard freedom to be an ‘ideal hovering inalienably and immutably above the heads of human beings.’<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> CM 34

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