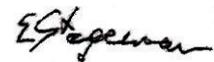


Adorno and Genealogy

by
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I, Emiel Stegeman, 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 as such.



Abstract

The history of genealogical arguments reveals why they are not philosophically popular today. They are prone to many well-known problems such as the genetic fallacy, the tendency to go globally relativistic and the chance to undermine their own position. Nonetheless, genealogical accounts are championed by the masters of suspicion, whose use of them is vital for their projects. Theodor W. Adorno also clearly relies on them in his critique of society and its ideology. The aim of my thesis is to i) distinguish the different forms of genealogical argument, ii) reconstruct Adorno's arguments in light of these distinctions, and iii) arrive at an evaluation of the force and interconnectedness of Adorno's genealogical arguments. Specifically, I will argue in Chapter One that we ultimately cannot read Adorno in terms of our contemporary epistemological genealogies. His critique does not undermine our ideological beliefs but it gives us an indication of why they might be false. Chapter Two uses these indications to dig deeper into the historical genealogies of our concepts. There is a non-fallacious form of this genealogy that Adorno holds but its normative power is limited. Chapter Three builds on the naturalist account initiated in Chapter One, and vindicates Adorno's use of genealogical arguments by showing that his philosophy is not methodologically but still ontologically naturalistic: it might be fact-defective but not law-defective. Chapter Four details a third type of genealogy that debunks our forms of consciousness (not merely our beliefs or our concepts) according to their constitutive connection to a form of functioning. Only this functional genealogy makes sense of Adorno's immanent critique, his quasi-dialetheism, the principle of abundance and the seemingly fallacious imputation of function in history. The account of self-reflexivity given there provides an alternative to its ethical interpretation.

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Abbreviations

Where possible (and as indicated) multiple translations and the original German have been consulted.

- AoP** Adorno, Theodor W. “The Actuality of Philosophy,” trans. Benjamin Snow, *Telos* 31 (1977 [1931]): 120-33.
- AP** Adorno, Theodor W. et al. *The Authoritarian Personality* (London: Norton, 1950).
- AS** *Aspects of Sociology*, The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, trans. John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972 [1956]).
- AT** Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. and ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2002 [1970]).
- CM** Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998 [1963/1969]).
- DEa** Adorno, Theodor W. and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997 [1944]).
- DEb** “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ “ , ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).
- HTS** Adorno, Theodor W. *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993 [1963]).
- HF** Adorno, Theodor W. *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006 [2001]).
- INH** Adorno, Theodor W. “The Idea of a Natural History,” trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor, *Telos* 60 (1984 [1932]): 111-24.
- IS** Adorno, Theodor W. *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Christoph Gödde (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1993]).
- IT** “Who’s Afraid of the Ivory Tower? A Conversation with Theodor W. Adorno,” in *Language Without Soil: Adorno and Late Philosophical Modernity*, ed. Gerhard Richter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010 [1969]), 227-38.
- IU** Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harvest, 1936).
- LND** Adorno, Theodor W. *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a lecture course 1965/1966*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008 [2003]).
- AE** Adorno, Theodor W. *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013 [1970]).
- MM** Adorno, Theodor W. *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005 [1951]).
- ND** Adorno, Theodor W. *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973 [1966]).
- P** Adorno, Theodor W. *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967).
- PD** Adorno, Theodor W. et al. *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976 [1969]).
- PMP** Adorno, Theodor W. *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schröder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1996]).
- S** Adorno, Theodor W. “Society,” trans. Fredric Jameson, *Salmagundi* 10/11 (1969-70): 144-53.
- SP** Adorno, Theodor W. “Sociology and Psychology I/II,” trans. Irving N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 46/47 (1967/1968 [1962]), [online].

Introduction

Introduction

It is not at all my intention to score points off Nietzsche since, to tell the truth, of all the so-called great philosophers I owe him by far the greatest debt - more even than to Hegel. (PMP 172)

All three [Nietzsche, Marx and Freud] begin with suspicion concerning the illusions of consciousness, and then proceed to employ the stratagem of deciphering; all three, however, far from being detractors of "consciousness," aim at extending it. (Ricoeur 1970, 34)

What Paul Ricoeur later called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" was not Adorno's thing. (Habermas 2003)

The first generation of the Frankfurt School was born out of the idiosyncratic marriage of Freud and Marx. Among Theodor W. Adorno's many other influences, these two and Nietzsche hold a special place. The aim of this essay is to place Adorno in the tradition of the 'school of suspicion', as Ricoeur calls it (1970, 32). Habermas is suspicious of this move and, perhaps as a result, not nearly enough work has been done to assimilate Adorno's argument in these terms as has been done for the other three (especially Nietzsche). My approach is to start afresh in attempting to apply various such genealogical strategies to Adorno.

Masters of Suspicion

What unites Marx, Nietzsche and Freud is their faith in genealogical methods (or genetic or archaeological, I will use these interchangeably). They all trace back an object, concept, belief or value system to some historical origin. Genetic explanations have also been used to vindicate the value of such objects. In fact, this is the traditional motive of genealogies (Geuss 1999, 1-3). But for the masters of suspicion, and for Adorno, the result will be a shameful origin that undermines the object of critique. The immediate means of this debunking genealogy is destructive but its end (as the second epigraph indicates) is edifying and liberating. On the one hand a genealogy ought to be theoretically acceptable: it needs a rigorous, non-fallacious argument for why its object is deflated. This has been the main philosophical interest in genealogies given their tendency to fall far short of this requirement. How can we construct such an argument without committing the genetic fallacy, or its being self-stultifying, or leading to global relativism? While its theoretical acceptability is central, a genealogy should also be reflectively acceptable. When Nietzsche undermines the value of Christian morality this is not a mere philosophical exercise but is meant to change the consciousness of those who do value it. It ought to be open to the individuals whose concepts, beliefs or values are being undermined to take up the position of the shameful genealogy.¹ This does not require its theoretical acceptability, but it is desirable if their new-found standpoint is not itself to be undermined. What it does require is that the genealogy use premises which are open to any agent in the belief or value system it is undermining. Only if it is theoretically robust and reflectively acceptable can a genealogy hope to have a genuine edifying effect.

Brandom's pithy summary of genealogical tendencies as "the revenge of Enlightenment naturalism on Enlightenment rationalism" (m.s. 3) sets the mood for this essay. Although it must be made

¹ In this vein I discuss Adorno as if he writes about our society: the perspective is still largely open to us.

Methodological Notes

absolutely clear that Adorno is not anti-rationalist,² he does oppose the form Enlightenment reason has taken. On my interpretation, his strategy for doing so is largely naturalistic. He follows the Enlightenment naturalist programme of explanation in physical terms, continuity between nature and the human realm, and the prohibition on supernatural entities. In contemporary terms, Adorno is not a methodological naturalist but he is an ontological naturalist. This does not obviate the hermeneutical dimensions of his philosophy. Adorno does not have reductive naturalised explanations but he uses naturalistic tools throughout his genealogies. A fitting slogan is that Adorno's philosophy is naturalistic but not naturalised.³

This naturalistic element informs us about what is novel in genealogies. They must falsify something, but not in any traditional way. That way might look like this: in order to debunk a value, a belief or a concept, one ought to show that it is factually false. Described by Freud as the error view, this strategy is adopted by none of the masters of suspicion, nor by Adorno (Freud 2008, 37; Geuss 1981, 39-40). If the naturalist is to have any claim to uncovering something new, it must be something that was not directly available within the dialectic. Finding what, precisely, this entails for Adorno will fill the lion's share of this thesis, along with the secondary aim of illuminating its naturalistic aspects.

Methodological Notes

Genealogical themes permeate most of Adorno's corpus, at least from 1931's "The Actuality of Philosophy" (or as early as 1925 if we count his rejected first *Habilitation* on Freud) up to his death in 1969. Accordingly, I present evidence from throughout this corpus; a stratagem in line with the general consensus on the continuity of all Adorno's work. Though I see genealogy as a conceptual link between different parts of his opus, I do not claim that this is an all-encompassing study of Adorno's thought. Some areas will be touched on only briefly and some will be ignored altogether. Equally, my genealogical reading could be compatible with other (e.g. Hegelian) interpretations.

These genealogical strategies are not all equally at the surface. My project is largely reconstructive. Adorno refused for characteristically idiosyncratic reasons to write straightforward argumentative philosophy. But this does not mean there are no worthwhile claims or arguments. It does mean that any interpretation will pick together strands from throughout his work to make sense of the whole, just as he did with society. Much of this will inevitably be presented in terms unfamiliar to Adorno. But this does not undermine the exegesis if it is charitable, plausible and has explanatory value. Similarly, the strategies identified in Adorno require some creative readings of his texts. Only in one case (the genealogical debunking argument) does my reconstruction go too far as exegesis, but only to test uncharted waters in the hope that others might venture out there too.

The reconstruction of the genealogical strategies will appeal not only to their exegetical accuracy but also to their general plausibility. In most cases the latter has priority. Any final reconstructed view must first be tested for robustness: Adorno is not merely a cultural critic but primarily a philosopher. Some commentators on Adorno present versions of his views that are easily dismissed by critical scrutiny. Adorno's writing does not help his case: he sometimes actively makes the fallacious claims that his interpreters find in him. In not bringing some of these to light I do not mean to white-wash his philosophy. They can only be ignored or dismissed because he provides other, better arguments.

² e.g. "I am not opposed to reason—I simply wish to define clearly the form it has taken" (DEa 238).

³ See (Reginster m.s., 75) for a similar slogan in Nietzsche.

1 — Epistemology

My overall aim is vindicatory yet critical: I think Adorno does have a credible, complex genealogical strategy but he also missteps on his way there.

1 — Epistemology

The uniqueness of the mythic process, which tends to legitimize factuality, is deception.
(DEa27)

The banal cannot be true. Whatever is universally accepted by people living under false social conditions already contains ideological monstrosity prior to any particular content, because it reinforces the belief that these conditions are supposedly their own. A crust of reified opinions, banality shields the status quo and its law. (ODS 122)

Genealogical Debunking Arguments

One way of thinking about genealogies has gained traction in recent epistemology. Following the slow decline of interest in debunking among Marxists and Nietzscheans,⁴ philosophers have started unpacking genealogical methods that are back on the rise in various sub-disciplines. The idea that the warrant of an agent's beliefs can be undermined by the revelation of the belief's genealogical contingency (i.e. that the belief itself becomes 'debunked') is now receiving due attention. The way in which epistemologists tackle this topic could help us make sense of Adorno's methodology. The general question is whether Adorno uses such an epistemological genealogical debunking argument (GDA) and, if so, what form this takes.

There is perhaps no one *locus classicus* for the work done by analytic genealogists in the past decades. Epistemologists have only recently starting taking up the litmus work of evaluating the epistemic principles to which a GDA might owe its destructiveness (e.g. Srinivasan 2015). This labour provides a conceptual framework in which to compare the diverse arguments and aims from the widespread debunking of moral realism (e.g. Street 2006), to Ladyman and Ross's genealogy of metaphysics (2007) and the nascent threat of experimental philosophy to philosophical intuitions (cf. Knobe and Nichols 2008, 2014). The discipline doing the undermining varies widely. A genealogy can be based on the revelation of cultural variation, evolutionary chance, psychological idiosyncrasy, developmental anomalies or historical contingency. But this already points to a consensus on the genealogical key, namely the contingency of our various beliefs, concepts and practices. There is a puzzle about whether and how the possibility that an agent could have acted or believed otherwise should cause a loss of credence. By the genealogists themselves, this counterfactual clause is taken to form the cornerstone of the strategy. For example, a striking (though still contested) upshot of philosophical experiments is that our intuitions would have been the exact opposite of what they are if we had been brought up in a different culture. Given that only this relatively minor fact about our lives binds us to a belief, how can we be warranted in holding onto it? The general structure of this

⁴ According to Brian Leiter, the atrophy also occurred among the most sympathetic scholars of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (2004).

The Sociology Of Knowledge

debunking strategy is as follows:

(GDA) Genealogical Debunking Argument

- 1) An agent believes p
- 2) It can be shown that the agent only believes p because of a particular contingent fact x
- 3) If the agent had been subject to contingent fact y rather than x, there would be no belief in p
- 4) Therefore, the agent is not warranted in believing p

The Sociology Of Knowledge

Before emulating Adorno's debunking strategy in similar terms, it will help to read a contemporary of his. Before their respective emigrations, Karl Mannheim and Adorno were both active at just a stone's throw from one another in Frankfurt. To the classical Frankfurt School cohort this proximity only increased the threat of the former's sociology of knowledge, a scientific coming-to-terms with social variations in belief. Adorno is particularly concerned with Mannheim despite the fact that his programme is similar to that of earlier sociologists of knowledge like Pareto and Scheler. Though they were personally amicable, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno all wrote scathingly about Mannheim (c.f. Jay 1974). The value of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge lies not only in contemporary genealogists' undiscovered debt to his early 20th century programme but also in Adorno's telling aversion to it.

Mannheim begins by outlining the cultural development of ideological critique. "Political discussion possesses a character fundamentally different from academic discussion. It seeks not only to be in the right but also to demolish the basis of its opponents' social and intellectual existence" (IU 38). The imputation of ideology turned out to be a critical tool in this debunking enterprise. One could destroy one's opponent by "unmasking" "the social-situational roots of thought" (IU 39), i.e. the basis of an agent's beliefs in contingent social facts about their life. At first, Mannheim points out, this was overwhelmingly successful. "It was stupefying for the [opponents] when it was demonstrated that their ideas were merely distorted reflections of their situation in life, anticipations of their unconscious interests" (IU 40-1). But since then two things have happened. First, "this weapon... has become the property not of one group among many but of all of them" (IU 41). It is not only the Marxist but now also the liberal, the conservative, etc. who can unmask the origins of their opponents' beliefs. The resulting outcome is epistemically catastrophic: a state of total relativism. "[I]n the measure that the various groups sought to destroy their adversaries' confidence in their thinking by this most modern intellectual weapon of radical unmasking, they also destroyed, as all positions gradually came to be subjected to analysis, man's confidence in human thought in general" (ibid).

Although he has reservations about its consequences, Mannheim affirms the validity of this genealogical argument. He describes his historical situation as dominated by the realisation that "the thought of every group is seen as arising out of its life conditions" (IU 78). This is explicitly related to warrant: "the validity of the adversary's theories is undermined by showing that they are merely a function of the generally prevailing social situation" (IU 69). From this it should be clear that Mannheim identifies a GDA: an agent believes p; it can be shown that the agent only believes p due to their social class; the agent would have believed otherwise if different facts had obtained⁵; therefore

⁵ In fact, Mannheim categorises various beliefs according to the particular social classes that hold them (see AS ch.XII).

the agent is not warranted in believing *p*.

Mannheim's work illuminates two epistemological nightmares recognised by himself, by Adorno and by our contemporary epistemologists. The first is the globality problem. While the GDA proves incredibly effective at the local level as an undermining of one's political opponent—where its efficacy is intended—it is not able to limit itself. Once it is unleashed and accepted as a valid strategy (as Mannheim does), there is no way to stop it from 'going global' and virally debunking all beliefs based on some naturalistic determinant thereof. What it means, in effect, is a situation where all belief claims are unwarranted because all belief is contingent; in other words, global scepticism or relativism prevails (c.f. CM 275-6). Our contemporary epistemologists are anxious to plug the gap that allows the local genealogy to go global (Srinivasan 2015, 327) and so is Mannheim, who realises that "it is hardly possible to avoid this general [i.e. global] formulation of the total concept of ideology" (IU 77). But first, the second problem: self-stultification. An argument is self-stultifying when an expression of the position undermines that position. A classic example is that of perspectivalism: the claim that 'there are no truths, only perspectives' is seen to be self-stultifying because by its own standards it could not itself be a true claim.⁶ The affirmation of a GDA can similarly self-stultify: the claim that 'there are no warranted beliefs because every belief is a function of an agent's contingencies' immediately undermines itself. After all, this belief too could be traced to its own contingent roots.

Mannheim recognises that these are major problems, not merely philosophically but societally. The prospect of a state of universal relativism is not a welcome one. He sees it as a problem to be solved: how to find a stable basis for social critique. But he does not repudiate that this relativist description is accurate: there is no *rapprochement* between different ideologies which all potentially undermine one another. There is no longer an objective standpoint from which one can judge these various ideologies. The question then becomes: "which social standpoint *vis-à-vis* of history offers the best chance for reaching an optimum of truth" (IU 80)? Mannheim's eventual solution rests on the reasoning that all these ideologies are inflections of economic class. If there were to be a social group that was (relatively) classless, it could achieve this standpoint. The answer: the "socially unattached intelligentsia" (IU 155). In one stroke, the invocation of the intelligentsia relieves Mannheim of the spectres of global relativism and self-stultification. The latter because of the lack of a causally efficient naturalistic determinant of belief (economic class) and the former because the buck stops with the intelligentsia, who can be relied on to provide an Archimedean standpoint.

Mannheim's solution has been mocked as, among other things, "a cry of desperation" (Wolff 2011; cf. Williams 2014, 299) and rightfully so. As far as ideological critique goes, Mannheim's *deus ex machina* is all the more suspect for being precisely the kind of thing that an academic would say. But it is not the case that every GDA is equally self-undermining.

Adorno's Epistemology

A cognisant reader will have foreseen my next move, which will be to establish a GDA-type strategy in Adorno. Aside from the exegetical problem over whether this is how one ought to read Adorno at all, the reader will be more likely to worry about whether he even speaks the same language as our

⁶ Although c.f. Moore 1997, 106).

Adorno's Epistemology

epistemologists. Not only does Adorno engage in epistemology,⁷ but he does so in a way compatible with the epistemological formulation of the GDA. In order to do this, he must provide an analysis of a knowledge claim and what it consists in, which he does most clearly in the essay “Opinion Delusion Society”. This may not be immediately clear given its focus on various forms of pseudo-knowledge and delusional opinions rather than beliefs and warrant conditions.

One of Adorno's first arguments is that there is no real difference between healthy and delusional opinions. “[S]o-called pathological opinion, the deformations due to prejudice, superstition, rumor, and collective delusion that permeate history, particularly the history of mass movements, cannot at all be separated from the concept of opinion *per se*” (CM 106). This leaves us with the concept of an opinion as a basic structure whose classification as healthy or delusional requires some further analysis. What is lacking from opinion as such—some additional condition such as warrant—is the same in all cases. But does Adorno equate opinions to beliefs as the basic units of knowledge claims? First we must remind ourselves that there is no German equivalent for ‘belief’. This is not to say that *Meinung* is one of the usual translations, but we must allow some leniency in the terms and focus on the concepts. All Adorno really needs to do is provide something structurally analogous to what we would think of as a knowledge claim, regardless of his terminology.

Adorno defines opinion as “the positing, no matter how qualified, of a subjective consciousness restricted in its truth content” (CM 106). Let us break this down. First, it is a claim or statement (“positing”) of some mental content. Second, it does not, as yet, have any claim to be more than what it is as bare unqualified or unwarranted expression of mental content. This constitutes, thirdly, its alethic contingency: if the content is to be true, this must be external to the mental content itself. These three definitional requirements approximate our pragmatic use of ‘belief’. The argument is verified by Adorno's odd description of a case of testimonial belief that has caused someone to be of the “opinion [that] the faculty building is seven stories high” (CM 106). This shows that in practice, what Adorno understands by ‘opinion’ is not axiological in the way that its English usage often indicates. ‘Belief’ would be a perfectly acceptable translation of this mental state.

This will not suffice just yet. The reader was promised an analysis of the constituents of a knowledge claim. Although Adorno's definition hinted at some additional elements beyond mere opinion or belief, this does not prove he thinks there is such a thing as warranted belief. This is suggested by his claim that “verified opinion” is an “empty promise only rarely fulfilled” (CM 109). But this pessimism is directly mainly at “the usual epistemological theory” that holds that all beliefs are empirically verifiable. Adorno does have a conception of justified belief as knowledge: “the means by which opinion [i.e. belief] can become knowledge is the relation of thought to its object” (CM 109).

There is one possible objection to this traditional conception of epistemology in Adorno according to which he in fact has a naturalised epistemology. As he and Horkheimer put it, “we had set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism” (DEa ix). This barbarism, crucially, is not merely its domination and lack of freedom but equally its ignorance and lack of rationality. In trying to understand why humanity is in this epistemic state and how this could be ameliorated, Adorno's project resembles that of naturalised epistemology, whose aim “is to understand the epistemic quality of hu-

⁷ Geuss rejects the interpretation of Adorno as having a positivist conception of knowledge (OE 122) but I do not claim that Adorno thinks in purely propositional terms.

1 — Epistemology

man cognitive performance, and to specify strategies through whose use human beings can improve their cognitive states” (Kitcher 1992, 74-5). Both critical theory and naturalised epistemology ask: Why not look at actual cognitive processes themselves? As Quine put it, “[w]hy not settle for psychology?” (1969, 75-6). For Adorno too, “it would be impossible to understand how people passively accept a state of unchanging destructive irrationality...without psychology” (CM 270). The naturalist concern, as Jaegwon Kim puts it, is to specify a causal relation between input and output of cognitive content (1988, 390). Equally, it matters to Adorno both that and how “[t]he lying words of the radio announcer become firmly imprinted on the brain” (DEa 221).

Although I uphold a naturalistic interpretation of Adorno and would extend this to his epistemology, the standard conception of epistemology is still dominant. His conception of warranted belief is fleshed out with an affirmation of the external addition to mental content of a warrant condition: “[t]he moment called cathexis [the investment of mental energy in an object -ES] in psychology...is not extrinsic to thought, not merely psychological, but rather the condition of its truth” (ODS 109).⁸ Ultimately, the naturalised interpretation must be false. Adorno’s epistemology is naturalistic, not naturalised. Both rely on some scientific discipline in order to explain the geneses of beliefs. The difference is that the former is compatible with an analysis of knowledge in terms of its primary constituents of belief and warrant while the latter “surrender[s]...the epistemological burden to psychology” (Quine *ibid*).

Adorno’s Genealogical Debunking Argument?

We now have the structures in place through which we could impose a GDA on Adorno. Although it fails as strategy and as exegesis, making the case for it will illuminate what we are to learn from the Mannheim-Adorno dispute and will set us on the path toward a non-epistemological interpretation of Adorno’s genealogical method.

Adorno and Mannheim disagree over the concept of ideology itself. As we have seen, Mannheim adopts the general political usage of the term whereby there are many ideologies in competition with one another. These ideologies are traced to their particular socio-economic origin. Mannheim traces all these ideologies back to the particular form of social organisation that causes class divisions. Adorno too identifies the general societal level as the determinant of beliefs but he skips the intermediate step: there is only one ideological determinant of a belief.⁹ It is a monolithic, general feature that supervenes on the organisation of society. “It is idle to search for what might have been a cause within a monolithic society. Only that society itself remains the cause” (ND 267). So Adorno still, like Mannheim, identifies a contingent determinant of our beliefs. This is often phrased in terms of power, most plausibly not some political power imbalance between classes but the generic power of the universal over the particular: the social whole over individual humans. This is not as extravagant as it sounds. All it claims is that persons by default believe the general or average societal belief. On the weakest interpretation of the claim it is only that these default beliefs “are impressed on the individual as the only natural, respectable and rational ones” (DEa 28).

Given this theory about the ideological influence on belief, the general Mannheimian structure

⁸ Adorno does not always differentiate between the warrant and truth of a belief but this is no great obstacle.

⁹ This is compatible with my account in Chapter Four that there can be multiple forms of consciousness within this single ideological structure.

Adorno's Genealogical Debunking Argument?

is still open to Adorno. We can see ideological critique as a debunking strategy that destroys a belief's warrant. There are two ways of conceptualising this. The first takes seriously Adorno's warrant condition, which can only come in terms of an appropriate relation to the object of cognition. Let us call this the Reliabilist interpretation: a person S's belief p is warranted only insofar as it was formed through or is constituted by a reliable relation to the object.

(A) Reliabilism

- 5) A belief is warranted when it is based on a reliable belief-forming process
- 6) Such a process would remain stable regardless of social circumstances
- 7) If a person's social circumstance is the major determinant of their beliefs then those beliefs are insensitive to reliable processes
- 8) Beliefs are unwarranted when we have reason to suspect that they are insensitive to a reliable process

This is not an implausible theory about warrant, but it is also open to standard epistemological falsification: there is nothing philosophically interesting to it from a genealogical perspective. The second conception is more recognisable as ideological critique. It can let itself be informed by the more sophisticated Reliabilism but this is not necessary. Ideological critique has sceptics not because it fails as an argument (the formalisation is relatively uncontroversial). Rather, sceptics reject ideological critique over the difficulty of finding decisive evidence for its first premise. This would amount to showing that beliefs are generally held only or primarily due to power relations, upon which it would follow that these beliefs are unwarranted. Formally:

(B) Vulgar Ideological Critique

- 9) Power relations have caused "the masses" to believe p
- 10) Beliefs caused by domination are ones that would be different contingent upon there being a different dominating power or causal history
- 11) Beliefs caused by domination are unwarranted
- 12) All beliefs under late capitalism are unwarranted

This second version does more justice to Adorno's views on ideology as a monolithic determinant of belief.

But there are three reasons why Adorno cannot be giving a GDA of this form. First, note that (B) implies the second conclusion (12): global relativism. (Reliabilism in fact reaches a similar second conclusion implying global relativism: if all beliefs are ideologically determined, as Adorno implies, then there can be no such thing as a reliable epistemic process.) Adorno criticises Mannheim exactly for this relativist conclusion. "[Mannheim's] universal expansion [of the concept of ideology to encompass all social standpoints, -ES] empties the critical concept of ideology of its significance. Since...all truths are supposedly mere opinions, the idea of truth gives way to opinion" (CM 115). In other words, all knowledge claims come to be seen as mere (i.e. unwarranted) beliefs. This is "ideology...diluted...to universal relativism" (P 30).¹⁰

When Mannheim reaches this same conclusion, he responds with his *deus ex machina* of the free-floating intelligentsia. Adorno's second argument is that according to the logic of the GDA, the intelligentsia has no superior standpoint and must be equally undermined because it too has particu-

¹⁰ This undermines Habermas's claim that Horkheimer and Adorno "surrendered themselves to an uninhibited scepticism" (1987, 129).

lar social interests (CM 117; P 48). So any such position must face up to the real globality problem that all claims to knowledge are debunked, including those of the intelligentsia.¹¹

Lastly, it is not the case that Adorno thinks of a belief as debunked just by being shown its contingent genealogy. The fact that a belief is caused in a certain way is no guarantee of its falsehood. This is true even when the particular genealogy betrays private interests, which a vulgar interpretation (like the one given above) might see as reason for suspicion. Did Adorno not just indicate that a belief's being traced to ideology makes it unwarranted? No, "[t]he insight into the fact that thinking is mediated by objectivity does not negate thinking" (ND 181). In this opinion Adorno respects the constraints of the genetic fallacy. It must have been clear to Adorno by 1936, thanks to his epiphanic reading of Alfred Sohn-Rethel, that "[v]ery little of value to a materialist can, as a rule, be gained from tracing ideas...to their genetical condition. If the ideas are accidental themselves, their genetical basis is accidental too" (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 196; cf. Abromeit 2011, 383-4). In other words, a belief can have some contingent ideological origin without this undermining its validity.

What this implies for Adorno's (hypothetical) account of warrant is unclear, given how underdeveloped this remains here. He might think GDAs fail to undermine warrant conditions; that these are more robust. Or he could think that warrant is deflated but that this does not suffice for undermining a belief altogether. A claim might well be true despite the particular belief in it being unwarranted. Given that Adorno pursues the falsity of the ideological beliefs, this interpretation is more likely. But the upshot is the same in both cases: Adorno does not (nor can he) pursue a GDA strategy. If the use Adorno makes of "ideology" and ideological critique throughout his writings does not add up to a GDA based on the contingency of ideological beliefs, we may have reached a dead end. What, then, is the point of ideological critique?

Adorno's Ideological Critique

First, Adorno does obey the jurisdiction of the genetic fallacy as shown above. It cannot be the case that the mere revelation of a belief's genealogy undermines it. But that does not mean that tracing a belief's origins is futile (which would commit half of Adorno's work to the dustbin). There is a particular value to the revelation of a belief's social, economic, material, hegemonic or psychological origins. "[T]he dominant opinion...is not due simply to people's inadequate knowledge but rather is imposed upon them by the overall structure of society and hence by relations of domination. How widespread these beliefs are provides an *initial index of falsity*" (CM 121, emphasis added).¹² Adorno confirms that beliefs are determined by the domination (or dominant influence) of society over individuals. But he stops short of calling these beliefs false. Now, it is clear in many—if not all—cases that Adorno thinks these beliefs are falsified in some other way. Rather than call them false outright, Adorno thinks of the ideological origin of a belief as revealing the likelihood or at least possibility of its being false. This *index falsi* [indication of that which is false] (ND 317; LND 23)¹³ is not the end point at which we can make a judgment about a belief's truth value. It is rather the beginning of an inquiry into a belief's truth or falsity; a heuristic that can guide our choice for which beliefs to further

11 Adorno does not explicitly claim that this GDA is self-stultifying, but he does refer to "[t]he difficulty of accepting Nietzsche's grandiose anticipation of the self-destruction of truth" (CM 115).

12 Habermas appears to get this right (1987, 116).

13 Adorno may have borrowed the phrase from Bloch rather than directly from Spinoza or Marx. His contemporary rephrases Spinoza's statement as "*Verum nondum index sui, sed sufficienter iam index falsi* [The truth is not yet an indicator of itself, but is already sufficient to indicate that which is false]" (Bloch 1998, 343).

Adorno's Ideological Critique

investigate. Such investigations can be costly and are likely to go awry when their object is picked merely at random. They have a greater chance of success when we have reason to believe that there is something to be uncovered.

So what makes something an index of falsity? Is it the content of the ideology? It could, for example, contain claims of a type which we know to be suspect. Mannheim's invocation of the intelligentsia as *deus ex machina* signals the kind of claim one would make only because one is in that social position oneself. This case might be an *index falsi* not by virtue of the content but rather its source. Proclaimed by anyone else, the content would be an *index falsi* only if we could suspect the intelligentsia of playing a dominant role in society, a ruling class. Adorno thinks it is distinctively not the content of a statement that commits it to suspicion. "Ideology lies in the substruction of something primary, the content of which hardly matters" (ND 40). This might seem to revert to the claim that ideological belief is false due to its genesis, not due to its content. But the emphasis is on the indication of falsity, not falsity itself. To claim without pause that the genesis or content of a belief entails its falsity begs the question of why it is an indication of falsity. Chapters Two and Four will attempt to answer the question of why the *index falsi* can, after further investigation, be confirmed as false.

For now, we need to see that what makes something an *index falsi* is not the content of a proposition but rather its function. In short, what makes a belief suspect is its obfuscatory function. The belief serves to obscure some additional meaning or is part of a general veiling intention. Ideology is "a fraud about [some fact]" (CM 260). This explains the use of "substruction" in the preceding quote: ideology is what underlies or supports the primary object that it disguises. Is this a circular explanation? We might say that a claim is only shown to be obfuscatory when we examine what it obfuscates. So the critique does not get off the ground. Against this I will claim that there are particular strategies that are known to be suspect.

Another way to answer the circularity worry about obfuscation is to look at the latter's *telos*. The function of obfuscation is to stabilise and legitimise a *status quo*. Adorno frequently implies that this legitimising function is a necessary condition of ideology. Beliefs are not ideological as such; it is only when "...stabilized as transcendence, [that] they become ideology" (ND 40). This stabilisation need not entail some intentional agent with an awareness of the added benefit that this stabilisation will bring. It definitely does not imply this of individual agents who hold the belief. After all, the point of the obfuscation is that the true meaning of a statement is hidden also from the agent making the claim, who would oppose the statement if they were aware of its real meaning (ND 311).

There are two ways of making this kind of claim. First, Adorno attributes to society, his version of Hegel's *Geist*, beliefs that characterise the overall mindset of a population. They need not be held by all individuals, but without their conscious or unconscious belief by a large subset of the total population they cannot come to predominate. Adorno might have this object in mind as the intentional agent behind the stabilisation. If such a total subject can have beliefs it could have intentions regarding which of these to express and which to hide. Such cunning reason might thus obscure from all individual sub-agents what the function of their belief really is.

A likelier explanation omits intention altogether. This is the functional explanation championed by G.A. Cohen, which is "conveyed by statements like 'The function of x is to ϕ '" (2001, 263). This fits our claim that the function of obfuscation is to stabilise a *status quo*. How does this explain the

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explanandum event of an obfuscatory belief? “[A] functional explanation is a consequence explanation in which the occurrence of the *explanandum* event...is functional for something or other” (ibid), in other words that it brings about another condition. In this case that other condition is that society remains the way it is; that operates as before. A successful functional explanation will allow us to conclude that “the cause occurred because of its propensity to have that effect” (idem, 281). Adorno certainly thinks he can point to an event which “serves the antagonistic condition” (ND 344-5). He also suggests that this is the case for “subjective illusions”: “it is only through the principle of individual self-preservation...that the whole will function” (ND 312). So his argument about the *telos* of distorting beliefs can be grounded in a functional explanation, to the effect that these beliefs occur precisely because they maintain a *status quo*.

To buttress the claim that ideology legitimises a *status quo* by its masking function, Adorno sometimes invokes additional layers of obfuscation. This has the function of stabilising a *status quo* against possible objections. This is why “the notion of culture as ideology” (which is only nominally critical of this society) “has a suspicious tendency to become itself ideology” (MM §22). The critique of a civilisation as ideology becomes an obfuscation of substantive insight into what makes this civilisation ideological. This is how “the spell...itself, becomes imperceptible” (MM §131). The less overt markers of ideological veiling are present, the less chance of awareness and insight into these markers, the better society functions at sustaining itself.

Adorno’s *oeuvre* is riddled with the identification of strategies of obfuscatory legitimisation. Rather than list them all, I will identify what I take to be the general structure of these strategies. Though perhaps not intended as such, Adorno provides an overarching explanatory concept in *Negative Dialectics*. This is “phenomenality...the appearance that the substance is present here and now” (ND 16). An obfuscatory strategy is one that gives the impression that the real meaning, substance or essence of an object is available at the surface level, thus obscuring the need for further investigation. It is the denial of the possibility of latent content and an essentialisation of manifest content. One way this can be made to work is by presenting the manifest content as unquestionably or obviously true, e.g. as ‘Being-in-itself’, ‘authentic’, ‘banal’ (as in this chapter’s epigraph), ‘common sense’, ‘immediate’ or ‘natural’. Some of these (such as common sense) are conceptually weaker. Others present more robust obstacles in terms of philosophical acuity: ‘Being-in-Itself’ comes loaded with the rigour of a philosophical system. But structurally they are the same. They deny that there could be anything more to a claim than its surface content, which is taken for granted. So it is the latent meaning that will need to be uncovered by a genealogy.

Enlightenment Naturalism

One baffling aspect of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is what Horkheimer and Adorno mean by the relation between enlightenment, Enlightenment and myth. And how do these themes connect to the topics discussed so far? They are not merely an application of the theory of ideology but rather tell us how to think about it and critical theory’s metaphilosophical outlook.

One of the starting points is that Enlightenment and mythology are entwined: there is no clear segregation between our 18th century cultural-scientific achievements and pre-Enlightened world-views. This does not mean that we cannot disambiguate the two societal tendencies as they manifest

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themselves in, for example, Newtonian physics and forms of anthropomorphic animism. The distinction may not always be immediately apparent in their inception but retrospectively we can identify what belongs to our regulative worldview. We identify ourselves with the era of Enlightenment and its advancement towards a rational and naturalistic understanding of the world. That we live in a demythologised, disenchanted world is not a choice for us but a presupposition, a heritage. But these advancements do not legitimise our self-representation as fully Enlightened. The Enlightenment did not finally bury the dialectic between mythological and non-mythological worldviews. This is the point of the introduction of enlightenment as a concept (as opposed to the extended century marking the Enlightenment). The dialectic inherent in the concept of enlightenment (between mythology and demythologization) has a long history in Europe. It can be traced back at least to Homeric times and unfolds throughout mediaeval and Renaissance times. As such, enlightenment and mythology are processes or tendencies. The Enlightenment is only a moment in that unfolding dialectic. And it is not an unambiguous moment.

The Enlightenment did not deliver the decisive blow after which it would be impossible to return to pre-Enlightened (in this case also pre-enlightened) times. Myth still survives “amongst an only seemingly demythologized mankind” (ND 309). The point of revealing the perennial dialectic of enlightenment is a vindication of the claim that enlightenment and myth are intertwined, and that the latter persists today. The demythologising purpose of the Enlightenment has, despite itself, recoiled into a new mythology. The upshot is that our “disenchanted and conserved spirit takes the form of myth” (ND 305). This only limited escape from supernaturalism is an uncomfortable fact given that we think of ourselves as enlightened but, as mentioned, the uncovering of this particular delusion is not the point of this narrative (at least for my purposes). It is true, think Horkheimer and Adorno, that our self-conception as enlightened and demythologised obscures the fact that we really still live in mythical times. But the crucial point is that the mythological worldviews that we in fact hold veil the way the world really is. If we take this as a mere example of obfuscation at work, it is of the double kind: our belief that we hold a demythologised worldview obscures the fact that we in fact have a mythical one, which in turn obscures our actual relation to the world (among which the fact that our worldview is not enlightened). Our *Weltanschauung* is not truth-conducive. Not about what it itself really is nor about the external world.

So it is not (merely) that our supernaturalism is an example of ideology. Rather, our current enthrallment to ideology is a form of supernaturalism. Ideological critique is a corrective to this. Any uncovering of ideology is part of a strategy of demythologisation just as “Xenophanes... strove to demythologize the forces of nature” by revealing the contingent human genesis story of the gods (CM 7). So why are ideologies supernaturalist *Weltanschauungen*? They essentially share an obfuscatory function. The first way this is done is through a type of wish fulfilment. We need to be clear, however, about what wish fulfilment in the appropriate Freudian sense entails. When Freud analyses a dream, he reveals a relation between its manifest and latent content. His famous claim that “a dream is the fulfilment of a wish” (Freud 1953, 121) could be interpreted propositionally. For example, Freud lists the famous cases in which people dream seemingly without fulfilling a wish; their manifest content being so disconnected or opaque as to make any discovery of a latent content pointless. Then

the elaboration follows: their wishes fulfilled the desire to disprove Freud's theory (which they had very recently become aware of). On the propositional reading, what is to be fulfilled is the wish that Freud be proven wrong; that a counterexample exists to his theory of dream interpretation. But this is absurd. First, it is *prima facie* implausible to ascribe such elaborate propositional content to the unconscious, the motor of mental life.¹⁴ But, second, the reason why this reading is false is because it misconstrues the relation between manifest and latent content. They are not connected propositionally but rather on the level of affect according to the work that the unconscious does in transferring latent to manifest content. So the wish is a wish to be in a certain affective or emotional state (the sense of intellectual victory over Freud) and does not have propositional content. According to the pleasure principle, mental life is structured toward mental comfort (or the lack of discomfort) and a wish is part of the general tendency to bring oneself into this comfort zone. This is why, according to Adorno, it deviates from the truth (MM §37).

The ideological interpretation of wish fulfilment operates similarly. It is not wish fulfilment in the circular, propositional sense that we have certain beliefs merely because we wish to have these beliefs. Rather, it is the naturalistic, affective interpretation according to which we wish to be in a stable, comfortable state of believing ourselves to have knowledge about the world. This is the interpretation in the *Dialectic* of the genesis of our need for understanding. "Dualization...originates in human fear, the expression of which becomes explanation" (DEa 15).¹⁵ So our dualistic ideological beliefs are the result of a particular wish: for stable, categorised, systematic knowledge. "Unity is the slogan from Parmenides to Russell" (DEa 8).

The second obscuring function is partly downstream from wish fulfilment. It consists of a general veiling of the way the world actually is by a more appealing *Weltanschauung*. Our cognition is a form of myth like anthropomorphism, "the projection onto nature of the subjective" (DEa 6). This is not a consequence of the world itself but has its source in our rationalisations. This is why "[t]he wish must not be father to the thought" (DEa 57). It is no coincidence that Adorno describes the predominance of the universal over the particular (or 'ideology', simply put) as 'the spell', invoking magical causation. Both myth and ideology bar cognitive access to the world through some interfering element.

Adorno's drive to demythologise manifests itself as a form of Enlightenment Naturalism: 1) the rejection of supernatural entities entails that 2) we must therefore account for everything in physical terms, and 3) that this is equally true for the human as it is for the animal realm. For (1) the most common objects are theological entities like deities and souls but our ideological concepts are equally misleading subjective projections. Sometimes these are factually inaccurate but more often the point is that they are or purport to be beyond investigation, especially natural methods. Adorno's affirmation of (2) is expressed in his materialism. Together with (3) we can already see it at work to some extent in Adorno's explanations based on psychological drives (fear, desire, wish). The rejection of myth is also a rejection of the denial of nature in human beings (DEa 54, 245). So Adorno's project is both a rejection of the non-natural terms of explanation of ideology and a naturalistic explanation of how that ideology came (or could have come) to be held. For example,

¹⁴ Though perhaps not impossible given the arithmetic power he ascribes to the unconscious in the Determinism chapter of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

¹⁵ We must think here of all historical dualisms as detailed already by Hegel in the *Phenomenology* but also its current grip manifested, for example, by our concepts of subject and object, theory and praxis.

Enlightenment Naturalism

An appealing shorthand of critical theory is the thesis that ratio has turned into rationalisation; or reason into instrumental rationality (MM §37). Based on this, we might conclude that the solution is to turn away from Enlightenment rationalism and into Enlightenment naturalism. This simplistic claim carries quite a high burden of proof but is also demonstrably wrong as a summary of the Frankfurt school: the point is precisely not to throw out the “baby with the bath water”¹⁶ but to find what forms of reason still provide a way forward. Adorno seeks “the redemption of the hopes of the past” (DEa xv). The truth is more nuanced. There is certainly an element of Enlightenment naturalism to critical theory but this is not total. For example, Adorno claims that “the only kind of thinking sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive” (DEa 4). This is a puzzling claim. If ideological critique is a necessary demythologising, why does Adorno criticise it? Here is one suggestion. As in epistemology, Adorno offers a naturalising—but not naturalised—view. That is, naturalist critique is the limit; we ought not delude ourselves into thinking we can now offer a fully demythologised (or naturalised) worldview. This is in line with his considered position that a negation of a negation does not a new positive make (e.g. ND 158). Even though “demythologization recoils into the *mythus*,” it is only the claim to have removed the contradiction inherent in the concept of enlightenment (the pretense to full enlightenment) that condemns such a demythologisation (ND 402).¹⁷ As with the self-destructiveness quote, the context is important: self-reflection. Only when demythologisation unreflexively pursues its naturalising goal does it recoil (like the Enlightenment itself) by virtue of its denial of the mythological elements inherent in any enlightenment project. A moderate naturalistic critique and self-consciousness about the dialectic of enlightenment explain Adorno’s thinking here.

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Supplemental rationality. - All things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason thereby becomes improbable. Does not almost every precise history of an origination impress our feelings as paradoxical and wantonly offensive? Does the good historian not, at bottom, constantly contradict? (Nietzsche, Daybreak §1)

We need no epistemological critique to make us pursue constellations; the search for them is forced upon us by the real course of history. (ND 166)

Chapter One left us with an epistemological explanation for the contingent origins of our beliefs as a route to their debunking. Although this failed—largely on its own merit but especially as exegesis—Adorno’s use of ideology does have an important role to play in the reconstructed argument. By indicating their potential falsehood, ideological critique naturalistically undermines the self-evidence of our beliefs. One of the obfuscatory methods identified in ideology was the denial of history. In

¹⁶ The title of one aphorism in *Minima Moralia*.

¹⁷ This might explain why Adorno thinks logical positivism “forsakes the anti-mythological impulse of philosophy” (CM 10).

order to go beyond mere indication of falsehood, we will have to turn to a study of this denied history. But as this leaves open a field of argumentative options, this chapter will start to explore what it could and should be taken to mean.

Conceptual Critique

There is one at least nominally historical view that can be discounted almost immediately. This is the view that their historical contingencies make our concepts unreliable. Its argument shares the structure of the GDA. Our concepts have come to be: had we lived in other times, we would have operated with different concepts. We have no deep justification for using the concepts that we do. They are contingent to our historical time and place. Therefore, our warranted use of them rather than others is *prima facie* undermined. This view does not merit much charity. “Nothing but a childish relativism would deny the validity of formal logic and mathematics and treat them as ephemeral because they have come to be” (ND 40). It shares all the flaws and none of the sophisticated epistemological underpinnings of the GDA. Its employment retrieves all the familiar problems of self-undermining global genealogy from Chapter One. At the same time, concepts are not interchangeable with beliefs. So an analysis in terms of warrant conditions will not be straightforward, especially given that our concepts have other use conditions such as appropriateness and usefulness.

This naïve view is helpless. But it does bring our attention to the question of what is to be undermined. Aside from a change in the method of the argument, the object of a historical genealogy is a concept. There are important differences between concepts and beliefs. A belief could be: ‘we live in a free society’. Every substantive word in that sentence denotes a concept (all of which Adorno submits to genealogical inspection). Which ‘we’ does the living and what social ontological foundation does this require? What does the concept of ‘living’ mean today? According to what understanding of ‘freedom’ are we free? Does this in fact depend on some account of free will? What in fact constitutes our ‘society’ and how is it related to the aforementioned ‘we’? These are not yet genealogical questions but they do show the redirection from belief investigation to conceptual archaeology.

This indicates that, like language, concepts are not private. They are shared, social objects. When I use a concept I cannot reconfigure its rules or meaning *ad hoc*.¹⁸ Their social nature opens a range of possibilities for the genealogist. While our holding a belief might be socially determined, this is genetically as far back as it needs to go.¹⁹ When transmitted, a belief starts anew in terms of warrant conditions. Of a concept we can ask more interesting questions because it remains relatively stable. So we can examine a concept through the usage of our forebears, and theirs, and theirs. Even the concept of genealogy can be subject to genealogical investigation (see AS, ch. XII). In other words, concepts can be traced historically (hence “The Concept of Enlightenment”). And this, the genealogist supposes, has implications (whether vindictory or shameful) for its meaning. This will be true not merely for one individual but all its users and, especially, for the concept itself. So conceptual critique is much more powerful and wide-ranging than its epistemological sibling.

But conceptual critique does not exclude epistemological undermining. The conclusion of a genealogy might be that a concept ought to be given up. One way or another, this entails that belief in

¹⁸ For Adorno’s version of the private language argument, see MM §141.

¹⁹ We can ask why this belief is imposed on an individual. For example, because it is a belief held by the ruling class. Why is the belief held by the ruling class? Because it promotes their self-interest. But the first step—that a belief is held because it is in some sense socially determined that it should be—is sufficient for an ideological undermining.

Genealogy Proper?

the concept ought to be given up. For example, if we accept that concepts are in place largely due to the fact that there is an overwhelming belief in their validity then the mass loss of credence will also cause the concept itself to recede or adapt. Alternatively, a genealogy can uncover some hidden aspect of a concept that causes us to have to reject it based on some other views we hold (that this revealed aspect is intolerable or contradicts our beliefs about the concept itself). So while a belief is ultimately individual (one debunks not belief itself but every individual belief that p), a concept is primarily social, carrying implications for many agents.

To engage in a genealogy of concepts is not the same as examining our conceptuality. Adorno does both. A lot of his writings are motivated by the desire to change the way concepts are applied. This is currently dominated by what Adorno calls identity thinking, the classical Kantian view of conceptuality that reason is a faculty for deducing the particular from the universal. Adorno claims that such a view of “[r]epresentation gives way to universal fungibility” (DEb 7). Particulars are defined according to their relation to a universal (that is seen as more stable because of its scale [DEb 182]) and thereby lose their individuality: they become interchangeable. These ‘simple concepts’ ought to be replaced by ‘complex concepts’, as Bernstein calls them (2001). This is a claim about our form of judgment; how concepts are applied. By giving this form of judgment a name (identity thinking), Adorno is able to trace it back to some past use or origin. So he does also give a genealogy of our conceptuality. But this is not the only way to investigate our form of judgment, nor does it exhaust the objects of conceptual genealogy.

Genealogy Proper?

This account of concepts as the object of a debunking leads us to a second, equally naïve sibling of the GDA. If concepts remain in use throughout generations and their rules are not private then our understanding of a concept could be wrong. Compare it to a case of word usage: I can be shown that a word did not mean what I thought it meant, thus undermining my use of the word. This is the general idea behind conceptual critique: the revelation that a concept long in use (in fact precisely because it has been long in use) has elements relevant to its meaning that were unknown. As with the word, this is not a new meaning now being imposed but it was always the case that the concept had this other meaning. On the current naïve view, being shown this aspect of concepts could count as a debunking argument: we now know that, given their long history of usage, our concepts are likely to contain elements unfamiliar to us and perhaps even unacknowledgeable by us. This is again like the GDA, the possibility of conceptual confusion being an analogue of (historical) contingency. For a concept to be contingent it must be the case that its obtaining had the same chance as that of any other concept; in this case the obtaining of the meaning of a concept is called into question by the possibility that all concepts could really have another meaning. But from the mere possibility that a concept could mean something we think it does not, a debunking does not follow. This is true even in case all our concepts are under suspicion. Compare the word usage case: the mere fact that the words I use could mean something that I’m unaware of does not undermine my use of them. Even in an epistemically unreliable state (e.g. I am a second-language speaker), where I am more likely to be wrong, this general debunking effect still does not hold.

In chapter one we encountered how the bare fact of a contingency does not constitute a debunk-

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ing, although it can be an index of falsehood. Now we are in a better position to see why—especially in the case of conceptual critique—the contingent debunking argument is flawed. It is able to recognise where the falsehood lies. But instead of entering into the investigation that would provide the hidden meaning of a concept, it then diverts into relativism. It stops at the suggestion that this hidden meaning could be there. A proper historical genealogy, on the other hand, uncovers “the precipitate of history in concepts” (MM §82): how they arose and evolved. This is how genealogists redeem the claim that there is a substance or essence hidden by the (ideological) veil. What undermines concepts is not merely that they have come to be but “that they have come to be under certain conditions” (ND 52).

It is interesting to note in this context that the denial of history is precisely one of the ideological structures of phenomenality that Adorno criticises. By being made to seem natural, permanent, or perennial, concepts are denied a history (MM §149). But Adorno thinks (like Nietzsche) that the truth is essentially historical. Ideology thus disguises what would lead to an investigation into the real nature of a concept (its historicity) and the primary road for identifying what is really the case is to embark on this historical examination. The upshot is that if we are to validate our suspicion about various ideologies, this will require us to look at the actual history as a way of finding out the truth. A correct interpretation of the facts is what is hidden by ideological obfuscation. Calling something “ideological” is thus not the end of the story but only the beginning.

If ideological critique outlines the reasons to suspect the putative self-evidence of various beliefs, genealogical critique takes the next step by “provid[ing] a historical dissolution of self-evident identities” (Geuss 2005, 157). This does not obviate the need for or use of Adorno’s ideological critique. First, recall the costly nature of a genealogical critique: which ones of all our concepts require scrutiny? Ideological critique cuts down the costs by telling the genealogist where to start digging. Second, a genealogist already aware of the outcome of a genealogical critique—“I shall now tell you what I was after down there....I descended into the depths, I tunnelled into the foundations” (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, Preface §2)—has even more reason to be suspicious of the ideologies that function to cover up the buried meaning. This is the more likely sense in which Adorno uses ideological critique. He does not always show that he is warranted in using it as such (i.e. he does not show us every genealogy undergone for the use of a particular piece of ideological critique) but he does display a tremendous confidence in his suspicion, as if the genealogical work is already done.

If Adorno wants his historical genealogy to reveal that concept and beliefs are not self-evident, he will have to show the opposite. That is, he will have to show that we have no reason to take our concepts to be self-evident because these are not straightforward. Rather than being consistent and granting an uncontroversial meaning, he will show that our concepts are contradictory. They are not what they appear to be. The genealogist, as Nietzsche says, contradicts.

Genesis Fetishism

Now we are in a position to see what the structure of Adorno’s historical genealogy might be, based on the *telos* of contradiction. All of these are specifically concerned with the origins. This focus is not illegitimate, given Adorno’s detailed analysis of the Odysseus and Oedipus origin stories. But the arguments in this section will misfire for their fetishisation of the genesis: the idea that undermin-

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ing information about a genesis itself undermines that concept *tout court*.

The worst category of arguments are those that take the uncovering of a specified genesis as a sufficient condition for undermining. Within these we might encounter the return of the naïve view that some concept has contingent origins. Now at least this insufficient condition can be supplemented by other conditions specific to the genesis reveals. One such condition could be that this origin rests on an intellectual error (Foster 2000, 42), which would contradict the presupposition of correctness. If there was a mere error to be found what would be the need for genealogy? Genealogy is supposed to do something more than normal philosophical critique of cognitive falsehood. To really go underground would involve finding something hidden, of which an intellectual mistake would be a bad example. A more appropriate object, therefore would not be factive but affective. This could come in the form of a social circumstance: “domination in the conceptual sphere...is raised up on the basis of actual domination” (DEa 14).²⁰ In this form, the argument can amount to no more than vulgar ideological critique. It would need to be established how all concepts under conditions of domination are exclusively caused thereby in order to undermine them. And the argument is more ambiguous when the obviously negative “domination” is replaced by something more innocuous like the division of labour (DEa 35). In what sense is a concept called into question by its reliance on the separation of mental from menial labour?

A more plausible form of the argument invokes a naturalistic drive. For example, Horkheimer and Adorno think that “dualization...which first makes possible both myth and science, originates in human fear, the expression of which becomes explanation” (DEa 15, 16-7). But surely the concept of explanation cannot be undermined by this? Otherwise what should we take Adorno to be doing? His use of *Deutung* (roughly, elucidation) may be significantly different or at least have no similar origins to ‘explanation’. But Adorno must also do more than *Deutung*. Adorno might still be intending to undermine the concept of explanation. But this adds an additional worry: Adorno’s affirmative use of *Deutung* illustrates that even for concepts that might be totally genealogically debunked (‘explanation’), undebunked sibling concepts (*Deutung*) exist. If that is the case, why should we suppose that our originally fear-driven concept of ‘explanation’ still takes the same form today? We might instead have adopted another sibling concept (‘schmexplanation’) that is safe from the debunking of ‘explanation’ like *Deutung* is.

This genesis fetishism is easy prey for the genetic fallacy. The bare fact of a naturalistic drive in the origin of a concept (as the best current interpretation has it) does not undermine that concept in the past or present. This is something Adorno had been aware of since 1931: “the truth content of a problem is in principle different from the historical and psychological conditions out of which it grows” (AoP 128). It is clear that origins are of non-negligible interest to Horkheimer and Adorno, but why? Does the origin have a particularly strong impact on the continuing meaning of a concept? In any case, it is clear that the uncovered origin cannot be a sufficient condition for its undermining. The invocation of debunking elements at the origin of a concept implies that a faulty origin is at least a necessary condition for genealogical critique. But the genealogist will need to supply a closer connection between the concept and the undermining element, as well as convincing reason why an origin should be considered faulty. As with the intellectual error, it is possible that this original drive

²⁰ This is also Habermas’s interpretation of the argument: that there was reification at the “beginning of hominization” (1984, 366).

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is no longer present and has been excised since the concept's moment of birth. This is exactly what has happened in the case of art: "[artworks] are not to be called to account for the disgrace of their ancient dependency on magic, their servitude to kings and amusement, as if this were art's original sin, for art retroactively annihilated that from which it emerged" (AT 3). The genealogist needs to show that the affective element is still at work today if it is to do any undermining of the concept. Only this revelation of a non-contingent link between the concept and its undermining genesis has any foothold as conceptual critique.

One way of doing this is to show that the undermining element is not just a part of the origin but is carried through with the concept. This may sound vague but all it requires is that the affect-concept relation found at its origin is also found at current instantiations of the concept. (It does not need any additional explanation specifying whether the affect or the concept is primary or causal, or whether one supervenes on the other, and we will see why shortly.) The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* does make such claims. It identifies the Enlightenment with "mythic fear turned radical" due to the fact that it wants to dominate all natural objects (DEa 16). By doing so it rids itself of all natural elements that could constitute fear in the subject. This is a rather roundabout way of inferring the presence of fear. A more direct psychological explanation is provided by the claim that the fixation of agents on some mythic past causes dread to radiate "from the age-old occurrence to make every event its mere repetition" (DEa 27). It is not clear what to make of either of these. A *locus classicus* that we might appeal to in order to explain the debunking effect of this permeated genesis is Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*. A plausible interpretation of his argument is not just that "Christianity arises from hatred, envy, resentment, and feelings of weakness and inadequacy" (Geuss 1981, 44) but that these affects will always (or at least typically) accompany Christianity. This could be what Horkheimer and Adorno are after. But there is an important difference: the affects Nietzsche invokes are effective precisely because they are the opposite of what the Christian's motivations are claimed to be based on. The meaning of hatred undermines that of love. The Christian can therefore not admit to hateful motivations. From the claims surveyed so far, Adorno cannot appeal to the same debunking argument. Fear is a perfectly acceptable basis for a drive to explanation; it does not contradict it. A scientist's discovery of the immanent self-immolation of the planet due to the destructive tendencies of mankind is not undermined by their experience of motivations of fear (e.g. at the fact that this may be true) on top of curiosity. We could instead appeal to the hypothesis that a strong affect is likely to distort judgment, perhaps by fulfilling an agent's wishes rather than relying on sound reasoning. This may indicate a higher cause of error but it is still no direct contradiction of the typical motivations of 'explanation'. As argued in Chapter One, the imputation of wishful thinking can only be an index of falsehood and not its confirmation as such (see Geuss 1981, 43).

Illustrative Genesis

So far it has been taken for granted that there is something about the origin itself that Adorno is investigating and that the origin is at least a constitutive part of the debunking process. This is not *prima facie* exegetically implausible given Adorno's return to Odysseus and the origin of myth and enlightenment (and if not for Odysseus it would have been Oedipus [Schmidt 1998, 831]). But to talk of an origin as the beginning is misleading. Firstly because of Adorno's dialectical understanding

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of enlightenment and myth: we cannot trace each to their individual beginning because they never were truly separate. To speak of their “origin” is to speak of the same causal influence (e.g. fear) somewhere along its history. Therefore, secondly, it is even more unlikely that Adorno thinks of this causal event as the origin of myth and/or enlightenment. Adorno simply recognises that one can only go so far back before historical questions become too speculative. As Geuss puts it, “an ‘origin’ is a relative stopping point picked out for one or another reason, but ‘behind’ which there will stand a history” (1999, 26 fn.11). Homer is about as far back as one can go for a written source in Western cultural history but there is no claim that this is the absolute beginning. So Habermas’ criticism of Nietzsche—that he appeals to the ‘myth of origins’, that the older is earlier and more aboriginal—(which he could have extended to Horkheimer and Adorno) misses the point. An origin is not an aboriginal point that is as close as possible to the beginning of a concept. The origin story (e.g. a fictional state of nature) does not take place in the Pleistocene (Williams 2002, 27-30). Thus there is no genesis fetishisation in this genealogical argument. An ‘origin’ or ‘genesis’ is 1) not the aboriginal starting point, 2) is not a supreme determinant for the meaning of a concept, and 3) is not exclusively what we should look to for the debunking element.

The more insight we possess into an origin the less significant does the origin appear: *while what is nearest to us, what is around us and in us, gradually begins to display colours and beauties and enigmas and riches of significance of which earlier mankind had not an inkling. Formerly, thinkers prowled around angrily like captive animals, watching the bars of their cages and leaping against them in order to smash them down: and happy seemed he who through a gap in them believed he saw something of what was outside, of what was distant and beyond.* (Nietzsche, *Daybreak* §44)

The discovery of the origin of a concept has thus far been viewed as leading immediately to its undermining. But Nietzsche suggests that the genesis of a concept is not relevant as the object of critique so much as it is to the understanding of a concept itself. Rather than leaping against the cage of genesis we ought to look through the bars at the view it offers of our contemporary times and concepts. That hypothesis grounds the most plausible interpretation of Adorno’s historical genealogy. This is why it is valuable that Nietzsche opened up the possibility of tracing a concept “back to the beginning of traditional history” (DEa 44). Not because this origin is itself to be criticised. Nor does it have some special aboriginal status: “*traditional history*” suggests that we have only gone some limited distance back. But rather because it illuminates our own society.

One of the things Adorno will vindicate (against the phenomenalist view) is that our concepts do in fact have a history. Our current concepts are not some new creation (whether of the past 20 or 200 years) differing from whatever came before, but are essentially a continuation of what seemed to precede them: “the newest ideologies are a mere reprise of the oldest” (DEb 42). Adorno’s own thoughts on history are unsystematic and vague. The best we can do without spilling too much ink is to look at his influences in this area. Many take not Nietzsche but Hegel as their guide to reading what Adorno does in his historical texts. This is justified but as with so many things Adornian we must find a balance among various elements. With regard to history, Adorno seems to take up the impossible position between Hegel and Nietzsche; between the teleological development of a progressive history and its purely contingent remoulding by a succession of wills, respectively. Finding some such

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balance will prove particularly useful here. The first lesson is that there is one thing the Hegelian and the Nietzschean can agree on, which is that concepts persist. Both think that we can still identify in our current concepts where they came from and that these earlier formulations get only slowly reworked throughout history. Nietzsche does not think that St. Paul or anyone else created something *ex nihilo* when they made their contributions to the meaning of Christianity. Similarly for Hegel, an *Aufhebung* necessarily carries elements of the preceding thesis and its antithesis. The revelation of the truth of what the ideology denies—that our concepts are historical—is already a significant step but not yet sufficient to undermine it. The different modal claims of the Nietzschean and Hegelian both inform Adorno’s position.

Adorno’s historical genealogy imputes the falsehood of a concept by what is normally called immanent criticism, the exposing of contradictions. It is usually thought that this method in Adorno is Hegelian. To some extent it can be seen that way: our current concepts contain within them certain contradictions or inadequacies that must be overcome. The Hegelian presupposes that the current contradictions are, to some extent, new. Every sublation brings with it a new antithesis and therefore a new contradiction. To some extent Adorno does hold this progressive picture of history but there is one major *caveat*: there has been progress within spirit but not progress of spirit. He affirms that there is progress but only in a technological, means-directed sense; for example, from the slingshot to the atomic bomb (LHF 12). There is no similar progress from “savagery to humanitarianism” (ND 320): spirit itself is still static. What does this mean? While we can see some progress at work in technology, spirit itself still carries the same contradictions that have never been smoothed over. Both savagery and humanitarianism have been within it from the start and are still with it now; as are myth and enlightenment. This in fact supports the Hegelian aspect: it is because of this discrepancy in the two forms of progress that we find ourselves in a new contradiction today. But he leaves the Hegelian camp when he loses faith in the teleological progress of history: Adorno is not confident that our current stage of history can be overcome.

This is where the Nietzschean historical picture gains the upper hand. By examining in particular the early history of a concept (as both Nietzsche and Adorno do), the genealogist wants to show something about our current concept. This concept can, in its long history, have many influences (Jesus and Paul; perennial enlightenment and European Enlightenment) but we should expect to see a strong residue of this particular genesis. This is not a case of the genetic fallacy. Adorno does not think that a contradiction he finds in Homer thereby debunks our current concept. This is to misinterpret the role of history. To Adorno, doing history is a species of micrology: the study of specific elements in society that tell us something about the whole even if they seemed insignificant. They grant us cognitive access more readily than grand objects such as the economy, which is more likely to be ideologically veiled. As such, the study of history grants special access to what is otherwise hidden. By passing for a distanciation from our situation, history allows a deeper perception of it. The *Odysseus* chapter is a parable for our own concept of enlightenment. This presupposes that we are still lodged with the same contradictions as the ones found in Homer. Adorno will need to show that the same contradictions are still present today, and this is the primary purpose of micrology. If he did not find the actual contradictions in society and in history, Adorno’s dialectic would just be question-begging. Although the Hegelian in Adorno finds a new form of contradiction today, what is

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constitutive of that contradiction is the one that has always been inherent in concepts like enlightenment and reason. The Nietzschean in Adorno tells us that no matter how often history has attempted to smooth over this contradiction, it is still dominant today.

Conceptuality and Immanent Critique

Before examining what it means for concepts to be contradictory, we need a clearer picture of what concepts are. It will help to start with a naïve view. We first need to distinguish between a concept and whatever content will fill that concept. If we are to apply a concept we first need to know what its definition is. Then we can take the content of this concept and apply it to the world when we find an object that fits the definitional requirements. As Geuss puts it, “it was supposed to be possible to distinguish clearly between a “definition,” which gave the mere meaning of a concept, and empirically or theoretically contentful statements in which the *definiendum* occurred” (2005, 116). This is an instance of what Adorno refers to as identity thinking, which we have seen does not work.

Traditional conceptuality can be no guide to conceptual critique because it cannot be entirely aware of what its object is. On top of its other limitations, a traditional concept falls short by denying its historicity. It takes concepts as stable entities that exist independently of their content and of our normative claims of the world. If we really want to understand a concept we need a new form of conceptuality that will do justice to its object; one that will also be able to unearth why identity thinking fails. Adorno’s attempt at a new type of concept is the constellation.

“Cognition of the object in its constellation is cognition of the process stored in the object. As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers” (ND 164). A full appreciation of what a concept is thus includes the many elements that form a constellation around an object, such as its place within society and its “sedimented history” (ND 163). This brings us back to this chapter’s epigraph: a recognition of the history in concepts forces us to appreciate that anything historical cannot have a simple definition; and that the best we can do in this situation is construct a constellations approximating a definition around an object.

This means that our judgments cannot be made independently of how things are. The content of a concept is informed by the history of the world. This content is not fixed independently of the state of the world. When we apply a concept in a judgment about an object, this at the same time constructs the concept by determining it in a new context. Adorno famously thinks that to make a judgment about an object is to want to make it so: that two things are equal pushes us toward equating them in practice, thus eliminating their conceptual differences. Constellations allow for the fact that our concepts change course based on the judgments that use them. The content of a concept as it is now seems stable. But a constellation can unlock the fact that this is not so. In fact, concepts as they are applied to objects affect those objects just as the content of a concept is affected by the judgment that is made of an object. The concept of reason seems stable now but that is only because we deny the fact that a concept is informed by judgments made. A constellation can uncover the broader meaning to a concept where this includes its history: it can come to show that ‘reason’ does not refer to what it always referred to; that the objects we applied it to slowly and subtly informed the meaning of the

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concept. The process in the object of a judgment is equally the process of the content of a concept itself.

Adorno aims to show that our concepts are not what we think they are; that they contradict themselves in some basic way. The so-called contradiction of a concept is really an exegetical catch-all term for any “internal contradictions, discrepancies, and paradoxes or inconsistencies” (Jaeggi 2005, 79). The constellation allows us to broaden the scope of what a contradiction is. Of course it is essentially a claim about “the contradiction between what things are and what they claim to be” (ND 167). But the non-traditional form of the concept allows us to expand this beyond the straightforward concept and its object.

Adorno thinks of contradiction in two main ways. First, there is “the contradictory nature of the concept. What this means is that a concept enters into contradiction with the thing to which it refers” (LND 7). When a universal concept is applied to a particular object, it will inevitably stop short because a single concept will never capture all that a particular object is. This copula ‘is’ in a judgment (“that object is a chair”) does not merely entail ‘part of’ (“chairness is one aspect of that object”) but an identity (“chairness is an exhaustive description of that object”). Objects do not allow this judgment to take place, and this generates a contradiction (chairness cannot exhaustively describe an object because it also has the properties of mineness, redness and brokenness). Second, there is the immanent contradiction, not between two objects (or presumably one object and one concept) but “a contradiction in the object [e.g. a concept, -ES] itself” (LND 9). For example, our society is a society not “*despite* its contradictions but *by virtue of* its contradictions” (LND 8-9). For example, Adorno thinks that our cold war economies are sustained “only” by virtue of the investments in weapons of mass destruction; weapons which make possible the self-destruction of that society (LND 9).

This allows an account of the falsehood of concepts. It cannot be the case that they are false merely for not being what they pretend to be (cf. CM 252-3). This would be merely obfuscatory. The contradiction is between (e.g.) what something pretends to be and what it is, but because it is both these things. That it denies being both these things is an indication of this falsehood: “[c]ulture...cannot bear to be reminded of that zone” (ND 366). But it is contradictory, and false, because culture both pursues ends toward its own fulfilment and does so by means of something that would cause its own destruction (as in the weapons of mass destruction example). The enlightenment is also undermined when it oversteps its own boundaries and inevitably turns into the myth it opposes.

A good example of this genealogy is Adorno’s critique of praxis. At first he seems to make the fallacious claim that an original affect in the concept of praxis undermines its current concept. “Praxis was the reaction to deprivation. This still disfigures praxis” (CM 262). But he then elaborates on this claim in two ways. The first is his critique of the concept of praxis as consisting of an exclusion of any theory. To see this, we “must trace the divergence between theory and praxis back to the oldest division between physical and intellectual labour, probably as far back as prehistoric obscurity” (CM 262). But on the matter at hand, the claim is the well-known one that theory and praxis derive from a basic division of labour. At one stroke Adorno absolves himself of any form of genesis fetishisation discussed above: we can choose a starting point (he mentions the Middle Ages) but should not be

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deluded into thinking this is the absolute origin. Nor should we be misguided into thinking that our concept is the way it is due only to this prehistoric division. It is an historic claim but equally applies to our situation, allowing us to see it as a contingent and therefore fallible distinction.

Adorno's positive claim on this matter is that theory is itself already a form of praxis and that any real form of praxis must include or be preceded by substantive theorising. So the claim here is not that the division of labour is bad in itself and that this badness is passed on to its consequence in the division between theory and praxis. Rather, Adorno wants us to see the limitations in our concept of praxis which cause the instantiations of praxis to be a pseudo-praxis or "actionism" (cf. IT; CM 289-93). Why is "actionism" false? The concept of praxis involves a demand for freedom if it is to be action and not reaction. Adorno reminds us that historically (although again: this historical observation primarily functions as a parable for our situation), "[p]raxis arose from labor" (CM 262). That is—to return to the original quote—there was a need for labour because humans were deprived of sustenance. This was as true prehistorically, as it was in early feudal societies (presumably prompting Adorno's allusion to the Middle Ages), as it is today. This makes praxis involuntary: it is a reaction to our social conditions and therefore uninformed (even if retrospectively rationalised) by theoretical reflection. Praxis today does not fulfil conceptual demands that we would make of real praxis. It is therefore false or untrue.

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This historical genealogy can quite effectively undermine our concepts and, in turn, our beliefs about our concepts. It is clear from Adorno's attempts to present better alternatives (mainly *via negativa*) that he thinks we ought to abandon our current concepts. This is based on a certain understanding of what it is for concepts to be proven untrue: that they do not fulfil their immanent expectations. But what can a genealogy in terms of concepts really achieve?

The conceptual genealogy is supposed to vindicate Adorno's claim that ideologies are false. Historical genealogies presuppose an accurate account of history that reveals the contradictoriness of our concepts. The first problem is that Adorno's genealogies might have little independent claim to truth. Some, for example, see *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an exercise in "abstruse Hegelian *Geistesgeschichte*" (Villa 2007, 44), implying that its historical content is unsupported by empirical historical investigation.²¹ The next chapter defends Adorno against this objection. The second problem for Adorno is that if his genealogy undermines the truth of ideological concepts, it is unclear why he often speaks of them as both true and false. If he had truly falsified a concept, why does he give these dialetheist assessments? To have shown that a concept is at least in part false (or false in addition to being true) is an achievement for the conceptual genealogy but there is still an obvious gap. Chapter Four will put this dialetheism to rest.

There is one objection based on a stronger interpretation of Adorno than is warranted. This is the totality objection, which comes in two forms. According to Habermas, Adorno and Horkheimer follow Nietzsche into a totalizing critique of the enlightenment (1987, 120). Their ideological critique turns "against the rational potential of bourgeois culture itself" (ibid, 119). Therefore, they find themselves

²¹ This presupposes, of course, that Hegel's historicising is similarly non-naturalist, which may not even be the case if we are to believe naturalistic Hegelian interpretations.

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“in the same embarrassment as Nietzsche” in that they lose a rational ground on which to stand (ibid, 126). Brandom does not mention critical theorists but attacks a similar version of Nietzsche on linguistic grounds.²² His claim is against semantic purity, “the view that the contents concepts possess are not at all affected by the use of those concepts in making judgments” (m.s. 9). The claim of totalising critique, that human thought can take place “independently of commitment to how things actually are” (ibid), would be semantically naïve. Brandom and Habermas agree that such a total genealogy must presuppose that it stands outside the space of reasons, which is impossible, irrational or both.

As I have shown above, Adorno’s constellations precisely recognise—and investigate—the interdetermination between concepts and their content. Constellations are aware of how the contents of concepts are influenced by their use. Adorno cannot be semantically naïve. Nor does he claim to stand outside the space of reasons: “[t]he existing cannot be overstepped except by means of a universal derived from the existing order itself” (MM §98). The point of Adorno’s historical genealogy is precisely that the concept of reason dialectically divides into its instrumental and intrinsic²³ varieties. His claim is not that the latter has been entirely eradicated: we must still be able to construct a critique on its grounds no matter how unstable. A total critique would no longer be immanent critique.

All genealogical methods discussed so far have at least one thing in common: they aim to undermine. It is clear from Adorno’s intentions that his theory aims to be critical of the current state of affairs. But it is not clear that this will be effective either in theory or in its reflective acceptance by oppressed agents. Similar historical genealogical strategies have been employed by many philosophers, but not always with a debunking intention. Hegel and Bernard Williams are two examples of genealogists who offer a vindicatory genealogy.²⁴ Adorno’s genealogy, on the current account, could be a powerful way of tracing concepts and revealing their contradictions. The worry is that his critique of concepts is not strong enough to resist a vindicatory turn. As Williams puts it, a genealogical explanation is vindicatory if one can accept it “and still give [the concept], its motivations and reasons for action, much the same respect as one did before one encountered the explanation” (2002, 36). We might decide that our current concepts are, despite their admittedly unattractive history and internal contradictions, worth keeping. This requires a considerable retelling of their genealogy that highlights ways in which they (could) have been useful or contributed to our achieving fundamental ends (this is essentially the task of Williams’s 2002). Or one could accept the debunking genealogy and decide that this is overridden by a thorough philosophical justification of the correctness of our concepts and our reasons for using them. As long as we vindicate our concepts we can continue to use them.

Robert Brandom provides an account of how Hegel predicted the hermeneutics of suspicion with his own hermeneutics of magnanimity (*Edelmütigkeit*), based on the *Phenomenology*’s account of the debasing (*Niederträchtig*) attitude of a valet to their hero. The valet knows the hero not merely as hero but also inevitably as a man with normal bodily functions and ordinary (if not base) wants and desires. “No man is a hero to his valet; not, however, because the man is not a hero, but because the valet—is a valet...” (Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, 665; quoted in Brandom m.s., 17). But

²² I think this is a strawman but for the purpose of the argument this is irrelevant.

²³ This term—which is meant to capture ends-directed, non-instrumental forms of reason—is mine.

²⁴ There is also a third quasi-vindicatory reaction to genealogies: Richard Rorty’s private ironic distanciation from them in pactical life (1989, esp. ch. 4).

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“the valet fails to see that a norm can *also* be active, that the particular contingent motives he sees (what the hero had for breakfast) can be given the form of a normative necessity” (ibid, 18). So rather than take this lowly attitude, Brandom encourages us to adopt the Hegelian conception of reason: “at its core is the magnanimous hermeneutics that shapes contingency into a normative, rational form” (ibid, 19) For Adorno, the fact that our concepts are contradictory is to be seen as an indictment of them; he takes an explicitly *Niederträchtig* attitude to them. But what is to stop us from joining Hegel and Brandom in “forgiv[ing]...the normative contingencies that infect prior applications of concepts” (idem)? It is not that they disagree. We can still think of our concepts—present and past—as contingent and contradictory but there is nothing inherently wrong with this. Adorno and Brandom can agree that reason takes the form of rationalisation, they just evaluate this differently. For Adorno it is a degradation of reason (MM §37) but for Brandom it is an affirmation of the best we can hope for. Nothing forces us to take the *Niederträchtig* rather than *Edelmütig* attitude to this. So it is not clear that his method of contradiction grants Adorno the undermining conclusion he wants.

This way of cashing out Adorno’s genealogical argument may not do full justice to it. Some might claim that I misrepresent the argument when I claim that it takes concepts as the object of critique. One among them is Rahel Jaeggi, according to whom the objects of Adorno’s critique are not concepts but “particular forms of life” (2005, 80). The other is Geuss, for whom ‘spirit’ and ‘society’ are the objects shown to self-contradict, where these mean more than just their concept. Although they do not invoke genealogy and have different objectives from mine, they would probably assent to the way I have outlined the argument. The representation of the method—as finding contradictions according to which a phenomenon does not live up to its own promise—is a version of the widely accepted dialectical method of immanent critique.

Their broader understanding of the object of critique expands its critical scope. Part of the reason why a conceptual critique failed was its lack of real critical power. They both in effect propose to examine our social world rather than just some set of concepts in that world. It is when we measure our society against what it could be or what it immanently demands of itself that we find the space to condemn it. For there will be an obvious discrepancy between the current state of the world and its inherent requirements it fails to live up to (eadem 80). Since these exigencies are internal to that society it is still a form of immanent critique that finds a contradiction not in the concept but in the total social organisation.

Adorno shows us both that “our world is radically deficient *and* what demands spirit makes on the world” (Geuss 2005, 124). Presumably the former is an effect of the latter in this argument: it is only because we can imagine something better or see this as a demand that our society is seen to fall short. But it is unclear that Adorno’s audience should care about spirit’s demands or that he is the best person to voice these demands. His most obvious claim is our own unfreedom and how this conflicts with our self-conceived free society. First, this demand can be set too high. It might be the case that we do not live up to a radical freedom, but Adorno always was prone to exaggerations. Is he a reliable guide to the exigencies of spirit? Therefore, secondly, even if the demand is not too high the discrepancy is not necessarily undermining. We can fall short of the ideal and still think, *contra* Adorno, that our society is not therefore “hell”. Thirdly, It is unclear why this is not again subject to

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the vindicatory turn. Even granting these contradictions does not stop us from providing a vindicatory rather than shameful rationalisation of our world. Adorno's struggles against Hegel make it obvious that he wants to avoid this. But he recognises that Hegel's identification of truth with the whole, with "the dynamic totality of all the propositions...can be generated from [them] by virtue of their contradictions" (HTS 11-2). Though his challenge to Hegel is stronger (it is the whole itself which is contradictory or "the false" [MM §29]) it does not escape the fact that a Hegelian vindication always already rested on the overcoming of contradictions.²⁵ Lastly, there is a contradiction in this method. It aims to show the current contradictions in reason, enlightenment and society; and, by the use of history, that this contradiction is perennial. It is unclear why the admittance of our individual powerlessness is any less an act of resignation than "capitulation to the collective" (CM 292). Acknowledging this powerlessness might be the first step towards theoretical praxis but can we reason our way out of this contradiction. Do we have reason to try?

As I will argue in the last chapter, the focus of Geuss and Jaeggi on a different object of critique is appropriate but it requires a different genealogical argument.

3 — Genealogy and Naturalism

*G*enealogy is intended to serve the aims of naturalism. (Williams 2002, 22)

As Bernard Williams indicates, an account of genealogy cannot do without a deeper account of its naturalist basis. This will vindicate Adorno's genealogical use of history, sociology, and psychoanalysis. But beyond that, there are other reasons for trying to answer this question. While philosophical scholarship has outlined Adorno's stance on materialism, positivism, scientism, etc. these terms do not hold much common currency today. The interesting question (for better or worse) is about naturalism. A common term can help us situate ourselves in relation to historical figures as well as historical figures amongst each other. An attempt to write about a quintessentially continental figure like Adorno could only benefit from this common vocabulary. Chapter One indicated that Adorno holds some form of Enlightenment Naturalism, which I took to consist of the claims that (1) we ought to banish supernatural entities, (2) the world can be explained in physical terms and (3) that the human realm is continuous with the animal realm. This chapter will elaborate on all three of these, but the main concern will be to specify that while Adorno is an ontological naturalist, he is not a methodological naturalist. To a certain extent these terms correspond to materialism and positivism, respectively. Ontological naturalism holds that the world is nothing but the entities to which successful scientific explanation commits us, while methodological naturalism is the claim that scientific methodology is our only genuine source of knowledge.

Methodological Naturalism

It is notoriously difficult to stabilise the idea of naturalism: explaining one concept in terms of the rest of nature. If biology is a natural science, is ethology? Once we have culture on the table, what

²⁵ Even Adorno is not entirely without this hope, as in "Meditations on Metaphysics" and the hopes expressed by art.

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is really excluded (Williams 2000, 149-52; 2002, 22)? We might do more justice to Adorno's view if we take a rather broad view of what count as the sciences, such that these are expanded to include sociology and psychology.²⁶

Adorno's philosophical methodology is closely related to sociology.²⁷ In his own words, he is unwilling to isolate "philosophy, which I refuse to divide strictly from sociology" (IS 5). As a result, Adorno talks about philosophy and (his brand of) sociology as if they are one continuous discipline. Their unity consists not only in their contingent subject matter—society. Rather, they are "intrinsically impossible to separate" as two moments of the same concept (IS 139). This intrinsic connection could only have its methodological moment in what Adorno calls "*Deutung*".²⁸ This is a method of elucidation of phenomena that does justice to more than just the surface structure. We have already seen it at work in Adorno's interpretive history, micrology and constellations. Its significance varies from conceptual and hermeneutical analysis to historical inquiry to psychological interpretation. Its main methodological competitor is positivism.

Adorno's anti-positivism is obvious throughout his writings, culminating in the infamous dispute with Popper. Positivism is an ideological tactic that evades what Adorno sees as the essence of the facts in favour of a reliance on their surface appearance. But he also identifies it as the method of many of the modern-day natural sciences. Its "basic thesis [is] the absolute independence of science and its constitutive character for all knowledge" (PD 4). Positivism is perhaps a species of the broader trend Adorno sometimes calls scientism, which is a form of "methodological monism" regarding the natural sciences (Brandom 2008, 209); the claim that only scientific methodology is knowledge-conducive. This is itself already a claim to methodological naturalism. The difference between positivism and *Deutung* condenses to an approach to scientific material. As Adorno puts it repeatedly in his lectures, positivism is really a "refuge in the mere observation of facts" (IS 23).

Adorno's rival concept of *Deutung* strives to get to the essence of the constitution of facts and is unwilling to take them for granted. It is often the facts which hide what we can really learn about a phenomenon (aside from the fact that something lies hidden). This basic feature of positivism—bare facts as *sui generis* pieces of knowledge about the essence of an object—has various components. The first is familiar from Comte: in any claim to knowledge "one must finally be able to point to something physical" (IS 34). This is essentially the same as the claim that positivism reifies society; it posits society and social facts as thing-like in their accessibility to sense perception (IS 37). But it is also an identification with physicalism, an extreme form of naturalism. For example, positivism cannot recognise a concept like 'society' because there is nothing physical to point to.²⁹ Adorno's adherence to this concept makes him a non-physicalist but not a non-naturalist: society is composed of the individuals of which it consists and their interactions. Any more moderate naturalism can still

²⁶ Liberal naturalists stand in an intermediate position similar to Adorno. They deny any form of supernaturalism but want to expand the realm of what is natural so as not to be limited to the jurisdiction of the natural sciences. Hence they grant room for a second nature, the space of reasons rather than causes, that humans construct for themselves. The issue of 'liberal (or soft) naturalism' is too labyrinthine to do justice to here, but I do not deny that it is a possibility.

²⁷ See: "sociology is not so very different to philosophy" (IS 8).

²⁸ Usually translated as "interpretation" but I am inclined to agree with Gillian Rose, who translates it as "elucidation" (1978, 102).

²⁹ The concept of gravity will always be troubling to it unless it changes its definition to be that which is validated by the physical sciences. But this was the point of the Williams reduction I started with: if physics is a natural science, is chemistry? Is biology? Is ethology? Culture and society cannot be excluded on the basis of not conforming to physical sciences in this sense of that term.

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account for ‘society’ on these terms.

Second, the positivist approach denies that there is anything lying behind the facts. It rejects the notion of the “essential” (IS 19), or, in less exaggerated terms, it takes the facts for granted as being themselves essential. Adorno’s historicism is but one way of indicating that an underlying essence is a necessary condition for facts to “be what they are” (IS 46). Positivism simply does not get to the bottom of the subject matter it deals with. One instance of this is positivism’s ahistoricism, the denial or ignorance of the historical constitution of society and social phenomena. Here too, Adorno’s interpretive approach is a better assessment of the facts. Where positivism takes the bare facts to be that which is natural, a historical approach dispels this illusion. The facts reflect at most a second nature that, Adorno would say, works in the interest of sustaining a *status quo*. In order to gain true understanding, we ought to see “the essentially historical conditions under which the phenomenon concerned has come into being” (IS 22). This would entail both seeing it as second nature and seeing how this second nature might have naturalistically grown out of first nature.

Third, positivism’s assessment of “the facts” is indifferent to the subject matter at hand. It seeks instead to improve its methodology independently of any differentiated subject matter (IS 20). In the primacy accorded to methodology, any thoroughly empirical stance is foregone. “Unregimented experience,” claims Adorno, is impossible without a more conceptualised account of the object of inquiry (IS 79). This objection really cuts to the core of Adorno’s methodological non-naturalism: it just cannot be that one method (no matter how perfect) can be applied universally regardless of the subject matter. It presupposes non-contradictoriness. “An ideal of conceptual unification taken from the natural sciences cannot, however, be indiscriminately applied to a society whose unity resides its not being unified” (SP 69). As against this, Adorno vindicates his use of *Deutung*. Ideological critique uncovers ideological obfuscation and this is then shown to require a special form of inquiry to overcome the phenomenalist veil.

Lastly, the uncritical acceptance of facts as being what they claim to be can be nothing but an “apologia for existing society” (IS 81). That is, it is suspect as a methodology for the aforementioned ideological reasons. This goes hand-in-hand with the supposed value neutrality of positivism, by which it assures itself of being unable to grasp society in a way that is not already entirely mediated by ideology (IS 77).

It is clear that Adorno opposes positivism, but is he against methodological naturalism in principle? The question of naturalism in relation to the natural sciences is complicated by the fact that Adorno not only commented on the methods of science and how these could or should be translated into sociological and philosophical methods; he was also highly critical of science as it was being exercised. The texts from the *Positivist Dispute* dealt largely with the former aims. The latter aims are buttressed by claims made in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the gathering of knowledge of nature is not innocent but is at the same time a domination of nature. One potential solution for Adorno is to claim that his version of science is better—more naturalistic, more empirical, more accurate—than that of the natural sciences. At least as compared to positivism Adorno claims that

“the dialectical viewpoint can manage without witchcraft or a false bottom, and that it simply represents a more logical way of thinking. And I would say that the real sin of positivism is to cut off

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this logic of thought, this advance of a theory driven by its own inner necessity, in favour of a naïve and stubborn adherence to immediate facts. Such an approach is quite alien to the natural sciences, which are far more advanced in this respect, and are constantly forced to develop theories of the very kind which the positivists forbid dialectical sociologists” (IS 83).

That is, critical theory does without supernatural entities and at least is closer to the methods of the natural sciences than positivism. But Adorno also goes further than that, claiming that due to its different subject-object relation critical theory is “far more commensurable with ‘reality itself’ than...the natural sciences” (PD 15). As he puts it in his lectures on Hegel, “the institution of science and scholarship...regresses to a prescientific recording of mere unrelated facts, events and opinions” (HTS 7-8). This shows that not only various types of sociology but all of the natural sciences are positivist. Hence the claim that something methodologically, ontologically and morally better is needed than current scientific methods. This does not commit him to an anti-science stance *per se* given that his dissatisfaction with the natural sciences (as with reason) is merely with how it is instantiated. Science is necessary to gaining understanding of the world, it just so happens that our historically developed notion of science dominates nature as much as it cognises it. If it were not for the fact that “[n]atural science and philosophy have miserably come apart” (ND 266), both would be in a better position.

Some might point out that even for Adorno sociology does not constitute a science, which threatens any claim to methodological naturalism. Adorno contradicts his claim that sociology unifies the sciences when he claims that, “precisely by relating itself to the proper location of science, and thereby reflecting on science, it is not such a science, but something qualitatively different” (IS 129). I think we should take this primarily as a claim about the content, not the form of sociology. What ultimately differentiates sociology from the natural sciences is that it takes its object to be at the same time its subject. This ascription of subjectivity to the object of inquiry, society, relegates it to some extra-scientific position. It is unwilling to reify its object (this is essentially the claim of *Deutung*) as any proper science would. Adorno is even willing to admit that “[t]he commensurability of the object—society—with the knowing subject exists just as much as it does not exist” (PD 15). No positivist can take seriously the claim that a discipline can be self-referential, i.e. take itself to be “a part of the object-domain it describes” (Geuss 1981, 55). In short, Adorno’s adherence to sociology does not make Adorno a methodological naturalist. “The notion of society cannot be grasped in any immediate fashion, nor is it susceptible of drastic verification, as are the laws of the natural sciences” (S 145).

But Adorno has an ace up his sleeve in the form of his commitment to psychology and psychological methods. His *Dialectic and Minima Moralia* evidence his debt to Freudian psychology and *The Authoritarian Personality* showed a commitment to empirical psychology that he always held onto. The Adorno I am considering here did not go back to empirical psychology (though he directed various such studies after his return to Germany) but he did continue using psychoanalytical and empirical methods and concepts in his analyses. We might be especially suspicious of the claim that psychoanalysis is a natural science, or even psychology. But according to Adorno, “the classification of the sciences which opposes psychoanalysis, as a clinical-therapeutic discipline, to psychology is

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invalid and arbitrary....Psychoanalysis sets out, of course, to be a dynamic, topological and genetic psychology” (IS 112). In other words, psychoanalysis is a full member of psychology and any pretension of the latter to be a natural science applies also to the former. Adorno claims to have “acquired techniques of the natural sciences from psychology” (IS 109). At least in a methodological sense, psychology conforms to the natural sciences. By extension, this status of “science” applies just as much to Freudian psychoanalysis (IS 118). In a nutshell, he considers psychoanalysis and empirical psychology to both be natural sciences. At most, I think this buttresses the claim that Adorno is not an anti-methodological naturalist in principle. Scientific disciplines which harbour the potential for *Deutung* (or other non-positivist methods) are still acceptable to Adorno, hence sociology and psychology are acceptable. But dominant scientific trends make him a *de facto* non-methodological naturalist.

Ontological Naturalism

Although Adorno opposes the application of scientific methods (at least as these appear now) to philosophy (and other disciplines such as sociology and psychology), his methods are ontologically naturalistic. That is, he only applies concepts and objects the use of which would be sanctioned by successful scientific explanation.

The affirmation of materialism is Adorno’s rejection of idealism. This is, firstly, a metaphysical thesis. As he puts it in the preface to *Negative Dialectics*, his task is “to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity” (ND xx). In other words, the idea that it is the subject that is primary and constitutive of reality. Instead we should look to the material world as metaphysically foundational.³⁰ We might be careful of ascribing too strong of a materialist position to Adorno. His opposition to the subject as metaphysically foundational may stem more from his opposition to any undialectical foundation *per se* than it does from his critique of idealism. But it is undeniable that this anti-idealist thesis is prevalent.

Secondly, it is a thesis about cognition. Adorno claims that it is the object that ought to be primary to cognition. An idealist cognition is one that starts from premises of conceptuality in the subject and attempts to impose these on the objects. But a respectable experience of the world is open to the demands that objects make on it without imposing pre-established concepts. Materialism corresponds at least in a weak sense to the claim that (2) the physical can be ultimately explanatory. But materialism is not equivalent to naturalism. The former is a metaphysical position and the latter metaphilosophical or methodological. So we need to establish more than just materialism to constitute naturalism.

As we have seen, Adorno also wants to pull sociology methodologically closer to the sciences. As well as *Deutung*, sociology will often need to rely heavily on empirical methods in investigating social phenomena (IS 48). This second requirement shows not only the methodological but also some ontological considerations for Adorno’s naturalism. In relying on empirical methods, he shows himself to at least be cognizant of the requirements of naturalism without falling into positivism. This ontological naturalist claim is further expanded in his conception of what sociology is. That is, in accordance with ontological naturalism, the world is everything that sociology-as-science commits

³⁰ Pace Bowie, who claims that Adorno’s materialism “is not a metaphysical thesis of the kind that is opposed to idealism” (2013, 76).

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us to:

“The fact that there is absolutely nothing between heaven and earth—or rather on earth—which is not mediated by society implies that sociology can deal, from a social perspective, with absolutely everything which exists. This applies even to society’s seeming antithesis, nature and the concept of nature. For this concept is mediated essentially by the need to control nature, and therefore by social need” (IS 64-5).

This may not satisfy our contemporary naturalist but for our expanded scientific realm it does the job without supernatural excess (note Adorno’s correcting his slip of the tongue above). Ontologically, sociology is practically all-encompassing. And it fulfils at least a minimal physical requirement as society is not “a merely metaphysical concept” but something concrete (IS 50). The notion of spirit might seem to pose a counter-example but on Adorno’s conception this can be explained as “a piece of natural history” (CM 156; see also ND 354-5).

We should deal with what is sometimes thought to be the more fundamental naturalist claim, that (3) human beings are a part of nature. Generally, Adorno signs up to this claim. He follows the Nietzschean/Freudian line that genealogy can be used to unearth an unexpected “affinity” between human beings and the natural world. As Adorno puts it in *Philosophical Terminology*, the point of critical theory is “[t]o counter our conceit that we are utterly distinct from, and superior to, nature, the mind’s own natural growth should be acknowledged by tracing it back to material scarcity” (quoted in Cook 2011, 103). The discoveries of the sciences are not merely unexpected but also (as in Nietzsche) supposed to be debunking of our received conceptions of ourselves. The Adornian picture is somewhat more complicated, however. Adorno acknowledges (but does not always disambiguate between) both first and second nature. The former refers to nature in terms of the natural sciences (INH 118) but the latter refers to socialised humankind and what it takes to be ‘natural’ to itself. While in the former sense we are a part of nature, we consider ourselves, in our second nature, to stand outside nature. It is because of this “history of distantiation” (our second nature) that we are “unaware of our *de facto* affinity with [first] nature” (Cook 2011, 12). It is in this light that we should examine the more puzzling claim that “[w]e are really no longer ourselves a piece of nature at the moment when we notice, when we recognize, that we are a piece of nature” (Bowie 2013, 94; quoting PMP). Is Adorno claiming that by coming to self-consciousness about its natural origins humankind transcended its natural limits? It is more plausible to read this as the claim that we form our second nature in light of our coming to self-consciousness about our first nature (perhaps to shield ourselves from that unappealing truth). In that sense it is hardly the case that we really stop being (first) natural beings, it is just that we delude ourselves about this fact.³¹

One of the most incisive challenges to Adorno at this point is that his historical strategy is not empirically verifiable (See also Rosen 1996, 272). But this misconceives what it is to give a naturalistic historical account like a genealogy.

³¹ A less immediately plausible reading inserts “second nature” in at least one occasion of “nature” in the quote. The most plausible one for my purposes would insert it only for the first instance, which produces the claim that we stop seeing ourselves in the false light of our second nature when we start to see ourselves as properly natural beings with Nietzschean drives, etc. The fact that Adorno does not always specify his use of “natural” leaves this interpretation open but not on solid ground.

3 — Genealogy And Naturalism

Part of Nietzsche's claim to naturalism rests on his doing grey history. This historical naturalism is something Adorno seems to be able to get on board with. The upshot of overcoming the antithesis between nature and spirit or nature and history is that "its place must be taken by a formulation that achieves in itself the concrete unity of nature and history" (IS 116-7). There is much still to be said on Adorno's puzzling 'idea of natural history' but it is clear that critical theory is committed to some version of historical inquiry set out there. Critical theory investigates the historical development of social phenomena and concepts. "[I]t is one of the essential faculties of a critical theory of society to grasp things which purport to be...given by nature in terms of their having come to be" (IS 146). Put otherwise, this just is the genealogical method.

One well-known naturalistic aspect of Nietzsche is that although his genealogy is sometimes fact-deficient it is not law-deficient.³² That is, it strives to stay within the boundaries of the best scientific explanations. If our explanations are made according to our best understanding of scientific validity, they are not law-deficient. These explanations (which are merely fact-deficient) show that "a process is *possible*" (Williams 2002, 31). For example, the historical argument according to which 'explanation' arises through fear makes use of plausible scientific hypotheses.

We can now shed light on Adorno's claim that "[p]hilosophy lives in symbiosis with science and cannot break from it without turning into dogmatism and ultimately relapsing into mythology. Yet the content of philosophy should be to express what is neglected or excised by science, by the division of labor, by lack of self-reflection" (CM 158). It is clear that Adorno takes aim at the flawed conceptions du jour of reason and science. But his claim to deviate from the content of the sciences is not anti-naturalist. As I have been trying to show, Adorno is largely ontologically naturalistic. Like Nietzsche, he may sometimes use history to make claims not currently sanctioned by the sciences. But though these will be fact-defective, they cannot be law-defective: they must develop according to what would suit a proper naturalistic inquiry.

In that vein Adorno claims that the concept of society is not "empirically demonstrable" (S 146). But he also specifies that he "made the attempt to derive the phenomena...from objective social and social-psychological conditions" (CM 307). They might be speculative claims but they are not law-defective. On top of that, Adorno seems to have hope in the idea that "[s]ometimes social psychology and sociology are able to construct concepts that only later are empirically verified" (CM 198). Though some concepts may not currently be verifiable, Adorno does care about potential future verifications. This is also shown in the counterfactual: in cases where Adorno could make claims about pre-history he resists doing so because these claims cannot "be settled with the aid of facts" (ND 321; cf also DEa 20).

A Problem of Priority?

We cannot leave this topic without indicating that all we have done here is to push Adorno closer to the naturalist camp. He is by no means an unequivocal naturalist, as shown by his use of the hermeneutic concept of *Deutung*. This is supported by his few uses of the term naturalism in reference to Freud—primarily to oppose it. On the one hand there is his first *Habilitation*, in which "Adorno warned expressly against a naturalistic misinterpretation of the unconscious and of instinct. In Freud,

³² See Leiter 2015.

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he maintained, neither concept is ultimately primary; they are rather no more than conceptual tools with which to describe laws governing the psyche” (Müller-Doohm 2005, 105). Does this force the claim that Adorno’s naturalism follows from his hermeneutics but is not the basis for it? In other words, that his naturalism is a contingent upshot of his *Deutung* rather than its underlying foundation?³³ These two must be balanced in some sense. A later text sheds more light on the matter: “the soul of Freudian psychology, as part of the already constituted world, falls within the province of the constitutive categories of empirical analysis. Freud put an end to the ideological transfiguration of the soul as a residual form of animism. It is no doubt the theory of childhood sexuality that most thoroughly undermines all metaphysical humbug about the soul” (SP 81). Given Adorno’s use of psychoanalytic concepts in his explanation, he seems to presuppose that these concepts are already naturalistically appropriate rather than that the naturalism is a side-product. This is also vindicated by Freud’s early *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, which was “grounded in the materialism that he never abandoned” (Wollheim 1971, 44). This tips the scale in favour of Adorno’s naturalism informing his *Deutung*, rather than vice versa.

4 — Functional Genealogy

*Suddenly it seemed
to a world which had been in gleeful pursuit
of the good life,
that living had become survival!*
(Will Eisner, 3)

The question is to what extent [a judgment] is life-promoting, life-preserving, species-promoting, perhaps species-cultivating. (Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil §4)

Necessary false consciousness, then, is not faulty consciousness. It is, on the contrary, logically correct, inherently incorrigible consciousness. It is called false, not against its own standards of truth, but as against social existence. (Sohn-Rethel 1978, 197)

We are faced with a puzzle. On the one hand, there is agreement that “no reading of the works of T.W. Adorno can fail to be struck by the ethical intensity of his writing” (Bernstein 2001, 1; also Hulatt 2014, 676-7; Finlayson 2009, 10). This claim is usually exaggerated. It may be the case that “Adorno talks in a way that suggests that he has an ethics” (Freyenhagen 2013, 2), but the road to its reconstruction is littered with retreats to minimalistic ways of vindicating the claim. Nevertheless, this sentiment touches on the expression of strong *normative* content in Adorno’s writing. One can open a random page of Adorno’s to find mention “systematized horror” (MM §72). But all previously

³³ I thank Lydia Goehr for pressing this point against (overly) naturalistic explanations of Freud, which Adorno must also have been aware of.

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discussed genealogical arguments fail to justify this normative content. Adorno's version of ideological critique can act as a prolegomenon to actual (that is, historical) genealogical inquiry. But even the strongest version of this genealogy in Adorno does not vindicate the normative content of Adorno's writing. It might occasion us to reflectively reject a false concept and its obfuscatory presentation but it does not warrant its description as 'evil'.

One obviously insufficient view might ground normativity in the failure of phenomena "to live up to the very highly pitched requirements and expectations [Adorno], as archetypal bearer of spirit, imposes on [them]" (Geuss 2005, 115). We can see how this might ground Adorno's normative claims but simultaneously undermine them as idiosyncratic. Even if he is one of 'the lucky few', this will not provide warrant.³⁴ We might think that the tools for a successful argument have already been put in place; that we can combine the ideological and genealogical critiques. It has been uncovered that our concepts do not fulfil their potential and that this is systematically obscured from our view, which in turn helps to legitimise our false consciousness of the world. Is the connection between conceptual contradiction and its mystification not enough to justify the normative claim that this is repressive? Only if conceptual critique is able to overcome the vindicatory turn. Even then, Adorno might say that "people can of course be made aware of this contradiction and probably can also be motivated to change. In general I do not think this will do it" (CM 302).

It might be pointed out that Adorno is fond of exaggeration (e.g. MM §29). But even if we take this claim at face value and apply it to his normative commitments, would that solve the puzzle? The first question is whether statements like "horror" really are exaggerations. They certainly aim to react appropriately to the phenomenon Adorno denotes by Auschwitz. Only exaggeration (or what seems like it) could come close to capturing a response free of 'coldness' to a world that allowed Auschwitz to occur. Even if these (or at least other normative terms) are exaggerations, they still presuppose that some level of normativity is warranted (perhaps not "horror" but "pretty bad"). And even this lies outside the scope of what Adorno can uncontroversially claim.

Functional Genealogy

As some Nietzsche scholars have argued, the power of his genealogy "lies in introducing the idea of *function* where you would not necessarily expect it" (Williams 2002, 32, emphasis added).³⁵ We need to disambiguate the two senses in which this genealogy is functional. The primary focus is on *functioning*. It does not challenge the truth of our beliefs and concepts but rather their effect on human functioning. This is also, I think, Nietzsche's primary intention in this chapter's epigraph: a genealogy uncovers a hidden connection between a cognitive phenomenon (e.g. a judgment) and some characteristic effect on human life. A subsidiary claim of this form of genealogy is that this cognitive phenomenon works so as to make the effect obtain; that it is functional. This was the Marxist sense in which ideological critique was already functional: ideologies have the function of masking social reality. It is also the sense of Geuss's 'functional *Ideologiekritik*' (1981, 31-6). His sense of functional is that of tracing the function of an ideology to the stabilisation and/or legitimation of domination, which explains how domination comes to be and to persist. On my account, ideological

³⁴ One might claim that Adorno is not interested in justificatory grounds. This is likely true, but if his critical theory is to be acceptable either theoretically or by its addressees it will need such grounding anyway.

³⁵ Except of course that on Williams' story the provided function is vindicated.

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critique establishes the stabilisation of the *status quo* (e.g. by obscuring human suffering). But a functional genealogy takes that *status quo* itself as the object of critique. The causal relationship between forms of consciousness and functioning is explanatorily central to this genealogy. This will rely on the claim that there is a functional explanation here but it will ultimately criticise the functioning of human beings under late capitalism.

A new form of genealogy comes with a new object: not beliefs or concepts but forms of consciousness.³⁶ As Adorno suggests, what is philosophically central “is a critique of the constitutive consciousness itself” (ND 148). This is not merely a *Weltanschauung*. As Geuss puts it, a form of consciousness is “a particular systematically interconnected subset of the set of all the beliefs, attitudes, [dispositions,] etc. the agents of a group hold” (1981, 12 fn. 26). Adorno often simply refers to this as ‘the ideology’, or ‘thought forms’. While, on my account, ‘ideological’ refers to the obfuscatory function of (the beliefs in) this ideology, the ideology itself encapsulates particular beliefs and characteristic ways of thinking about the world. If there is one encapsulating form of consciousness for our society, it is probably that of instrumental reason. The instrumentality of this reason grounds a particular way of looking at the world: our relations to other persons, objects and theorems all fall under the jurisdiction of our form of reason.

Just as for Nietzsche the value of our values lies in their effect on our functioning, so for Adorno the value of form of consciousness lies in their effect on our functioning. Forms of consciousness are, in this sense, dangerous: harm could follow from their application. This harm takes many forms in Adorno (hence, the many forms of functioning implied by a form of consciousness). The blanket term ‘normative content’ covers all their deleterious effects. Human beings today are impotent; disabled (DEa 37). Adorno speaks of the “socially defunct individual” (MM §148) that lives today. At its normative peak, this is “a perversion of real life” (S 153), already an indication of something stronger than a contradiction. The connection between consciousness and functioning is especially obvious in Adorno’s positive proposals for society (primarily in his public lectures), which invoke us to adopt new forms of consciousness—or, as we shall see, be reflexive about their use. We will encounter these in more detail—and how they result from forms of consciousness—in the next section.

This genealogy really has two objects of critique. Both the forms of consciousness and functioning, and especially their relation, play a combined role. But just as the genealogy of concepts could also ‘trickle down’ to undermining the beliefs in those concepts, a genealogy of forms of consciousness transfers to the concepts and beliefs included in them. Ultimately, the form of consciousness is an expanded (and therefore stronger) version of objects we have encountered so far. In one sense we can think of our form of consciousness as just another concept. Reason has such a double position. But only the form of consciousness does full justice to the constellation around that form of reason: its constitutive character for all our thought, its use as tool, its influence on our conceptuality, its affective significance, etc. This means that in various ways this genealogy could either complement or compete with the other two. It profits from the indications given by obfuscation and contradiction but it can also stand independently. And part of the motivation for this interpretation comes from the

³⁶ I do not mean to imply an exclusive pairing between objects and methods of critique: they are not necessarily conjoined but can come together in other ways. As we saw before, Jaeggi and Geuss talk about a similar object of critique using the method of immanent critique. It is plausible that what I have called ideological critique also concerns not just beliefs but forms of consciousness. But whatever its object, its argument in that form is limited to showing the lack of warrant or indication of falsehood.

4 — Functional Genealogy

normative failure of the purely historical genealogy. In terms of undermining, this is the genealogical view in Adorno we ought to endorse.³⁷

The Constitutive Connection

The most important part of this chapter will be the argument that reveals the constitutive connection between a form of consciousness and a form of functioning. Some of Adorno's attempts to connect these still look fallacious: "man....drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations inflicted upon him over thousands of years" (ND 124). Nevertheless I will, as before, charitably reconstruct Adorno's argument not to hide the fallacies but to show he has more plausible resources for showing that "praxis imitates spirit" (CM 267).

Only now can we fully redeem what Adorno means by constellations. As we saw before, a constellation makes up for the lack in traditional definition and conceptuality by seeing the dialectical relation between a concept and its instantiation. But there is more to it. Constellations show that Adorno means to be tracing more than just a conceptual history. Constellations do not explicitly trace a form of consciousness but they do break down the distinction between cognitive and non-cognitive content. "There is no thought...that does not have its practical *telos*" (CM 265). The meaning that is unlocked by a constellation is not just conceptual but practical: it tells us about the type of action that accompanies a thought form. This connection is not yet clarified or elaborated but it is clear that Adorno always has this connection between the cognitive and non-cognitive (or factive and affective) in mind. There is never merely a theoretical upshot to a theory. Its practical effect is mentioned in the same breath and can call it into question just as much as a refutation of the premises can.

Adorno could be thinking explicitly of Nietzsche's critique of our values when he claims that "[t]he history locked in the object can only be delivered by a knowledge mindful of the historic positional value of the object in its relation to other objects" (ND 163). The invocation of 'history' and 'value' is explicitly cognitively non-committal: it is not only the 'meaning' or 'definition' that Adorno is after as these already imply a more purely factive critique. A constellation will take into account anything it finds to be connected to a form of consciousness. Geuss picks up on these carefully chosen words: "Instead of a 'definition' one must try to give an 'analysis' of the contingent synthesis of 'meaning' Christianity (for instance) represents" (1999, 13). This meaning includes to what extent it is life-affirming, anxiety-inducing, debilitating, etc.

This can make sense of Adorno's method of immanent critique. First, it is crucial to note that his version of immanent critique is not purely immanent (see O'Connor 2013, 44-51). It could more accurately be described as a critical or dialectical immanent critique, being neither wholly immanent nor transcendent (P 31; ND 181). An immanent critique measures an object (concept, form of consciousness, philosophical theory, etc.) against its own internal standards and demands. But since Adorno uncovers hidden connections to the meaning of a position, these internal standards apply only to norms and not to content. "No immanent critique can serve its purpose wholly without out-

³⁷ It is interesting that in the final analysis Mannheim's version of ideology is not all that different from Adorno's—it even illuminates it. This is shown in two passages. First, Mannheim describes "ideologies whose function it is to conceal the actual meaning of conduct rather than to reveal it" (IU 95), which points to the meaning inherent in praxis, not just in theory. And "the reality to be comprehended is distorted and concealed, for this conception of ideology...deals with a reality that discloses itself only in actual practice" (IU 97); similar to how Adorno thinks the real meaning of a form of consciousness is found, in part, through its practical consequences.

The Constitutive Connection

side knowledge,” that is, without “look[ing] beyond the dialectical structure” (ND 182).³⁸ Adorno’s version of immanent critique reveals not just the theoretical presuppositions of a form of consciousness but the constellation, properly understood: all cognitive and non-cognitive content is relevant to it.

A prime example of this is Adorno’s immanent critique of philosophical theories. Kant, Hegel and Heidegger are not measured solely according to what they write but additionally in terms of the practical import of their philosophy. This might seem odd: why ought a consequence undermine a theory? Nowadays it is not unheard of to reject a philosopher *tout court* due to their iniquitous personal life or the pervasive influence of their derogatory minor writings on their system as a whole (Kant’s Anthropology comes to mind). Adorno turns to neither of these. He would probably endorse recent efforts to trace the influence of Heidegger’s Black Notebooks in his phenomenology. But this is superfluous: it is the major works themselves that bear a direct and immanent connection to a consequence. The point is not that philosophers and their writings are racist (or any -ist)—the history of philosophy makes this claim too easy—but that they entail a certain function. This functional consequence is not something for which a reading of philosophy suffices. It is only effective and non-question-begging when it looks to the world—“beyond the dialectical structure”—for what these consequences are. The only plausible interpretation is that a philosophical theory has an inherent connection with its functional consequences. The examples of Marx and Nietzsche (surely two of the most destructive intellectual influences on the twentieth century) only reinforce the point. The inherent connection must be found in the theories themselves, as forms of consciousness. If Adorno made the fallacious claim that any false interpretation of a philosopher undermines them then we would surely expect to see him criticise Nietzsche and Marx rather than fascism and Soviet communism.

There is a second reason to investigate philosophical theories. It is not merely, as above, that they can be genealogically mined as forms of consciousness, but there is also a causal connection between *the* form of consciousness and philosophical theories. As with so many other things, this is a dialectical relationship: a philosophical theory can (over time) influence a form of consciousness but it is itself a part and result of a form of consciousness. Adorno remains ambiguous on the first front. On the one hand he claims that “societal consciousness...long ago took its leave from philosophical consciousness” (CM 114). Yet thought nowadays, our form of reason, derives from philosophical logic (DEa 30). The more constant claim is that our philosophical theories are all instances of the reigning form of consciousness. This establishes the elements common to both the form of consciousness and philosophical theories. “The derivation of thought from logic ratifies in the lecture room the reification of man in the factory and the office” (DEa 30). Thus the dual function of philosophical theories: both to duplicate the form of consciousness and legitimise it (ND 131).

In the historical genealogy it was seen that a concept can typically originate in a specified affect. But this was not enough to undermine that concept today. Seen in the current context, however, the historical role of a function can have an effect on its undermining. Adorno cites the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to remind us that “[t]he universality of thoughts as developed by discursive logic, and lordship in the sphere of the concept, arises on the foundation of lordship in reality” (AE 79). Why might this be relevant? We can see, again, the influence of thought forms on philosophical theories.

³⁸ As my introduction claimed would be the case if a genealogy was to be a novel form of critique.

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The fact that these arise in circumstances of domination can tell us something about the real social connection that we might expect to find. This is not conclusive but it is not fallacious: that a form of functioning can, over time, determine our consciousness establishes that this consciousness might be expected to deliver this functional consequence.

Micrology

The study of philosophical theories is already a form of micrology, a central method in this form of genealogy. Micrology can study the unguarded moments in everyday life that reveal the functional significance of our form of consciousness. The “withering of experience” (MM §33) consists of ways in which our mode of cognition guarantees weak epistemic conditions. For example, intellectual honesty is really a “sabotage of thought” (MM §50). Our thinking is impaired just as our experience of the world is by the concepts we apply (MM §116). Adorno thinks we are wronged in all the ways in which we are estranged from the truth (MM §37). This is not an implausible norm: knowledge is an essential aspect of human life, and ways in which we are systematically barred from it impair our epistemic function. The example of idealism is instructive insofar as it posits the primacy of the subject rather than the object in terms of cognition, when it is precisely the object which we ought to cognise. This is especially true when the object in question (society, ideology) actively evades cognition.

The death of the individual is also downstream from cognition in some ways.³⁹ The first is our scientific consciousness. Both enlightenment and mythological ways of finding out about the natural world utilise or aim at the domination of nature by human means. But given the inclusion of humans in the natural world—the lack of distinction between inner and outer nature—the domination of nature also entails the domination of human beings. This causes “the suppression and dissolution of the very individual in whose service knowledge was related back to the subject” (MM §39).

Identity thinking plays a role here as well. Adorno thinks that the idea that two things can be categorised as identical leads us to trying to make them so (Geuss 2005, 165). This is the role of fungibility: it establishes all human beings as interchangeable just as physical objects are seen to be. This plays a role in the ‘melting pot’ of American liberalism just as much as it does in the fascist extermination camps (MM §66). Social equality or fungibility before the universal constitutes “the age of the individual’s liquidation” (MM §83). Life itself is devalued by human cognition because the subjugation of nature is “made the absolute purpose of life (DEa 31-2). If this has any beneficial effects, Adorno does not mention them. Only that “ideology...imposes a praxis by which everything living is suppressed” (DEb 36). An adoption of rational methods only “causes man to pay for his increasing inner organization with increasing disintegration” (MM §147).

This disintegration is not limited to the individual’s self-relation but also to intersubjectivity. Although we desire to establish a social sphere and live closer together than ever, estrangement shows itself precisely in the interactions based on the elimination of distance (MM §20). This is exacerbated by the fact that we no longer know how to communicate. Adorno holds the Kierkegaardian conviction that real communication is no longer possible, only the one-sided imparting of information (CM 247).⁴⁰ This is also established in the psychoanalytic term of ego weakness, the psychological effect

³⁹ Adorno only uses this term in a more limited sense to refer to ways in which a person loses their individuality through domination by the social whole (or by the atomistic concept of individuality), but I am using it here to highlight all the ways in which human individual and social functioning is impaired.

⁴⁰ In this he is immensely prescient of Habermas’ later discourse arguments—or maybe the reverse is true.

Historical Questions

of increasing socialisation (ND 277).⁴¹ Psychoanalytic terminology is essential to explaining human functioning: “[n]euroses are pillars of society; they thwart the better potential of men” (ND 298). Empirical psychology additionally warns us of the increasing tendency towards totalitarian characteristics, which fuel social antagonism. One gets the point: our forms of consciousness impact our functioning in many ways we ought to find objectionable by standards we already hold. What is new is either the revelation that these harms are present, even pervasive, or that they are caused by our forms of consciousness (which we also may not have realised we held), or both.

Historical Questions

How can Adorno redeem his claim that mystification evidences a “regression in consciousness” (MM §151)? What does the history of a form of consciousness tell us about its current state and effect on functioning? It surely cannot be either that a function related originally to a form of consciousness still undermines it now, or that the origin of a form of consciousness in e.g. a situation of social domination undermines that whole form of consciousness. Adorno’s image as mandarin elitist intellectual is partly justified but he is not nostalgic about some brighter past. He is not the Socratic inward thinker who is able to see things as wrong because he was alive “before the period of decline” (O’Connor 2015, 183). Adorno does think there are a handful of lucky individuals who have not adjusted to societal norms, but not because they happen to be sexagenarians (ND 41). Furthermore, Adorno could not be nostalgic if we plausibly assume that there is no time in recent history that has been free of the currently dominant form of consciousness. The modernism that Adorno romanticises in Balzac still characterises the twentieth century.

A more subtle form of nostalgia is the call for a “‘Back to nature’” (ND 147). Either this is an “appeal...for a return to nature,” which is thus a “recourse to what [spirit] had estranged itself from and therefore mistakenly believes to be invariant” (CM 158). Or it could rely not on mistaken phenomenalist views but the historical claim that pre-technological mankind was better off. But as Adorno makes clear, such a fetishism of a glorious origin “is itself an ideological principle” (ND 155).⁴² A stronger view concerns a non-dominative “reconciliation with nature” (Villa 45). This is not necessarily an appeal to the past—even Odysseus had a far from ‘organic’ relation to nature. But the point of history is precisely to show that to a certain extent we are stuck with our reason, language, concepts, and technology. The idea that there is yet something aboriginally natural that we could return to resembles the aforementioned ideological use of origin.

What the history of a form of consciousness can do is suggest a deeper connection to a form of functioning. This is non-trivial. We already have indications that there is such a connection but we might want to see proof that a functional consequence is inherent to a form of consciousness. We already know from Chapter Two that due to their dialectic our concepts and forms of consciousness are congruous with those of our past: “[t]his rationality has transformed itself, not disappeared” (DEB 42). The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* takes us back to an earlier historical phase to show the intertwinement of mythology and enlightenment at work. It is precisely *as* a form of consciousness that

⁴¹ Although cf. ND 294 for Adorno’s critique of Kant’s rationalistic conception of “the intelligible character as a strong ego in rational control of all its impulses”.

⁴² And presumably misguided, like the currently popular view that paleolithic diets would be better because early humans were stuck with them.

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enlightenment reverts to mythology (DEa 27). If Adorno can establish the connection between this dialectic and the resulting functioning, there is a stronger case to be made that this is inherent to it.

For this we need to turn again to the Odysseus parable. Its explanatory function is still partly the same: it allows us greater access to the truth about our own situation. Now it is not the concept but the connection between forms of consciousness and functioning that remains continuous between antiquity and today. Like our current society, Odysseus is caught in a particularly clear stage in the dialectic between myth and enlightenment. The one thing they historically have in common is their functional consequence: “domination and exploitation” (DEa 45). The same process of individuation that now gives us the death of the individual can already be found in the work of “Appolonian Homer” (DEa 46, quoting Nietzsche’s *Nachlass*). Adorno explicitly signals the effect of ideology on the individual when he describes Odysseus’s journey as “the path of the self through myths” (DEb 38). On this dangerous path Odysseus is able to survive only by using reason in the form of cunning, thus the self “throw[s] itself away in order to preserve itself” (DEb 39) just like modern self-preservation. Ultimately, the Odyssey (like other myths such as that of Odin) details humankind as it uses nature in an attempt to survive. But this relies on the denial of nature in mankind, by which “not merely the *telos* of the outward control of nature but the *telos* of man’s own life is distorted and befogged” (DEa 54). As in modern science, the addition of an ends to our means is relinquished and human life pays the price. Now we can see that a shared form of consciousness has a close connection to a particular form of functioning both present and past. This implies a non-accidental connection between those forms of consciousness and functioning.

At this point we might expect the following objection from an Optimist. The Optimist might accept the constitutive connection between our forms of consciousness and functioning, and could even accept that this is a harmful form of functioning. But, the Optimist will say, we have now shown that this connection has always been there and is there necessarily throughout our cultural history. The Optimist earns their name when they next claim that these forms of consciousness have also given us great progress. Don’t our technological, cultural and medical advancements (perhaps not vindicate but) make it all worth it? Adorno himself must admit that we would not be where we are—for both better or worse—without even our most reifying forms of consciousness.

Adorno is not unaware of the Optimist’s objection, nor does he entirely disagree. Adorno sometimes does nothing but point out all our technological advancements, even if as *j’accuse*. His thinking on progress is slightly ambiguous, as when he lectures that “we can speak of *something like* progress from the slingshot to the atom bomb” (LHF 12, emphasis added; see also ND 320, CM 153). His view can be summarised in the form: “Everything within the whole progresses: only the whole itself to this day does not progress” (CM 149). What he means is that we can recognise progress in our technologies: even if it is progress towards the most destructive man-made weapon ever devised, we cannot deny that we have progressed in terms of destructiveness. The idea that everything progresses even suggests we will inevitably see it as such, no matter the content. This might be what Adorno means when he claims that “[c]ontemporary mass-culture is historically necessary” (MM §137); that it must be viewed as such. At the same time the whole, spirit, has not progressed even if it ought to. Spirit is “what progress could be above and beyond all progress” (CM 157): a decrease in barbarism

Functioning As Critique

and an increase in freedom (the demands from the beginning of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*). This progress would be equally tangible but it might not be experienced as progress by those raised and socialised under late capitalism (ND 352). Adorno even implies that the two forms of progress are mutually exclusive: “progress begins where it ends” (CM 150), meaning that we can only get any real progress when we stop (or stop caring about) technological progress.⁴³

An orthodox interpretation of Adorno would claim that it is this contradiction in the concept of progress as not living up to its potential that falsifies it. But in Adorno’s argument against any Hegelian universal history—which would identify increasing technological domination as progress—it is the *horror* that verifies Hegel and stands him on his head” (ND 320, emphasis added; see also MM §33). In other words, it is the outcomes, the effects, the consequences of our technological progress that undermine Hegel’s optimism, not the contradiction itself.

But this function has also been present for a long time. What makes our situation particularly objectionable? It is precisely the discrepancy between the two forms of progress that creates a situation Adorno calls abundance. Abundance is the claim that our particular socio-historical situation is objectionable precisely because it could be better. Our technological progress has made it possible that human destiny “might be realized from one day to the next” (MM §131). It is not merely that abundance is an irrational state of capitalist profit, as Adorno suggests (DEa 156). Rather, “in the age of both utopian and absolutely destructive possibilities”, we are veering toward the latter (CM 143). Our current state is marked by an “intensification of antagonisms” between what our technological progress has made possible as means and what we pursue—instead—as ends (MM §149). At no point before in history would it have been possible that no one should go hungry.⁴⁴ “[F]inally progress can begin, at any moment” yet it does not (CM 150). This is what characterises our situation: the abandonment of the chance to alleviate human suffering. So the fact that human impotence obtains today does differ from its obtaining historically (DEb 32). The distance between possibility and actuality has expanded to such a point that functional impairment can no longer be mere oversight. There must be some cause preventing real progress: our forms of consciousness.

Functioning as Critique

This historical account is the key to Adorno’s claims about self-preservation, which are echoed in this chapter’s epigraph from Will Eisner’s classic graphic novel. According to the orthodox interpretation, our current concept of self-preservation is contradictory: “self-preservation forfeits its self” (MM §147). This is an evaluative claim about our concept but it is open to the magnanimous twist. That we now concentrate solely on individualist ways of sustaining ourselves might be better for us as a species. It is not yet a critique of what our self-preservation *does*. For that we can look to its effect on forms of functioning today. A fictional history confirms the connection through the case of Odysseus’s cunning tale of survival. But only an account of abundance tells us we now have the potential to fulfil all humans beings’ biological needs. *Ratio* is always the tool of self-preservation but a truly rational society “preserves its societalized subjects according to their *unfettered* potentialities” (CM 272-3). The real critique is not merely in terms of contradiction but functioning:

⁴³ Adorno does claim that the two concepts currently “communicate with each other...in averting the ultimate disaster” (CM 154). But this non-exclusivity only seems to be necessary and possible now, as a last resort.

⁴⁴ The call for a more rational use of ‘bread factories’ is far from a return to nature.

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“self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved” (DEb 43). The problem is not, as Habermas thinks, that self-preservation has “gone wild” (1982, 18). It is that our pursuit of self-preservation actively frustrates our individual and collective functioning. On the one hand we could say that a different *concept* would give us real self-preservation. But on the other hand this concept (if it is one) is driven by our form of consciousness: instrumental reason. In either case the functioning is the decisive reason for its rejection.

Now it should be obvious what the functional critique criticises. A GDA undermines the warrant of a belief and conceptual critique appeals to the self-contradiction of a concept to invoke its falseness. Functional critique aims not at truth value but at the medical value of forms of consciousness.⁴⁵ Only this study of the effect on human functioning constitutes a new form of critique beyond critiques of truth value or warrant. It fulfils the criteria of deriving from outside the dialectic and of being naturalistically informed.

As Reginster points out, there are two reasons why this function is a revelation and can therefore undermine our form of consciousness. First, our socialisation under current conditions obscures the connection between forms of consciousness and functioning. Adorno affirms this in his critique of second nature, which takes itself to be basic, normal and therefore natural. Even if we are already aware of some functional impairment, the revealed connection to our form of reason is undermining—perhaps even more so if we already experienced some amount of suffering without knowing why. Second, the medical value is “meant to be kept hidden” (Reginster 56). Our ideological beliefs only hold when they are taken to be true. This is ensured by the various modes of phenomenality in our form of consciousness, which takes cognitive content as purely factive. It denies any deeper investigation that might reveal a connected affective dimension. It is this affective dimension of our forms of consciousness that undermine them. Additionally, there is the revelation that we hold a form of consciousness at all. Since all our judgments are made through the lenses of these forms of consciousness, they remain invisible to us. We need to be shown that we hold particular forms of consciousness at all before these can be undermined.⁴⁶ This explains Adorno extremely liberal use of the term ‘positivism’: many forms of consciousness are positivist without realising it. By polemically pointing out their equivalence, Adorno reveals an unacknowledged form of consciousness at work.

I hesitate to call these affective states non-cognitive, even if “truth and falsehood are characteristics of sentences alone, and not of ideas as a whole” (S 146). Adorno definitely thinks these affective states are false (consciousness) and therefore truth-apt: the genesis of a thesis is inseparable from its correctness (AE 79). The falsehood of forms of consciousness consists in the functioning they bring about, even if these forms of consciousness are themselves true, e.g. as descriptions of the world. “[O]ne’s judgment is indeed metaphysically true...but psychologically false: one succumbs to the objective increase in persecution-mania” (MM §138). Adorno rarely differentiates the alethic modalities as he does here. Usually he identifies a statement as “both true and false” *simpliciter* (ND 358). This grants the impression that Adorno is a dialetheist, someone who upholds the simultaneous truth and falsity of a claim. A conceptual interpretation will claim that this is an immanent contradiction in things (or in spirit itself) which literally are and are not themselves. But something being

⁴⁵ The term “medical value” is Reginster’s (m.s. 51), adapted from *Gay Science* §345.

⁴⁶ I also owe this addition to Reginster, who claims that for Nietzsche our affects are invisible for the same reason (m.s. 72).

Self-reflexivity

both true and false occurs in two different modalities. It is no contradiction but a mere paradox; a quasi-dialetheism. That humankind is self-alienated (takes subject to be object) is false in the sense that false consciousness is; as a deleterious form of functioning. But at the same time it is absolutely true (especially under current circumstances) that humans are not only subjects but objects. What Adorno is signaling here is that there is nothing untrue (in the traditional sense) about the ideology. Its falsehood (in the medical sense) consists in the functional meaning it engenders.

Self-Reflexivity

We might think that reification falls into the same category as other forms of functioning; that our forms of consciousness ought to become non-objectifying (see Villa 2007). But Adorno thinks there are non-objectionable forms of objectification that are useful or even potentially rational. When one self-objectifies one's own writing through the medium of dictation, one estranges it and takes on the role of a critic. "In face of the difficulty, now grown to desperate proportions, of every theoretical utterance, such tricks become a blessing" (MM §135).⁴⁷ So reification is not wrong *per se*, only insofar as it impedes functioning. But Adorno needs to be able to claim that reification as a whole, as a form of consciousness, is wrong through its inherent relation to a form of functioning. Otherwise the constitutive connection does not follow. The explanation is that reification—in fact every form of consciousness—is harmful only insofar as we are unaware of it. If, like Adorno, we are self-reflexive about our use of them then we can stop short of letting them impact our practical functioning.

This is not a minor idiosyncrasy. Our societal lack of self-reflection plays a central role in Adorno's philosophy (*pace* Villa). Self-reflexivity plays a central role in our constitutive form of consciousness—reason—of leaving factive claims and personal affective responses unchallenged. Whether there are any appropriate means to our ends is left unquestioned. Like our technology, this has developed historically. "On the way from mythology to logistics, thought has lost the element of self-reflection, and [therefore -ES] today machinery disables men even as it nurtures them" (DEa 37).

The lack of self-reflexivity seals the connection between a form of consciousness and functioning. Part of the reason why the functional upshot of our forms of consciousness is hidden from us is because they are seen as merely factive phenomena. "The beneficial self-reflection of reason, however, would be its transition to praxis: reason would see through itself as a moment of praxis and would recognize...that it is a mode of behavior" (CM 153). Seeing our form of consciousness for what it is reveals its practical consequences. This is why Adorno repeatedly calls for the prime purpose of education to be inducing self-reflection: "awakening a general awareness of those [mechanisms that render people capable of genocide], to prevent people from becoming so again" (CM 193). Self-reflexivity plays a constitutive role in the falsehood of our form of consciousness. This lack of self-reflexivity is itself (part of) a form of consciousness which deserves special critical attention, though not of a different kind than other forms of consciousness. We could criticise our form of reason for contradicting itself by not being self-reflexive (as reason ought to be) but the normative weight lies in the critique of its allowing certain functional consequences to follow.

That our forms of consciousness are harmful only when we lack self-reflection might seem to weaken the argument, but that is only true if this lack is not global. The burden of proof is shifted on individuals to show that they do possess self-reflexivity. Additionally, this puts Adorno in agreement

⁴⁷ Martha Nussbaum has similar reservations about the putative wrong of objectification (1995.)

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with other masters of suspicion. Foucault's "point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous" (Foucault 1997, 256). He follows Nietzsche on this point, for whom morality is not harmful or bad *per se* but "the danger of dangers" (Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Preface §6). Adorno sometimes likewise indicates not harm but potential for harm; danger. "The universality that reproduces the preservation of life simultaneously imperils it" (ND 311). It is a danger of our form of consciousness that has been realised. The need for self-reflection reveals that our forms of consciousness are merely dangerous in themselves. They become harmful when, lacking this self-reflection, there is nothing to stop the functional consequences.

At the end of chapter two it was claimed that Geuss and Jaeggi have the right object of critique in mind but not the right method. Immanent critique of a form of life or consciousness shares the flaw of all immanent critique: it is not definitively normative. But there was something left unsaid, which is that the account of functioning I develop here is encompassed by the immanent method. According to at least to Geuss, it is precisely suffering that is indicative of the contradiction in society (2005, 114). Immanent critique takes functioning seriously after all, plus it has the additional elegance of preserving the method of contradiction. This would make for an elegant argument, but there are two reasons for scepticism. First, suffering in our society does not allow us to detect its "real causes" (ibid, 113). So suffering is not constitutive of a contradiction but merely an indication thereof, which initiates further analysis. This sort of claim should be familiar from my discussion of ideology in Chapter One, the upshot being that this *index* does not falsify anything. The actual immanent critique could function entirely independently of the occasion and detection of suffering and produce largely the same results. Second, this demotion of the concept of functioning is also evident in the ordering of the critique. According to this method it is the regression in functioning that tells us something valuable about what is contradictory in society. But according to the genealogy outlined in this chapter, it is the functioning itself that is ultimately relevant to critique. Its connection to a form of consciousness makes the latter objectionable. Geuss and Jaeggi might respond that it is the contradiction in the form of consciousness (that it promises flourishing but delivers impotence) that undermines it. But first, why the extra step? That a form of consciousness delivers a form of functioning suffices for a debunking. Second, this presupposes that there will be a contradiction. To some extent they can make good on this claim but is this true in all cases? Horkheimer and Adorno claim that "regression.... means an impoverishment of thought and experience" (DEa 36). But they do not always speak of a contradiction with a satisfactory concept of cognition, even if we fall short of it. Adorno assents to this line of argument. He agrees that "[b]y sacrificing thought...enlightenment forfeited its own realization" (DEb 33), thus contradicting itself. But he then confirms that "[t]he *fault* lies in a social context which induces blindness" (idem, emphasis added).

Normativity

It should be clear that Adorno's functional genealogy can ground his normative claims about society in a way that the other two could not. Only an investigation into functioning shows us that our forms of consciousness are dangerous and almost invariably harmful. This might additionally reveal that they contradict what we would expect of them but this has no critical or explanatory

Normativity

role. Furthermore, the functional genealogy respects the immanence principle. It does not import extra-contextual norms but only shows us hidden meanings to forms of consciousness. These functional consequences we have reason to reject anyway. What is new is the revelation of suffering and its causal relation to forms of consciousness we hold.

This allows us to say something about ethical interpretations of Adorno's normativity. First, the source of Adorno's normativity is not necessarily Aristotelian, *pace* Freyenhagen (2013, ch. 9). The Aristotelian relies on an essentialist claim about the function of a life form. But neither Adorno nor Nietzsche rely on essentialism. In fact, Adorno claims that "we cannot tell what man is", which "vetoes any anthropology" (ND 124). The Nietzschean only needs to rely on what is harmful; what causes us to fall short of what we could see, immanently, as a lack of full functioning. We might think this is more in line with Adorno's negativism.

Adorno's normativity is based on his cultural critique, in a broad sense. It is *Kultur* [culture or civilisation] as a whole which is implicated. It is individuals themselves who ultimately uphold society and its forms of consciousness and functioning. But this does not imply an ethical judgment of them. "There is only one bleak, remote chance of achieving the total transformation of society today and that is through politics" (PMP 176). In part, this can be achieved through a change in our education system toward critical self-reflection (CM 193). In this Adorno is explicitly aware that it is not the tired old concept of ethics that we need. Rather, "[w]hat we can do is give people contents, give them categories, give them forms of consciousness, by means of which they can approach self-reflection" (CM 300).

Adorno agrees with Hegel, that only a correct political life makes morality or moral education possible (ND 337). What Adorno provides is a propaedeutic for the existence of an ethics, not a minimalist version thereof. Self-reflection is "a precondition of what might be meant by the good life nowadays" (PMP 168-9). Before this it makes no sense to speak of ethical deliberation because only through raised consciousness of the bad can we start to pose questions about the good (PMP 167). As in abundance, it is spirit itself that ought to move forward because "there can be no good, not a trace of it, without progress" (CM 147). And it should be clear that Adorno has some proposals for how to move spirit forward.

Conclusion

This essay makes a case for Adorno's place in the 'tradition' of the hermeneutics of suspicion; that he thinks "suspicion...[is] a compelling approach" (MM §138). In my view, a genealogy needs to satisfy both theoretical and reflective acceptability. The former criterion is fulfilled when the genealogy given is philosophically and naturalistically plausible and consistent. Most of my arguments have been geared toward presenting Adorno's as a strong theoretical position without extravagant or unsupported claims. Many hypotheses were rejected for not conforming to these standards based on the globality problem, the vindictory turn, and quasi-dialetheism. The threshing and winnowing of the chaff left us with a clearer picture of the wheat.

The reflective acceptability has played a less prominent role—given that it relies on a robust fulfilment of theoretical acceptability—but is equally presupposed. Adorno may not have had confidence in the possibility of communicating with popular consciousness but he never stopped trying. Even if his writings and lectures were mere messages in bottles, they were meant to be read. His genealogy must be reflectively acceptable to individuals from the same society: they must be able to adopt its stance. This stance does not have to be immanent or contextualist,⁴⁸ though Adorno's is. My reconstruction aims to do justice to a form of this contextualist claim that opens up a democratic epistemic picture. This is not the authoritarian claim to know what is best for other (cf. Skinner 1982). As I lay out the genealogical arguments, they provide a roadmap to Adorno's normative viewpoint: if we follow these steps we will come to a similar conclusion without needing to object to a fallacious argument or unacknowledgeable presuppositions.

First, that our forms of consciousness are obfuscatory due to various phenomenalist strategies. Second, that these function to sustain a *status quo*, a form of functioning. A study of historical, social and psychological materials which are available anyway lead us to see that these forms of consciousness and functioning are causally connected. This phenomenon is not new but our current state of abundance gives us reason to reject this harmful form of functioning and the dangerous ideology that brings it about. We will come to see this functional *status quo* itself—not the fact that it contradicts its own demands (which we might remain unaware of given the stabilising form of consciousness)—as the primary reason to reject our forms of consciousness in their current instantiation.

Adorno could only be counted among the masters of suspicion given a firm idea of what his contribution is. Perhaps it would look something like this.

⁴⁸ Habermas's transcendental argument is also aimed at reflective acceptability (Geuss 1981, 64).

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