Spinoza and Critical Theory

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Guide to Abbreviations

Descartes

AT I – III = Descartes's *Correspondence*

AT VII = *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. John Cottingham, Second Edition, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

PP = René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. Valentine Rodger Miller and Reese P. Miller (Boston: Kluwer, 1982).

All Latin/French citations of Descartes are from René Descartes, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, IX vols. (Paris: Léopold Cerf, 1897).

Spinoza

KV = *Short Treatise*

PPC = *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*

CM = *Metaphysical Thoughts*

TTP = *Theological Political Treatise*

TdIE = *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*

TP = *Political Treatise*

Ep. = *Letters*

Ethics is cited by part number followed by: p = proposition; c = corollary; d = definition; p*x*d = demonstration; s = scholium; Pref = preface; App = appendix.

All English citations of Spinoza are from *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).

Latin citations of the *Ethics* are from *The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza's Ethica* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

Latin citations of the TP are from *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Carl Hermann Bruder (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1843).

Hegel

LHP = Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 1: Greek Philosophy to Plato*, trans. Elizabeth Sanders Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 2: Plato and the Platonists*, trans. Elizabeth Sanders Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 2, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Volume 3: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Sanders Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

EPR = Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. Hugh Barr Nisbet, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

SL = Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni, Cambridge Hegel Translations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

PhG = Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Marx

CHR = Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Annette Jolin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

SW = *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Horkheimer and Adorno

DE = *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Jephcott Edmund, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002).

Rawls

TJ = John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Revised (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999).

Habermas

TCA1 = Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

TIOO = Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

MCCA = Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2007).

RR = Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God and Modernity* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2002).

Honneth

FR = Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2014).

SR = Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

Forst

JC = Rainer Forst, *Justification and Critique: Towards a Critical Theory of Politics*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Malden: Polity Press, 2014).

Introduction

> "The first one to go beyond promulgation to appropriate the new criticism in a productive way, and to push it radically beyond its own presuppositions was the genial Salomon Maimon, who had been inspired in his youth by Spinoza."
>
> – Jürgen Habermas, "Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen" in *Philosophisch-politische Profile Erweiterte Ausgabe* (1981)

Critical theory, which always sought to scrutinize social unfreedom, was inspired by a diverse panoply of sources, disciplines, traditions, interlocutors, and—most importantly—concrete material conditions. Beginning 1923 in Frankfurt am Main, sociologists, political theorists, psychoanalysts, and philosophers banded together to form the *Institute for Social Research* which sought to understand how Western society could explicitly proclaim freedom but implicitly propagate unfreedom amid the same population. Thus, the Frankfurt School was born. It was fitting that their influences were principally German: Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, the *maîtres de soupçon*, were among the most integral historical antecedents from whom they drew, as well as Kant, Hegel, and Weber. A common thread between these figures and the continued tradition of the Frankfurt School is the legacy of German Idealism. Further, what each of these figures undoubtedly share is an analysis of the social situatedness of reason and an eye towards necessary conditions for social freedom. The philosophical ground from which the Frankfurt School grew was fertile for models of social critique which center the normative standpoint of the theorist as themselves a socially engaged subject.

In what follows, I argue that another adjacent but eclipsed figure offers much to the continued development of critical theory. While he was a crucial partner in dialogue for Hegel and Marx, his writings have not always received adequate attention from students or scholars of either. It is Baruch Spinoza, the early modern Dutch Jewish philosopher, who offers several inroads to develop certain elements of critical theory, especially as it has grown in subsequent generations of the Frankfurt School. Here, I focus on three facets in particular:

First, the social dimension and detranscendentalization of the critique of reason.

Second, the development of suitable normative foundations for social critique.

Third, the critical dialectic of immanence and transcendence.

I argue that the assemblage of Spinoza's views on these points culminates in the view of society as a diverse unity, *social organicism*, a view which was once common in the history of social philosophy, going all the way back to the microcosm-macrocosm analogy of Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus* as well as the Stoic *anima mundi*.

I analyze the ways in which Spinoza's geometrically articulated, often unwieldy, difficult to defend view of *substance monism* has relevance for the concerns of critical theorists in several traditions. By undertaking this project, I hope to contribute to the recent and renewed interest in Spinoza among historians, especially of early modern philosophy. As I intend to argue, insofar as Spinoza's interpretation of substance has traction, there are continued ramifications for social philosophy today. For example: a crucial idea for the Marxian tradition, going back to the *Economic and Philosophical*

Manuscripts of 1844, is the historical materialist thesis that humankind is not set apart from nature in any meaningful sense. Marx reverses Hegel's idea that Mind is the ground for Nature. "That man's physical and intellectual life depends on nature merely means that nature depends on itself, for man is a part of nature." Marx writes in *The German Ideology*, against Feuerbach's view, that his conception of nature remains relevant only insofar as "one regards man as distinguished from nature." I argue that Spinoza's *Ethics* is consistent with a materialist, naturalist tradition and is by far the strongest predecessor of this thought in Marx.

Many analytic scholars working in early modern philosophy, e.g., Jonathan Bennett, John Carriero, Edwin Curley, Michael Della Rocca, Tad Schmaltz, Yitzhak Melamed, Martin Lin, Samuel Newlands, and Karolina Hübner, have sought to clarify the full range of the metaphysical entailments of Spinoza's substance monism, the view that there is exactly one substance. Far fewer within this developing tradition (c.f., Justin Steinberg, Andrew Youpa, Michael Rosenthal, Susan James, and Matthew Kisner) have brought these views to bear on social and political philosophy, despite Spinoza's own explicit usage of substance monism to clarify his understandings of political power and the role of the State. If Spinoza's substance monism stipulates that each individual thing—including every dust mite, blade of grass, and even human being—is but a finite mode dancing within the one infinite substance, then what could politics or social relations really look like?

Continental Spinoza scholars of the past forty years, including Pierre Macherey, Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Yirmiyahu Yovel, Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Étienne Balibar, Dimitris Vardoulakis, Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd, Hasana Sharp, and Julie Klein, however, concern themselves predominantly with the social and political implications of Spinoza's substance monism. Many of these thinkers are familiar with the importance that Spinoza had for Marx. They have laid the groundwork for a Spinozistic approach to critical theory. Each certainly acknowledges how Spinoza's core ontological commitments flout tradition. However, they often pay less careful attention to untangling the knotted puzzles of substance monism in relation to other contending views. How can Spinoza speak of the one infinite substance, almost as a deterministic puppeteer of its modes, while maintaining a relational, democratic account of political power?

I attempt to bridge the gap between the two traditions by balancing the concerns of both while considering the above questions about substance monism and its ramifications. I hope to tackle both substance monism's social implications and absurd entailments through considering the range of consequences for the view of substance which Spinoza espouses. The present work, therefore, has three metatheoretical goals which I hope to achieve through the establishment of the aforementioned philosophical implications of substance monism for critical theory.

First, to overcome barriers between Spinoza's analytic and continental reception.

Second, to follow through on the particular social relevance of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Third, to demonstrate the efficacy of Spinoza's resources for critical theory.

I envision that the project will be of interest for those involved in key generational divides of the Frankfurt School or in the recuperation of Spinoza's substance monism for social and political philosophy. However small the contribution, I hope what follows can push discussions in critical theory towards the tightly knit web of Spinoza's philosophy.

1 The Crisis of Reason

"*Reason itself destroys the humanity which it had made possible in the first place*."

– Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique* (1982)

Ex nihilo, nihil fit. The principal school of thought undergirding the Enlightenment's overreach of reason was the rationalistic philosophy which sought to elevate our capacity for reason as the primary bearer of truth over revealed religion and inherited tradition. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* proposes what I call a *crisis of reason* at the heart of modernity because of modernity's very fixation on reason as its guiding principle. The crisis of reason is a dialectically inevitable problem, coming directly alongside modernity's explicit rejection of mythology, a rejection which contains an implicit acceptance of the false idol of technical rationality, a problematic species of reason, yet still reason nevertheless. I attempt to elucidate how they understand the crisis of reason—not completely clear on their account because of its fragmentary structure—through a reading of early modern rationalism in which I argue that a similar point arises when its logic is taken to its limits. The problem: *reason alone drives both our* (1) *possible freedom yet* (2) *present demise*. The issue is structured like the conundrum of history from the start of the Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*: we oversee our fate—but not at our leisure. I draw a thread between the domination of nature to the domination of man, a *non sequitur* first noted by Seyla Benhabib.[1] I understand rationalism as a commitment to the universal intelligibility of nature through the *principle of sufficient reason*. I localize Horkheimer and Adorno's concerns largely to rationalism because of its universalism. Without rationalism's commitment to nature's universal intelligibility, nature's universal *manipulability* is not an immediate inference. Further, the same is true for the transition from the domination of nature to the domination of man.

In this chapter, I first (§1.1) outline the principle of sufficient reason primarily as presented in the early modern period before focusing on Spinoza's version (§1.2) and its wide range of application in his philosophy. Overall (§1.3), I elucidate Spinoza's monism, naturalism, and necessitarianism through his strident commitment to the principle of sufficient reason. Next (§1.4), I analyze how Horkheimer and Adorno arrive at their far-reaching conclusions about the crisis of reason in addition to Benhabib and Habermas's criticisms of their view. Elucidating Horkheimer and Adorno's view concerning how the Enlightenment commitment to the intelligibility of nature leads to human reification animates my reading of Spinoza. Finally (§1.5), I conclude by showing how Spinoza's version of the principle of sufficient reason in which everything is *immanens ex Deo* leads to the crisis of reason. Spinoza's philosophy helps understand the dialectical impetus behind the crisis. An implicit goal of my analysis is demonstrating the logic of the principle of sufficient reason as the motivation for establishing, e.g., God's (lack of) attributes or God's creation *ex nihilo* to

[1] In heelr book, Seyla Benhabib remarks on how Horkheimer and Adorno's transition from the domination of nature to the domination of man is not only unclear but never discussed as a *necessary* one in their view. See Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 218. I supply in this chapter a Spinozistic argument for not only the elision of the two but the inevitability of both by the norms of technical rationality.

be the same logic driving the social contradictions which Horkheimer and Adorno depict through the back and forth between Enlightenment and mythology.

1.1 The Principle of Sufficient Reason

Descartes's assumption in his *Meditations* of hyperbolic doubt concerning the external world by the dream argument established at the start of *Meditations* I is only truly discharged at the end of *Meditations* VI. He states, "[i]f, while I am awake, anyone were suddenly to appear to me and then disappear immediately, as happens in sleep […] it would not be unreasonable for me to judge that he was […] a vision created in my brain […] when I can connect my perceptions of them with the whole of the rest of my life (AT VII 90).[2] The problem with dreams: *they do not exhibit a causal structure*. As such, Descartes rejects their possible contribution to philosophical inquiry because they do not demonstrate an observable and stable framework for analysis. According to Descartes, in dreams things occur for no sufficiently discernable, lawlike reasons. Thus, dreams must be excluded from philosophical inquiry.[3] In the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesianae*, Spinoza's *mos geometricus* reconstruction of Descartes's formidable *Principia*, Spinoza assigns what is often called, following Leibniz, the *principle of sufficient reason* to Descartes at PPC1a11: "Of every thing that exists, it can be asked what is the cause or reason why it exists." Notably, for Descartes, an answer may be found, for example, my innate idea of God, or, it may not be found, as in the relevance of my dreams, although it may always be asked. I illuminate in following sections how, for Spinoza, this lack of cause cannot be the case as he takes the principle of sufficient reason to its radical limit. Aligning himself with a classical theistic view of God as transcendent, Descartes preserves the longstanding idea that God's ways are inscrutable. Thus, they are possibly exempt from our knowledge of them through the principle of sufficient reason, and potentially from the principle at all.[4]

Consolidating all fundamental philosophical axioms to the (i) principle of non-contradiction and the (ii) principle of sufficient reason, Leibniz writes in the *Monadology*,

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[2] Key to abbreviations of works by

[3] Foucault also found and insisted, contra Derrida, that Descartes excluded madness from philosophy because of his pronouncements in *Meditations* I against those he found to be *dementis*. Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); Yubraj Aryal et al., eds., "My Body, This Paper, This Fire," in *Between Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 62–81.

[4] Much literature has been written on questions of the coherence of Descartes's *Creation Doctrine*, whether Descartes held the view, and whether it is properly deduced from his correspondence. It is the idea that God could create certain eternal, necessary truths (*vérités éternelles*) and amend these laws as a king does within his kingdom. For example: Steven M. Nadler, "SCIENTIFIC CERTAINTY AND THE CREATION OF THE ETERNAL TRUTHS: A PROBLEM IN DESCARTES," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 2 (June 1987): 175–92, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1987.tb01615.x; Émile Bréhier, "The Creation of the Eternal Truths in Descartes's System," in *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Willis Doney (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 192–208; Jonathan Bennett, "Descartes's Theory of Modality," *The Philosophical Review* 103, no. 4 (1994): 639, https://doi.org/10.2307/2186100; Margaret J. Osler, "Eternal Truths and the Laws of Nature: The Theological Foundations of Descartes' Philosophy of Nature," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 3 (1985): 349–62, https://doi.org/10.2307/2709472; Harry Frankfurt, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *The Philosophical Review* 86, no. 1 (1977): 36–57, https://doi.org/10.2307/2184161; E. M. Curley, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *The Philosophical Review* 93, no. 4 (1984): 569–97, https://doi.org/10.2307/2184828; Michael Della Rocca, "Descartes, the Cartesian Circle, and Epistemology Without God," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70, no. 1 (2005): 1–33, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2005.tb00504.x. At Etienne Gilson, *La Liberté Chez Descartes et La Théologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1987), 14,. e.g., it is argued that the Creation Doctrine is the most fecund of Descartes's innovations.

"[o]ur reasonings are based on [these] two great principles."[5] Further, as Leibniz states in correspondence with Samuel Clarke concerning the principle of sufficient reason, "[h]as not everybody made use of this principle upon a thousand occasions?"[6] Leibniz highlights how the goal of any scientific inquiry is to discover the true causes of things, an intuitive axiom which Spinoza highlights in his own causal axiom, 1a4: "knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause." In Leibniz's philosophy, as well as most other Enlightenment accounts, the principle of sufficient reason takes center stage to reject purely occult (i.e., supernatural) causes.[7] Even with Kant's idealist Copernican Turn, at least *what appears to us* obeys the principle of sufficient reason's guiding law. He writes in the first *Critique*, "the principle of sufficient reason [*der Satz vom zureichenden Grunde*] is the ground of possible experience, namely the objective cognition of appearances with regard to their relation in the successive series of time" (B246/A201). As for Descartes, as for Kant: whatever appears in perception must have a sufficient reason for its existence and be structured according to certain causal laws.[8]

Leibniz may have offered different versions of the principle of sufficient reason, although I understand them as functionally identical. For example, in "On Contingency," Leibniz writes,

> For in necessary propositions, when the analysis is continued indefinitely, it arrives at an equation that is an identity […] But in contingent propositions one continues the analysis to infinity through reasons for reasons, so that one never has a complete demonstration, though *there is always, underneath, a reason for the truth*, but the reason is understood completely only by God, who alone traverses the infinite series in one stroke of mind.[9]

Leibniz's variant of the principle of sufficient reason indeed puts the emphasis on reason; however, *the mind of God* is primary for him because God can compute the unqualified, infinite depth of the reasons for contingent truths, which for him do not reduce easily to the mere identity of subject and predicate as in necessary truths. Despite Leibniz's focus on God's reason, external to human inquiry, there is always a sufficient reason for why what is the case attains and not something else. In his *Theodicy*, Leibniz still assigns a reason for why God instantiates this possible world and not another; this world is the best among other possible ones. Further, one should remark the contrastive, two-sided nature of the principle of sufficient reason. Not only do we need a reason for why things *are* but also for why other things *are not*. The Leibniz of the *Monadology* states of the explicitly named principle of sufficient reason,

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[5] Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, trans. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 217.

[6] Leibniz, 346.

[7] Leibniz, of course, because of his theory of contingency, opens the door for God's performance of miracles. Spinoza shuts the door to this possibility. Thus, as I argue, the unabridged principle of sufficient reason leads to necessitarianism.

[8] To reiterate, Kant limits this to the phenomenal realm; the noumenal realm of things-in-themselves is unknowable for him because of the limited possible role of pure reason in discovering extramental truths.

[9] 7/18/*24* 5:27:00 PM Emphasis mine.

> We can find no true or existent fact, no true assertion, without there being a sufficient reason why it is thus *and not otherwise*, although most of the time these reasons cannot be known to us.[10]

Again, the focus is never ultimately on our finite minds for Leibniz; however, at bottom, there is a sufficient reason for each thing's being *or nonbeing*. The principle of sufficient reason must be understood as a two-way street. If *x* exists, it demands a reason as to why. If *y* does not exist, it would theoretically require a reason for why it does not. In other words, a condition which blocks its existence must be in place. If the principle of plenitude (1p16) holds, as much being as can be *must be* actualized by God's power.[11] Since *y* does not exist, then it is also patently *unthinkable* by the principle of sufficient reason.[12]

The historic roots of the principle of sufficient reason extend as far back as the Presocratics. Parmenides of Elea, whose poem *On Nature* is unabashedly monistic, argues against the possibility of any change in the singular substance he aptly calls the "One." Parmenides writes, "it is [*to on*] […] thus coming-to-be has been extinguished" (B8.3-21). Although only fragments remain, Parmenides's radical monism shines through in his "Way of Truth [*alêtheia*]," the first half of the poem. As Horkheimer and Adorno note, the supposedly decisive break from irrational mythology to Enlightenment is compromised in its origins. Parmenides's philosophy relies on our finite, human rationality first and foremost. Although it is the goddess who hands Parmenides the ancient dilemma (i.e., *it is* [*to on*], or, *it is not* [*to mê on*]), she calls upon him to "judge by [his] reasoning (*logos*) the much-contested examination spoken" (B7.4-6). In other words, reason guides all things, including the truth or falsity of even divine judgment. Parmenides's poem also offers a succinct variant of a rationalist thesis concerning the natural world's intelligibility: "the same goes for thought as for being [*τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι*]" (B3.1, translation mine). In other words, one can assume an explanation or rationale for whatever can be conceived by the thinking subject. As Fatema Amijee and Shamik Dasgupta recently argued, rationalism gains traction because of everyday requirements of explanation. To put it bluntly, "every substantive fact has an autonomous ground,"[13] so if we believe in substantive facts, then we are committed to searching for their fundamental rationale. This idea is the crux of the rationale for the principle of sufficient reason. For Parmenides and other rationalists, reason's reach extends as far as things exist. Thus, if thought and being coincide, as he finds:

(a) If and only if we can think of it, then it exists (Parmenides's assumption).

Breaking (a) down, we get,

(b) If we can think of it, then it exists (simplification of *a*).

Conversely, also from the biconditional,

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[10] Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 217. Emphasis mine.

[11] Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[12] Spinoza highlights in 2p8 how nonexistent modes are still understood within the infinite idea of God just like existent modes. My ideas of even nonexistent things still exist but only as inadequate ideas through an unreliable imagination for Spinoza.

[13] Shamik Dasgupta, "Metaphysical Rationalism," *Noûs* 50, no. 2 (2016): 348, https://doi.org/10.1111/nous.12082; Fatema Amijee, "Inquiry and Metaphysical Rationalism," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 101, no. 4 (2023): 809–23, https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2022.2060273.

(c) If it exists, then we can think of it.

The consequences of this view are radical although it begins with the intuitive assumption, namely, reason penetrates existence in a meaningful sense. However, problematic contrapositives of both sides of the biconditional also seem to follow:

(d) If it does not exist, then *we cannot think of it* (contraposition of *b*).
(e) If we cannot think of it, then *it does not exist* (contraposition of *c*).

As I demonstrate in the following section, Spinoza takes the principle of sufficient reason back to its Parmenidean heights. From this principle, necessitarianism, monism, and naturalism all follow. Nature thus (i) follows its own laws without fail, (ii) cannot permit uninstantiated possibilities, and (iii) is the only thing conceivable in and of itself because it is the only legitimately self-standing 'this' which exists. If any of (i-iii) fail to attain, the door opens to the logical possibilities of occult causes, miracles, or restrictions on our knowledge about the world. Even in Kant's transcendental idealism, the reduction of human reach to phenomenal inquiry, the principle of sufficient reason still relates all legitimate objects of inquiry into things. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Spinoza all realized the sharp and inevitably *political* side to this truth because the domination of nature, whether it comes through the ancient logic of sacrifice or the modern desire for *mathesis universalis*, leads inevitably to the domination of man as another object to be manipulated and reified, made into a mere thing. Spinoza's naturalistic insight means if everything plays by the same rules, then we are as much of a 'thing' to be controlled—by other humans—as anything else.

1.2 The Spinozistic Principle

In this section, I begin by offering an account of Spinoza's principle of sufficient reason and Spinozistic relations which I demonstrate marry *existence* with *knowability* to secure the foundations of rationalism and the principle of sufficient reason. In the following section, I show how Spinoza's rationalism and substance monism entail necessitarianism. I contend that Leibniz's analysis of contingency and Descartes's Creation Doctrine both fail to draw the full consequences of adopting the principle of sufficient reason for inquiry. Later, it will become clear how Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments about Enlightenment *Zweckmäßigkeit* assume the recognition of rationalistic impulses formalized in Spinoza's *Ethics* are the key trend in modernity.

1.2.1 God as Substance

Spinoza offers only one overt formulation of the principle of sufficient reason in his own philosophy. At 1p11d2, he writes: "For every thing a cause must be assigned either for its existence or its nonexistence." I explore other implicit formulations and connections across his *Ethics*. Spinoza's methodology here is from the standpoint of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*); thus, he starts from self-evident axiomata and definitions to derive, in Euclidian fashion, certain propositions, each accompanied with demonstrations, scholia, and sometimes lemmata of varied length. The crystalline structure of the *Ethics* mirrors Euclid's mathematical treatise, the *Elements*, a rigorous and demanding formulation that obeys the driving insight behind the principle of sufficient reason in its very structure—each proposition has at least one demonstration and follows deductively only from previously garnered or self-evident truths. Spinoza advances only from this pure and deductive form of reason, taking reason to counter-intuitive heights and conclusions that flout philosophical

tradition and even common sense.[14] For example, Spinoza argues for all the following views: all substance is infinite (1p8), God has extension (or is *res extensa*) (2p2), God is the only substance conceivable (1p14), God is equivocally Nature (*Deus sive Natura*) (4Pref), mind is but an idea of body (2p13), and free will is incompatible with an eternal God who necessarily exists (1p11, 1p33, 1p35, and 1App).

Spinoza does not lay out his principle of sufficient reason neatly like Leibniz. He never even explicitly states it as an axiom in the *Ethics*, despite his adherence to purely geometrical exposition. Nevertheless, there is an implicit reliance on the principle of sufficient reason for the very structure of geometrical exposition. We can analyze connections and the driving force behind the *Ethics* to derive it from the book's structure. Michael Lin clarifies how every axiom of *Ethics* I helps to express or clarify Spinoza's rationalism.[15] The key to understanding why Spinoza thinks we can proceed from stipulative definitions and axiomata is because its object of inquiry, Nature, obeys certain constitutive principles and exhibits a regularity penetrable by reason because its structure is already rational. As Descartes's dream example shows, people cannot haphazardly appear and disappear from our senses, and the law of non-contradiction, another axiom of thought which Spinoza never explicitly names, maps onto our experience. Following the rationalistic-Parmenidean insight, the same goes for thought as for being *and vice versa*.

Although I do not explicate each of the axioms, take 1a1: "All things [*Omnia*] that are, are either in themselves [*in se*] or [*vel*] in something else [*in alio*]." By *vel*, Spinoza intends for 1a1 to function as an exclusive disjunction, or 'All things that are either in themselves or in something else *and not both*.' Already, Spinoza's reader faces a challenge to commit to the principle of sufficient reason. The scope of Spinoza's universal quantification is over 'all things' before their specific status as *modes* is encountered or explicated. It is not until *Ethics* II where Spinoza goes into finer detail concerning the status of modes, but Spinoza has the reader follow his classification of things into distinct categories, (i) things conceived through themselves and (ii) things conceived through something other. 1a2 reads: "That which cannot be conceived through another thing must be conceived through itself." If we understand conception as referentiality as I argue below, then Spinoza is saying, when 1a1 is taken with 1a2, we can refer to all things in their own right or through their higher causes. If one cannot refer to the first category of things from 1a1, things *in se*, by reference to a higher cause, then that thing must be conceived through itself by virtue of its being in itself. Finally, consider 1a3: "From a given determinate cause there necessarily follows an effect; on the other hand, if there be no determinate cause, it is impossible that an effect should follow." This amounts to Spinoza's rejection of occult causes. If a specified cause occurs, then its effect must follow. Contrapositively, if that effect did not follow, its effect did not occur. Nothing happens without a cause, even if that cause is unknown *at present* by finite minds.

[14] Spinoza and Adorno are both highly skeptical of common sense, opinion, pure imagination, and rote appeals to tradition to ground philosophical conclusions. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Opinion Delusion Society," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 105–22. Also, see Ep. 56, 2p40s2, and 1p15s.

[15] Martin Lin, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 134. He states the same of 1a1 as the principle "in disguise" at Martin Lin, "Rationalism and Necessitarianism," *Noûs* 46, no. 3 (2012): 420, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2011.00832.x.

Like many before him, Spinoza's Enlightenment-driven commitment to the principle of sufficient reason commits him to the intelligibility of being—albeit as understood through *God*, the one self-referential substance from which all things emanate or have their genesis. Spinoza's commitment to universal intelligibility comes in large part due to his commitment that God is conceivable under another name, as Nature. The structure of Spinoza's *Ethics* follows a path guided by reason [*ratio*] and intuition [*scientia intuitiva*] (2p40s2) to conclude definitively that individual beings are simply modes of God or substance, without any independently conceivable existence (by 1p15, 2d1). Spinoza, in many ways, exploits the common commitment to rational inquiry to demonstrate how inquirers seldom take it as seriously as initially set forward. Michael Della Rocca writes that we can only do justice to rationalism by doing justice to Spinoza, who himself pursues rationalistic means to their limit.[16]

Aristotle considers the relations of substances in a multivocal way. He writes in the *Categories* that primary substance is primarily a 'this' (3b10). By this, Aristotle means substances are things we refer to which 'carry' their accidents. For example, if I come across a brown desk, Aristotle considers the desk as the substance and its brownness as an accident of the substance 'desk.' These substances generally carry a self-standing nature for him. I can point to this desk, referring to it. I can leave the desk and assume it will still be as sturdy as it was when I return to it. I can distinguish between *this* desk and *that* flower, the desk from the books which rest on it. Aristotle also considers *secondary substances*, species concepts which possess a kind of necessary existence through his view of eternalism.[17] Aristotle devotes a large chunk of his *Physics* to refuting Eleaticism, especially the Parmenidean thought of the univocality of being to argue himself that being can be said in many ways ["*τὸ δὲ ὂν λέγεται μὲν πολλαχῶς*" (*Metaphysics* 1003a32-33)]. Aristotle says Parmenides assumes being to have "a single meaning when it has many" (*Physics* 186a24-25), submitting Eleatic monism to a *reductio ad absurdum*. In short, Aristotle says that Parmenides' conflation would ultimately lead to one saying that nonbeing, something that is not just being, is. If all that existed were being, meaning that all things have the same formula, Aristotle tells us that the same thing would be "good and not good and a man and a horse" (*Physics* 185b20-25) in a complete breakdown of distinctions.

Spinoza's principle of sufficient reason takes him to similar monistic conclusions; however, Spinoza's univocality of being hides an infinite multivocality of its own through his innovative ascription of *modes* to God's being. Deleuze's reading of the *Ethics* argues that Spinoza guarantees the ground of plurality and difference through first establishing God's absolute oneness and unity.[18] Substance exists in itself and is conceived through itself, requiring no other thing for its conception (*in se est et per se concipitur* […] conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, 1d3, emphasis mine). Ironically, as Aristotle remarks in line with the Hellenic view of his time, "*The smallest number*, taken without qualification, *is two* (*Physics* 220a27, emphasis mine). One, by itself, was not considered a number by the Greeks—instead, it guarantees the possibility of numerical existence. For Spinoza, plurality

[16] Michael Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto: Spinoza and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Philosophical Topics* 31, no. 1 (2003): 75–76, https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics2003311/215.

[17] In short, if there was no beginning of the universe (i.e., it was always in a process of generation and corruption), then there was no shortage of each species and members which manifest their reality.

[18] Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990).

comes through *modes*, affections of substance which exist in something else and are conceived through something else (*in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*, 1d5), namely, in and through *substance*, which he eventually identifies as God by the indiscernability of identicals (see 1p5) at 1p14. Descartes held attributes to be essential characterizations of substance (i.e., a substance is essentially and exclusively either extended or thinking), whereas modes were nonessential differences 'modifying' a substance. Thus, he writes, "we do not say that there are modes or qualities in God, but only attributes because no variation is to be understood in Him" (*Principles* I.56). Spinoza, on the other hand, ascribes modes to what we perceive as God's essence, attributes. 1p15c states:

> Particular things are nothing but affections of the attributes of God, that is, modes wherein the attributes of God find expression in a definite and determinate way.

To understand the force of Spinoza's ascription of modes to God, we must understand the thrust of his conceptualization of God as the one substance. If substance is conceived in and through itself alone, then it exists in the same way as Western philosophers and theologians have hitherto understood God, something I explore in further detail in Chapter 3.

Spinoza's argument in *Ethics* I for God as substance proceeds in its most skeletal form,[19] without considering the specific roles of attributes or modes, as follows. Notoriously, Spinoza's argument for substance monism relies not on any particular or special feature of God, rather, inherent characteristics of substance.[20]

[19] I am adopting Martin Lin's consideration of what he calls Spinoza's first argument for God's existence, an adaptation of the ontological argument. See Martin Lin, "Spinoza's Arguments for the Existence of God*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 75, no. 2 (2007): 273–75, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00076.x.

[20] There are a few potential problems on Spinoza's account which I do not detail here. Please see Galen Barry, "Spinoza and the Problem of Other Substances," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 49, no. 4 (2019): 481–507, https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2018.1475184; Ruben Noorloos, "'Except God, No Substance Can Be Conceived': Spinoza on Other Substances," *Analysis* 81, no. 4 (2022): 656–65, https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anab057.

1. Substance is *in se* (self-standing, 1d3) and *causa sui* (1d1).
2. All things are *in se* or *in alio* (1a1).
3. Things with no commonalities are not coreferential (1a5).[21]
4. Finite things are limited by similar things (1d2).
5. God is a substance (1d6).

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6. Substance must be considered before any modifications (1p1 by 1, 2).
7. If two substances exist, they must be fundamentally different (1p5 by 3).[22]
8. Substances exist by nature (1p7 by 1, 2).
9. Substances must be infinite (1p8 by 3, 4, 7, 8).
10. God is not an infinite substance (assumption for *reductio*, see 1p11d).
11. God does not exist (by 8, 10).
12. God is not a substance (by 1, 2, 11).
13. God is and is not a substance (by 5, 12).
14. God is an infinite substance (discharge assumption, see 1p11).
15. *God is the only referential substance* (1p14 by 7, 14).

By (15), God is the only substance conceivable and thus the one and only infinite substance. 'Infinite' must be understood as unlimited, such that no other thing could limit God. Something's finitude is understood as its negation by it having a limit or a place where that thing is 'not' (1p8s1).[23] Therefore, Spinoza states in 1p15 that we conceive everything through God since all things are in God. If God is the only substance conceivable, then particular things must be understood as *modes* [from Latin *modus*, manner of arrangement] following from the infinite essence of God.[24] Following a discussion of Spinoza's three relations, I show in the following section how this bifurcation leads to Spinoza's often maligned necessitarianism.

1.2.2 Spinoza's Three Relations

Scholars regularly identify three basic relations from Spinoza's *Ethics*: conception (*concipere*), inherence (*in se/alio esse*),[25] and causation (*esse causa* with genitive).[26] There are other noteworthy relations, for example of the often-underappreciated relation of expression (*exprimere*), Deleuze's major focus. Further, Spinoza puts what are not purely

[21] Spinoza's own version does not use the term "reference" here. However, I take the relation of conception to make a referential claim about its objects.

[22] Or they would be the same by the principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

[23] Here, one could easily think of Fichte's argument on the positing (*setzen*) of a boundary between the *Ich* and the *Nicht-Ich*.

[24] Kristin Primus uses Spinoza's argument to refute Descartes's Creation Doctrine, an argument I discuss in the following section. Kristin Primus, "Spinoza's 'Infinite Modes' Reconsidered," *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2019): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.25894/JMP.2108.

[25] As Yitzhak Melamed notes, there is no direct relation of inherence *verbatim* in Spinoza; however, scholarly convention has moved me to adopt the language. Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza on Inherence, Causation, and Conception," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50, no. 3 (2012): 368n12, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2012.0048.

[26] For recent and helpful overviews of the three Spinozistic relations, please see the following entries. Melamed, "Spinoza on Inherence, Causation, and Conception"; John Morrison, "The Relation Between Conception and Causation in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Philosophers' Imprint* 13, no. 3 (2013): 1–17; Zachary Gartenberg, "Spinozistic Expression," *Philosophers' Imprint* 17, no. 9 (2017): 1–32, "Introduction."

relational ideas such as existence (*existere*) and essence (*essentia*) to much work, but I limit myself to the three relations (conception, inherence, and causality) because I find the permeability of relations follows from the principle of sufficient reason, Spinoza's commitment to universal intelligibility. For Spinoza, conception, inherence, and causality all involve each other in various, difficult to discern, but important ways.

Conception is the relationship of referentiality. If *x* is conceived through *y*, it means *y* requires *x* as a referent. John Morrison uses the example of Socrates's smile, a smile which requires the additional, coherent thought about Socrates for its complete conceptualization. Adequate conception of Socrates's smile, then, necessitates the possession of some adequate idea about Socrates first.[27]

Inherence is the traditional relationship of Aristotelian accidents to substance.[28] If *x* inheres in *y*, then *y* requires *x* as something its more fundamental or self-standing 'container.' To remain with the example: if Socrates's smile inheres in Socrates, then Socrates is the primary bearer of the modal relationship of smiling, frowning, crying, laughing, etc., all states which do not modify Socrates himself essentially, i.e., he can go back to another state later. However, without humans, for instance, there could be no laughter because laughter inheres in a specifically human rationality. Having brown eyes or blue eyes is an accident predicable of a substance which can have identical powers despite a trivial (i.e., nonessential) difference in color.

Causation is the relationship of genesis. To say *x* causes *y* is to say there is a sufficient power in *x* to generate *y*. For example, to say Socrates causes Socrates's smile is to say Socrates can cause himself to smile. Although matters become more complicated with multiple objects, typically understood as substances, Spinoza's way of parsing modal distinctions actually simplifies the relations between things.[29] Modes are *Natura naturata* [as perfect *passive* participle, 'nature natured'], whereas God is *Natura naturans* [as present *active* participle, 'nature naturing'] (1p29s).

Take conception and inherence. Immediately, the argument considered above followed by 1p15 demonstrates the relationship between inherence and conception. If 1p15 shows how all things are in God because God is substance, or conceived *in se*, and if God is the *only substance*, then to conceive of something other than God will first require God as guarantor of that thing's existence. Thus, Spinoza notes, "modes cannot be or be conceived without substance; therefore, they can be only in the divine nature and can be conceived only though the divine nature" (1p15d). Modes are conceived through substance because they *inhere in substance*. Of the relations between Spinozistic relations, the coextension of conception and inherence is the most immediately apparent link. At 2p10s, Spinoza indicates boldly, "[a]ll

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[27] Morrison, "The Relation Between Conception and Causation in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 2.

[28] In addition, Melamed describes the substance-mode relationship as primarily that of inherence-predication. Please see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, no. 1 (2009): 17–82, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2008.00231.x. He critiques Curley's attack on traditional interpretation of Spinoza whereby substance must be simply the efficient cause and nothing more of modes, a view originating in Pierre Bayle's criticism of Spinoza's substance monism, in which God becomes the agent of evil by human existence as modes, or ways of being, of God. On Curley's view, God is understood not as Nature but *natural laws and principles of order*.

[29] Cf. Leibniz's understanding of substance. For example, in his *Monadology*, Leibniz must deny intersubstantial causation in favor of a preestablish harmony of the universe.

must surely admit that nothing can be or be conceived without God." As indicated, this is because all things inhere in God by 1p15. Drawing on a Scholastic distinction, Spinoza continues, "God is the cause of things not only in respect of their coming into being [*secundum fieri*], as they say, but also in respect of their being." God as *causa in fieri* of things means God is their cause of becoming, whereas God as *causa in esse* of things means God is their cause of being. For Spinoza, God is both. Thus:

(i) If *x* is conceived through *y*, then *x* inheres in *y*.

In ordinary language, if the ceramic is conceived through the teapot, then the ceramic inheres within the teapot. If modes are conceived through God, then modes inhere in God.

Considering this important Scholastic distinction, let us consider conception and causality. As Zachary Gartenberg indicates, much is implied by the causal axiom, 1a4:

"The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause."

Gartenberg writes,

(ii) "if *x* is caused by *y*, then *x* is conceived through *y*."[30]

For example, if the artefact is caused by the artisan, then the artefact is conceived through the artisan. Further, if the writing of the *Ethics* is caused by Spinoza's wisdom, then the *Ethics* is conceived through Spinoza's wisdom. Skipping to *Ethics* II, to know a thing's effect necessitates having adequate ideas[31] about that thing's causes. Alongside Spinoza's commitment to universal intelligibility, this means any effect witnessed will need a coinciding observable cause, otherwise something could be a brute fact by sneaking beyond this closed, conception-inherence conditional. Knowledge of an effect must track, on a rationalistic view, the actual nature of that effect.[32] In Hegel's view, Descartes and Spinoza's "first foundation" is this equivalence of the concept and being *causa sui*.[33]

Finally, compare inherence and causality. Modes are limited insofar as they require *something else* for their referentiality, namely, substance which requires nothing else. Following 1a1, if something exists, it will be *in se* or (*vel*) *in alio*. Put differently, something will be conceived through how it inheres in something else or in itself. Therefore, for Spinoza, inherence and causality must be linked if the power of modes is related to the power of God. 1p18 separates Spinoza from the purely mechanistic materialist philosophy of Hobbes: "God is the immanent, not the transitive, cause of all things." God is specifically the

[30]Gartenberg, "Spinozistic Expression," 22.

[31] I understand these as Spinoza's adaption of Cartesian *clara et distincta perceptio* because of his substance monism's views on God. For a detailed account, see Andrew Burnside, "Spinoza and Descartes on Expression and Ideas: Conception and Ideational Intentionality," *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 11, no. 2 (2022): 13–29, https://doi.org/10.5840/jems202211211.

[32] Michael Della Rocca considers the problem of what is often called the 'conceptual barrier' between attributes in relation to Spinoza's causation in Michael Della Rocca, "Causation and Spinoza's Claim of Identity," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1991): 265–76, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315187983-2.The problem of inter-attribute causation given 2p7s would seem to mean, e.g., "finite mode *x* causes finite mode *y*" entails a contradiction if *x* is a mental state and *y* is a physical state. 2p12 and 2p14 are clear enough, I find, to surmount this problem because whatever happens in a mind happens in a body and *vice versa*.

[33] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part 1: Science of Logic*, ed. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, trans. Klaus Brinkmann, Cambridge Hegel Translations (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), §76n18. Here, Hegel cites 1d1 to make his point, related to the ontological proof.

immanent cause of all things because all things inhere in God, or their power is a fraction of God's infinite power which flows from God's infinite essence. In fact, as Spinoza writes in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the power of God is the sole root of all human power (*potentia*) as we are but modes within God's being. He writes,

> Man, insofar as he is part of Nature, constitutes a part of the power of Nature. Thus, whatever follows from the necessity of man's nature—that is, from Nature as we conceive her to be determinately expressed in man's nature—follows from human power, even though it does so necessarily (TTP 4).

One may contest, God could cause only our existence but not our essence. However, Spinoza hints at 1p25 why God must be efficient cause of both. To say our essence could come from elsewhere would be to say there is something (conceived) without God. By the causal axiom, what is conceived must be conceived adequately alongside a sufficient cause. If without God, however, nothing can be conceived, then an essence apart from God's causal power would be nothing. If we can conceive of human essence, it must exist as something through God. 1p25s indicates helpfully how God as *causa sui* also entails, granted other things' inherence in God, their being caused through God's power. Since modes are not *causa sui*, they are caused by something else, namely, God. Given Spinoza's radical naturalism, detailed in what follows, all things must play by the same rules—for him, these are *God's* rules. If we are part of nature, our power extends no further than our status as finite modes within nature since our essences does not include existence (2p10), or we may or may not exist (2a1) unlike God whose infinite power guarantees our finite power. To say *x* inheres in *y* is to say that *x* is caused by *y*. Thus, we may simply state,

(iii) If *x* is caused by *y*, then *x* inheres in *y*.

For example, if UV rays are caused by the sun, then UV rays inhere in the sun. If modes inhere in God, then modes are caused by God.

There is an intimate connection between each of Spinoza's three relations, such that we can draw conditional relationships between them, as I have shown with (i-iii). However, an additional, fourth proposition which combines them by the Parmenidean knowability-existence thesis is harder to accept:

(iv) If and only if mode *x* is caused by, inherent in, and conceived through substance *y*, then *x* exists.

Whether such a view attains in Spinoza's own system is highly debated.[34] However, as I have shown, finite modes must be not only caused by but also inherent in and conceived through God if they are to be at all. We must and perhaps can only accept a *provisional* elision of these Spinozistic relations such that the three attain a functionally coextensive status. In my view, (iv) holds as a regulative ideal for thinking through the substance-mode relation. However, I avoid Michael Della Rocca's much stronger idealist thesis that something like (iv) attains necessarily because of some of the absurd implications of his view, for example, that all distinctions lose their meaning in Spinoza's view, an interpretation nearing the acosmism that Hegel ascribed to Spinozism, detailed in Chapter 4.

[34] Melamed contends that it is not Spinoza's own view but could be established as a "friendly amendment" to his system. "Spinoza on Inherence, Causation, and Conception," 366.

1.3 Necessitarianism

The principle of sufficient reason entails necessitarianism, an argument considered by Jonathan Bennett, Peter van Inwagen, and defended by Michael Della Rocca.[35] I show in this section why Leibniz and Descartes, staunch rationalists in their own right, refused to draw this conclusion of the principle because of prior commitments to God's freely chosen activity and human free will, commitments Spinoza flatly denies as superstitious, logically indefensible, and anti-naturalistic (e.g., at TP 2.6, 1App, 3Pref). In other words, Leibniz and Descartes did not take the principle of sufficient reason far enough, refusing a dialectical conception of reason, a Spinozistic line of argument I explore in the final section of this chapter.

1.3.1 Bennett and van Inwagen

Bennett's highly influential book, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (1984), argues *inter alia* the principle of sufficient reason's truth is doubtful because of its concomitant necessitarianism. Bennett states clearly how Spinoza in no way permits contingency in his system of substance and modes. 1p29 states clearly, "Nothing in nature [*in rerum natura*] is [*datur*] contingent." In Leibnizian terms, this 'possible world' is the only world.[36] Bennett describes a commitment to the principle of sufficient reason as "explanatory rationalism," the view that "there is a satisfactory answer to every why question" which over and above commits him to being a "causal rationalist."[37] Bennett shows how Spinoza argues for two things out of 1p16, that infinite things follow in infinite ways from divine nature:

(x) everything true is necessary

(y) everything possible is true

When we combine these, we can syllogistically derive (z), "everything possible is necessary."[38] Spinoza's view must lead to necessitarianism because unless (z) attains, something has constrained God's power of action whereas he has established that God cannot be limited by anything external to God since nothing exists as external to God. The two-way street of the principle of sufficient reason is helpful here: the existence of impossible things, like flying horses or cows, is existentially blocked by concurrent necessary truths. Aerodynamically, it would not work; evolutionarily, only certain bone structures would allow for the development of functional wings, etc. Put simply, if we take 1p11d2 seriously, all things have a reason for why they are *and not otherwise*. If all things are explainable and unexplained possibilities are blocked, then everything possible is true. Further, if something is true, it must come to pass unless other possibilities were open; however, as established, impossible things are impossible precisely because they were blocked from existence. Therefore, everything possible must be necessary, or all things are necessary. Notice, the principle of sufficient reason is animating Spinoza's reasoning here.

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[35] Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984); Michael Della Rocca, "PSR," *Philosophers' Imprint* 10, no. 7 (2010): 1–13, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0010.007; Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010).

[36] Although, just after Spinoza's death, Leibniz actually stated he had flirted with a kind of necessitarianism. See Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 115.

[37] Bennett, 114.

[38] Bennett, 122.

Van Inwagen, like Bennett, states the principle of sufficient reason must be rejected because it entails necessitarianism since it entails the collapse of all modal distinctions (i.e., this possible world is necessary). Van Inwagen's *reductio* against the principle of sufficient reason's necessitarian entailment works as follows:

1. All truths are contingent or necessary.
2. Only necessary truths follow from necessary truths.
3. "For every state of affairs that obtains, there is a sufficient reason for its obtaining."

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4. Let 'P' be the conjunction of all contingent truths (assumption).
5. P must be contingent or it would be necessary.
6. 'S,' a state of affairs that guarantees P, must be true.
7. S must be either contingent or necessary.
8. If S were contingent, it would just be a part of P and itself contingent (or entailed by and entailing P, i.e., explaining nothing, leaving the demands of the principle of sufficient reason unfulfilled).
9. If S were necessary, then P would become necessary, an absurdity combined with the assumption.
10. S cannot be either contingent or necessary.
11. Therefore, P cannot be contingent (discharge assumption).[39]

In essence, van Inwagen's argument clearly shows how necessitarianism follows from natural deduction by the principle of sufficient reason alongside the division of truth as either necessary or contingent. If everything has a sufficient reason for existing, then everything can theoretically be accounted for. According to van Inwagen, we must reject the principle of sufficient reason because of this absurd consequence of necessitarianism, even though he states, "many great philosophers have believed this," naming only Spinoza explicitly. Van Inwagen's main goal here is demonstrating a concept of free will—his need to reject Spinozistic principles is only expected.

1.3.2 Descartes and Leibniz

I accept the principle of sufficient reason because it makes being intelligible, grounds naturalism, and is too much of an intuitive principle in our everyday use (as Leibniz noted). Although van Inwagen and Bennett argue necessitarianism is false and therefore the principle of sufficient reason must also be rejected, I find turning away from the principle of sufficient reason leaves reason's reach incomplete and far too crippled. Leibniz and Descartes both accepted the principle of sufficient reason while rejecting necessitarianism, something I turn to detail now.

Leibniz's theory of contingency smuggles the will of God back into his analysis of the natural world. Strikingly, Leibniz foresees van Inwagen's *reductio*, writing, "Contingent truths cannot be reduced to the principle of noncontradiction; otherwise everything would be necessary and nothing would be possible other than that which actually attains existence."[40] Leibniz, as noted above, has to rely on God's infinite intellect for these contingent truths to

[39] Formalized, summarized, and restructured from Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, 202–3.
[40] Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 28.

exist by the principle of sufficient reason since he has rejected their reduction by the principle of non-contradiction. We cannot achieve what he calls a complete demonstration of contingent truths, whereas God, "who alone traverses the infinite series in one stroke of mind," understands this completely.[41] Thus, Leibniz advances two ideas: "1. God always acts with the mark of perfection or wisdom," and "2. Not every possible thing attains existence."[42] Leibniz therefore denies Spinoza's thought at 1p33 that things could be produced by God in only one particular way.

Confusingly, Leibniz also maintains that God acts and always choses the best of a range of possibilities—but through his free decree and wisdom by (1). Somehow, "God himself decreed that he would always act only in accordance with true reasons of wisdom,"[43] but all truths are not necessary. Leibniz escapes this entailment by claiming that *what is chosen* is not necessary although God's choice of the best (and the conceptualization of 'best' itself) is necessary. Our capacity of choice, falling short of God's perfection, Leibniz concludes, cannot guarantee that we always choose the best outcome because we are incapable of the requisite infinite analysis. God's will, being perfect, guarantees certain optimal outcomes while preserving the contingency at the heart of the universe for Leibniz. In fact, Leibniz underscores how God's perfection requires absolutely that he choose the best among possible outcomes, i.e., God's choice is not *ex hypothesi*.[44]

Descartes's Creation Doctrine is the view deduced from his correspondence that God creates eternal, necessary truths.[45] Spinoza would have had access to these letters because he references the Dutch translations of Descartes's letters at PPC1p6s which included letters to Clerselier (AT IV 445-7). Similar to Leibniz (and Aquinas before both of them) Descartes maintains that God cannot perform logical contradictions after establishing laws of nature. However, Descartes moves in a different direction by writing to Mersenne, "[God] was free to make it not true at all that the radii of the circle are equal—just as free as he was not to create the world" (AT I 152). God wills necessary truths *and their necessity* on Descartes's view. Thus, as Primus notes, because God has free will for Descartes, nothing is *absolutely* necessary but only and always in this iterated sense. The Creation Doctrine maintains that God creates necessary truths *but not necessarily*. In other words, the world could or could not have existed, and it cannot have always been possible.[46]

Descartes's Creation Doctrine is therefore more radical than even Leibniz's view. As he states in the replies to the objections to *Meditations* IV, "there is not even any priority of order, or nature, or of the 'rationally determined reason' as they call it, such that God's idea of the good impelled him to choose one thing rather than other." To illustrate his prioritization of the will of God, Descartes remarks,

> it is because [God] willed to create the world in time that it is better this way than if he had created it from eternity; and it is because he willed that the three angles of a triangle

[41] Leibniz, 28.
[42] Leibniz, 30.
[43] Leibniz, 29.
[44] Leibniz, 69.
[45] I lift much of my analysis and the name of this tenet from Primus, "Spinoza's 'Infinite Modes' Reconsidered."
[46] This was Avicenna's view, synthesizing Islamic creationism with Aristotelian eternalism.

should necessarily equal two right angles that this is true and cannot be otherwise" (AT VII 432).

The goodness of anything is radically contingent upon God's fiat for Descartes. In other words, Descartes takes the first horn of the Euthyphro dilemma; it really is only God's decision which determines what is good for him. In this move, he splits from Aquinas who held that God was the source of goodness but in an absolutely necessary way because God's act and power are contemporaneous.[47] Put differently, divine wisdom and divine power must be thought together.[48] Descartes's Creation Doctrine makes all things arbitrary because they rest upon the will of God beyond all else despite maintaining the existence of certain eternal, necessary truths which flow from God's eternal, necessary nature.

Spinoza's necessitarianism is closely aligned with his naturalism, the thesis that "all things play by the same rules."[49] His commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to both. In the case of Spinoza's naturalism, similar to Aristotle's naturalism, it carries widespread effects in his philosophy. First, it is his rationale for treating the affects and human affairs in the same manner (*Ethics* III) that he treats God (*Ethics* I) and the human mind (*Ethics* II). From the opening to *Ethics* III, consider the following:

> Most of those who have written about the emotions [*affectibus*] and human conduct [*hominum vivendi*] seem to be dealing not with natural phenomena that follow the common laws of Nature but with phenomena outside Nature. They appear to go as far as to conceive man in Nature [*hominem in natura*] as a kingdom within a kingdom [*imperium in imperio*]. They believe that he disturbs rather than follows Nature's order, and has absolute power over his actions, and is determined by no other source than himself (3Pref).

Della Rocca conceives of naturalism as the view all things playing by the same rules. We can also conceive of Spinoza's naturalism negatively, as Spinoza himself does: there is no *imperium in imperio*. Spinoza's *Ethics*, unlike Descartes's *Les Passions de l'âme*, takes human emotion as nothing over and above nature's power. Spinoza continues in 3Pref, "our approach to the understanding of the nature of things of every kind should likewise be one and the same; namely, through the universal laws and rules of Nature." In *Tractatus Politicus* 2.4, Spinoza argues right must be coextensive with power through his commitment to naturalism, the uniformity of laws of nature. He states, rights do not exist by nature but by convention. He continues in a critique of those who take humans led by desire or reason as somehow violating nature's law, expressing his negative formulation of naturalism again, "they think of men in Nature as a state within a state. They hold that the human mind is not produced by natural causes" (TP 2.6).

The principle of sufficient reason, in its two-way stipulation, necessitates a reason for a fact's attainment as well as a reason for an untruth's failure. Applying the principle of sufficient reason here, we would need a very good reason to treat human emotion differently from other concepts to not subject it to the same analysis of reason as the other concepts. Spinoza cannot find a reason to treat us as if we were in a kingdom within a kingdom; thus,

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[47] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), 1.25.1, ad. 2.

[48] Aquinas, 1.25.5, co.

[49] Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 5.

all our aspects can come under reason's scrutiny. Understood this way, the principle of sufficient reason, Della Rocca notes, tends towards unification.[50] Monism involves unifying all things under one substance, necessitarianism involves unifying possible truths under necessary truths, and, finally, naturalism involves unifying causal laws of nature as applicable across all beings. Interestingly, according to Hasana Sharp, all interpretations of Spinoza, from pantheist, "God-intoxicated man" (Novalis) to raging atheist (Jacobi) converge on the fact of Spinoza's unyielding naturalism, his rejection of a dominion within dominion.[51] Spinoza holds that all things, humans included, endeavor to preserve their being (3p7, TP 2.7). Human beings are modes (2p10c) which are *immanens ex Deo* for Spinoza, meaning we are *in Natura*. Thus, we play by the same rules as other things in nature.

Although I cannot belabor the point until the following chapter, Spinoza's unwavering commitment to naturalism is the most powerful version of the driving force behind postmetaphysical thinking, an assumption behind almost all of the Frankfurt School's inquiry. In the Marxian insight that we are the sole author of our own history is the Spinozistic rejection of an *imperium in imperio*. Nothing stands over and above us besides what is within us: ourselves, our inventions, and our hopes and fears.

1.4 The Puzzle of Enlightenment

In this section, I advance a reading of "The Concept of Enlightenment" that spotlights reason and its uses as the crux of the motivating principle behind the Enlightenment, leading to a *crisis of reason*. In short, reason hamstrings itself. Our ability to reason gets us into trouble but is also the only thing which can get us out. Like Marx's argument in his *Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the first step in the critique of society must be the critique of religion to ensure the corruption or injustice of any social order is not enshrined in a divine will or unchangeable by human means. Understanding the critique of metaphysics in Spinoza's naturalism is crucial in the critical tradition's use of Marx, according to whom we must understand our present oppression as well as our possible liberation as equally manmade.[52] Adorno unexpectedly writes at the end of "Education After Auschwitz," recognizing the conundrum, "against [the legitimacy of torture], however, education *and enlightenment* can still manage a little something [*ein Weniges unternehmen*]."[53]

1.4.1 Dialectic of Enlightenment

Horkheimer and Adorno are highly critical in their infamous *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* They are concerned in particular with the Enlightenment conception of reason which they interpret as the other half of mythology, not something apart from it. They open, "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (DE 1). However, as they state in the Preface to the 1969 Edition, there is a tendency in modernity "toward total integration" because of the "associated lapse from enlightenment into positivism" (DE xi-xii)

[50] Della Rocca, 7.

[51] Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 1–2.

[52] Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion and Its Heirs: Marx, Benjamin, Adorno* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), Ch. 5. She argues that Spinoza's critique of religion recognizes the enterprise as the necessary "arche" of all critique (16).

[53] Theodor W. Adorno, "Education after Auschwitz," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 204. Emphasis mine.

Earlier, in the Preface to the 1944 edition, they describe their first essay as depicting how "[m]yth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (DE xviii). The rationalistic program, in an effort to overhaul the foundations of philosophy, aimed at the "disenchantment of the world […] to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge" (DE 1). Through the animating principle of sufficient reason, the most radical rationalists explicitly reject occult causes, superstition, and myth[54] Horkheimer and Adorno seem to split the difference, however, stating both "rationalist and empiricist versions" of Enlightenment thought "do not differ" on the idea that "what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event" (DE 4). As Adorno notes in his "Essay on Form," Descartes's method, focused on attainment of certainty, is also focused on totalizing reality through a search for a *mathesis universalis*. *Ibidem*, Adorno pronounces,

> A "general overview" would be possible only if it were established in advance that the object to be dealt with was fully grasped by the concepts used to treat it, that nothing would be left over that could not be anticipated from the concepts.[55]

Adorno argues that Cartesian rationalism stacks the deck. For Adorno, the object always exceeds its concept.[56] To derive, magically, the contents of our thought from an imagined process is to beg the question, Adorno contends.

Marx presents a similar argument concerning Hegel's *Idea*:

> [H]e has developed the determinate reality out of the universal Idea. […] He does not develop his thought out of what is objective [*aus dem Gegenstand*], but what is objective in accordance with a ready-made thought which has its origin in the abstract sphere of logic."[57]

The abstractions of Cartesian and Hegelian philosophy for Adorno and Marx lead readers in the wrong direction. Instead of working from the ground up, Descartes and Hegel start from abstraction and trace downwards. In a rather Aristotelian fashion, each moment of the dialectic for Marx and Adorno proceeds from bottom-to-top, not the other way around. Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* demonstrates how the human acquisition of the universal comes like a unit of soldiers on the precipice of defeat who eventually rally around a vanguard. He writes, they arise "from sensation (*aisthesis*), like a reversal in battle brought about when one man makes a stand, then another, then a third, till a principle (*arche*) is attained.[58]"

Returning to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno write, "Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them." Further, "Nature, stripped of all qualities, becomes the chaotic stuff of mere classification" (DE 6). Principle of sufficient reason entailment (c) (if it exists, then we can think of it) seems to reduce (or marry) being to knowability, thus classification is being's fate. "Whatever might be different is made the same" (DE 7)

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[54] E.g., in Spinoza's philosophy, 1App, Ep. 21, Ep. 73., TTP 6.

[55] Theodor W. Adorno, "Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 15.

[56] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1983), 4–5.

[57] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* ed. Joseph O'Malley, trans. Annette Jolin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 14.

[58] *Aristotle's Posterior Analytics* (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1981), 100a13-14.

because whatever is classified as being is classified as knowable. The final political effect of the classification of being under knowability, they argue, is the ideological sameness of the culture industry. Although the rationalistic philosophers of the Enlightenment took themselves to distance themselves radically from myth, they only reinscribe its principles. "Both reason and religion outlaw the principle of magic" (DE 13), as all things become knowable objects through divine providence or logical positivism. Even the rational structure of language is suspect in the transition from chaos to civilization for Horkheimer and Adorno: "Language itself endowed what it expressed, the conditions of domination, with the universality it […] acquired" (DE 16). If the same goes for thought as for being, and if language expresses thought, then even language is complicit in the domination of nature through its universal intelligibility.

Horkheimer and Adorno identify in Kant a tendency towards technical rationality as well, as "There is no being in the world that knowledge cannot penetrate, but what can be penetrated by knowledge is not being" (DE 19). For Kant, philosophical judgments only clarify what was already present in objects. While "Animism had endowed things with souls," the unfortunate reality of modernity is that "industrialism makes souls into things" (DE 21). Enlightenment rips the soul from nature and leaves only a husk to be mastered; mythology's anthropomorphizing tendencies served the same purpose. Sacrifice placates gods, who are made just like us, as the example of Poseidon's laughter from the *Odyssey* shows (DE 60).[59] Ultimately, exchange and the barter principle are secularized principles of sacrifice (DE 40). Finally, in a dialectical reversal of Spinoza's idea from Ep. 76 that *verum index veri sui et falsi*, Horkheimer and Adorno write, "the [dualism of thought] becomes the index of the *untruth* both of itself and of truth. Ending their essay on a somber note, quoting Bacon, the Enlightenment unquestionably sought knowledge for "the sovereignty of man." However, "in face of this possibility, enlightenment, in the service of the present, is turning itself into an outright deception of the masses" (DE 34). Despite their totalizing critique of reason, Horkheimer and Adorno end on the recognition that reason's *future* ends are still undetermined despite its present use as facilitating mass deception.

1.4.2 Benhabib and Habermas

Benhabib's criticism of Horkheimer and Adorno's view is that the transition from the knowability of nature to the (self-)domination of man is unclear.

> The premise upon which they base their assumption is that the domination of nature inevitably leads to domination over others and over the self. It is unclear what kind of causal or other sort of connection is being established here: do they mean that social relations are secondary to the primary relation of production, and that we have to show the emergence of the social out of the sphere of production; or do they mean that there is an analogy, or maybe even stronger, a necessary link between the domination of external nature and intersubjective domination and intrapersonal sublimation?[60]

[59] Interestingly, Spinoza is firmly anti-anthropocentric in his concept of God/Nature. Please see 1App. For a further explanation of his view, see Ep. 56. Spinoza writes, "I believe that a triangle, if it could speak, would likewise say that God is eminently triangular, and a circle that God's nature is eminently circular."

[60] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 218. For a discussion of Benhabib's view, please see Matt Shafer, "Engels after Frankfurt: Nature and Enlightenment in Critical Theory," *New German Critique* 50, no. 1 (2023): 1–29, https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-10140705.

Benhabib casts Horkheimer and Adorno's view as an obscure, branching path between (*a*) the view that base-superstructure theory moves unidirectionally from the economic base to the social superstructure, or (*b*) that the domination of nature is necessarily followed by intersubjective domination. Ultimately, although she states they imply both (*a*) and (*b*) as assumptions, I argue (*b*) takes precedence on their view by taking a Spinozistic lens to the issue. Benhabib states domination of nature is the *explanans*, whereas social domination is the *explanandum*. Put differently, the social dynamics of disrespect, alienation, and hatred are the core issues to be explained for which the rationalistic flattening of nature as mere object is intended to provide an explanation. However, she contends this model is sociologically deficient or operates on a flawed philosophical anthropology. *Herrschaft*, supposedly operative on both levels and inherently antagonistic, offers no recourse through a non-dominative register of interaction. On their view, all interaction with nature is domination and all social exchange is conflict-ridden because it is structured by an initially thin model. Dominance, however, seems to apply best and first to the *intersubjective* dimension of human social exchange; therefore, taking social domination as the *explanandum* inevitably confuses the very order of meaning-making.

Ultimately, Benhabib's criticism culminates in the question, "what is the normative standpoint of critical theory?"[61] She raises this question because reason is hamstrung beyond recognition by Horkheimer and Adorno's characterization of the dialectic between reason and myth. In rejecting the self-reflective, subject of German idealism *and* the productive, labor-driven Marxian subject, critical theory is without means to reconnect *either* reason to emancipation or reflection to freedom. Benhabib's criticism of the very dialectic driving "The Concept of Enlightenment" is like Habermas's criticisms, to which I now turn.

Habermas, towards the end of the first volume of his *Theory of Communicative Action*, lambasts Horkheimer and Adorno for leaving reason without a leg to stand on, which he states they argue "was from the beginning instrumental" (TCA1 382) Habermas's *précis* of the thesis driving *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is accurate. He writes,

> Horkheimer and Adorno do not understand "the mastery of nature" as a metaphor; they reduce the control of external nature, the command over human beings, and the repression of one's own internal nature to a common denominator, under the name of "domination." "Domination of nature involves domination of man" (TCA1 379).

Horkheimer and Adorno, in other words, take Lukács theory of reification non-metaphorically and eternalize it. Although Lukács only meant to characterize a certain subset of capitalistic relations, indexed to a specific time and place, Horkheimer and Adorno generalize reification twice over.

First, over time. Horkheimer and Adorno differ from many other Marxian philosophers by finding the fault of late capitalism in something ultimately unspecific to capitalism altogether. The logic of what Adorno calls in his mature thought "identity thinking" is present throughout human history. Technical rationality only reaches new heights when married to the technological advancements of modernity. Overall, for them, the bad-making features of capitalism are not endemic to capitalism at all.

[61] Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 222.

Second, over place. Horkheimer and Adorno see all reason as technical reason, or reason was from its very use always instrumental and therefore implicit in domination. In Habermas's words, they "anchor the mechanism that produces the reification of consciousness in the anthropological foundations of the history of the species" (TCA1 379). Their unrelenting critique, Habermas writes, was from the "perspective of an objective reason that had fallen irreparably into ruin" (TCA1 377). It was Lukács, not Horkheimer or Adorno, who recognized the rational need to limit (or 'critique') the very critique of reason. Lukács, Habermas writes, was aware that there was "some reservation within the subjective nature of human beings that is resistant to reification" because the "'seemingly complete' rationalization of the world […] runs up against [this] inner limit [of] 'the formal character of its own rationality" (TCA1 368). Put differently, Lukács still believes in a bifurcation between objective and subjective reason, a division Horkheimer and Adorno elide in their acceptance that the domination of nature inevitably leads to the domination of man because culture and inner nature are equally reified in the thought that "the whole [is] the untrue" (TCA1 378). By casting off the supposedly untrue whole, Horkheimer and Adorno become unable, in Habermas's view, to legitimate either (i) any legitimate, self-validating normative foundation, the true goal of critical social theory, or (ii) their very critique of reason because their conceptualization of reason is too inflexible to differentiate what (instrumental) reason creates or destroys (TCA1 389).

After having discussed Horkheimer and Adorno's view alongside two possibly fatal criticisms, I turn now to identify a Spinozistic solution to the problems these criticisms raise. Benhabib and Habermas's criticisms rely principally on one of two thoughts. First, they argue that objective and subjective reason can be disentangled. Second, they consider that the thread tying the domination of nature to the domination of man can be unwoven. Put differently, they contend that the consequents of Horkheimer and Adorno's principle conditional argument do not follow necessarily. Either the domination of nature can exist without the domination of man, or subjective reason can be criticized without being grafted onto objective reason. However, as Spinoza's monistic insight can show us, the crisis of reason is, in every possible sense, a necessary crisis because of the back-and-forth nature of dialectics.

1.5 Spinozistic Solutions

Spinoza's radical naturalism—when combined with his commitment to the principle of sufficient reason and his monism—can demonstrate the inevitability of the crisis of reason. The limited Cartesian and Leibnizian accounts of the principle of sufficient reason, on the other hand, do not necessarily lead to the problem because of their accounts of the will of God. As I show in the following chapter, it is the Spinozistic conclusions of popular and presupposed arguments both for naturalism and the inaccessibility of transcendent reasons (at least to public argument) which make the inevitability of the crisis of reason manifest not just for Spinoza but for Horkheimer, Adorno, and the remainder of critical theory. Spinoza's universalization of reason is always a political issue for Horkheimer and especially Adorno, who never denies "to think is to identify."[62] Both of them note, however, how "Thought thus becomes illusory whenever it seeks to deny its function of separating, distancing, and objectifying" (DE 31). In this sense, I hope to argue that Spinoza's rationalism is a potentially

[62] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

less or non- ideological form of thought. *Prima facie*, it is an inevitable march towards the crisis of reason; nevertheless, dialectically, reason cannot be cut apart from its greater totality.

Spinoza's unrepentant adoption of the principle of sufficient reason leads him to necessitarianism, as I have shown. I have also offered an analysis of how Spinoza's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads him to substance monism, the view that exactly one substance, identified in 1p14 as the one, eternal, and infinite God, is in itself and conceivable through itself. Now, I direct Spinoza's commitment to necessitarianism through his universalization of the principle of sufficient reason into an argument against Habermas and Benhabib's criticisms of Horkheimer and Adorno's thesis that *there is a necessary transition from the domination of nature to the domination of man*. Call this the *domination thesis*. I proceed in support of the domination thesis in two parts. First, I detail how the domination thesis follows from the aforementioned Spinozistic points. Second, I engage with the possible counterargument that the Spinozistic account of reason still falls prey to Habermas's criticism of Adorno's conceptualization of reason as hamstringing itself in a purely negative analysis.

The domination thesis follows from the principle of sufficient reason. The domination of man follows from the domination of nature because technical rationality exhibits the same process of domination in either case. Unlike Benhabib's breakdown of social domination as the *explanandum* with the domination of nature being the *explanans*, the reality is that both forms of domination are the *explanandum*, whereas it is *reason itself* which is the *explanans*. Marx's *Capital* identifies a 'spell' over humanity in the capitalistic mode of development. "The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish."[63] Commodity fetishism is the transformation of human relations into economic ones, assuming commodities appear on the market as ready-made for consumption. However, Marx is clear that this spell has a completely rational basis. He writes, "Commodities cannot themselves go to market and perform exchanges in their own right."[64] As Hegel indicates with his idea of the cunning of reason, a group-interested rationality that all self-interested processes exhibit, the very reason inherent in humanity that causes us to act selfishly is the same reason that causes the motor of history to turn. Spinoza's universalization of reason is the epitome of this thought. If reason is the *explanans* of both kinds of domination as the *explanandum*, we can understand how there is a necessary transition between them. Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis, as I have indicated, puts an emphasis on the crisis of reason, meaning that reason must be understood as the *explanans* for all social domination.

The principle of sufficient reason states a cause must be assigned for every effect. If we observe social injustice or domination, therefore, we should be able to observe causes that necessitate this injustice. Objective and subjective reason therefore cannot come apart for Spinoza. Marx's approach to capital followed a similar line of thought in going from the commodity and process of exchange to an entire market presupposed by the existence of these innermost elements of capitalist production. Further, the role Marx assigns the critique of religion as *ur*-critique means that since we are necessarily the authors of social injustice, we can (and should) work through and rectify these injustices. Spinozism glides into the Hegelian thought that freedom is the recognition of necessity. Only on the recognition that

[63] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1 (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 187.

[64] Marx, 1:178.

the domination of man is something of which we are the authors through various social ills can we recognize our ability to improve social conditions. Necessitarianism is stereotyped as locking everything into a one-track outcome. However, Spinoza's necessitarianism helps us see how things could not have been otherwise given the inescapability of prior social conditions.

The domination of nature leads necessarily to the domination of man because the same concept of reason leads these parallel processes. Spinoza's TTP highlights the power (*potentia*) leading all human endeavors as the power of Nature. Spinoza's conceptualization of '*Natura*' here is not altogether different from Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the nature which is dominated by technical rationality. Unfortunately, as Spinoza's immanentism also shows, we exist *in Natura* because we exist *in Deo*. Therefore, insofar as we exist *in Natura*, we would inevitably be subject to domination in the same way as nature is, regardless of the fact it is our capacity of reason behind these parallel processes. It may also be objected; the domination thesis does not necessarily attain in the strict sense, or the domination of nature still does not *necessarily* lead to the domination of man as Horkheimer and Adorno depict. However, if my defense of the inevitability of necessitarianism follows from our inability to object rationally to the principle of sufficient reason holds, then the domination of nature *does* inevitably lead to the domination of man. If the principle of sufficient reason entails necessitarianism, then there is a straightforward sense in which the domination of man did necessarily follow the domination of nature. Further, as Spinoza's immanentism demonstrates, the reality of all things *in Deo* means we should not consider the mechanisms guiding the domination of nature as very far from the domination of man even if its historical truth is admitted as a contingent fact which could have been different.

Habermas and Benhabib assume objective and subjective reason can come apart in their analysis of the domination thesis. Reason at the level of working with nature and the process of scientifically reifying it, therefore, could be different from the "identity thinking" of subjective reason. Thus, it may also be objected; Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of the domination thesis is more temporally sensitive. It could be that they intend to state (in a non-Spinozistic way) that the domination of nature occurs first, then the domination of man is realized only secondarily out of the same process but applied in a different way. For example, they may have seen the domination of nature as a difference in kind, not degree, from the domination of man. However, Horkheimer and Adorno focus on a *dialectic* of Enlightenment. Their conceptualization of dialectics is not one-sided; thus, it would not make sense to conceive of them as viewing the transition from the domination of nature to the domination of man as a one-way street. Instead, their defense of the domination thesis must have been, just as "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (DE xviii), the domination of nature is already the domination of man, and the domination of man reverts to the domination of nature. Put differently, in dialectical inquiry, what appear first as two seemingly opposite elements reveal themselves as two sides of the same coin. Based on this, I hold the Spinozistic conceptualization of the principle of sufficient reason necessitates the domination thesis.

Finally, I formalize another Habermasian objection to the domination thesis. Returning to Habermas's argument against Horkheimer and Adorno, his key line of argument is effectively that they leave reason without a leg to stand on. In the totalization of objective reason by subjective reason, Horkheimer and Adorno are ultimately unable to even advance

the domination thesis, let alone a normative foundation for a critical social theory which could seek conditions to undo the domination of man. In other words, Horkheimer and Adorno's conceptualization of reason is completely self-effacing. The objection would work as follows:

1. Instrumental reason cannot clarify any reification of consciousness (assumption).
2. Reason must identify things (Adorno).
3. Instrumental reason is the key factor in our demise (Horkheimer and Adorno).
4. All reason is or becomes instrumental reason (Horkheimer and Adorno).
5. Reason cannot clarify reification of consciousness (by 1, 4).
6. Reason cannot identify some things (by 5).
7. Instrumental reason can clarify some aspects of reification (discharge assumption).

In essence, the Habermasian objection is that Horkheimer and Adorno's universalization of reason is self-undermining and cannot pull itself up from its own bootstraps. However, notice how the Habermasian argument itself assumes the bifurcation of instrumental reason from reason. Against this Habermasian objection, I contend Habermas sneaks this distinction into his argument. Nowhere do Horkheimer and Adorno find reason 'develops' on its own into instrumental reason. Instead, as referenced above, since myth is already Enlightenment and Enlightenment reverts to mythology, the very distinction between instrumental reason and reason, subjective and objective reason, was already delegitimated and undermined by their dialectical analysis of reason.

We can understand the delegitimization of the bifurcation between instrumental reason and reason *simpliciter* on Spinozistic grounds. Recall my argument concerning the three key Spinozistic relations of causality, inherence, and conception. If these relations are understood in the context of the *Ethics*, they come together and exist as largely permeable and interchangeable. For something to inhere in something else is like something else causing that thing. Next, for something to cause something else is for something to be adequate for conceiving that something else, etc. Similarly, the very relation between instrumental reason and reason should be understood as permeable. Under this Spinozistic understanding of how reason works, it should be clear how the Habermasian objection fails, namely, by sneaking in a bifurcation between otherwise permeable, dialectical concepts. To divorce reason from instrumental reason would be to try and pry the obverse side of a coin apart from its reverse. Horkheimer and Adorno do not argue for a differentiated variant of instrumental reason.[65] Therefore, the Habermasian objection is undialectical.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to introduce Spinozistic arguments to legitimate the *domination thesis*, the view that the domination of nature necessarily leads to the domination of man. I show how Spinoza's radical commitment to the principle of sufficient reason entails his monism, necessitarianism, and naturalism. I advanced a reading of "The Concept of

[65] It may be the case, as Habermas identifies, that Horkheimer calls for a clean split between objective and subjective reason. See *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013). However, Horkheimer's analysis, at times, waffles between the two as types or mere modes of one and the same reason. For example, pp. 13, Horkheimer writes, "Having given up autonomy, reason has become an instrument." Reason overall, not one or the other because of its *becoming* an instrument from a prior non-instrumentalization. He continues, "Reason has become completely harnessed to the social process," again signifying the same reason becomes harnessed in a different mode. Thus, I maintain my rejection of the Habermasian bifurcation of reason.

Enlightenment" that identifies a dialectical *crisis of reason* at the heart of Horkheimer and Adorno's arguments. Reason is both the cause of our unfreedom and the only means of our becoming free. I have considered two objectors to Horkheimer and Adorno's argument, Habermas and Benhabib, reconsidering Habermas's objection by formalizing it and demonstrating how it relies on an undialectical conceptualization of reason. On the other hand, uncovering Spinoza's implicit arguments for the principle of sufficient reason through a genealogy of the history of rationalism, I have shown how there must be only a single, dialectical concept of reason operative at all levels. If, as Parmenides thought, the same goes for thought as for being, and if there is only one possible world, then we must conclude that there is only one possible concept of reason engaging us in a back-and-forth struggle against ourselves. In objecting to Leibniz and Descartes's strong reliance on the will of God to defend contingency and libertarianism, I have shown how the principle of sufficient reason leads to necessitarianism by formalizing van Inwagen and Bennett's well-remarked arguments against the principle of sufficient reason. The same principle of sufficient reason also guarantees the link between the domination of nature and the domination of man. Paradoxically, naturalist reasons for accepting necessitarianism should be welcome consequences along Hegelian and Marxian lines. These reasons guarantee we understand the perpetuation of conditions undermining human freedom as radically modifiable by our own ends but still as necessitated by prior injustices at present. Freedom, then, may be nothing other than the recognition of necessity.

2 The Grounding Problem

> "To seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is a futile undertaking."
>
> – Max Horkheimer

As I have shown through my analysis of the crisis of the Enlightenment conception of reason in Spinoza, Descartes, and Leibniz, as well as Horkheimer and Adorno's critique, a dialectical understanding of reason introduces an inevitable problem. Our ability to reason could eventually liberate us—but undermines us at present. It is a tool to solve problems as well as the source from which they spring. I begin the next chapter by first (§2.1) introducing the idea of *normative foundations* and proposing an issue concerning justifications of social criticism and ethical demands by defining what I call the *grounding problem* for normative foundations. Second (§2.2), I formulate this grounding problem in terms of a dilemma to make its stakes clear. Next (§2.3), I offer a broad reconstruction of three views about the proper role of normative foundations in critical social theory. I find that they all have in common a handful of concerns, with the most important being the rejection of merely contextual standards in grounding social criticism, i.e., what *x* group happens to want. I agree with the overarching concerns in the debate—but ultimately problematize the possible determinacy of normative foundations. The normative ground for Adorno's critical social theory was the deep seated unfreedom which he saw in the modern European social order, relativized to this specific context and the need to respond to a particular set of social injustices. His approach did not jettison the search for a determinate ground of social criticism. Therefore, I conclude (§2.4) on a skeptical note, maintaining that the grounding problem is an inevitable—and possibly insoluble—issue for any critical social theory.

2.1 Normative Foundations

There is a bipolarity is at the heart of social criticism.[66] Negatively, social criticism concerns the possible configurations of our shared world such that the normative salience of different modes of living are diagnosable, often made to fit into categories of right and wrong, and subject to subsequent criticism. In broad outline, the social critic concerns themselves with the countless ways in which we inevitably come to lead our lives together in the wrong ways. Positively, social criticism involves making value judgments on how we *ought* to live together. I take the fact that diverse social groups of people live together[67] as self-evident and concern myself in this chapter with the question of how these *ought* statements, the positive half of a critical theory, normative judgments which concern the social sphere, could legitimately arise as binding on subjects. Stated generally, if the social critic issues normative judgments (e.g., using deontic modalities, 'S ought to φ,' 'S should not φ'), in what sense can others be said to be held accountable for modifying their behavior

[66] Benhabib characterizes critical theory as having two 'moments.' There is, first, an *explanatory-diagnostic* element which lays alienation, unfreedom, and social evil bare. However, there is also a second, necessary, and *emancipatory-utopian* half which is the "properly normative dimension" of critical theory. Both parts are required because without the first half, critical theory is indistinguishable from ethics. Without the second half, critical theory does not aim towards freedom. Please see Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, 142 and 226. Allen picks up on this thread in Benhabib and draws out the full implications of Benhabib's view. Amy Allen, "Emancipation without Utopia: Subjection, Modernity, and the Normative Claims of Feminist Critical Theory," *Hypatia* 30, no. 3 (2015): 513–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12160.

[67] I mean to construe this diversity of peoples broadly to include various ethnic, cultural, racial, ideological, political, physiological, sexual, etc. kinds of differences. This view can be likened to Rawls's statement as discussed in 2.3.1 of a *reasonable pluralism* of comprehensive conceptions of the good, except in direct reference to a diversity of individuals who hold these views themselves.

in response? If we are looking for a criterion for ethical prescription, or a *normative foundation* to sort good from bad reasons, what makes for a good criterion? Concerning the relationship between knowledge and morality, Habermas argues that critique itself is born precisely when epistemology meets normativity.[68] Thus, I consider the question of normative foundations as a question with an irreducibly epistemic dimension, a question which concerns specifically the *knowledge* of whether, how, and why certain duties to others arise.

As I showed in the previous chapter, Habermas's major criticism of the crucial thread underlying *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is serious. As he reiterates in his later essay,

> [moving from the domination of nature to the domination of man] is from the very beginning dependent on an impulse of self-preservation which mutilates reason because it can only make use of it in the form of a purposive-rational domination of nature and instinct, i.e., in the form of instrumental reason.[69]

The unorthodox Marxism of Horkheimer and Adorno finds the locus of the domination of humankind not specifically in capitalism, the modern era, or the industrial revolution at all but in an *instrumental rationality* whose history they trace back as far as the ancient logic behind sacrificial acts to gods and barter between merchants. The very act of thinking itself becomes suspect under Horkheimer and Adorno's critical lens. To many, this is their great achievement. Habermas, on the other hand, uproots this as their great folly.

Habermas cuts to the heart of Adorno's conception of reason and the possibility of dialectical inquiry. Adorno himself states: "To think is to identify."[70] Throughout his corpus, he picks out "identity thinking" as the key manifestation of instrumental reason. Although "the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived,"[71] the very structure of the thought determinations we are met with in modern society do not leave the possibility of escaping them readily open, if we can feasibly be said to be able to escape at all.[72] Given that we cannot avoid thinking and what technical, means-ends reasoning does to reason *überhaupt* is miasmatic, especially given the position that I outline in Chapter 1, where does Adorno's critical theory leave sympathetic readers after engaging with this Habermasian challenge? Call a generalized version of Habermas's challenge to early Frankfurt School critical theory the *grounding problem*.

> social criticism must espouse valid normative claims by appealing to ethical prescription (e.g., "S ought to φ") while at the same time recognizing how impure practical reason cannot offer guidelines *prima facie*.

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[68] Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), Part 3.

[69] Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment," trans. Thomas Y. Levin, *New German Critique*, no. 26 (1982): 17, https://doi.org/10.2307/488023.

[70] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.

[71] Adorno, 5.

[72] The generally Lukácsian objection to Adorno's critical theory of society is that it offers no escape or is trapped in deep cynicism about which values we can rally around. Adorno's response to this in "Resignations" appeals to the need for autonomy of thought to preserve an inlet for the possibility of good life, instead of a static, reified image of the good. Theodor W. Adorno, "Resignations," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 289–94.

Ultimately, Habermas's later derivations of his principle of universalization (U) and principle of discourse (D) both rest on the assumption that the Kantian procedure of making pure reason practical fails.

Habermas's alternative, still Kantian in outline, begins from the idea that discursive norms, instantiated in the default tendencies of our day-to-day informal relationships with one another in speech-acts, point towards a necessarily *intersubjective* practical principle. Kant's moral principle derives its weight from the fact that each rational subject can (or should in principle) be capable of independently reproducing its validity. In Habermas's critical theory, the very fact that all participants in discourse must share certain discursive frameworks or norms of communication effectively guarantees (U) such that (D) must follow (TIOO 33-4). For him, we produce these principles *together* as social beings, i.e., never through purely independent usage of reason.[73] I reproduce Habermas's principles of discourse ethics:

> (U) All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its *general* observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of *everyone's* interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation).
>
> (D) Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity *as participants* in *a practical discourse*. (MCCA 65-6).

Habermas is very clear how his method diverges from Rawls's approach in *A Theory of Justice*, discussed in 2.3.1. Habermas refuses to rely on a fictional *statu naturae* common to most variants of classical contractarianism. Habermas's participants in discourse, i.e., those who are 'affected' by the discourse principle, are fully embodied individuals. They maintain their interests, goals, personal identities, and aspirations as fully intact people, unlike those in the "original position" of Rawls's proceduralist thought experiment.

Habermas's focus on identifying standards or normative foundations for social criticism in the intersubjectivity of *communication* and *discourse* is not a fruitless approach to solving the grounding problem. Despite the easy inclination, however, towards an insistence on solving the problem and clearing skeptical worries, it is not at all *immediately* obvious whether the grounding problem can be solved because of how trenchant the divide is between relativism and metaphysics in how social criticism could muster the proper resources to ground its normative claims. Habermas and most other philosophers in the Critical tradition approach social criticism from a decidedly 'postmetaphysical' standpoint with deep roots in naturalism, going back to Spinoza's *Ethics*.[74] Ideas such as the 'will' or 'command' of God or

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[73] This account of reason, described by Anthony Laden's book, *Reasoning*, is a social form of reason. Arguably, this is what Kant proposed in the first *Critique*, especially when read in tandem with the essay, "What is Enlightenment?" Anthony Simon Laden, *Reasoning: A Social Picture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[74] The most paradigmatic case can be found in Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Of course, the possible exception to this rule is Rainer Forst who sees his work and project of justification in critical social theory in a deeper, Kantian vein. He also tries to avoid the idea that only certain individuals have access to a requisite, ahistorical truth because transcendental concept of rights stems from a basic, *universal right of*

other ideas of a 'natural order' in a metaphysical conception of justice are unsuitable to ground democratic arguments about collective action. Therefore, they are rejected by critical theorists in this legacy. Grounding social critique in metaphysical, ahistorical insights relies on special knowledge or access to truths that others do not have access to, contradicting the idea of a public discourse or of democratic norms. As Habermas writes, moral realism is an insufficient answer because the source of moral order is not easily located in the constitution of the world. Therefore, it is an implausible answer to ground moral philosophy for the modern age (TIOO 11). At the same time, justifying measures for objectivity in social critique is not easy or obvious without recourse to these kinds of transcendental ideas. With the rejection of even *formal* metaphysical concepts, e.g., Kant's view of respect (*Achtung*) rooted in his idea of *Humanität*, grounding social criticism without either relapsing into relativism or upholding whatever normative standards simply befall us is a difficult task. Although, as Marx and McCarthy both remark, critical theory involves "a clarification of the struggles and wishes of our age," critical theorists also invoke theoretical, *self*-clarificatory principles so these wishes have justifiable or valid grounds. To rephrase the issue, the grounding problem points to an issue for critical theory because without the special insights of pure practical reason, it is not clear how Frankfurt School-style critiques of society are binding or applicable in a way that should be necessarily of concern to participants in discourse. Hypothetically speaking, relativism stalks closely behind the rejection of metaphysical thinking and pure practical reason. If we seek clear reasons to reject relativism and advocacy of whatever interests befall us[75]—and to avoid advocating for merely *dogmatic* assertions—then we must overcome the grounding problem as to make social criticism still 'stick' to its object, the unjust social order, in a manner which holds others accountable.

Thus, I maintain that Habermas posits his initial objection as a grounding problem for critical theory to avoid the pitfalls of confused, weak, or insufficient *normative foundations* in social criticism, or for the very conditions of criticism. Although the concept of normative foundations is elusive and many commentators have discussed their role, I understand the role of normative foundations as follows:

> an ethical underpinning of a critical social theory which identifies guidelines for norm creation and following alongside subsequent social criticism considering said norms.

justification, or possible consent in principle to any legitimately given practice. Anyone, Forst thinks, can fulfill the requirement of abstraction needed for this relatively ahistorical principle to hold. As I will describe later in this chapter, Forst sees his own view as political, not metaphysical, as Rawls saw his own view.

[75] In short, I take this to be Kant's worry about starting from sensibility in ethics. If we begin here, we render ourselves unable to identify what can count as having *a priori* moral worth. Kant faces an analogous concern but accepts it; if we identify the noumenal realm as unreachable by insight of pure reason, and if we must have access to the noumenal realm to identify what has absolute worth, then pure reason cannot become practical without a transcendental move. I take Kant's maneuver in *Groundwork* III to be representative of such an acceptance, supposedly solving the *petitio principii* of the nature of the moral law and its bindingness upon subjects. *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor and Jens Timmermann, 2nd ed., Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Let this suffice for a provisional definition of the desired outcome of the positive, emancipatory-utopian side of critical theory. As Habermas states, critical theory has struggled to clarify its normative foundations since its inception.[76] He writes,

> But if negative dialectics presents itself as the only possible path of reconstruction—a path that cannot be traversed discursively—how then can we explicate the idea of reconciliation in the light of which alone Adorno is able to make the shortcomings of the idealist dialectic visible? From the beginning, critical theory labored over the problem of giving an account of its own normative foundations; since Horkheimer and Adorno made their turn to the critique of instrumental reason early in the 1940s, this problem has become drastically apparent (TCA1 373-4).

I turn in §2.3 to chart the debates over what could constitute a suitable normative foundation, offering my own analysis of the three major standpoints. Now, I turn to identify a dilemma within the structure of the grounding problem, leading into core issues with ethical justification and norm-prescription in general. In Allen's view, the common thread of most critical-theoretic approaches to normative foundations is the insufficiency of normative relativism at a first- and second-order level.[77] I agree with the authorial intent of these approaches in rejecting relativism—but ultimately problematize their avoidance of all relativism for critique and the turn to aprioristic normative foundations, especially in approaches taken by Forst and Rawls, detailed in §2.3.1. The normative ground in Adorno's critical social theory was the deep seated unfreedom he saw in the modern European social order. Honneth avoids this issue with a rejection of purely transcendent criteria for ethical life. The upsides of these more immanent approaches to social life and subsequent criticism, in my view, is not only that they help to avoid social pathologies, as Honneth has argued, but that they tend to start with what have become defensible, modern, Enlightenment norms. Principles of secularism such as liberty, equality, freedom, etc. are not bad ethical principles; however, their imperfect instantiation and supposed identification with developed, first-world Western democracies are key issues in their promulgation.

2.2 The Social Critic's Dilemma

The social critic is faced with a critical *dilemma* because of the makeup of the grounding problem. Recall the issue, which is abstracted as a universal proposition about social criticism

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[76] Most commentators and critical theorists follow Habermas attempt to clarify the normative foundations of the Frankfurt School closely. For a handful of in-depth works, see Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*; Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2007); Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018); Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

Jaeggi expresses her view of her own book in an exchange involving herself, Allen, and von Redecker, where she states: "I was interested in establishing criteria for criticizing where we are now." Amy Allen et al., "Progress, Normativity, and the Dynamics of Social Change: An Exchange," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 37, no. 2 (2016): 227, https://doi.org/10.5840/gfpj201637216. I take this to mean that she intended her book to be a clarification of her critical theory's normative foundations. Additionally, one should see, in my view, Habermas's entire second volume of *Theory of Communicative Action* as an attempt to rectify his diagnosis of the weak or confused normative foundations of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, especially in Horkheimer and Adorno. At the beginning of the second chapter on Habermas of her book, Allen writes "It is widely recognized that a—if not *the*—central aim of Habermas's work over the last fifty years has been to put critical theory on a secure normative footing." Allen, *The End of Progress*, 37.

[77] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 212.

from Habermas's *grounding problem* concerning the wide-reaching conclusions of the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> social criticism must espouse valid normative claims by appealing to ethical prescription (e.g., 'S ought to φ') and recognize how impure practical reason cannot offer guidelines *prima facie*.

The logical structure of the grounding problem, as I take it, imposes a dilemma for the positive half of the social critic's program. From the grounding problem, social criticism must both:

> (1) espouse valid normative claims by appealing to ethical prescription and
> (2) recognize how impure practical reason cannot offer guidelines [to fulfill (1)] *prima facie*.

Notice how the two halves of the grounding problem are intrinsically at odds. To restate again, (1) we need to do or prescribe a course of action and give good reasons for doing or prescribing it but (2) there exists some degree of normative uncertainty[78] because there is no agreement over the reasons or arguments grounding various courses of action. Having no clear answers on what actions reason prescribes means that universally valid normative claims are hyperbolic. If social criticism appeals to unclear concepts of ethical prescription, then it rests on shaky ground. Put simply, the answer is not as easy as prescribing we all ought to "do the right thing," "act justly," or "follow our intuitions." Fulfilling (1) is both necessary for the positive, utopian dimension of critical theory, but very difficult considering concomitant views held by most critical theorists who follow in the legacy of Spinozistic and Kantian critiques of metaphysics.

The need for social criticism to preserve (1) comes from a multitude of good reasons. To offer three determinate reflections, any critical social theory aims to:

(a) have its criticism be accurate and describe concrete material conditions,

(b) espouse norms worthy of following and hold others accountable for following them,

(c) and collectively envision how social conditions could improve for everyone involved.

The somber recognition of (2) comes from the internalization of the lesson from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which has roots in the Hegelian critique of Kant's aprioristic moral philosophy. Our capacity to reason creates as many problems as it solves. Now, I turn to elucidate these three reflections on the requirements of social critique.

(a) I take it as true that critical theory has specifically *normative* aims and is not merely a descriptive practice in its negative aspect of unveiling the depths of social injustice. If, as Fraser has put it, following up on Marx's own understanding of critical philosophy, that it involves a "clarification of the struggles of our age," the invocation of *struggles* implies an active motivation to transform the situations in which we are embroiled. Horkheimer's

[78] My understanding of the necessity of admitting a "normative uncertainty" is what arises out of the critique of Kantian moral philosophy in Hegel's *EPR*. In short, the Kantian categorical imperative's strength is reduced to an "empty ought." It seems like perfect duties may conflict—I believe moral tragedies are possible, whereas Kant seems to deny them, which I find to be a problem for his aprioristic formulation of the categorical imperative. For example, take the need to have one's life completely committed to both one's family and career.

classic, programmatic distinction in "Traditional and Critical Theory" criticizes precisely the idea that a purely descriptive theoretical practice is, first, at all even possible, and second, useful as a standpoint for the social sciences. I take Horkheimer's insistence that critical theory has liberatory aims seriously in its "concern for the abolition of social injustice" as its only specific influence.[79] Critical theory, in this sense, has principally historical aims.[80] Critical theory's normative aim is not divorced from its descriptive aims. One accompanies the other: not only does an accurate description of our predicament helps to evaluate the need for action but the desire to act itself encourages the careful diagnostic practices. Involved in this normative aim, which will involve description, is the need to hold others accountable and envision how things could be better in social critique.[81]

(b) Horkheimer and Adorno offer strong reasons to be skeptical of the totalization of the capacity of reason as a liberating force—reason is precisely what got us into the bind we are in, if we are the authors of our social arrangements. As Habermas states, in a sweeping gesture, all conceptions of reason and thinking for them fall under the banner of a technical rationality which wraps means-ends reasoning up with our enslavement (TCA1 379). As the narrative goes, the domination of nature supposedly leads to the domination of man. The facility to create aqueducts and bridges allows the same capacity which can enslave humans and torture prisoners. As stated, Horkheimer and Adorno differ from some of their Marxian contemporaries by finding the locus of domination in rationality itself, not a particular economic arrangement or mode of production. The ironic lesson of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that rationalization processes have a remarkable amount of trouble solving problems, all of which are self-imposed, when left to their own devices. Even Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action*, which criticizes Horkheimer and Adorno on this point, offers a Weberian picture of society where the rationalizing effects of modernity have some positive yet still some negative effects on the social world. Habermas's core idea that *system colonizes lifeworld*, in short, is due to the effects which unchecked processes of rationalization have on our ability to communicate effectively to one another through speech-acts. If we criticize this long list of inadequate norms, the idea is that we ought to propose a different way of life in opposition to these inadequate ways of structuring our lives together. If we are unable to hold others or those responsible for the propagation of certain norms accountable for their actions, then we are unable even to begin to legitimate the positive function of social critique. In this sense, to espouse worthwhile norms is to first critique those currently before us which fall radically short of their intentions.

(c) Honneth, building on Habermas, has sought to demonstrate that humans share a deeply political conviction: an *emancipatory interest*.[82] For both, all use of reason and claims

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[79] Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1982), 242.

[80] Horkheimer, 234. Horkheimer praises Hegel's immanent method of the *Phenomenology* which carries over to the SL and is inherited by Marx in *Capital*, "examples of the same method" at pp. 234, which I take to be a refutation in his view of a non-normative or purely scientific Marx in *Capital* who is not concerned principally and primarily with the objective, economic dimension of his social critique.

[81] This aim is what Allen discusses as present in Benhabib's requirement for effective critical social theories. Allen, "Emancipation without Utopia."

[82] This idea has roots in Horkheimer's early work, which I cite here. Habermas elucidates his full view in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. For a recent and helpful discussion of this concept, see Malte Frøslee Ibsen, "Domination, Social Norms, and the Idea of an Emancipatory Interest," *Constellations* 31, no. 2 (2024): 160–73, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12674.

of knowledge carry with them a normative interest. The basic gist of the Left Hegelian thought is that in the absence of a deep, unshakable conviction that we should liberate ourselves and pursue autonomy, any positive social change could be construed on the empty 'ought' which Hegel criticized in Kant's formulation of practical reason.[83] Instead, the fulfillment of the proletariat's wishes should be construed as distinctly *rational*, or in line with the revolutionary or abolitionary tendencies inherent to knowledge claims which seek domination's end and have intersubjective implications. For this view, social struggles take on the character of elucidating certain bases of knowledge, namely, what we ought to desire as rational participants in a shared, social order.[84] Therefore, Honneth argues, there is an *epistemic* basis to social struggles, demonstrated by Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The idea that even a slave cannot be forced to surrender his right to rebel has roots in early modern political theory (especially Hobbes and Spinoza) and is part of the basis of this idea of an emancipatory interest. Improvement of social conditions is one of humanity's innate desires, or what Honneth calls in this lecture the "de-naturalization of hegemonic patterns."

Ultimately, I do not argue that the grounding problem is completely fatal in the search for an adequate critical theory of society even if the problem itself is insoluble. Habermas's reading of Adorno's critical approach as reliant on confused or insufficient normative foundations for its social criticism implies that Adorno does not offer an adequate critical theory of society. I understand the search for an 'adequate' critical theory as closely aligned with Horkheimer's criteria. An adequate critical theory of society must be bipolar. It must function with its descriptive *and* normative halves, both always in view, in pursuit of "man's emancipation from slavery" or "abolition of social injustice."[85] Traditional theory, resigned to knowledge for its own sake, distances itself from its objects and settles for the possibility of a pure description, whereas critical theory sees the theorist as inseparable from the objects of their analysis. In the "Postscript" to his "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer writes that critical theory "has for its object men as producers of their own historical way of life in its totality."[86] Based on Horkheimer's understanding, it should be uncontroversial to say that critical theory proceeds with its positive goal, identification of the sources of normativity and legitimating ethical prescriptions, always in mind. Accordingly, the need for a settled, ideal normative foundation is untenable because of the positive, normative, or prescriptive requirement of all critical theories. In other words, critical theory would have to remain too silent to fulfill its positive aim were it to require an unchanging normative foundation before advancing normative prescriptions. It is not practical, therefore, to necessitate an ahistoric solution to the grounding problem.

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[83] Honneth makes this clear in "Is There an Emancipatory Interest? An Attempt to Answer Critical Theory's Most Fundamental Question," *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (2017): 908–20, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12321.

[84] Honneth, 915–16.

[85] Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 242; Max Horkheimer, "Postscript," in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et al. (New York: Continuum, 1982), 246.

[86] Horkheimer, "Postscript," 244. I like to see Horkheimer's point as equivalent to Marx's point in his Introduction of his Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. In short, we must view society's standpoint not as fixed by God or natural forces for there to be the possibility of amending it to remain justifiably open to us. As Marx put it, "the first step in the critique of society is the critique of religion."

To recall the crux of the issue, the first horn of the dilemma is that critical theory must have a normative dimension and prescribe actions in pursuit of liberation from injustice. This comes into conflict with the second horn, that critical theory at large is skeptical of prescriptive moral judgments under an outright, objective, and ahistorical standard.[87] As Habermas writes, "moral commands can no longer be publicly justified from a transcendent God's eye point of view" (TIOO 7). Another way of thinking about the second horn of the Social Critic's Dilemma is similarly to how Elizabeth Anscombe criticizes the possible role of moral philosophy for post-Enlightenment thinkers. Further, as Horkheimer famously stated, "To seek to salvage an unconditional meaning without God is a futile undertaking." Parlance about absolute moral obligations makes little sense in the sociocultural absence of belief in a divine lawgiver or punishment for transgression.[88] I assert that if we take the post-Kantian, naturalistic leanings of the Frankfurt School seriously, then we cannot avoid the implication of inevitable normative uncertainty. To offer a few key examples: there is no specific, prepackaged version of the right life for Honneth, Adorno was skeptical of all hypostatization of the good without direct access to specific instantiations of happiness, and both Habermas and Forst view their theories of justification as pertaining primarily to our *epistemic* lives in the space of reasons. As a final way to stress this point, critical theory has an innate skepticism of ideas like the "Given" or moral realism, as Nancy Fraser's line of critique against Honneth goes; therefore, practice-independent and ahistorical forms of moral theorizing become much less plausible (if not completely impossible) for the social critic to justify.[89]

2.3 Suitable Normative Foundations

In this section, I follow the Social Critic's Dilemma with a *trilemma*, reflective of the Münchhausen trilemma for epistemic justification. The problem was first heralded by Pyrrhonians as an argument for a global suspension of judgment (*epoché*).[90] Several critical theorists working out of the Frankfurt School[91] and participating in debates surrounding normative foundations in the tradition have attempted to chart out positions on how to proceed considering the need for normative foundations in social criticism. There are myriads of approaches; however, I am influenced most by a story in the ambivalent reception of the first generation which moves towards an immanent, historically mediated methodology,

[87] Even Jaeggi, who claims that her immanent critique of forms of life is not quietist about right and wrong ways of living, ends up discussing the possibility of experiments in ways of living, and societal learning processes, pragmatist solutions suggesting a fallibilist epistemic standpoint and lack of clear and distinct answers to the problems themselves.

[88] G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100037943.

[89] Titus Stahl, "Immanent Critique and Particular Moral Experience," *Critical Horizons* 23, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 7, https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2017.1376939.

[90] Ultimately, this maps onto a kind of *regress problem*, something affecting all theories of justification in the same manner, whether in value theory or epistemology.

[91] Jaeggi, Evans, and Cooke all offer accounts which chart out the relationship to which I apply the labels from contemporary metaethics of invariantism, contextualism, and relativism. Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*; Justin Evans, "On the Very Idea of Normative Foundations in Critical Social Theory," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 49, no. 4 (May 2023): 385–408, https://doi.org/10.1177/01914537211059512; Maeve Cooke, "Between 'Objectivism' and 'Contextualism': The Normative Foundations of Social Philosophy," *Critical Horizons* 1, no. 2 (February 12, 2000): 193–227, https://doi.org/10.1163/156851600750133342.

inspired by Hegel, as the best solution to the threats of relativism and metaphysics as pitfalls in establishing normative foundations for subsequent use in social criticism.

Call this the 'Two Modes' Argument:

(1) All things must be understood either *in se* or *in alio*.
(2) Not all things are understood *in se*.
(3) Therefore, some things are understood *in alio*.

(3) presents an issue because we must therefore repeat the very process of reasoning involved to derive (3) from (1-2). (3) must be followed by a set of reasons external to it, otherwise (3) begs the question. So, consider now:

(4) All things understood *in alio* require a different, more fundamental thing.
(5) A more fundamental thing would be understood *in se*.
(6) However, *nothing is (legitimately) understood* in se.

The point undergirding Sextus's Two Modes Argument is that good conclusions require convincing, external justifications. The argument is thus a *dialectical* one,[92] and good conclusions are dialectical. However, since these requirements about all external justifications being subject to the same scrutiny as any other conclusion, the process must then continue, *ad infinitum*, such that it is impossible to ever grasp some undisputable premises *in se* because an infinite regress ensues.

If the Two Modes Argument does not suffice to demonstrate the problem which the establishment of a criterion for knowledge poses, Sextus also presents another way of showing the problem which has become more popular. Consider two interlocking lines of questioning:

a) What do we know? What is the extent of our knowledge?
b) How are we to decide whether we know? What are the criteria of knowledge?[93]

The answer to the first question impinges on whatever possible answer is proffered to the second. Knowledge claims rely on having some criterion by which the true and the false are sorted. However, the criterion itself is only as good as its ability to sort the true from the false. This is a vicious circle because the criterion derives its validity from nothing other than the results which it stipulates, dogmatically. A criterion is 'good' if and only if it legitimately sorts the true from the false, and the true is sorted from the false using a criterion. Clearly, this vicious loop must be broken or cease to progress at some point if any ultimate form of justification of knowledge, practical or theoretical, is possible.

Hegel attempts to address the problem of the criterion through what is often called the coherentist response.[94] Hegel presents a *meta-level* problem of the criterion in his *History of Philosophy*, contra Hume. Empiricism requires that knowledge be rooted in experience. However, experience is required to justify empiricism. Therefore, empiricism cannot gain

[92] Scott F. Aikin, "Deep Disagreement and the Problem of the Criterion," *Topoi* 40, no. 5 (November 2021): 1017, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-018-9568-y.

[93] Roderick M. Chisholm, *The Problem of the Criterion* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1973), 12.

[94] Westphal, Bristow, and Rockmore all argue that Hegel offers a coherentist response to the problem of the criterion.

level epistemic footing because it relies on begging the question for its deployment. Hegel's solution to the problem of the criterion on this meta-level is to argue that knowledge and its criterion mutually entail one another in a way which escapes the problematic circularity. Thus, Hegel proposes a *virtuous* circularity, otherwise known more simply as *coherentism*. In the *Phenomenology* (§81), Hegel argues that Science must presuppose a distinction of itself against apparent knowledge such that Science is justified. However,

> it would seem that it [the distinction] cannot take place without some presupposition which can serve as its underlying criterion [*Maßstab*]. For an examination consists in applying an accepted criterion [*Maßstab*], and in determining whether something is right or wrong on the basis of the resulting agreement or disagreement of the thing examined [...]. But here, where Science has just begun to come on the scene, neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself.

In other words, as I have established, the question of knowledge rests on having some mode of distinguishing truth from falsity. However, distinguishing truth from falsity at all rests on having some token of knowledge. Science's ultimate ground as a kind of knowing, or "where Science has just begun to come on the scene" is self-effacing because "neither Science nor anything else has yet justified itself."

There are a few possible 'solutions' to *evade* the problem of the criterion, none of which are typically considered to *solve* the regress. In my view, Hegel's coherentist move does not actually address the problem itself but merely sidesteps it. The crux of the problem of the criterion does not allow for the criteria of knowledge and knowledge itself to co-create one another. In other words, as Hegel knows, you need to start somewhere to get somewhere else. To presuppose that we end up where we arrive is only to dodge the issue and place knowledge exactly where we want to find it.[95] As Habermas forcefully argues in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Hegel's critique of Kantian skepticism does not proceed immanently because it presupposes something particular to Hegel's own frame of reference, the Absolute.[96]

First, one can bite the bullet and beg the question. Second, one can agree that reasons justify reasons *ad infinitum* such that there is no legitimate end. Third, one can dogmatically assert something *in se* which justifies other things known through it. Notice, again, how the trilemma of suitable normative foundations maps onto the problem of the criterion. The first approach functions like contextualism. The second maps onto relativism. Finally, the third is invariantism. None of these approaches 'solve' the *diallelus* but the former two only take what the Skeptic considers a drawback to be a virtue or a nonissue, respectively. The invariantist argues that their central, Archimedean point is not dogmatic but well-founded. The relativist takes the impossibility of absolute foundations not to be an issue at all, working from within what Sara Ahmed has called "the messiness of the experiential."[97] Only the contextualist, I find, accepts the full weight of the Skeptical wheel by biting the bullet. To suppose, *arguendo*, an arbitrary beginning (of knowledge or ethical norms), the contextualist

[95] Christine M. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 34. She writes, "the realist like the cosmologist places the necessity where he wanted to find it."

[96] Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 12.

[97] Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Duke University Press, 2020), 22, https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822392781.

puts knowledge-claims into the context of their utterance in order to determine their validity. While the contextualist approach does not solve the problem directly, it considers the problem to be a legitimate one.

One could ask: if the problem is so severe, why not opt for a purely skeptical approach to normative foundations? Relativism, in this sense, could be the view which draws the fullest weight and range of implications from the *diallelus* since it admits that all knowledge, or any valid normative foundation, is an unachievable end. Sextus advanced the problem of the criterion as a *reductio* for all knowledge or understanding. On his view, if such a simple line of questioning puts basic epistemic principles into a freefall, then they must be rejected. However, I think that this is where the practicality of Pyhrronist epistemological skepticism separates from the ethical skepticism of Foucauldian genealogy. The question of normative foundations, or what I have cast as the grounding problem, is fundamentally a dilemma between needing to advance social criticism while acknowledging our epistemic finitude and fallibility. Thus, the more practical and theoretically sound line of argument is contextualism because it maintains the need for normative foundations while acknowledging the infeasibility and epistemic break of the special knowledge involved in positing ahistorical grounds for social criticism.

At the start of *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Habermas introduces a key problematic in the history of Western philosophy: the role of the *maître penseur*. Figures like Kant, Hegel, and Marx, to borrow his examples, who write with an eye to systematicity, are endangered because of the implausibility of holding the position as both usher (*Platzanweiser*) and judge of the objective truth.[98] Instead, Habermas prefers the limited roles of stand-in (*Platzhalter*) and interpreter. In transitioning away from the former, stronger roles, philosophy must abstain from claims of ultimate justification (*Letzbegründung*). Habermas is consistent on this point, trading on Karl-Otto Apel's claims to ultimate justification. However, a problem remains. Despite the abstraction away from objective truth, there is still the presentation of objectivity in the claims of the critic. What, then, grounds the claim of reason? On a pragmatist view, fallibilism holds that philosophy cannot develop knowledge single-handedly, and must rely on the empirical sciences for help in determining the best course of action (MCCA 16). Although Habermas cedes the objectivity claims involved in philosopher as judge, he maintains that the philosopher speaks in the language of universal validity because of the recognition of the *form* of generalizable maxims as balancing the interests of all involved (MCCA 64-5). The philosopher, on Habermas's view, while he cannot be a *judge* of the generalizable moral will, he can be an *interpreter* of it.

Despite the amended view of the philosopher as an interpreter, a problem still underlies the form of universal validity which comes with ethical cognitivism, the view that normative judgments express propositions.[99] As Habermas writes, citing Hans Albert:

> The attempt to justify moral principles with universal validity, according to Albert, ensnares the cognitivist in a "Münchhausen trilemma" in which he must choose between

[98] Habermas discusses these views as untenable because "philosophical thought […] has surrendered the relation to totality [and] loses its self-sufficiency" (TCA1 2). Here, he also writes that "All attempts at discovering ultimate foundations, in which the intentions of First Philosophy live on, have broken down."

[99] Habermas seems to adopt ethical cognitivism consistently throughout his work. He does so here in MCCA as well as "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality" (TIOO Part I Chapter 1).

> three equally unacceptable alternatives: putting up with an infinite regress, arbitrarily breaking off the chain of deduction, and making a circular argument (MCCA 79).

According to the ethical skeptic, the ethical cognitivist's claim to moral principles with universal validity, then, is still shot through with the presumption of a judge. It appears the grounding problem, on these lights, presents the social critic with an inevitable impasse, with the triadic web of relativism, contextualism, and invariantism, which correspond to the above order, all falling short from *really* addressing the core problem. Habermas charts a path out of the trilemma by appealing to a *semantic concept of justification*, which is "oriented to a deductive relationship between statements and based solely on the concept of logical inference" (MCCA 79). Habermas rejects the idea of a semantic justification for normative categories, involving only nondeductive and informal relations in his discourse ethics. He writes, "deductive justification […] is the only form of justification allowed by the Münchhausen trilemma" (MCCA 79).

The concept of semantic justification is not linked to acceptability to others. For Habermas, universalization principle (U) is localized to informal argumentation and discourse. In his view, a norm is considered "moral" only insofar as it can attain a universally acceptable status (MCCA 79). Since Habermas only intends for the scope of universalization principle (U) to be argument and not formal epistemology, he finds that the pitfalls of the aforementioned trilemma do not apply. Nevertheless, as Habermas intends to refute the "opponent relying on the Münchhausen trilemma" (MCCA 80), he proposes that this hypothetical opponent involves himself in a performative contradiction. The proponent will have to demonstrate that in any argument, each interlocutor must inevitably make assumptions which contradict the principle of fallibilism. The very logic of objection-raising behind the skeptic's claims, Habermas states, is subject to the assumption of "the validity of at least those logical rules that are irreplaceable if we are to understand [the] argument as a refutation." In other words, we assume "a minimum number of unavoidable rules of criticism" (MCCA 80-1) in argument. If a view can be critiqued, then there must be critical standards in place.

Habermas relies on a kind of transcendental argument to maintain the insusceptibility of moral principles to the Münchhausen trilemma of formal epistemology. The skeptic cannot avoid the implicit assumption and appeal to the key principles for universal validity claims undergirding ethical cognitivism. However, as Robert Stern writes,

> It is implausible to think that the skeptic would be satisfied with the use of any transcendental argument given against him given what has driven him to be a skeptic in the first place.[100]

Habermas is unlikely to convince the skeptic with his argument because he has not met the skeptic on their own ground. In my view, what has set the ethical skeptic down their path is their view that the cognitivist assumes too much in their line of argument.

Drawing on Karl-Otto Apel, Habermas reads the structure of the Cartesian cogito in light of the *performative contradiction* involved in the heart of the skeptic who would raise the Münchhausen trilemma against moral universalism. In the judgment of an imaginary

[100] Robert Stern, "TRANSCENDENTAL ARGUMENTS: A PLEA FOR MODESTY," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 74, no. 1 (2007): 148, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401204651_008.

interlocutor who doubts their own existence, Habermas writes that they develop a truth claim for the proposition:

> I do not exist (here and now).

However, upon analysis of this proposition, implicit within its utterance is the existential assumption:

> I exist (here and now).

Thus, the speaker of both propositions is subject to a *performative contradiction* and cannot consistently maintain the truth of first proposition. While Habermas's argument seems valid, he has already hamstrung the philosopher, the person who is in a position to challenge claims which feel or appear otherwise irrefutable. In his transcendental appeal to performative contradiction, Habermas assumes that the negation of a negation results in an implicit affirmation. As Adorno argues in *Negative Dialectics*, the argument against relativism that relativism itself presupposes the absolute truth of its own validity, and is hence self-refuting, is lazy. Adorno writes,

> it confuses the general denial of a principle with the denial's own elevation to affirmative rank, regardless of the specific difference in the positional value of both.

The problem with calling out the positional problem of a performative contradiction, then, is that one runs the risk of hypostatizing the very logic of argument. Instead of viewing the role of argument as instrumental on a first-order level, Habermas also views argument as instrumental on a second-order level. Indeed, at a basic level, argument aims towards the steady establishment of which truth claims to believe, but also, at a second-order level, towards the establishment of what can count as an acceptable truth claim at all. The argument is risky, however, because it begs the question on the skeptic's grounds. If Habermas is correct in his relegation of the philosopher to *interpreter*, then for his view to beg the question is *out of the question* because it either elevates thought to dogma or presumes the correctness of a certain set of pragmatic dialectical norms such that it cannot count out the views of the ethical skeptic.

The conclusion of Habermas's narrative concerning normative foundations is that the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theory was initially "trapped between nihilism and dogmatism"[101] because it failed to furnish a sufficient normative yardstick for social criticism. All dramatization aside, the theoretical dilemma is relevant to contemporary debates over the grounds of normativity: "Dogmatic" normative criticism typically posits a set of rules from an ahistorical, non-contextual vantage point, whereas "nihilistic" criticism posits no clear standard for normative values or commitments. We can map these views roughly onto invariantism and relativism (respectively). The dogmatic perspective, Evans argues, is exemplified by Lukács in his insistence that Adorno was trapped in the "Grand Hotel Abyss" of the German intelligentsia. Adorno, on the other hand, stated that Lukács's "repetition or duplication of a dogmatically ossified doctrine [is] appropriate to the content of his thought." Put simply, Adorno is charging Lukács with blind faith—dogmatism—

[101] Evans, "On the Very Idea of Normative Foundations in Critical Social Theory," 3.

concerning the status of possible justifications of objectively held normative standards for social criticism.[102]

Jaeggi has identified three major approaches to grounding normativity in the history of critical theory:[103]

> (a) a kind of *freestanding morality* (e.g., Forst's constructivism, Kantian practical rationality, a deeper ahistorical essentialism),
>
> (b) *Foucauldian genealogy* (which risks relativism or a troubling disinterest in otherwise relevant questions of normativity), or
>
> (c) forms of *immanent criticism* which rely on society's failure to instantiate values embedded in social consciousness, or its deep-seated self-contradiction.[104]

The web of views is similar to the Münchhausen trilemma: (a) maps onto invariantism, (b) onto relativism, and (c) maps onto contextualism. Still, the exact method of developing a normative framework, even among those who agree about one approach, is controversial. I disentangle and clarify these views, finally appealing to metanormative contextualism as the superior approach to making sense of (c) to mitigate the grounding problem. In the following three subsections, I delve deeper into arguments from a few exemplars of (a), (b), and (c) on normative foundations to describe each view of what suitable foundations for social criticism could be.

2.3.1 Invariantism

First, I describe Forst's and Rawls's critical methodology as Kantian. I refer to 'Kantian' here specifically as a shorthand for a turn to aprioristic, untethered practical reason as the mode of reason that determines what is often considered the only suitable normative foundations given these restrictions. Kant's own elimination of sensibility procedure from the *Groundwork*,[105] in short, necessitates a rejection of starting from real, embodied subjects in determining adequate grounds for social criticism. Both thinkers consider themselves, however, as differing from Kant in one serious respect. Forst and Rawls self-describe as thoroughly postmetaphysical,[106] whereas Kant's own conception in his second *Critique*

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[102] Theodor W. Adorno, *An Introduction to Dialectics*, ed. Christoph Ziermann, English edition (Malden: Polity Press, 2017).

[103] Jaeggi identifies these three key approaches in a conversation with Allen and Eva von Redecker. Please see "Progress, Normativity, and the Dynamics of Social Change," 228–29." I have modified her characterization for brevity.

[104] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 213; Evans, "On the Very Idea of Normative Foundations in Critical Social Theory," 5–6.

[105] Julian Wuerth, "Does Kantian Constructivism Rest on a Mistake?," in *Kant on Freedom and Spontaneity*, ed. Kate A. Moran (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 137–54, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316421888.008.

[106] Two cases in point. First, Rawls famously maintains that justice is "political, not metaphysical" in updates to his view to combat those who rejected his rejection of metaphysics in determining adequate conditions for justice. Second, Forst states his idea of dignity "at the heart of […] human rights is not a metaphysical or ethical one," but entails everyone "is an 'authority' in the space of reasons." Please see JC 63. In other words, the key idea grounded by Forst's idea of a basic moral right to justification, he says, is decidedly *not* metaphysical. However, I do take issue because of his conceptualization of *noumenal* power in other key places in his work. See Rainer Forst, "Noumenal Power," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (2015): 111–27, https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12046. His response to critics of his view can be found at Rainer Forst, "Noumenal Power Revisited: Reply to Critics," *Journal of Political Power* 11, no. 3 (2018): 294–321, https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2018.1523314.

seems to contain reservations on how far we can remove our moral lives from ideas of God and belief in the afterlife.[107]

I begin with Forst's critical social theory, which centers the moral right to justification, the innermost core on which Forst finds all subsequent or resultant human rights to have their grounds. The key thesis of Forst's fourth book, *Justification and Critique*, is that

> if human rights are meant to ensure that no human being is treated in a way that could not be justified to him or her as a person equal to others, then this implies – reflexively speaking – that *one claim underlies all human rights*, namely, *human beings' claim to be respected as autonomous agents* who have the right not to be subjected to certain actions or institutional norms that cannot be adequately justified to them (JC 39, emphasis mine).

Forst states three key dimensions are entailed in this thesis. (1) Human rights stem from a basic *moral right to justification*, (2) legal and political rights serve to launch this central moral right into practice, and (3) this reflexive moral right is in no way ethnocentric, whereas most other discussions of human rights are. In his earlier work, which is central in outlining his relationship to Kant's moral philosophy, Forst states that the moral right to justification is the best reconstruction of Kant's categorical imperative, especially the Formula of Humanity. I largely agree with Forst's overall concern of the central, normative question of how duties can be justified as a key question in social and political philosophy.

I begin by discussing each of the key points which Forst says follow from the central thesis of his book. First, Forst states that human rights stem from a basic moral right to justification. Following Habermas, Forst distinguishes the realm of the moral and ethical[108] and opts for a discussion primarily concerning the former. Ethical questions concern specific configurations of the good life and imply a particular conception of the good. Moral questions are neutral on what constitutes a good life or the good and deal only with the validity of a formal structure of norms.[109] Put differently, what Habermas wants to preserve is a non-ethnocentric conception of morality which can bind on all subjects equally. Ethical life, which exists within a cultural particularity, at least as Hegel constructs it, ultimately subsumes morality. Habermas can be read as pushing back against Hegel on this reading of ethical life. Given the general return to and need for a categorical imperative on their view, we can state the predicament such that a general conception of morality cannot be reducible in any sense to the particularities of any specific social arrangement. Forst largely inherits Habermas's view on the subject and is sure to outline the basic right to justification as a specifically *moral* right, meaning that it concerns the validity of basic and general structures of human conduct, i.e., not cultural rules, mores, norms, etc. Habermas's principles of (U) and (D) concern the general makeup of how we should conduct ourselves in discourse with one another, and Forst's right to justification concerns how we justify which actions we

[107] I take Kant's postulates of practical reason to mitigate arguments from the first *Critique* on establishing certain arguments for going beyond the limits Kant places on possible insights of pure reason. Interestingly, Habermas may have turned full circle on this view, following his "religious turn."

[108] Forst cites Habermas and Dworkin to make this distinction. Please see JC 45. There is at least one more thinker into the mix who distinguishes between the two, Bernard Williams.

[109] A more complex picture of Habermas's reasoning is offered in Gulshan Khan, "Politics and Morality in Habermas' Discourse Ethics," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 38, no. 2 (February 2012): 158, https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453711427254.

subject one another to. By way of transitioning to Forst's second point, I will examine the example of same-sex marriage, as he does. Forst writes that in defending a right to same-sex marriage, if we want to avoid stepping into the domain of the ethical, or outline a specific vision of the good life, then we are limited to crafting an argument based on the principle of generally binding legislation. If we are all social equals, marriage cannot be denied as a right to any particular group. The law must always be stated as a universal and be upheld by the rule of law.

Second, legal and political rights put the fundamental moral right of justification into play. To continue with the example of same-sex marriage, the political-legal right to marry a person of the same sex instantiates the basic moral right of justification. Forst's argument does *not* argue from the standpoint that marriage and family life are the teleological end of human life and that to deny one their *telos* is unjust. Instead, he argues that to deny to another anything which should be promised to all is what is unjust. It is a worse argument, Forst thinks, to ground the argument for same-sex marriage in an ethical idea which contains too much sociopolitical contingency. Relying on what he calls the tests "of reciprocity and generality" (JC 53),[110] denying same-sex marriage as a legal possibility fails to respect the basic right to justification in principle only because it denies something otherwise available to all. Forst writes, "it is not the ethical judgment about the importance or value of a practice that determines the normative rights claim but, instead, a claim concerning the social and legal standing that cannot reasonably be denied to citizens who are recognized as social equals" (JC 54). In a footnote, Forst clarifies that he does not mean to say that ethical arguments are irrelevant but only that they are insufficient to ground these claims in a general moral normativity. In other words, Forst is highlighting how, in his view, moral claims have a special and fundamental validity which legal and political rights serve to supplement or substantiate in the democratic arena.

The idea of this being a specifically *moral* and not ethical concept already implies Forst's crucial and necessary third point, which is that the basic right of justification avoids ethnocentrism, something which he states "harrows" other forms of justification for human rights. Put simply, Forst states that defenders of human rights face a critical problem. It is typically members of developed, affluent Western nations who defend the idea against its violators, often from underdeveloped nations, some of which are politically tumultuous and rife with political violence. Again, Forst states that the grammar of human rights must be general and capacious, outlining no specific vision of "the good life," save for a "language of emancipation" (JC 57-9).[111] In fact, Forst draws on the history of human rights to make his point. Although from a teleological, forward-looking perspective, defenders of human rights appear to look down on those who fall short, the history of human rights claims stems from a feudalistic, war-torn, and remarkedly *non-liberal* European context. In other words, defenders of a basic moral right of justification are not presenting a Eurocentric argument because the right itself is formalistic enough to be open to different interpretations from different perspectives of what viable ethical standpoints are available.

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[110]He expands on this idea heavily in Rainer Forst, *Tolerance in Conflict: Past and Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139051200.

[111] Forst is heavily inspired here by Joshua Cohen's view of human rights and their continued alliance with democratic ideals. Forst has Rawls in mind here, at least implicitly, when he states that human rights need to be presented "autonomously," or without a comprehensive conception of the good.

A corollary to Forst's third point is worth belaboring. To demonstrate how human rights need not be presented in an ethnocentric fashion, Forst engages briefly in the "Asian values debate" to demonstrate that "[h]uman rights are not immediate claims to certain substantive 'goods' but to a certain social and political standing of persons as 'norm-givers'" (JC 62). Citing Uma Narayan, an Indian post-colonial feminist, Forst argues that the conceptualization of human rights as Eurocentric is itself a deeply Eurocentric argument itself because those upholding the discourse of human rights *within* underdeveloped nations themselves are not alien to their own culture or status within their social sphere as norm-givers or -upholders.

In total, Forst's view is invariantist because he holds his focus on a moral right to justification as central and 'untethered' from any specific historical concerns or contexts. Although these factors certainly play into his reasoning for accepting the moral right to justification and invariantism, they are not the reasons for this right or invariantism. Forst is not grounding a defense of normativity in changing social situations or conditions but in this fundamental, formalistic, moral right which cannot be legitimately denied to any person or subject to violation without a breach of moral protocol. Forst's conception of rights and the basic right to justification identifies us as rights-bearers with us as rights-givers. He means to present his view as deeply reflexive and fundamental, meaning that each person is a norm-giver with the power to have a say in what does and does not happen to them. In one sense, Forst's description of his reflexive turn to human rights demands "a right to adequate justifications that do not exclude those affected" (JC 39), echoing Habermas's principle of discourse ethics (D) which brings all affected by discourse, i.e., *everyone*, into the fold of upholding the shared universal moral order.

The towering influence that Rawls had on Anglophone political philosophy goes without saying. It is no overstatement that Rawls revitalized a Kantian route for political and normative thought in the sphere of Anglophone philosophical discourse beyond formerly unquestioned utilitarian approaches. Further, he engendered a new, refreshing reading of Kant's practical philosophy, *constructivism*, which many of his students, Christine Korsgaard, Onora O'Neill, Forst himself, and many others have all come to embrace and defend philosophically for ends as varied as animal ethics, bioethics (especially on informed consent), and critical theory. Although Rawls is seldom considered a contributor to critical theory, he is peripherally important to the tradition insofar as comparative evaluations of our society against his standard for justice can constitute social criticism. After all, Forst uses Rawls as a major critical resource, and Habermas debates Rawls on the public use of reason as well as the discursive, reason-sharing realm of the public sphere and our participation as subjects within it.[112] In fact, Habermas openly goes as far as conceding, "Because I admire [Rawls's] project, share its intentions, and regard its essential results as correct, the dissent I express [to Rawls's project] will remain within the bounds of a familial dispute."[113] I cannot do justice to Rawls's ideal theory of justice or Rawls's seminal importance for Anglophone political philosophy; nevertheless, I will attempt to outline it in broad detail as to represent in what respect Rawls is both a Kantian and nested in the camp of invariable normative foundations for social criticism.

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[112] James Gordon Finlayson, *The Habermas-Rawls Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), Section III: "The Exchange."

[113] Jürgen Habermas, "Reconciliation Through the Public Use of Reason: Remarks on John Rawls's Political Liberalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 92, no. 3 (1995): 110, https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil199592335.

Rawls's opening gambit in *A Theory of Justice* is to claim that justice is the "first virtue of social institutions." In other words, an ideal social institution promotes justice in its outlook. If an institution is unjust, it ought to be amended if possible or abolished if impossible. Human rights are founded on an unimpeachable concept of justice which "does not allow that sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many" (TJ 3). Although Rawls puts several restrictions on the reach of his conception of justice, what is clear is its general character as an ideal theory. Rawls sets himself towards clarifying certain *a priori* concepts of a theory of justice because of his Kantian conception of a social contract whereby participants in its formation could agree in principle with two initial formulations of principles out of the "original position," his take on the contractarian *statu naturae.*

> First: each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others.
>
> Second: social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all (TJ 53).

These principles are meant to apply to what Rawls calls the "basic structure of society," not specific interactions between private individuals. Further, Rawls establishes what is often called a "lexical priority" of the first principle, the Liberty Principle, over the second principle, the Difference Principle. Within the Difference Principle, 2b must also be upheld above and before 2a, all after the precedence of 1. After much explanation and technical adjustments to these initial formulations (changes italicized below), Rawls sets forwards the final versions of these principles.

> Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar *system of liberty for all*.
>
> Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:
>
> (a) *to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle*
> (b) attached to offices and positions open to all *under conditions of fair equality of opportunity* (TJ 266).

Rawls does not seek for these rules to reward virtue (TJ 274), fit into a utilitarian scheme (TJ 278), or ground an inherently teleological moral perfectionism (TJ 286). Instead, Rawls seeks to fulfill certain "principles of natural duty" as a Kantian, which involves justifying why he selects these two principles specifically out of the thought experiment of the original position (TJ 293). The most crucial of these principles of natural duty involves two parts. First, to support and further just institutions, which involves compliance with just institutions. Second, assistance in their establishment in cases of their lack. Although there are other natural duties (including ones Kant considers, e.g., mutual aid) (TJ 297-8), Rawls argues that "all obligations arise from the principle of fairness" (TJ 301), which is defined in the first-person plural as "We are not to gain from the cooperative labors of others without doing our fair share" (TJ 301, reproduced from 96) In short, no freeriding.

Rawls later proposes several amendments and adjustments to his *A Theory of Justice*, which I cannot detail fully. There is still one key addition, however, which I discuss briefly in

the remainder of the current subsection. Rawls adjusts his theory in light of the concept of "reasonable pluralism," something Forst picks up on in a stronger sense to deliberately avoid ethnocentrism. Rawls writes that one main aim of his *Political Liberalism* is to "show that the theory of the well-ordered society in *Theory* may be reformulated so as to take account of the fact of *reasonable pluralism*."[114] Briefly, the core thought is that an overlapping consensus of comprehensive conceptions of the good exists between competing worldviews which are reasonable. Although unreasonable worldviews always exist, they are not Rawls's concern.[115] Importantly, Rawls starts with the rules imputed by his theory of justice, not any singular comprehensive conception of the good. Rawls explores the possibility of working from specific doctrines or worldviews to justice and points out a very specific problem: such a method would leave the theory politically charged "in the wrong way." By this, Rawls seems to mean biased, partisan, or even potentially *ethnocentric* ways. As a Kantian, Rawls prefers what he calls a "freestanding" theory of justice which proceeds from the "fundamental idea of society as a fair system of cooperation."[116]

Unfortunately, despite all the possible advantages afforded by the Rawlsian schema of ideal social institutions, the carefully formatted outline of justice, and the doctrine of reasonable pluralism, Habermas and Forst rightfully share a worry about Rawls's *Theory*. Put briefly, they argue that Rawls's liberalism is unsuitable in establishing the firm normative foundations required for social criticism. As Finlayson reports, "in advancing his political conception of justice only as 'reasonable' and in refraining from advancing it as 'true,' Rawls 'relegates the validity of the theory to the contingent fact of its being consonant with various comprehensive doctrines."[117] Rawls is open to the cognitive content of his theoretical citizens differing because of their diverse moral doctrines; however, this leaves the likely possibility that citizens only come to key political agreements indirectly. Instead, Forst and Habermas argue that Rawls's liberalism is therefore too tolerant of intolerance through a quietist avoidance of moral truths of the matter in political disagreements.[118] In their view, Rawls's formalism clears undue space for citizens holding morally reprehensible views about one another but only coming to the table and negotiating for non-essential, self-interested reasons.

In sum, Rawls's view is Kantian because he identifies certain ideal starting conditions for a just social arrangement and works backwards to justify them as, theoretically speaking, the fairest social arrangement organized by an impartial, blinded, and democratic review process by protean but real interests of participants. Forst pinpoints a basic right to justification, whereas Rawls focuses on reasons for our natural duty to uphold justice where it exists and to promote justice where it does not. All Kantianism is invariantism because of its freestanding, untethered arguments for its aprioristic normative foundations.

2.3.2 Relativism

Genealogical critique imposes relativism at a first-order level. Nancy Fraser's oft cited but controversial understanding of Foucauldian approaches is that they consist of "empirical

[114] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Expanded ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), xli. Emphasis mine.

[115] Rawls, 39.

[116] Rawls, 40.

[117] Forst in *The Habermas-Rawls Debate*, 157.

[118] To ground her *Critique of Forms of Life*, Rahel Jaeggi similarly criticizes liberalism for its quietism concerning configurations of the good and general aversion to criticism of all ways of living, even ones which destroy the environment, promote profligate consumption of resources, disseminate harmful norms, etc.

findings and normative confusions."[119] As she puts it in this important essay, "Genealogy takes it as axiomatic that everything is interpretation all the way down,"[120] which entails that the meaning of all historical institutions, practices, and standards (i.e., their normative foundations) is ultimately relative. According to Colin Koopman, on the other hand, a key advantage of critical genealogy is its refusal to employ a specific normative framework in its excavation of historical trends. Further, it can unearth the implicit, sometimes insidious values behind the adoption of normative frameworks themselves. Genealogical critique aims never to leave core components of society determinate and undertheorized. The core thought: once we identify something as 'evil,' it must be destroyed, and once we identify something as 'good,' it must be preserved. Unfortunately, these kinds of simplistic judgments are too reductive of the social processes which form subjects and which subjects form. As a result, the grey area which houses the norms which mold us must be examined and explained in terms of their development to uncover their genesis.

In this subsection, I outline a defense of Foucauldian first-order relativism or Nietzschean *epoché*[121] concerning normative foundations through an argument about the opportunity costs of value theory. For my reading of critical theory's aims, it is crucial to address the grounding problem because it is important for social criticism to advance normatively charged judgments and consider them as binding on subjects. Any analysis, on my view, which imposes even a methodological barrier of neutrality on the possible normative standpoint of the analyst remains at the level of traditional theory. Although genealogical critique is an influential alternative to introducing metaphysics for the sake of justifying social critique, it runs the risk of going too far in the other direction to deny the need for normative foundations altogether. In this subsection, I consider attempts by Danielle Lorenzini and Raymond Geuss to position genealogical critique as offering normative judgments. Ultimately, I pursue the conclusions of a pivotal argument introduced by Amia Srinavasan (further than her own account does) in order to respond to their views.

The relativist largely argues for the nonexistence of plausible or ultimate normative foundations for social criticism or ethical considerations because of how implicated they are in the status quo. Instead, the relativist's line of attack is to expose the social order of arbitrariness, incoherency, and bias without opting to 'pick a side' or appraise any specific set of first-order values (i.e., what is 'good' or 'bad' without recourse to an ethically thin standard). Michel Foucault is the posterchild of a refusal to establish clear normative foundations in social and political philosophy because establishing an objective, ahistorical normative foundations after Nietzsche misses the point of structural analysis. Instead of attempting to discover specific normative foundations for social critique, Foucauldian approaches largely unearth the structures underlying regimes of power and truth in localized social contexts. As Foucault once remarked, off-the-record, genesis and validity are unrelated concepts. He responds to Leo Lowenthal, Charles Taylor, Martin Jay, *et alia*, who all questioned whether validity claims were attached to genealogical analysis, one of whom provisionally offered him the solution that they were unrelated, as follows: "Yes. *I think there*

[119] Nancy Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions," *PRAXIS International* 1, no. 3 (1981): 272–87.

[120] Fraser, 274.

[121] To my knowledge, Foucault does not use the Academic conceptualization of a suspension of judgment (*epoché*) to describe his method or the reasoning behind his ethical neutrality. In fact, Fraser points out how Foucault rejected the label of "bracketing" to describe his suspension of moral judgment. Fraser, 275.

is no relation between genesis and validity. The problem is: how could it be valid, at a certain moment, in a certain context."[122]

Like Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality*, a tight-knit and careful analysis of the major historical trends leading to fundamental ideological developments can expose the status quo as serving specific regimes of power, hidden in plain sight. These regimes' objective guise hides a deeply arbitrary genesis. For Foucault, the modalities in which modern power operate do not simply emanate from the top-down, from state-actors to subjects, but also from the bottom-up, through practices of self-policing and the diffuse internalization of social mores and expectations. If one admits that these dominant ideological forces hold influence on us behind our backs, then Foucault's argument is a logically reasonable inference. Still, the genealogical approach is often quietist or silent about the rightness or wrongness of actions or institutional actors. As Foucault leads off a key essay on Nietzsche and the genealogical method, "Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times."[123] Subjecting Nietzsche's own idea of genealogy to a genealogical analysis, Foucault argues even the method's progenitor first held a confused understanding of its aim and of the potential role of history in philosophy. Ironically, genealogy rests on a modality of history which exposes "respect for ancient continuities [as] systematic dissociation."[124] A key insight of relativist approaches like Foucault's is that they see an insufficiency in attempts to dispense completely of the notions of power and dominance involved in value theory. Running a systematic normative program (i.e., doing ideal theory) like Rawls's *Theory* risks reinscribing extant ideological principles, reproducing the status quo, or shifting towards a new dominant ideology or regime of truth.[125] Instead, the Foucauldian approach is skeptical of trying to think outside of the framework or force of power and law to discover positive normative foundations as Rawls does in *Theory*, as Forst does in identifying a basic right to justification, etc., all products of ideal theory from a particular normative standpoint.

I turn to identify a few key facets of relativism to spotlight its differences from invariantism and contextualism, two views which prioritize the need for some kind of normative standpoint or foundation for effective social criticism. The main draw of relativism (and the best argument), as I find it, is that at a first-order level, attempting to discover grounds which could make social criticism stick is a very resource intensive dive into what is a potentially endless pit, where one may emerge on the other end with nothing to show for it. Alternatively, the relativist can structure their criticism as primarily descriptive (as embarking on a Foucauldian *genealogy*), or simply assert the mere interest of socially repressed alterity as a ground (as in Foucault siding with the emergence of *subjugated knowledges* in opposition to dominant forms of life).

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[122] Koopman, 89. Colin Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 89.

[123] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, 1st ed (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 76.

[124] 7/18/24 5:27:00 PM

[125] I acknowledge, while I blend the idea of a regime of truth/power and an ideology, Foucault rejects their conflation.

John Ransom states that Nietzsche's philosophical goal is "to uncover the battles that gave birth to the world that we accept as natural,"[126] very similar to Foucault's key thought that regimes of truth and power are molded, sculpted, and crafted in a particular image which benefits distinct groups, not natural modes of social interaction. Although the flow of power is inevitable, its distinct shapes and convergences are not. Foucault addresses his audience at the *Collège de France* in 1975, stating that we can refer to "[the] coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories, which [allow] us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics" under the name "genealogy."[127] One immediately should note the ethically thick language Foucault employs: struggles, tactics, "insurrection of knowledges,"[128] etc. This is like Marx's decision in *Capital* to use normatively thick and charged language (e.g., capital as 'vampiric…' that 'Dante would have found his worst horrors of *Inferno* surpassed…' etc.) despite explicitly disavowing moral criticism in the introduction of the same book. Foucault, similarly, cannot avoid explicitly charged language to describe what he has still cast as methodologically neutral. Thus, Marx and Foucault may embody social criticism's bipolarity best.

Foucault's understanding of power is intertwined with his view of truth. Akin to Nietzsche, who wrote that there was a proverbial 'workshop' where ideas were *manufactured,*[129] Foucault explores the historical flow and eventual diffusion of power. Foucault cautions, "Do not regard power as a phenomenon of mass and homogenous domination—the domination of one individual […group, or class] over others […] power is not something that is divided between those who have it […] and those who do not." He continues, power is "something that circulates" and is "exercised through networks."[130] Consider the following example. Foucault's approach to power is like an electricity grid. To harness electricity for its use in appliances, the structure of the grid is required. To say electricity is 'here' or 'there' on the grid would be to flatten the concept out, and to quickly ignore its volatility and dynamic fluctuations. Instead, electricity (power) must flow through the conduits of the grid's network, its transformers, substations, etc. (subjects), which diffuse its haphazard sparks and arcing currents for its deployment to various ends. Electricity is to its conduits as power is to us as subjects. Foucault makes the point directly that "the delicate mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation."[131] The arbiters of this circulation are, collectively, the members of a society and not just those who set the rules because, in a sense, we do so *collectively* in the modern age.

Foucault argues that there is a crack in everything. It should be made clear where Foucault is headed, considering his stark movement away from State-organized displays of power. No longer is the seat of power the gallows atop a ghastly hill—instead, the subway station and bus stop, sites of disorganized organization, force us into a routine. We learn to

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[126] John S. Ransom, *Foucault's Discipline: The Politics of Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 5.

[127] Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, ed. Mauro Bertani, Alessandro Fontana, and François Ewald, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), 8.

[128] Foucault, 9.

[129] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe, Revised ed., Cambrigde Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1:4.

[130] Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 29.

[131] Foucault, 33–34.

decide on a nonintrusive spot to stare at, tap at our smartphones, and never look at anyone for too long. This idea of a "nonsovereign" power implies that the very important thought that even the everyday facets of our lives must be addressed if our critical goal is the scrutiny of all sites of domination. Private institutions like sexual and gender expression, family dynamics, and speech patterns as well as public institutions like schools, hospitals, and prisons come under the purview of the critical genealogist's method because they are *all* primary hotspots for the multifaceted dynamics of a diffuse power at play between individuals. As Fraser states, "if power is instantiated in mundane social practices and relations, then efforts to dismantle or transform the regime must address those practices and relations," going on to remark that "This is probably the single most important feature of Foucault's thought."[132]

Two scholars working from Foucault's account, Lorenzini and Geuss, rebut the critical narrative that I produce here. In their views, genealogical critique is *not* methodologically bound or even intended to be normatively neutral. Although Geuss admits that "Genealogical critique is not directly concerned with the binding truth or falsity of a first-order claim or proposition," he continues by asserting that targets of genealogical critique (e.g., the Christian idea of sin, law and order, etc.) possess a "*fundamentum in re*"[133] which persists beyond criticism. The reason, Geuss argues, is because, we have freely shaped the historically effective identities of concepts (at least to some extent). Therefore, genealogy itself is not meant to identify certain features or historical contingencies as 'good' or 'evil.' Instead, genealogy is always meant to be related back to praxis. Geuss splits the idea of genealogy away from relativism with a pragmatic, functionalist argument. Geuss finds the idea that "everything is contingent" is never sufficient grounds for asserting any historical or philosophical thesis. For example, if we were to analyze the effects of the idea that "abortion is murder," to explain it simply through the historical contingency of religiously inflected right-wing politics and the doctrinal commitments of Christian voters is grossly insufficient. Instead, as the critical genealogist might proceed, analysis of the theological agenda *behind* Christian politics and the distinctly *insidious* theologico-political role of the Church's influence is necessary. Thus, although genealogy is thoroughly historical, it demands a "fresh historically detailed and specific analysis in each case" because genealogy and praxis must come alongside one another. In other words, genealogy's genetic analysis is always and inevitably practical. Doing adequate genealogical analysis unearths which ideas are distinctly *dangerous*, Geuss argues, not just 'good,' 'false,' or 'bad,' which were never actually among Foucault's chief concerns. Borrowing from a late interview of Foucault, Geuss advances an understanding of genealogical critique which is focused by "concentrating attention on a given situation in the context of an imminent danger." In conclusion, Geuss defines genealogy as "a summons to develop an empirically informed kind of theoretical imagination under the conditions of perceived danger." [134] To summarize Geuss's view, genealogy functions alongside praxis because its implicit aim is to think through potentially harmful ideas emergent from the free activity of humans engrossed within social-historical processes.

[132] Fraser, "Foucault on Modern Power," 280.

[133] Raymond Geuss, "Genealogy as Critique," *European Journal of Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2002): 212, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0378.00157.

[134] Geuss, 212–13.

Lorenzini's goal is to reveal the normative footing of Foucault's genealogical project through the idea of *possibilising*. Critically distancing himself from projects by Colin Koopman and Amy Allen,[135] Lornenzini claims their focus on *problematizing genealogy* misses the true critical attitude of Foucault's work. Genealogy does not just point out an issue with the status quo. Instead, citing Foucault, Lorenzini argues it also allows us to "'separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.'"[136] Similar to Marcuse's Freudian thought from *Eros and Civilization* that laying material conditions bare can thus reveal the possibility of living differently,[137] Lorenzini relies on the thought that critical scrutiny can help us reimagine ourselves and our ways of life. He calls this the "we-making" dimension of possibilising genealogy to help angle our focus towards recognizing the contingency of the domination that the status quo imposes on us. For Lorenzini, critical genealogy does not just unmask power relations but possesses a key dimension of possibilising, revealing how subjects have resisted domination and, as a corollary, how there is a very real possibility of living differently.

As the Habermasian criticism from *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* goes, Foucault's critical genealogy is normatively neutral, so his judgments within genealogical analysis express invalid normative assumptions considering his methodological neutrality. In Habermasian terms, Foucault's method can only produce invalid normative claims and cannot clarify its normative foundations. As he writes, "[genealogy] cannot but end up taking the form of 'the presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative illusory science that it does not want to be."[138] In short, Foucault's genealogical method is self-effacing because it admits of no guiding normative framework and therefore cannot accurately describe how to contest the regimes of power/truth that it reveals. Lorenzini's response to these views is that critical genealogy possesses a "*sui generis* normative force" because it "creates a concrete political framework for action (a political 'we') that commits us to resist the arbitrariness of the power/knowledge formations it reveals."[139] Possibilising genealogy, on Lorenzini's account, puts pressure on the arbitrary nexus of power by erecting an implicit counterfactual political imaginary, only possible when 'we' understand 'our' history as malleable and self-imposed.

Having described Foucauldian approaches to normativity, I now turn to my major criticism of the critical genealogical method to respond to Geuss and Lorenzini. Relativism can be taken as being like a disinterest, as Jaeggi describes it, with questions of normative foundations altogether. The argument and analysis above of the Foucauldian approach is to highlight the difficulty associated with establishing certain and well-grounded normative foundations. However, it is important to remember how Foucauldian approaches to normative

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[135] As discussed, Allen's account appears in her book, *End of Progress* where she weds Foucault to Adorno similarly to Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Foucault and the Critique of the West* (Brooklyn: Verso, 2018). Koopman's account of Foucault focuses heavily on problematizing as well and admits that Foucault's goal was never normative appraisal or judgment of good or evil ways of life because of the calcification which concepts undergo as they attain normative significance. Koopman, *Genealogy as Critique*, 90.

[136] Daniele Lorenzini, "On Possibilising Genealogy," *Inquiry*, 2020, 2, https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2020.1712227.

[137] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 4–5.

[138] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 275–76.

[139] Lorenzini, "On Possibilising Genealogy," 7.

foundations still run afoul of even the search for them. It is part of the critical genealogist's very methodology to dispense with the idea that a suitable normative foundation could ever be discovered. In dispensing with the search for normative foundations, an admittedly resource-intensive task, the relativist, I contend, risks never garnering a truth, the possibility of unearthing valid normative foundation for social criticism, even though the possible truth of their skeptical challenge will indeed also always remain live.[140]

Social philosopher Amia Srinavasan, herself a proponent of critical genealogy from a Nietzschean-Foucauldian lens, has argued that the inference from what she calls (1) *alethic indifference* to (2) a *lack of knowledge* is a *non sequitur*.[141] Srinavasan describes the idea of alethic indifference in reference to the ancient Xenophanean thought that—could they draw and reason like us—horses would draw horse-gods. Just as we fashion gods in our image, horses with similar capacities would likely do the same thing. In other words, for Xenophanes, there is nothing *necessary* about the fact the Greek pantheon takes human form except for the historical contingency of human beings having been their designers. She writes,

> In the arguments of both Xenophanes and the contemporary evolutionary debunker, there is a charge of what we might call *alethic indifference*: our beliefs (in, for instance, human-like gods or morality) are said to be produced by a causal mechanism (narcissism, evolution) that we have no independent reason to believe will tend to produce true beliefs about the relevant matter (theology, morality).[142]

To put her thought differently, even if there were a truth of the matter which we could ascertain directly, it would still be true independently of our beliefs. If we are comfortable in our ignorance, persisting within it is entirely possible, especially if it is a shared ignorance, a dominant ideology, or propped up by other people in whom we trust. She continues,

> Intuitively, alethic indifference—even if it does not entail that our theological or moral beliefs are false—bears negatively on the justificatory standing of those beliefs. Because justification is a requirement on knowledge, these genealogies thus intuitively threaten our clams to know the (theological, moral) truth.[143]

The fact that there is not an easy or stable confirmation of the truth in theological and moral beliefs means they are much more difficult and resource-intensive to justify as opposed to truths such as, e.g., "Justin Trudeau is Canadian." Theological or moral truths such as "the gods punish the guilty," "thou shalt honor the sabbath and keep it holy," "abortion is murder," etc. have a high likelihood of impacting our subsequent actions or affairs with others. The former kind of beliefs are mostly unimpactful (unless one strongly dislikes Canadians), whereas we must scrutinize the latter because we have no direct means of confirming their truth notwithstanding their wide-reaching impact. However, despite their indemonstrability, these theological and moral beliefs still have a high likelihood of affecting how people vote, lead their lives, and interact with others. Therefore, the critical genealogist argues that these views must be analyzed for two reasons. First, because they are unlikely

[140] I return to this specific thought about skepticism in 2.4 on the skeptical conception of the *diallelus*.

[141] Amia Srinivasan, "VII — Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119, no. 2 (July 1, 2019): 132, https://doi.org/10.1093/arisoc/aoz009.

[142] Srinivasan, 131.

[143] Srinivasan, 131–32.

ever to be justifiable in the same sense as empirical truths are. Second, unreliable mechanisms like divine revelation, social pressures, or other historical/theological/political contingencies produce them, i.e., they are not natural facts.

What leads my objection, like Srinavasan's, is that the critical genealogist is not actually justified by their own methodology in turning from (1) our imperfect epistemic resources to (2) our purported lack of truth altogether. In fact, the critical genealogist, on Habermas and Fraser's characterizations, must remain absolutely *neutral* on ethically charged matters because of their methodology. Thus, all that alethic indifference can entail is our difficulty in acquiring justification for beliefs, not the absence of our beliefs' truthfulness. Downplaying the objectivity of our rational capacities means we are unable to justify truths, not that we are not in possessions of truths. In fact, for the critical genealogist to assume we do not possess truth is to bypass the very epistemic limitations which they initially set on us as inquirers.[144] Although justification and consistency are important components of knowledge-formation, imposing a 'safety' condition on knowledge (i.e., accepting only beliefs under a schema like: "*x* belief does not lead to negative implication *n*," e.g., by contrast, moving from "the gods punish the guilty" to the negative implication, "all unbelievers will suffer") begs the question in this case. How can the relativist avoid imposing their own safety conditions on others? Only, for a moment, by bypassing first-order relativism and a purely historical, detached, and ethically uncharged inquiry, I argue.

In a post-Enlightenment world, arguments about gods and divine judgment are much less likely to move others; however, they held more weight in a not-so-distant past. The consistent relativist must therefore lock themselves into the neutrality of their analysis because of the implausibility of them importing some 'backdoor' normative foundations or criteria for reasonableness into social criticism. Thus, I reject relativism as a suitable answer to the grounding problem because of this high potential tradeoff of a valid normative foundation despite my admission about the relativist's point in the possibly endless, resource-intensive pit offered by contextualism and invariantism in stipulating inquiry into offering valid normative foundations for social criticism. Augustine argues in *Contra Academicos* that there is always the possibility that the Skeptic suspends their judgment about a possible truth which could have led them to happiness. Because of the Skeptic's very own methodology, not only can the Skeptic have no response, but *they must admit this very possibility* if they remain consistent to their agnostic methodology. Further, the Skeptic is not able to even assert the epistemic remoteness *or* proximity of this possibility precisely because of their Skeptical commitments. In short, I argue that relativism's epistemic tradeoffs are far too risky for social criticism, despite the series of advantages found with Foucauldian approaches.

2.3.3 Contextualism

In Allen's *End of Progress*, she applies metanormative contextualism to help solve the grounding problem while avoiding relativism or introducing metaphysics into social critique. Allen's uptake of metanormative contextualism applies a helpful and nuanced insight from metaethics to critical theory—asserting the possibility of normative uncertainty at a second-

[144] A similar conclusion is reached in Celikates's work on ideology critique. In his view, the biggest risk that the ideology critic faces is the assumption that they have knowledge not only of the improper ways of thinking but the fact that other minds only possess these. Robin Celikates, *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*, trans. Naomi Van Steenbergen, Essex Studies in Contemporary Critical Theory (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018).

order level does not necessitate relativism at a first-order level. As Allen states, this is Habermas and Forst's key worry.[145] Allen works through insights from contextualist epistemology in figures like Bertrand Williams and Linda Martín Alcoff. To these, in this subsection, I add recent work by figures in metaethics by scholars like Stephen Finlay, John Pittard, and Alex Worsnip. Although these metaethicists are working outside of the domain of critical theory, their careful exposition helps to clarify the stakes and advantages involved in adopting metanormative contextualism as a solution to the grounding problem.

First, I borrow from a diverse pool of work to clarify contextualism as a contender to ground critical theory in a determinate but historically sensitive normative foundation. As I show, contextualism carves out a third, mediative path between the 'dogmatism' of invariantism and the 'nihilism' of relativism. Contextualism seeks sensitivity to changing social situations and dynamics of power as well as the reasons behind a desire for valid normative foundations—even if a pure, a priori concept is ultimately unattainable. Contextualism splits the difference between invariantism and relativism by arguing for variable normative foundations which depend on the context of their utterance. Contextualism does not subscribe to first-order relativism but asserts it only at the second- or meta- level. As Allen puts it, "[metanormative contextualism] need not entail relativism at the level of our first-order substantive normative commitments."[146]

Gunnar Björnsson and Finlay define the term as follows:

> Metaethical contextualism is the semantic doctrine that normative terms like "ought" are semantically incomplete, and have one or more open argument places that can be filled in different ways, with values supplied by the context of utterance.[147]

I will use the terms "metaethical contextualism," "metanormative contextualism," and "contextualism" interchangeably unless a distinction is noted between contextualism in metaethics versus epistemology. Based on the above definition, contextualism comes under fire for the appearance of relativism. The idea that deontic modalities are *semantically incomplete* entail that they have more than one valid truthmaker. In other words, contextualism may then bottom out to relativism because it denies 'objective' validity claims. That is, statements like "S ought to φ" do not have binding status across *all* subjects in way which is valid irrespective of time, place, and speaker. However, what makes contextualism different from relativism is its sustained devotion to the search for valid truthmakers. On contextualist views, the validity of a normative claim is context-dependent (like relativism) but still subject to a 'validity check' (like invariantism). Therefore, deontic modalities and normative judgments exist squarely between subjective and objective poles.[148]

In contemporary ethics, confusing scenarios in know-how ethical dilemmas occur which prompt Björnsson, Finlay, Pittard, and Worsnip to defend contextualism in metaethics because it is the only view which is sensitive to the relative, and arguably, always incomplete,

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[145] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 211–12.

[146] Allen, 212.

[147] Gunnar Björnsson and Stephen Finlay, "Metaethical Contextualism Defended," *Ethics* 121, no. 1 (2010): 7, https://doi.org/10.1086/656304.

[148] My thought here is taken from the title of a paper in metanormativity, Niko Kolodny and John MacFarlane, "Ifs and Oughts," *Journal of Philosophy* 107, no. 3 (2010): 115–43, https://doi.org/10.5840/jphil2010107310.

bases of knowledge possessed by individual practical deliberators. As the first pair argue together:

> In the real world, we must typically answer these questions under less-than-ideal epistemic circumstances, possessing incomplete information. The action that is best given available evidence is often not the action that is best given all the facts. This raises a dilemma: is what an agent ought to do what is best given the evidence, or what is best given the facts?[149]

Stated as a matter of fact, the key premise is the straightforward idea that we are not omniscient. Therefore, we cannot be expected to always take the best course of action in matters of practical deliberation because the incompleteness of our knowledge impinges on our courses of action. As I state in §2.2 as horn (2) of the Social Critic's Dilemma, we do not always agree about acceptable reasons for certain directions of action following social critique. Contextualism argues from this normative uncertainty to the context-dependence of normative claims. As Pittard and Worsnip have argued, normative uncertainty is quintessential for arguments in favor of contextualism because uncertainty here bears directly on ethical decision-making. As they put it, "what you ought to do is not just whatever the correct moral theory says, but rather some action that takes account of your uncertainty between plausible moral theories."[150] Ethical deliberation matters for outcomes and this feature of practical reason is preserved specifically in contextualism. Sometimes, we make tradeoffs in practical matters, rejecting ideal circumstances, so that we can preserve a baseline of goodness, as we cannot often guarantee certain outcomes.

Aristotle was the first non-intellectualist concerning ethical truth to argue that it is not plausible to blame an agent for their actions in light of what somebody *might* do in response. An example from the start of *Nicomachean Ethics* Γ helps to demonstrate this point. Aristotle argues that if somebody is forced on account of some tyrant to perform a dastardly act, then this person cannot be said to have performed these actions in a blameworthy respect precisely because they were an instrument of the tyrant. Notice, the tyrant need not have necessarily retaliated against the actor in question's hypothetical disobedience for Aristotle's example to work. The fact that there is a genuine threat of retaliation is enough to guarantee the consideration of this hypothetical factor in our practical reasoning. Against the deontological concerns operative in invariantism, contextualism argues that factors surrounding practical matters constrain both the ideal courses of action themselves and the ideal justifications for these actions.

Aristotle's example considers a singular practical reasoner and a volatile tyrant as the bearer of normative uncertainty. Pittard and Worsnip attempt to think through a different scenario, where two practical deliberators possess two varied bases of knowledge to analyze the relevance of descriptive uncertainty together. They explain,

> Sarah is an herbalist in training. While collecting herbal treatments in the woods, she encounters Sam, who has been bitten by a poisonous snake and who will die soon if not treated immediately. Sarah has three herbs at her disposal: herb A, herb B, and herb C.

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[149] Björnsson and Finlay, "Metaethical Contextualism Defended," 9.

[150] John Pittard and Alex Worsnip, "Metanormative Contextualism and Normative Uncertainty," *Mind*, 2016, 188, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzv208.

> She knows that herb C will save Sam's life, but will leave him with mild hypersensitivity to the sun. She also knows that one of herbs A and B will completely cure Sam with no side effects, but that the other will kill him. Unfortunately, she doesn't remember which is which. 'Since I can't remember which of herbs A and B is the one that will cure Sam and which is the one that will kill him, I ought to give him a treatment of herb C', she says to herself. The next day, she describes the episode to her herbology professor, who sighs and says, 'You ought to have administered only herb B. Now Sam will need to wear sunscreen wherever he goes'.[151]

In this case, Pittard and Worsnip show how the two suggestions, 'administer herb C' and 'administer herb B' are mutually exclusive and incompatible courses of action because herb B could outright kill Sam in their example, whereas herb C will only unremarkably incapacitate him. At the same time, both propositions are valid courses of action in their respective contexts. The thorough skillset of the herbology professor and the limited repertoire of the herbalist-in-training demand different responses. They go on to define the view while explicating the thought experiment:

> According to metanormative contextualism […] the semantic value of a normative 'ought' claim of the form 'S ought to φ' depends on the value of one or more parameters whose values vary in a way that is determined by the context of utterance. The proposal is, then, that 'ought' has one semantic value in Sarah's mouth, and another semantic value in her professor's mouth. *Hence, both claims can be true*.[152]

Any semantics of 'ought' which cannot incorporate the context-dependence between administering herb B and herb C, they argue, is implausible *prima facie*. At the same time, others have argued for a non-contextualist view where the professor's 'ought' statement is descriptive, whereas the trainee's is purely normative precisely because she does not know. However, if one were to place the herbology professor in the same situation as his trainee Sarah, this 'ought' would immediately become normative. Further, if he is at all unsure about his practice, it would also become ambiguous to him whether he should administer B or C. Thus, trying to preserve what the authors term *soft invariantism* by parsing out different senses of 'ought' still collapses onto contextualism, the only view which can account for the semantic openness of 'ought' statements.

Shifting to an example specifically of *normative* uncertainty, the authors discuss a case where a practical deliberator is unclear on which of two ethical theories is more correct. To adapt their case slightly, consider a reasoner who is split between, say, *act utilitarianism* or *deontology*, with the two being mutually exclusive. In such a case, apply the key insight that we disagree about practical reasons but cannot verify them. This agent's decision to side temporarily with one view to enact, e.g., a specific utilitarian policy D could not feasibly be said to *contradict* an alternate decision on their part to enact, e.g., deontological policy E but only be held in opposition with their actual decision. In other words, the two are ultimately consistent. In other words, the truth of this agent's decision on whether they should enact D or E is dependent on the *context of utterance*. Had this agent been more inclined to deontology, 'S ought to enact E' would be true relative to this inclination. Although this example is functionally close to the former case, they insist on a distinction because the latter

[151] Pittard and Worsnip, 156.
[152] Pittard and Worsnip, 157. Emphasis mine.

is a deeper, potentially unresolvable uncertainty (i.e., we will likely never know which of utilitarianism or deontology is 'correct'). In this sense, Aristotle's case is the more straightforward and helpful illustration since the tyrant is a completely unpredictable actor for discussions of forced but voluntary action.

Habermas is skeptical about contextualism in the grounds for his critical social theory because it is limited to "a local context" which "closes down the normative dimension which enables us to identify the traits of an unhappy and distorted life" (RR 134). Allen writes, however, that Habermas's own view flattens out into "some variety of contextualism" because of his own focus on rational reconstruction and a discourse ethics in which validity claims arise as a result of an ongoing, albeit rational and directed, process.[153] According to Allen, Habermas's project includes two elements, (1) a metanormative theory of justification and (2) a universalist moral theory. The relationship between these two elements, while being unclear, is likely that "formal pragmatics [epistemology] and the theory of modernity [as a sociocultural learning process as part of the moral theory] [provide] mutual support for each other" in an ouroboric fashion.[154] Allen points out exactly how Habermas's approach, despite his protestations, must entail some form of contextualism. If the best way to describe Habermas is as a neo-Hegelian reconstructivist, *not* a neo-Kantian constructivist (i.e., an invariantist) because of his *developmentalist* conception of modernity which views our present outcomes as the product of an evolutionary process, then it becomes clear why Habermas's view entails contextualism.

Although he searches for the solid normative footing of a self-validating critical social theory lacking in the first generation of the Frankfurt School, Habermas's attempt to ground an invariantist moral theory in a socially mediated context of formal pragmatics which leads to a communicative form of ethics is either actually contextualist or just circular. In other words, he must propose a specific point to start tracing this circle; otherwise, he begs the question. Unless a deep metaphysical conception, e.g., of Kantian *Humanität*, grounds his discourse ethics, a fall back on historical development is a fall back on what theoretically could have been otherwise on his view. If things could not have been otherwise, then Habermas could be licensed in his view not entailing contextualism; however, his strong rejection of the Marxian conception of historical development[155] leaves him in a dangerous spot given his own commitments. Although I do not include Habermas in the present discussion as a representative of contextualism, a clarification of his views can help to situate the advantages of contextualism.

Honneth, a major proponent of *immanent critique*, which I argue is a deeply contextualist approach to normative foundations. Honneth's approach is contextualist because of the fact that his immanent critique is sensitive to the historical contingency behind the rational evolution of certain determinate elements of ethical life [*Sittlichkeit*], and yet, their very contingency. Alternatively, Honneth is aware of the *arbitrary but necessary* beginning at the

[153] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 65–66.

[154] Allen, 78.

[155] Habermas considers advantages and pitfalls of Marx's *historical-materialist concept of the history of the species*. Notably, Habermas points out how history makes sense on this view "in a developmental logic," *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon press, 1979), 148. However, the difficulties include the very problematic "*unilinear, necessary, uninterrupted, and progressive development of a macrosubject*," 139. In short, Habermas disagrees with his necessitarianism.

heart of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. We must start somewhere—although in Hegel, one could start from the end and read backwards, the starting point must be self-grounding to justify its later developments out of what is initially chaotic and largely indeterminate. Normative structures, for Honneth and other defenders of Hegelian approaches, flow from a tangible, historical process which is neither completely freestanding and 'objective' nor completely indeterminate and 'relative.' It is precisely because of monumental developments in our social institutions themselves that we can discover legitimate norms and recognize ourselves as norm-givers and -followers. In Allen's words, Honneth "refuses to base his normative project on a constructivist justification of abstract, 'transcendent' normative principles."[156] As Honneth opens his book on freedom and immanent critique,

> One of the major weaknesses of contemporary political philosophy is that it has been decoupled from an analysis of society, instead becoming fixated on purely normative principles (FR 1).

In other words, contemporary political philosophy has been watered down, essentially, to a form of applied ethics. The robust insight which contextualist approaches bring to the table for normative foundations is their simultaneous attention to historical grounding and need to prospectively justify social critique in more than just historical ground.

The relationship between analytic and critical theoretic metanormative contextualism is the semantically open character of both views' understanding of the nature of ethical norms. In short, the ethically 'binding' quality of our norms is a context-dependent phenomenon. Social norms develop out of a certain set of historically grounded activities. Pittard and Worsnip state,

> Metanormative contextualism is the view that the semantic value of a given 'ought' claim depends on the value of one or more parameters that are fixed by the context of utterance. So, *if there is even a single case that shows that 'ought' can have different semantic values* in a way that cannot be explained by a soft invariantist appeal to 'multiple senses', *then metanormative contextualism follows*.[157]

The rationale for Habermas's view flattening onto contextualism is the openness of his view for 'ought' to have a range of possible yet valid values since he accepts the idea of moral progress as a spring flowing from a fountain of collective social learning processes; however, he rejects the idea of their necessary progression. As such, 'ought' must have a variable truth value across time. As Habermas writes, he gives a "prominent place" to "normative structures in the framework of social evolution." Two possible misunderstandings: (1) Habermas is dropping materialism in social development or (2) Habermas trades on empirical scientific developments for the "logification of history."[158] In response, Habermas claims to preserve both through an explanatory strategy which opens up "*structural possibilities for the rationalization of action*," i.e., refusing to make the specific "orienting *content*" of morality binding.[159] Finlayson, analyzing Habermas's response to Rawls's theory of justice, writes that "it is not up to the theorist to determine the normative content of moral norms, principles of

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[156] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 91.

[157] Pittard and Worsnip, "Metanormative Contextualism and Normative Uncertainty," 189. Emphasis mine.

[158] Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 120–21.

[159] Habermas, 122.

justice, or legitimate laws" as "one of the main methodological principles of discourse ethics."[160] Put differently to substantiate my point, if there are multiple satisfactory contenders for valid moral norms, or if their content can be made different (across time), then contextualism follows.

2.4 Conclusion

In presenting the grounding problem, I understand the positive aim of critical theory (and social philosophy generally)[161] as being able to make normative claims about what society *ought* to look like, irrespective of whether our social actuality presents valid images of the good life.[162] In other words, the social critic and social philosopher must concern themselves with the necessary conditions behind human flourishing. For a Hegelian like Adorno, what is possible always comes out of what is actual. Adorno, in many senses, commits himself to diagnose the depths of wrong life to nudge us towards the possible configurations of what is better, reflecting on both poles of critical theory. In truth, as Freyenhagen states, Adorno's unwavering cynicism is a veiled optimism about our social potential to someday actualize the conditions which underlie human flourishing. Unfortunately, in our present historical situation, the material conditions of capital suppress human happiness and leave us with only unfulfilled desires. Only once these conditions are modified, the Hegelian argument goes, can we envision real specificity concerning the good life.

The grounding problem seems insoluble in the most fundamental sense. In my view, the problem is one that can be managed, not resolved. The grounding problem is not a fatal problem or an objection particular to critical theory. If the social critic can accomplish anything, it must come with a minimal acknowledgement of a provisional but still binding normative lynchpin which, at least momentarily, bypasses the ethical skeptic's concerns about the possible sources of normativity. In other words, normative *epoché* must always remain incomplete if we are to ground social criticism for the positive ends of critical theory.

Adorno argues in *Principles of Moral Philosophy* that relativism and absolutism (i.e., invariantism) are one of a kind. As he states,

> For the positive nature of beliefs, of ideologies, that prevail here and now is not relative at all. They confront us at every moment as binding and absolute. And the criticism of these false absolutes […] is much more urgent than the quest for some absolute values or other, fixed in eternity and hanging from the ceiling like herrings, which would enable us to transcend this relativism with which, as real living people who are attempting to live decent lives, we have absolutely nothing to do. On the other hand, however, the postulates and values that surface wherever people imagine that they have to overcome relativism are the products of arbitrary acts, things that are freely posited, that are created

[160] Finlayson, *The Habermas-Rawls Debate*, 82.

[161] Maeve Cooke asserts social philosophy's aims as being at least threefold: human flourishing is (1) our end, (2) possible under certain possible social conditions, (3) and non-arbitrary. Cooke, "Between 'Objectivism' and 'Contextualism'," 194.

[162] Recently, negativistic conceptions of Adorno's philosophy seek to demonstrate how Adorno sees the current social world as irredeemably evil such that "*es gibt kein richtig Leben im falschen*." At this point, I remain agnostic as to whether Adorno posits the possibility of glimpsing the good life and happiness through the pervasive, nebulous veneer of falsity via immanent criticism or another mélange of modes of critique. The position in this debate is called *austere negativism* by Finlayson and Freyenhagen.

> and not natural, and thus they necessarily always succumb to the relativism they denounce.[163]

Adorno offers two premises in support of his conclusion. First, ideologies excavated by critical genealogical approaches always appear as objectively valid. Foucault's decision to interrogate them in a merely descriptive manner is thus illegitimate. Second, the recourse to invariantism against relativism comes too quickly and nondialectically. In a kind of abstract negation, the invariantist clings to the need for absolute principles to match the confrontation with the impact of ideology. Ironically, then, his conclusion that "[invariantism] succumbs to the relativism [it] denounces," is because it needs to posit abstract guidelines in response to real, dominant ideologies. Thus, as Allen aptly argues alongside Adorno, "Relativism and absolutism are thus correlates, and 'dialectical thinking […] is a kind of thinking that, to express it in Nietzschean terms, would persist beyond that alternative.'"[164] I conceive of contextualism as providing the type of dialectical thinking needed to transcend the false dichotomy between relativism and invariantism.

[163] Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Polity, 2001), 175.

[164] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 216. She also references Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 175.

3 Immanent Critique

"*Transcendent critique sympathizes with authority in its very form, even before expressing any content; there is a moment of content to the form itself.*"

– Theodor W. Adorno, *Principles of Moral Philosophy*

As I have discussed, grounding normativity without recourse to either an inflexible metaphysics or merely subjective interests is a difficult task. The method which several Frankfurt School critical theorists mobilize in service of a third path, against internal and external criticism, a dialectical form of criticism with deeply Left Hegelian roots commonly referred to as "immanent criticism" or "immanent critique." I detail in this chapter (§3.1) why critical theory should be committed to this form of contextual, dialectical critique which seeks to transform society from within, given the inescapability of shared values embedded in a shared social order. I describe (§3.2) arguments by Habermas and Honneth for the possibility of a transcendence *from within* or an *immanent transcendence* in the establishment of normative criteria for social criticism. Drawing on the model of Spinoza's immanent critique of substance dualism as a paradigmatic form of the method (§3.3), I show how Spinoza's *immanentism*, the naturalistic view that there is no *imperium in imperio*, is a more consistent route for establishing normative criteria for social critique without the need or possibility of a moment of transcendence. In the following chapter, I continue my development of a Spinozistic ground for social criticism.

3.1 What is Immanent Critique?

Immanent critique, the critical method of exposing society's deep-seated self-contradictions and inability to make good on its own institutional standards, has been the subject of endless discussions in contemporary critical theory.[165] Often, the view is opposed to what Adorno calls *transcendent criticism*, social criticism based on *external* standards (e.g., the will of God, a metaphysical view of human nature), unpopular among critical theory's committed post-Kantians, who, as I mention in the previous chapter, observe a widespread skepticism concerning nonhistorical forms of unmediated knowledge. First, I offer a provisional definition of immanent critique.

> deployment of incompletely or non-fully realized norms latent to *specific forms of ethical life or social circumstances* for criticism (i.e., the "normative promise"[166] behind justice for all, liberty, egality, fraternity, etc.) based on society's self-contradictions and current inability to instantiate said normative promises.

The latent social ontology in approaches to critique which rely on immanent criticism is a distinctly pre-modern view, held by Plato, Spinoza, Hegel, and others.[167] Nevertheless,

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[165] Rocío Zambrana, although criticizing his views, helpfully writes, "[t]he key to inheriting the left-Hegelian notion of immanent critique, according to Honneth, is pursuing a metacritical reconstruction of the moral expectations implicit in institutions" "Paradoxes of Neoliberalism and the Tasks of Critical Theory," *Critical Horizons* 14, no. 1 (January 2013): 98, https://doi.org/10.1179/15685160X13A.0000000005. In general, this is the approach taken by immanent critique.

[166] I lift this phrasing directly from Honneth, who emphasizes in *Freedom's Right* how immanent ideas of freedom as they have come to be known in our shared, social world are better grounds for our action than transcendent ideas or reasons in avoiding social pathologies. In other words, untethered ideas about what the good life should look like are worse as a guide for action than what we are currently acquainted with.

[167] I discuss the view fully in Chapter 5.

seldom do critical theorists explicitly defend this view. Immanent critique works best (and perhaps only) on the view that society constitutes a self-structuring unity because of the immanent critic's focus on what is posited (and fails to be instantiated properly) *within* a specific form of ethical life. Typically, immanent critique is attributed to thinkers in the post-Kantian German tradition: Hegel, Marx, and Adorno are considered the progenitors of the method or approach which the immanent critic takes up.[168] Numerous scholars have retraced the origins of immanent critique and evaluation or creation of standards for values in society as running from Hegel through Marx to Frankfurt School critical social theory.[169]

3.1.1 Key Features

Immanent critique has a few defining features. Jaeggi identifies seven.[170] Rachel Fraser proposes three desiderata for an adequate immanent critique.[171] I develop five interrelated requirements of immanent critique. A method of social criticism is immanent just in case it is: (1) internalist, (2) systemic, (3) transformative, (4) dialectical, and (5) contextual.

Internalist. Criteria for social criticism come either from within or from without. There are two kinds of social criticism based on internal standards: immanent critique as well as internal critique. External criticism, on the other hand, employs criteria and normative categories from outside of the object criticized, like metanormative invariantism. Criteria for immanent critique must come only from within the normative order of the social institutions in question. This means that the consistent immanent critic is not licensed to appeal to external criteria for social criticism, i.e., they can only work from within the normative environment in which they actively find themselves. The immanent critic is not licensed to argue from the will of God, an ahistorical conceptualization of justice, or a basic right to justification to normative prescriptions. Instead, the immanent critic works from within the scope of their particular historical situation to maximize the possibility of their criticism's

[168] Finlayson has taken issue with this stance. In his view, there is a complicated story for why there is *not* a line running from Hegel to Adorno on immanent critique. For him, on the common view of immanent critique, we can say that Socrates was a practitioner of immanent critique. The common understanding makes immanent critique philosophically uninteresting in his view, whereas Hegel's stronger, metaphysical variant is more suppositional but constitutes a real philosophical intervention. James Gordon Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 22, no. 6 (November 2, 2014): 1142–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2014.993918.

[169] To name some fundamental examples: Rahel Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology," in *New Waves in Political Philosophy*, ed. Boudewijn de Bruin and Christopher F. Zurn, New Waves in Philosophy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 63–86; Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*; Karen Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," *Constellations* 22, no. 3 (2015): 393–404, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12170; Karin de Boer, "Hegel's Conception of Immanent Critique : Its Sources, Extent, and Limit," in *Conceptions of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Ruth Sonderegger and Karin de Boer (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, UK ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 83–100; Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism"; Michael A. Becker, "On Immanent Critique in Hegel's *Phenomenology*," *Hegel Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (August 2020): 224–46, https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2018.8; Robert J. Antonio, "Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Developments in Hegel, Marx and Contemporary Thought," *The British Journal of Sociology* 32, no. 3 (1981): 330–45, https://doi.org/10.2307/589281.

[170] Jaeggi contends that immanent critique is distinguished from internal criticism on seven grounds. They are: (1) the normativity of the actual, (2) the (functional-)constitutive character of norms, (3) the inverted effectiveness of norms, (4) orientation to crisis, (5) parallel contradictoriness of reality and norms, (6) a transformative character, and finally, (7) an experiential and learning process.

[171] Fraser argues that these desiderata are *no-external-standards*, *normative significance*, and *sociality*. Rachel Fraser, "IV—The Limits of Immanent Critique," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 123, no. 2 (July 17, 2023): 97–125, https://doi.org/10.1093/arisoc/aoad005.

uptake. One key upshot of immanent criticism is therefore that it is potentially less resource intensive to satisfy onlookers than external criticism.[172]

The external critic must develop a set of norms from scratch or discover them from outside a normative order. The immanent critic, on the other hand, works from within the extant ethical order, which already has uptake. Thus, immanent criticism is more familiar, in addition to being, likelier, less resource intensive than criticism from without. Spinoza, for example, begins with definitions of God, substance, mode, attribute, etc., with the intent to *repurpose* and *transform* these concepts, about which readers have pre-formed ideas. As the time comes to recognize that God and substance are coextensive, the reader has a more difficult time walking back their own prior commitments than if Spinoza had developed unfamiliar concepts out of thin air. The immanent critic can therefore reach within a discourse and expose the inadequacy of the order of things to demonstrate its deficient organization. Thus, although immanent criticism *begins* with norms as they are instantiated, it is different from internal criticism insofar as it pushes *beyond* the current constellation of norms, practices, and social institutions. Jaeggi argues that "immanent criticism […] cannot help but start from the inside; however, insofar as it aims at superseding through criticism, it cannot help but transcend this position."[173]

Honneth centers the idea that all normative criticism pulls from the idea of self-contradictory norms in a given moral culture; in other words, we share some key moral reference points.[174] External critique relies directly on the idea that one has access to a metaphysical, culturally transcendent kind of truth—he thinks that evades rational justification,[175] so immanent critique is methodologically superior to external critique. Honneth lambasts external critique, stating that it presupposes a particular image of "the good life." His own theory of recognition, on the other hand, he thinks, avoids precisely this issue by only drawing a positive conception in broad outline and not assuming a particular configuration for all social arrangements.[176]

Internal criticism differs from immanent criticism insofar as internal criticism does not necessarily seek to go beyond the normative criteria which it accepts as valid objects of critique. Jaeggi gives an informative example: theologians or religious believers who criticize the practices of a given faith. For example, Muslim feminists who argue that a more consistent interpretation of the Quran would involves the abolition of misogynistic practices. In this case, the critic is herself a Muslim and advances her criticism from this vantage point. She does not seek to abolish or surpass Islam itself, only misogynistic instantiations at present. The standard for her criticism, Jaeggi says, is also found in what is criticized.[177] As I

[172] In my view, this is another answer to the relativistic critique that the search for normative foundations is an endless pit. Immanent critique offers a determinate starting point without necessitating an absolute, ahistorical one.

[173] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 195.

[174] Axel Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism," *Constellations* 7, no. 1 (2000): 118, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00173.

[175] Honneth, 122.

[176] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 174.

[177] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 179–80.

describe below, however, immanent critique differs from internal critique in several important respects.

Systemic. Jaeggi argues that the difference between the two internalist methods of criticism, internal and immanent, is that immanent critique is *strong*, whereas internal critique is *weak.* Despite the normatively charged terminology, both modes of criticism have a proper time and place in a changing and increasingly global context. According to Onora O'Neill, social criticism [*Gesellschaftskritik*] is *strong* [*starke*] when it provides systemic and confrontational analysis. Social criticism is *weak* [*schwache*] when it proposes pragmatic solutions and focuses less on upending or dismantling social structures and institutions.[178] In her account, the two ultimately must dovetail with one another in a global context to address the challenges of pluralistic societies.

At times, as Fraser argues in her debate with Honneth for the concept of *reformist reform*,[179] it may be beneficial in the long run to trade on launching strong criticism for a weak criticism if it makes the difference between some change and none. Further, if Fraser is correct, with enough consistent effort, reform over time can result in systemic change itself. Therefore, it is possible for the barrier between strong and weak criticism to erode through this *via media*. However, immanent critique is generally systemic insofar as it launches strong criticism of the extant normative order. Even on Fraser's idea of reformist reform, there is a clear eye to the eventual systemic change required to upend inadequate social norms, institutions, and laws. Immanent critique holds that forms of life are criticizable in their essences and do not match up with their concepts. On my conception of immanent critique, the focus on structures and systems is most amenable to the view of society itself as an organism.

Jaeggi argues that immanent critique is oriented towards crisis and problem-resolution. For her, "The problems and crisis tendencies demonstrated by immanent criticism, by contrast, point to structural issues that place the constellation described itself in question."[180] The systemic orientation of immanent criticism comes from its dedication to understanding social structures at a systemic level. While internal or external criticism take a desired normative order for granted, either as a given within a society or as an aspiration towards which a people strive, immanent criticism views social structures as systems of conflict and strife. Although internal and external criticism differ insofar as they view the appropriate basis of criticism as a contradiction between the 'is' of existing practices and the 'ought' of either social ideals or external standards, they both take their 'ought' for granted. It is the social ideals themselves or the invariant universal against which we measure up. Immanent criticism, on the other hand, in its focus on systems, takes them as modifiable and prone to kinks and error.

Transformative. The immanent critic must be committed fully to social transformation. This fulfills the 'positive' side of critical theory's bipolarity. It is not enough for the social critic to point out how society falls short of its purported aims. Rather, immanent critique

[178] Onora O'Neill, "Starke Und Schwache Gesellschaftskritik in Einer Globalisierten Welt," *Deutsche Zeitschrift Für Philosophie* 48, no. 5 (2000): 719–28, https://doi.org/10.1524/dzph.2000.48.5.719.

[179] Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 78–79.

[180] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 202.

must push society to realize that to live up to its standards would be to surpass and overcome its current modes of organization. Although the creation of a correct depiction of the social reality is an important undertaking, the immanent critic does not merely aim at a descriptively accurate picture but seeks to realize better standards which are birthed from within the current sociopolitical climate, which was built upon the old, *ad infinitum*. Marx writes to Arnold Ruge in 1843, "we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover the new world through the critique of the old." I take Marx to mean that identifying new principles, which are born from the contradictory practices within the current social order, leads to a more consistent critique of it than the use of dogmatic principles from its outskirts. If the goals of immanent critique are practical, then it is a necessarily transformative mode of analysis. In its use of the social order as a bedrock of contradictions, it is the starting point "only as part of a process of transformation."[181]

Honneth's understanding in *Freedom's Right* of the link between analysis and critique is important here. Hegel's account in the *Philosophy of Right* has received the criticism by many, including Marx, of its purely conservative justification for the status quo of his day. However, upon closer scrutiny, Hegel's analysis can be said to seek transformation in an adequate reconstruction of the social institutions sustaining ethical life. Immanent criticism is transformative in its social outlook because in the moment of analysis, the correct normative angle reveals itself. As Jaeggi argues, borrowing from Adorno, "the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better."[182]

Dialectical. Determinate, dialectical critiques are more effective than untethered ones because they speak to concepts familiar to interlocutors. Immanent critique is dialectical because it relies on the push-and-pull of concrete sociopolitical realities and the prior commitments which come along with them. This is in opposition to ideal theory's construction of sociopolitical norms, which operate in a top-down, more heavy-handed fashion. In other words, the immanent critic works from within the realm of practical contradictions and rejects the view of an impartial spectator. In this Hegelian vein, the immanent critic relentlessly pursues the contradictions at the heart of social institutions to demonstrate why our institutions cannot currently live up to their explicitly stated norms. As Honneth states, it is an analysis of the *normative promise* behind liberal ideals which forces the confrontation of social wrongs, not the just the present instantiations of liberal institutions themselves or the arguments grounding these ideals.

Frederick Douglass offers a well-known example which demonstrates the dialectical nature of immanent criticism. In his 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" Douglass argues that the United States held itself was caught between two mutually exclusive poles. On one hand, the Constitution explicitly commits the nation to "liberty and justice for all." On the other, the widespread practice of chattel slavery and white supremacism tells a starkly different story. Therefore, Douglass argues, the ratification of the Constitution cannot be a cause for the slave's celebration. Douglass could have easily (and perhaps, convincingly) appealed to an argument *imago Dei*, but his dialectical approach of prying Americans' prior commitments apart is far more convincing. On their very own grounds, white Americans were inconsistent in their simultaneously avowed allegiance to freedom and possession of

[181] Jaeggi, 209.

[182] Adorno in Jaeggi, 209.As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is also a play on Ep. 76. Adorno references Spinoza here, as well as with Horkheimer earlier.

slaves. As another example, after Euthyphro admits that the gods disagree about the nature of the good, Socrates puts him in a position where he must admit the incoherency of his previous articulation of the pious as that which is loved by the gods.

In Finlayson's view, the roots of immanent criticism, conceptualized in a weaker, non-Hegelian form, extend back to Socrates.[183] The method of *elenchus*, or refutation, proceeds in a dialectically structured fashion. Socrates, upon discussion with his interlocutors, pries apart the views of his interlocutors to determine their internal contradictions. The dialectical nature of immanent critique, in this sense, is not special to the Left Hegelian tradition with which it is often associated. Although the Left Hegelian tradition adopted the dialectical requirement of social criticism wholesale, it is a familiar concept with roots in ancient philosophy.

Contextual. As I argue, immanent critique relies on some variant of metanormative contextualism because it leaves normative judgments, at least implicitly, as semantically incomplete. Put differently, the fact that it is our historical circumstances which prescribe a specific range of actions means that acceptable actions, norms, and institutions are context relative. However, they are still subject to a validity check. Therefore, they are not *just* relative. The coherent immanent critic must be some kind of contextualist because immanent critique requires an appeal to the historicization of norms: the historical specificity and development of the institutions behind their claims. The immanent critic does not rely on a pure, universalist moral theory for ready-made answers. Instead, they profess that the superior approach is to admit the historical basis of our institutions and work from within these shared boundaries. Immanent critique must be contextualist because the norms to which it appeals have only context-driven validity claims, not universal or transhistorical applicability. Again, normative terms are semantically incomplete on this view. In his juxtaposition of freedom against slavery, Douglass's radical critique of white American's cognitive dissonance shows that, on their own terms, they are not licensed to the conclusion that slavery ought to be permitted.

Allen has argued that metanormative contextualism and a purely immanent method of social criticism is the best path to open fractures within the social world. In opposition to the context-transcendent, "two-worlds talk" of Forst and other Frankfurt School critical theorists, contextualism refuses the "assumptions of metaphysical and normative purity" associated with non-contextual normative standards. In an effort to get their hands dirty, the immanent critic adopts an impure understanding of practical reasoning.[184] As such, the only conceptualization of history which can adequately capture the context-driven approach of the immanent critic is a *Verfallgeschichte*, a negativistic philosophy of history.[185]

In total, immanent critique's defining features blend and mutually reinforce one another. Its commitment to contextualism implies its dialecticality because what is context-based arises from a dialectical interplay between social institutions and their concept. If immanent critique is dialectical, this implies that it is likely transformative—dialectics push towards something's self-unfolding development. The most likely path for convincing others and revealing their self-contradictions for a transformative effect, as Douglass's rhetoric shows, is

[183] Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism."
[184] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 160–61.
[185] Allen, 164.

an approach which appeals to concepts which are immanent to the context of a particular lifeworld.

3.1.2 Key Problems

As with any other approach, there are problems facing immanent critique, particularly as the sole means of grounding a critique of society. I discuss two crucial issues with the method before moving to detail Spinoza's version against Descartes. First, I detail whether normative coherence can arise at a group level because immanent critique aims to discuss agency at this register. Second, I raise the question of whether immanent critique is complicit in the hypostatization of historical norms and an "independent logic of culture,"[186] a question first raised by Adorno, a supposed progenitor of immanent critique in "Cultural Criticism and Society." As we will see, Adorno is highly ambivalent about a purely immanent methodology for social criticism.

Group agency is a difficult subject. Hegel's idea of *Geist* attempts to establish a normative, social force which he defines in the *Phenomenology* as the "'I' that is 'We' and 'We' that is 'I'" (*Phenomenology* §81). This concept is the vehicle of much of, if not *all* of, Hegel's social philosophy, as he effectively views the collective of civil society as working behind the backs of individual citizens. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel advances the idea that, in civil society, it is the individual will which always mediates the inner necessity of civil society (*Philosophy of Right* §206). The *cunning of reason* shows how seemingly arbitrary, individual actions can cohere into a rational whole. As he states, "*subjective selfishness* turns into a *contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else*" (*Philosophy of Right* §199). The *Gestalt* effect of individual agential activity, greater than the mere sum of their parts, for Hegel, is the essence of *Geist*. This conceptualization of group agency has had a major impact on the history of sociopolitical critique. Group-based agential concepts like ideology, systemic racism, misogyny, etc. are heavily, even if indirectly, reliant on Hegel's idea of *Geist*, which drives all normative relations. Marx's understanding of the origins of capitalistic economic organization involves a highly rational nexus of multiple actors' fragmented, individual, and arbitrary decisions. *In toto*, these haphazard decisions which serve the individual motives of the agent can perpetuate an economic system. Further, the beliefs of these individuals can serve to legitimate these relations.

Recently, Rachel Fraser has thrown these kinds of assumptions and premises concerning how group agency and norm adoption function into question. Fraser uses a thought experiment to demonstrate how "complex social systems" do not *and cannot* adopt norms in the same way that individuals can. She makes two interlocking points. First, that the "adoption of a norm" and "adoption of an end" are different concepts entirely for social systems. We are not licensed, Fraser contends, in believing that 'capitalism' is able to 'do' anything. Second, complex social systems do not function with the same coherence requirements as individual actors. In brief, social systems are tolerant of incoherency—in some cases, their structure specifically invites it.

(i) Fraser argues when social systems like democracy, capitalism, etc. adopt a norm, it is not identical to that social system adopting an *end*. Democracy, capitalism, etc. do not

[186] Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought 4 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 29.

themselves exhibit teleological, means-ends styles of reasoning. In fact, they do not reason at all, properly speaking. As Fraser writes:

> when a complex social system adopts—or, more appositely, comes to be governed by—a norm, it does not (at least in general) do so because it aims at satisfaction of that norm. Capitalist social formations are governed by the norms of capital accumulation. But a sentence like 'Capitalist socio-economic formations aim at capital accumulation' has the aura of metaphor.[187]

To recapitulate her point, to say that capitalism aims specifically at capital accumulation cannot entail that capitalism does so in order to satisfy an end. Fraser is not implying that capitalism does *not* do this; however, she argues it does not do so for the express intent of accumulating capital. Further, despite these negative effects of capital accumulation *on capitalism*, capitalism possesses the dynamic ability to regulate itself.[188] As Jaeggi has forcefully shown, a purely functional critique of capitalism is insufficient. Not only is capitalism's high tolerance to variance a factor within its capacity to function, but there is great difficulty involved in the assignment of a *telos* to capitalism or other complex social system.[189] Fraser, like Jaeggi, argues that a social system is deficient just in case it fails to fulfill some normative criteria established for its function. Quickly, the skeptic of immanent critique sees the problem, namely, that the normative criteria involved in the criticism of capitalism's function are not identical to the function or *telos* of capitalism itself. Fraser's counterexample is the operation of a car's engine, which produces heat under normal operative conditions but incorporates a cooling system to counteract overheating. Therefore, to say an engine's production of heat is contradictory to its function is factually incorrect despite an engine's overheating being contrary to its function. Only if we were to ascribe a particular *telos* to a good engine as one which does not produce *any* heat could we draw certain normative conclusions about the engine's heat production.

(ii) Social structures, Fraser argues, do not have the same requirement of internal coherence as individual agents do. When a particular agent enacts a plan and either contradicts it or cannot uphold it, they fail to make good on their commitments. However, the operation of a social structure is infinitely more complicated. Fraser presents the following case to demonstrate that we should not consider complex social structures as agents.

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[187] Fraser, "IV—The Limits of Immanent Critique," 106.

[188] Arguably, this is capitalism being perpetually 'in crisis.' Schumpeter's Gale, or the idea of "creative destruction" is well-documented in the history of critical theory. Horkheimer and Adorno make use of this idea in how the culture industry creates false art, and Albena Azmenova draws on this concept to argue for capitalism's overall instability. *Capitalism on Edge: How Fighting Precarity Can Achieve Radical Change without Crisis or Utopia*, New Directions in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

[189] Rahel Jaeggi, "What (If Anything) Is Wrong with Capitalism? Dysfunctionality, Exploitation and Alienation: Three Approaches to the Critique of Capitalism," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 54, no. S1 (September 2016): 50, https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12188.

Expert Panel. An expert panel is asked to give a government advice on global warming. The panel must form judgements on three propositions:

P: Global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels are above 6500 million metric tons of carbon per annum.

P → Q: If global carbon dioxide emissions are above this thresh- old, then the global temperature will increase by at least 1.5 °C over the next three decades.

Q: The global temperature will increase by at least 1.5 °C over the next three decades.

Suppose the experts' judgements are as shown in the table below.

	P	Proposition *P* → *Q*	*Q*
Expert 1	T	T	T
Expert 2	T	F	F
Expert 3	F	T	F
Group	T	T	F

Figure 1: Expert Panel[190]

Fraser elaborates *Expert Panel* (Fig. 1) to show how if a group's collective attitude comes down to a simple, majority vote, then their independent findings, *were they to constitute a group norm*, become incoherent and guilty of *denying the consequent*. Her simple solution, therefore, is that *Expert Panel* is a *reductio* for group agency and therefore immanent critique. She rejects the idea of large-scale group agency. Thus, she writes, even a simple "doxastic coherence" cannot legitimately be demanded of groups. *Expert Panel* constitutes a group because they have what she calls *participatory intention*, or "a thick shared project […] to which each member of the group is committed."[191] Finally, Fraser maintains that humans are agency over-detectors, and we perceive it even when it is not present. In conclusion, Fraser holds that the immanent critic is nevertheless hostage to this broadly Hegelian scheme of agential social structures because immanent critique cannot otherwise make good on its commitments.[192]

Although I offer an extended response to Fraser's position in the following chapter, let it suffice at present for me to expose a crucial problem within her criticism of immanent critique. Fraser tries to argue that the immanent critic runs the risk of their view unduly bootstrapping any possible conclusion based on prior normative legitimation. Fraser argues that the following logical sequence makes an illicit deduction of (3). Let *S* be some normative principle:

(1) ¬ ◊ (Endorse *S* ∧ ¬ Satisfy *S*)
(2) ¬ ◊ (Endorse *S* ∧ ¬ Satisfy *S*) ∧ Endorse *S*
(3) □ Satisfy *S*

[190] Reproduced from Fraser, "IV—The Limits of Immanent Critique," 108.
[191] Fraser, 109.
[192] Fraser, 110.

Fraser proposes (1) to show how there is no contradiction involved in endorsing any single particular standard.[193] (2) highlights the crux of the immanent critic's contradiction-unveiling. Despite the impossibility of a social institution upholding and satisfying a norm, it nevertheless upholds the norm. Fraser tries to argue that (3) cannot follow from a principle like (2), thus the immanent critic would need to show (2'). Namely, that the conjunction in (2) include a *necessary*, more fundamental endorsement of *S*, i.e., *S* as a guiding principle.

(2') $\neg \Diamond$ (Endorse S $\wedge \neg$ Satisfy S) $\wedge \Box$ Endorse S.

Fraser argues against Titus Stahl's understanding of immanent critique. Stahl's view includes a proviso, where participants within a community have a *prima facie* reason to endorse *S* if they commit to *S*.[194] Ultimately, Fraser argues that the bootstrapping case arises because (2') means that one *should* endorse *S* simply because one *does* endorse *S*.

My issue with Fraser's reconstruction of the endorsement/satisfaction puzzle is that (1) does not capture what Stahl or other immanent critics argue regarding how social norms and their baggage, or their practical contradictions, operate. (1) reads, *it is not possible*[195] *to both endorse* S *and not satisfy* S. To fill in (1) using her earlier example, it is not possible [or, logically consistent] [for capitalism] to both endorse [the maximal accumulation of capital gain] and not satisfy [the maximal accumulation of capital gain]. Fraser's logic is sound. Indeed, (1) must involve a practical self-contradiction or a self-undermining operation at its heart for it to function as a valid reason in the immanent critic's argument. However, her breakdown of (1) and her argument at large both miss the point of *Dialectical*.

The immanent critic's entire enterprise is based on the inability of a set of social norms to cohere on theoretical and practical levels. As Douglass argued, there is a terrible inconsistency with America's Janus-faced endorsement of chattel slavery and satisfaction of a more perfect union. Douglass and other immanent critics effectively argue, (1) cannot just be a mere conjunction. Instead, (1) must include some self-undermining aspect of *S* as indispensable in *S*. The scope of the modal operator remains the same for the immanent critic, who argues for what is better yet captured by (1'), a conjunction with a nested conditional.

(1') $\neg \Diamond$ [(Endorse *S* $\wedge \neg$ Satisfy *S*) $\wedge \Box$ (Endorse *S* $\rightarrow \neg$ Satisfy *S*)]

(1') is meant to show how the immanent critic leans on the *dialectical* nature of their criticism. Not every concept is rife for an immanent critique. The kinds of norms subject to an immanent critique, however, contain a self-undermining property such that to endorse them and to work towards their satisfaction is *inevitably* to undermine their possible satisfaction. The immanent critic therefore reaches into the institutional depths of a social order to salvage the "normative promises" at its core by exposing the social order's self-effacing nature. There is no greater social contradiction or site of tension, e.g., than a new society which professes freedom as its guiding virtue while legally sanctioning the enslavement of an entire population. Thus, (1') expects only the kinds of social practices

[193] Fraser attempts to show this point with the playful example statement/norm, *never wear matching socks*. Upon the realization of one's socks matching, the only way to justify, normatively speaking, needing to remove them is through identifying a contradiction between the reasons for a norm and its violation.

[194] Notably, there may be *moral* reasons guarding against their endorsement of *S*, which Fraser argues is an unsuitable distinction whence the immanent critic could draw.

[195] In this case, we must interpret Fraser's view of what is 'possible' in this case rather loosely, to mean logically consistent or feasible argumentatively.

which the immanent critic can legitimately target. The rest of the argument can run in the same order.

Now, I turn to disentangle and clarify Adorno's web of criticisms against the method. Adorno paves the path for what Honneth later terms *immanent transcendence* in his critique. First, two caveats which go alongside Adorno's points. Despite Adorno being considered a progenitor of immanent critique, he is on record as cautioning strongly *against* the method as an ideological panacea in critical theory. Thus, Adorno advances his first crucial point: immanent critique, taken alone, runs the risk of hypostatizing ideology and culture. Additionally, Adorno is clear why immanent and transcendent critique are not contradictories. The dialectical method erodes the very distinction between "knowledge which penetrates from without and that which bores from within."[196] However, as he writes, "The traditional transcendent critique of ideology is obsolete" because it "succumbs to the very reification which is its critical theme."[197] Therefore, as Adorno ultimately implies, the cultural critic must employ both approaches in tandem.

> The alternatives—either calling culture as a whole into question from outside under the general notion of ideology, or confronting it with the norms which it itself has crystallized—cannot be accepted by critical theory. To insist on the choice between immanence and transcendence is to revert to the traditional logic criticized in Hegel's polemic against Kant.[198]

Adorno accuses the partisan immanent critic of parading a false dichotomy. Instead, on his view, critical theory must incorporate elements from immanent and transcendent methods of critique because dialectics enables the social critic both to look beyond and dwell within the broken societal norms and ideology with which they are met. In other words, dialectics levels the playing field of social critique and delegitimates the binary thinking behind these hard bifurcations. For the remainder of this subsection, I will explicate the interlocking premises in Adorno's dialectical critique of immanent critique.

For Adorno, the immanent critic makes a category mistake in their commitment to Hegelian reconstruction. Analyzing the logic of culture as an *independent* one "is to collaborate in the hypostasis of culture."[199] In other words, the immanent critic presupposes a crystalline structure of social norms as given in order to dissect them, not unlike the transcendent critic, who "assumes an as it were Archimedean position above culture and the blindness of society."[200] In reality, as Adorno contends, norms grow out of culture alone. The immanent critic, therefore, loses their purported intellectual mobility, which is contextualism's advantage for social critique, in their grasp for fixed and rigid social rules. If the immanent critic, for example, were to analyze the structure of antebellum slavery and reply that the United States' social institutions ought to be consistent and live up to their own standards, the critic risks collaborating, in blind faith, to the very institutions which enabled slavery.

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[196] Adorno, *Prisms*, 33.
[197] Adorno, 33–34.
[198] Adorno, 31.
[199] Adorno, 29.
[200] Adorno, 31.

Surprisingly, Adorno therefore argues *for* the transgression of the logical rule, originating in Aristotle, against a *μετάβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος* [lit. "a change from one genus to the next," the fallacy of a category mistake] in dialectics. He writes,

> Dialectics cannot, therefore, permit any insistence on logical neatness to encroach on its right to go from one genus to another, to shed light on an object in itself hermetic by casting a glance at society, to present society with the bill which the object does not redeem.[201]

In an ironic twist, Adorno mobilizes the logic of dialectics *against* the dialectical requirement which leads immanent critique. Recall that immanent critique purports to be dialectical because it holds that the most convincing reasons to one's interlocutors are those within a social and discursive context. If the immanent critic can reveal the contradictions at the heart of a social order, then the risk of sustaining an inconsistent social structure should move argumentatively sensitive participants to change their current practices and the institutional structures which uphold these contradictions to more sound principles. Society cannot be left as it is for the immanent critic. However, the focus in immanent critique on the structure of the social order and its logical inconsistency imposes this "logical neatness" upon culture. On the contrary, Adorno argues, the truly dialectical approach is sensitive to the unsuitability of this imposition and instead does not reify its object, the unjust social order, as it is itself an extremely unstable thing.

Immanent critique does have a sensitivity to the idea, noted by Geuss, that ideology is more than *just* untruth.[202] It is only "its pretension to correspond to reality" which is false.[203] Adorno continues,

> Immanent criticism of intellectual and artistic phenomena seeks to grasp, through the analysis of their form and meaning, the contradiction between their objective idea and that pretension.[204]

As I have described, immanent critique hooks into the discrepancy between social norms and their inadequate realizations within social institutions. Thus, as Adorno states, the immanent critic analyzes the social contradictions which arise in this context. The similarity between Hegel's method of *Spekulation* and immanent critique should be clarified. It is the objective *Idea*, the very concept of a thing, which is distinguished from social *Realität*, its present and unreflective disunity. The immanent critic pries apart the inadequate reality from its idea to show the impossibility of the idea's possible realization within current institutional norms. "[Immanent critique] pursues the logic of its aporias," Adorno writes, and "In such antinomies criticism perceives those of society."[205] Adorno's explanation of the immanent approach to social criticism is eerily similar to ideology critique. He remarks how immanent critique looks beyond personal inadequacies and "does not ascribe them hastily to the individual and his psychology […] but instead seeks to derive them from the irreconcilability

[201] Adorno, 33.

[202] Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School*, Modern European Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 22. As Althusser puts it, ideology has tangible, real effects and material existence. Louis Althusser, *On Ideology* (London: Verso, 2008).

[203] Adorno, *Prisms*, 32.

[204] Adorno, 32.

[205] Adorno, 32.

of the object's moments." Since "the mind has always been under a spell,"[206] the immanent critic searches precisely for whatever has enraptured individuals into this scheme.

Herein lies the problem. Adorno contends that immanent critique "cannot take comfort in its own idea" unless it becomes "vain enough to believe that it can liberate the mind directly by immersing itself in it." Adorno echoes the same criticism of Hegel that Marx sets forward in the *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* concerning the issues with the application of idealism to social relations. Idealism springs forward to normative evaluation of social structures with "ready-made ideas [*aus dem Gegenstand*]."[207] In Hegel's case, Marx argues that Hegel stacks the deck to defend social reality. The immanent critic, on the other hand, Adorno argues, stacks the deck to criticize social reality with neat, pre-formed logical categories. Instead, the truly dialectical approach must avoid what Adorno calls a reversion to idealism, or the "illusion of the self-sufficient mind."[208] Dialectics and ruthless criticism must pursue whatever ends are necessary because the dichotomy of immanent versus transcendent methods is insufficient in their independent respects. The immanent critic imposes a false dichotomy, therefore, upon social critique, pitting transcendence as diametrically opposed to immanence.

3.2 Immanent Transcendence

Habermas, and later, Honneth, pioneered an approach to the dialectic of immanence and transcendence which blends them: *transcendence from within* or *immanent transcendence*. According to the sociologist Piet Strydom, immanent transcendence is the key metatheoretical component of the entire Left Hegelian tradition, spanning German philosophers to American pragmatists.[209] In this section, I comb through major developments of the concept in Habermas and Honneth's critical theories. As we will see, Habermas's introduction of the idea approaches the question of immanent transcendence in the development of normative foundations and human knowledge from the vantagepoint of interpersonal *communication* and its emergence from *religion*. On the other hand, Honneth's explicit nomenclature of the term comes with his attempt to make the struggle for universal social *recognition* emerge from within but still point beyond the particular social climates of moral disrespect in which the claims develop.

3.2.1 Religion and Communication

Habermas argues for the "linguistification of the sacred" in *Theory*. He draws on foundational sociologists like Durkheim and Weber to argue that the flawed concepts of myth transform into the modern understanding of moral categories, nature, and our place in the world. Unexpectedly, the "religious turn" is at the innermost core of Habermas's development of immanent transcendence. Thus, the Durkheimian idea of the "linguistification of the sacred" ultimately implies not the *disposal* of sacred categories but their *sublation* for Habermas. Despite J. M. Bernstein's assessment that the arguments behind

[206] Adorno, 32.
[207] Marx, *Critique of Hegel's "Philosophy of Right,"* 14.
[208] Adorno, *Prisms*, 33.
[209] Piet Strydom, "On the Origin of the Left-Hegelian Concept of Immanent Transcendence: Reflections on the Background of Classical Sociology," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 20, no. 1 (2020): 3–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X18803642.

Habermas's religious turn are either "false or so indeterminate as to resolve nothing,"[210] these points are quintessential for understanding his development of a solution to the dialectic of immanence and transcendence for critique first discussed by Adorno.

Habermas, tackling the fraught relationship between religion and rationality in modernity, holds a discussion with theologians in 1988. Habermas rescinds the reductive, flat model of religion inspired by Weber which he originally proposed in *Theory*, whereby the processes of modernization harbor disenchantment. Initially, Habermas argues that…

Habermas openly admits that he hastily accepted the thought that following the demise of religious views, only a universal ethics of responsibility could be salvaged from their collapse (RR 79).

Amending his position, Habermas invites non-philosophical religious language and semantics which hold an "unrelinquishable" power. Habermas goes on to say that the "secularization hypothesis" of Weber was untenable considering the reality of modernity's non-linear trajectory. Habermas eventually goes as far as to say in a conversation with Eduardo Mendieta,

> Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. This legacy, substantially unchanged, has been the object of a continual critical reappropriation and reinterpretation. Up to this very day there is no alternative to it. And in light of the current challenges of a postnational constellation, we must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance. Everything else is idle postmodern talk (RR 149).

Habermas therefore flips his former position on its head. Instead of a universalist egalitarian ethics being the residue or ruins of a religious ethic, Habermas makes the Enlightenment universal ethic into a direct consequence of the religious ethics from which they sprung. Further, he maintains that there is no alternative to the religious heritage of the West. Additionally, as Allen points out, Habermas's identification of the Western world as the birthplace of postmetaphysical thought and sweeping religious faith throws a "secularistic self-understanding" into free fall.[211] Habermas writes on the genealogy of morals, "everyday moral intuitions are still shaped by the normative substance of so to speak decapitated, legally privatized, religious traditions" (TIOO 8). The cognitive validity of moral norms, on Habermas's account, has always begun with the public use of religious reasons in a Kantian sense. However, transcendence from within does not appeal *only* to the social facticity of the positive effects of religious ideology. Such an appeal would reduce moral consciousness to a mere function which may not track the truth of the matter (TIOO 12).

Looking to the American theologian Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's political theology as a model, Habermas seeks to break down the barrier between the laicized world of modernity

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[210] J. M. Bernstein, "Forgetting Isaac: Faith and the Philosophical Impossibility of a Post-Secular Society," in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 273.

[211] Amy Allen, "Having One's Cake and Eating It Too: Habermas's Genealogy of Postsecular Reason," in *Habermas and Religion*, ed. Craig J. Calhoun, Eduardo Mendieta, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013), 235.

and the transcendental aspirations of theology. In response to Rawls's idea of a plurality of conceptualizations of the good (comprehensive doctrines), Habermas reports that Schüssler Fiorenza suggests a "dialectic between universalizable principles of justice and the reconstructive hermeneutic of normative tradition" (RR 70). In other words, a dialectic between the transcendence of invariantist principles and the immanence of public discourse around norms.

Habermas, introducing the concept more formally in 1990, writes about the pragmatist American philosopher, Charles Sanders Peirce, that there remains to a community of knowers only the possibility of projecting a "transcendence from within" because of an insurmountable reliance on "the [immanent] sphere of language and argumentation,"[212] or discursive structures. Even in his work on religion and rationality, Habermas refers to Peirce as a beacon of a "self-relinquishing, transcending anticipation of an unlimited community of communication" (RR 80). While Peirce is concerned with a community of knowers insofar as they seek the advancement of scientific knowledge, Habermas is concerned with the social dynamics of interpersonal communication and the development of social norms and mores. As a result, Habermas draws on Peirce's originally epistemic and pragmatic insights to argue that we can envision a reality which is both independent *and* dependent on our individual reflection and consciousness. In principle, given an unlimited amount of time, effort, and resources, Peirce argues that we can discover the truths of the "buried secrets"[213] hidden behind our present scientific limitations and inabilities. For example, it was impossible to observe subatomic particles before the development of the cloud chamber. As traced in Chapter 1, there is a rationalistic presupposition on the part of any scientific inquiry, that the features of its object are in principle *knowable*, i.e., discoverable and traceable. As Habermas argues, the very presupposition of a shared reality between inquirers counts as a transcendental assumption by itself. However, despite this inevitable assumption, our insurmountable dependence on argument, dialogue, linguistics, and ultimately *communication* imply an unavoidable, immanent dimension to this reality which draws a boundary on the new discoveries themselves. Hence, it is transcendence but *from within*, preserving both the immanent dimension of "reaching mutual understanding" and communicability as well as the transcendent dimension of independent reality as a reference and the "objectivity of experience."[214]

In essence, Habermas contends that the very practice of communicative action orients us towards universal validity claims which can only be raised within the context of language and informal, discursive registers. This, Habermas argues, is the "movement of a transcendence from within" (RR 80). As we saw in Chapter 2, Habermas's mitigated view of the philosopher as merely a stand-in and interpreter culminates in his argument that the practice of argument itself always points beyond itself. While interlocutors locked in debate will focus on the specific context of one another's arguments, their very recognition of what counts as a contradiction, internal consistency, and other logical rules signal something beyond and above the local confines of their debate. The very practice of communication is both immanent and transcendent because of its requisite pieces. Proponents and opponents must

[212] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 103.

[213] Charles Sanders Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," *Popular Science Monthly* 12, no. 1 (1878): 286–302.

[214] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 103.

dialectically engage one another locally while accepting "unavoidable rules of criticism" (MCCA 81). By "unavoidable," Habermas means both universal and necessary. As Habermas argues in another place,

> Reflective reconstruction of the everyday practice of justification in which we ourselves participate as laypersons permits reconstructive translations that foster critical understanding. In this methodological attitude the philosopher extends *from within* the participant perspective beyond the circle of *immediate* participants (TIOO 5).

In other words, the reflective reconstruction of justification should erect a participant-participant norm structure which governs all individiual and hypothetical interactions. In Habermas's view, this is precisely why universalization principle (U) can be derived from each and every discusive, argumentative exchange, "regardless of the context in which it occurs" (MCCA 82). Now, it should be clearer how Habermas's view of religion is the base for a transcendence from within intersects with his discourse ethics. In the inheritance of modernity, the religious viewpoint, which involves a transcendent God and absolute moral codes from the perspective of worldly affairs, and discursive registers, which involve worldly affairs but necessitate certain universal rules, both involve the two spheres of immanence and transcendence.

Although he does not state this explicitly, Habermas draws on the fullest sense of dialectics in his account. Immanent transcendence appeals to dialectics for both its overall structure and its developmental picture of norms. First, at the level of transcendence, the interplay between the derivation of principles which have universal validity but contextual genesis. Second, at the level of immanence, in its reliance on communication and the application of religious ethics as a basis for moral universalism.

3.2.2 Recognition and Respect

In his infamous debate with fellow critical theorist Nancy Fraser, Honneth introduces the nomenclature of *immanent transcendence*, a term which has stuck to the Left Hegelian legacy for the idea of a transcendence from within. The core idea is that "a critical analysis of society needs to be tied to an innerworldly instance of transcendence"[215] Honneth salvages what Fraser critically points out as "the dialectic of immanence and transcendence" through the unquestionably Marxian idea that the new world is built out of the criticism of the old one. For Marx, and for all proponents of immanent critique, the normative categories of the future are inexorably tied up with the normative categories of today. As Honneth argues, real concepts of labor and use-value contain the seeds of the possible orientations of the new world. However, while this approach is promising on paper, it arises out of the problematic gap between the values of the past, present, and future with which all critical theories must grapple. For Honneth, the conceptual constraint of immanent criticism arises as the social detranscendalization of reason. Immanent transcendence underpins immanent criticism for Honneth because it identifies the rational potency of practices, norms, and promises as they exist today in a *validity surplus* (*Geltungsüberhang*). Therefore, it has the advantage of sketching both the details of the current situation and the arc of the future, a feature which he remarks most in Habermas's communicative turn. Honneth reads most critical theorists as

[215] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, 238.

falling under the Left Hegelian motif of immanent transcendence, including Cornelius Castoriadis, Herbert Marcuse, Habermas, and even Michel Foucault and Judith Butler.

Honneth understands transcendence as the necessary, other half of immanence in critique. Put simply, all claims to objectivity which reach beyond a social sphere or local context arise from *within* a particular social sphere or local context. Going back to the original point of *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth claims to outline the "moral grammar" of social struggle and reach towards a holistic explanation for how an articulation of the struggles themselves contours the shape and form of right life. If Hegel is correct in saying that contradiction is the motor of history, then instances of misrecognition must steer us towards ways in which we can recognize others as holding an equal standing within an inclusive community. As Honneth writes, analyzing Hegel's turn in the *System of Ethical Life* towards a conflict-based, structure of social dynamics in an appropriation of Hobbes and Machiavelli, "the coordinates of [Hegel's] political philosophy shift from a teleological concept of nature to a concept of the social, in which an internal tension is contained constitutively." For both Hegel and Honneth, it is this inevitable and internal tension which drives more mature ethical relationships. As Honneth remarks to Fraser, his "efforts to make the Hegelian motif of a 'struggle for recognition' fruitful for social theory can be understood as an attempt to set Habermas's ingenious conception [of social transcendence] 'back on its feet,'" considering the ambiguity as to where the transcending *objectivity* in communication arises. Is it in light of human language itself, or is it a feature of interaction (as opposed to work) itself?[216]

Honneth finds, like Habermas, that "'transcendence within social immanence' […] is of religious origin." The connection between transcendence and immanence itself is inseparable, and Honneth makes transcending claims into an inevitable property of social relations. In any social context, Honneth writes, there exists a "normative potential" in the fact that ideals are always found within a particular social reality and time.[217] To reconstruct Honneth's claim, I analyze the structure of *Sittlichkeit* in his framework to ask whether it fulfills the desiderata of immanence and transcendence. Although Honneth's account does not proceed in light of the religious heritage of the concept, a necessary moment of transcendence attains the same importance for his view as it does for Habermas's critical theory. Since Honneth explicitly formulates his account as picking up where Habermas's theoretical project left off in his debate with Fraser,[218] I will assume that he understands the religious turn as nonessential for the concept because of his lack of systemic treatment. Instead, for Honneth, it is the Hegelian backdrop of social conflict which seats the objective but subjective sides of immanent transcendence. What Fraser calls Honneth's recognition "monism" is rooted in the young Hegel of the Jena period's social theory and the Left Hegelian context-dependent but -transcending reasons.

Honneth's analysis of *Sittlichkeit*, according to Danielle Petherbridge, is supposed to be the vehicle for immanent transcendence. As she writes,

> In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth attempts to define a model of critical social theory that can account for both an immanent basis for critique and context-

[216] Fraser and Honneth, 242.
[217] Fraser and Honneth, 244.
[218] Fraser and Honneth, 246.

> transcending validity with reference to a 'formal concept of ethical life' or *Sittlichkeit*.[219]

For Honneth, like Habermas, it is important for the normative foundations of social critique to emerge organically, out of a particular social milieu, but still transcend their local origins. The best way to achieve such a feat, Honneth argues, is to return to the early insights of Hegel and his fellow idealists for their recognition-based philosophical-anthropological models of social interaction and norm-conferral. In Honneth's view, Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit* is unique because it locates the locus of social integration as the product of reciprocal, intersubjective dealings (SR 58-9). However, Hegel's quasi-materialistic early insights were never followed through, as he turned to the philosophy of consciousness to outline social relations in his mature work (SR 67). Therefore, Honneth returns to the Jena period to outline a critical social theory which disambiguates the location of the transcendent moment within immanent transcendence. For Honneth, it is a pre-linguistic notion which is not wholly reducible to communicative action. In this sense, Honneth historicizes immanent transcendence more fully than Habermas does to tie the ultimate basis of normativity to a holistic social theory.

In *The Struggle For Recognition*, Honneth flips modern social philosophy's characterization of life as defined by *struggle*. Machiavelli's *Realpolitik* describes political life as a constant competition over resources and territory, and Hobbes's political absolutism and contractualism view all life as *omnia bellum contra omnes*, or, a war of all against all, which is nasty, brutish, and short. Machiavelli and Hobbes universalize struggle, and they transform all social interaction into a struggle for the preservation and advancement of self. While Honneth limits himself to a brief discussion here, he easily could have added Spinoza, who conceives of the *conatus* doctrine (3p7), that things are perpetually striving to increase their being, as operative at all levels of affect, social dynamics, and politics. Further, striving is our very essence (4d8). Spinoza was inspired by both Machiavelli and Hobbes to implement a struggle to persevere and increase one's power within his own social philosophy and ethics. In Jena, on the other hand, Hegel breaks with the tradition of modern social philosophy in the very early 1800s. Instead of the atomistic, individualistic conception of self which drove the social agonism of Machiavelli and Hobbes, Hegel adopts in *The Earliest Systematic Program* and *The Scientific Way of Treating Natural Law* a view which understands the societal ideal as a self-structuring unity which must be integrated ethically. Honneth understands Hegel's harmonistic view of society as conflicting with the antagonistic view of his predecessors.

Honneth draws on an important quote from Aristotle on which Hegel reflects.

> The nation [*Volk*] comes by nature before the individual. If the individual in isolation is not anything self-sufficient, he must be related to the whole nation in one unity, just as other parts are to their whole (SR 14).

The ethical ties which bind us socially come before the individuals who compose society in isolation. Whereas Hobbes begins with the atomistic subject in their fractured, self-interested, and egoistic sphere of self, Hegel's *Jenaphilosophie* views humanity in a holistic, communal, and quasi-altruistic way. Hobbes, Machiavelli, and others view society as a struggle *for*

[219] Danielle Petherbridge, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013), 167.

preservation. Although Hegel eventually drops his project in favor of the development of a philosophy of consciousness, the seeds of a budding struggle *for recognition* emerge from within the young Hegel's vision. While the *Phenomenology* contains the famed master-slave dialectic, depicting the struggle between two competing consciousnesses for recognition of the other, social recognition does not take center stage at all in the *Phenomenology* (SR 62).

The insight found in the *System of Ethical Life* is that social philosophy need not begin with the preformed, hostile subjects of much modern social theory. Instead, Hegel starts with the family and cooperative legal relationships which themselves are to be thanked for the initial formation and socialization of subjects. While Hegel returns to these ideas and even the concept of *Sittlichkeit* in the *Philosophy of Right*, it is not *recognition* which attains systematic development there. The first, speculative thesis which drives Hegel's idea is that

> Not until both individuals see themselves confirmed by the other as independent can they mutually reach an understanding of themselves as autonomously acting, individuated selves. For Hegel, this thesis has to be the point of departure, since it discloses, as it were, the basic structural feature of the societal subject-matter with which he is concerned in his theory of ethical life (SR 68).

The advantage of Hegel's early view, like that of many ancient and medieval thinkers before him, is that society becomes a cohesive, self-structuring unity. Instead of the agonistic view of many other moderns, Hegel's approach ensures that the unfolding and development of individual selves culminates in a shared, ethical order which takes its shape *organically*. Instead of an externally imposed ethics, Hegel's internally based struggle for recognition ensures the possibility of a transcendence from within because it makes social relations the product of an immanent, material process. The second thesis proposes

> the existence of various forms of reciprocal recognition, which are to be distinguished according to the level of autonomy they make possible for an agent (SR 69).

The benefit of viewing intersubjective recognition in terms of *stages*, Honneth writes, is that it is necessary for ethical life itself to become a process. Although Hegel approaches the question from metaphysical premises, Honneth views empirical psychology as the superior basis for such an endeavor. The final, third thesis is that

> the sequence of forms of recognition follows the logic of a formative process that is mediated by the stages of a moral struggle (SR 69).

In essence, Hegel's theory is characterized by the attempt to fold the concept of moral education (*Bildung*) and autonomy into a developmentalist story about the fight or struggle for the acknowledgement of certain forms of social support, respect, or esteem. Since it is mutual recognition which grounds development, then it is misrecognition which explains stalled development and social pathology. As Honneth writes, subjects experience disrespect "in such a way that they seem themselves obliged to engage in a 'struggle for recognition'" (SR 69). Following the establishment of these three theses, Honneth examines them according to postmetaphysical, empirical assumptions in order to discover whether they can serve as the basis for an adequate critical social theory. While I do not, at present, elaborate on Honneth's scrutinization of Hegel's theory of recognition, I turn to a key development in his view, that of a *validity surplus* as a solid ground for transcendence from within out of the principle of recognition.

Honneth has not specifically pursued the development of his idea of a validity surplus beyond *Redistribution or Recognition?* in his initial response to Fraser. Nevertheless, it holds the key to understanding how immanent transcendence can work on his theory of recognition. Although Fraser argues that Honneth subordinates immanence to transcendence in a failure to "establish a foothold in the existing social world that can also point beyond it,"[220] Honneth argued that

> each principle of recognition has a specific surplus of validity whose normative significance is expressed by the constant struggle over its appropriate application by appeal to a general recognition principle (love, law, achievement).[221]

The three "modes of recognition," emotional support (love), cognitive respect (rights), and social esteem (solidarity), all point beyond themselves towards a greater goal. However, each instance of or demand for recognition appears in a specific, social context and is the result of a concrete, material instance of misrecognition. The recognitive structure of *Sittlichkeit*, on Honneth's view, guarantees a "moral dialectic of the general and the particular"[222] Further, as he argues in the same place, the principles of each sphere of recognition arise through an immanent deduction of their own internal standards "of what counts as 'just' or 'unjust.'"

Geltungsüberhang reappears in a different form in *Freedom's Right*, where Honneth argues that reconstructive social critique builds on the "normative promise" of social institutions (FR vii-viii, e.g., especially on the labor market: 164, 196, 225).[223] It is the analysis of the "neglected potential," Honneth argues, of "already existing institutions" which can provide, simultaneously, social analysis and a theory of justice through the prism of critique. Similarly, Hegel provided a normative reconstruction of the ideal and insights behind the social institutions of today as a means of challenging them in the *Philosophy of Right*. Arguing against the contention that Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* was a conservative justification of the status quo, Honneth views Hegel's project as no mere descriptive undertaking.[224] Instead, the embodied values of the social order reveal the various ways in which institutions fall short of their intended goals for ethical life. For example, since Hegel reconstructs the family as the first sphere of recognition, where love is its principal form, an unloving family or one which distributes load-bearing tasks unequally becomes criticizable on these grounds. In "developing a theory of justice on the basis of social analysis" (FR 9), Honneth does not use an external or transcendent standard. Rather, Honneth uses the logical structure of ethical life to draw out ways in which we can reconstruct the roles of institutions which could actually suit human needs.

In a similar vein to the Hegelian approach of reconstructive critique, Lucius Outlaw has argued that a critical theory of society

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[220] Fraser and Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, 207.

[221] Fraser and Honneth, 186.

[222] Fraser and Honneth, 186.

[223] According to Rahel Jaeggi, such a form of criticism is different from negativistic versions of immanent critique, such as her own. See Jaeggi, "Rethinking Ideology."

[224] For an argument against such a premise, see Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). Macherey argues that Hegel's position in the German university necessitated quietism. Accordingly, Spinoza's position outside of the university allowed him more freedom to explore various avenues of social analysis.

> seeks to reconstruct, through reflective understanding, the development of historical forms of understanding, and their groundings in the social order, to reveal how they misrepresent actual social relations and thus justify forms of oppression that are in reality historical.[225]

In other words, reconstructive social critique takes the injustices of the social order as a historically contingent matter of fact. Misrecognition, therefore, is an effective teacher of the actual principles which provide the normative yardstick for subsequent social criticism. As Hegel argues in the *Philosophy of Right*, the violation of right in abstract right, *wrong* (*Unrecht*), including unintentional wrongs, crime, and deception, are essential in the transition to morality and responsibility.

Clearly, on both Habermas and Honneth's accounts, there is an essential point of normative "overhang" in the local practices, norms, and rights-based claims which gives them a claim to universality and a transcendence beyond the context of their utterance. In this sense, Habermas and Honneth resolve to have their cake and eat it too. Given Honneth's focus on a Hegelian notion of ethical life, only immanent criteria are valid targets of criticism. Habermas's use of communication as the bedrock for discourse ethics entails the importance of actual discursive exchanges for its normative criteria. Nevertheless, in both of their critical theories, transcendence emerges out of the particular. Even in Habermas's religious turn, there is a methodological atheism to its usage of theological semantics. As Hegel argues in the *Logic*, the immanent development of the Concept gives birth to its three moments of individual, particular, and universal. The winding path of the Concept at the head of the Subjective Logic mirrors the acquisition of concepts themselves, a non-abstract process based on real content. Similarly, Habermas and Honneth resolve the genesis-validity question through models which begin with the non-abstract content of everyday practices of communication and recognition to derive the universal validity needed to transcend the confines of said practices.

3.3 Immanentism

To the list of philosophers behind the popularization and methodology of immanent critique, I argue that we must add Spinoza's arguments against Cartesianism as a paradigm case. In this section, I offer a reading of the *immanentism* developed in the *Ethics* and the political works through an analysis of their core concepts. I show how Spinoza offers an immanent critique of prevalent views of the concepts of 'God' and 'substance' to demonstrate the inadequacy of Cartesian and classical theistic accounts of God and substance. In taking these terms to their radical conclusions, following the principle of sufficient reason, Spinoza's substance monism is the result of taking these concepts of God and substance seriously. Thus, Spinoza does not jettison talk of God, religion, blessedness, or rights. Instead, they take on radical, transformed shapes in his social philosophy. As Goetschel points out,

> Spinoza's metaphysics engages the project of transforming traditional philosophical thought by critically rethinking its inherited status. Those elements of Spinoza's thought that seem to be building on the obsolete structure of traditional metaphysics are actually

[225] Lucius T. Outlaw, *Critical Social Theory in the Interest of Black Folk* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 17.

> Spinoza's way of developing a new approach without losing sight of problematic elements inhabiting both the old and the new philosophy.[226]

Spinoza's philosophy is as dialectical as it is critical because of its transformative characteristic and willingness to engage other traditions of Descartes and classical theism at their own formal register.

I begin this section by outlining the Cartesian view of substance, substance dualism, with special attention to Descartes's most complete elaboration in the *Principles of Philosophy*. Next, I demonstrate how Spinoza's *substance monism* culminates in an immanent critique of Descartes and classical theism in the *Ethics*. Finally, I show how the crucial product of Spinoza's immanent critique of substance is *immanentism*, from the panentheism which Spinoza articulates in 1p15. All things exist *in Deo* because apart from God, nothing can be conceived. Spinoza's view has heavy downstream consequences for social critique, some of which have been discussed and more of which are detailed in the subsequent chapter, but it begins with a rejection of Cartesian dualism *by its own lights*. As I show, Spinoza's immanentism answers Adorno's criticism of immanent critique. Only a strictly immanent approach, which permits no social or cultural exceptions to naturalistic laws, can ground a ruthless critique of everything.

Since everything is in the one substance, everything is a permissible target of scrutiny and critical analysis. Adorno himself draws an unjustified, hard bifurcation between dialectical cultural critique and the two undialectical methods as conceived as mutually exclusive. Instead, as he argues, the real distinction in ideology critique is not ideology's untruth but *its hubristic claim to a truth* which is inadequate. Thus, I contend that the more dialectical and consistent view of transcendence and immanence, if one is tenable, is that *there are no such things as transcendent criteria*. The very barrier between inside and outside, on Spinoza's substance monism, is suspect. The transcendent or external critic's real error, therefore, lies in their purported discovery of a normative principle which reaches beyond the social order at all. My criticism consequently implicates the concept of *immanent transcendence* if it is more than a merely verbal distinction from Spinoza's immanentism. Forst makes a similar point,[227] that there is always a "superfluity" in "the distinction between an 'immanent' and a 'transcendent' perspective" (JC 4). Jaeggi's account also problematizes internal criticism, in part, because of its inability to erect a "boundary between internal and external, between a standard derived from the status quo and one brought in from outside."[228] On my view, Jaeggi's criticism applies to all methods of social critique which exhibit a claim to transcendence, as her own view does.[229] She outlines the fact that on the assumption of a pluralistic society, what counts as being brought in from "the outside" is a contentious matter. While Jaeggi describes the starting point of internal criticism as "shared values/norms and beliefs," the starting point of immanent criticism is "norms embedded in social practices." Despite the exact difference being unclear on her account, she does not return to address how

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[226] Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 29.

[227] For different reasons than he argues. He makes the case that the participants in democratic normative structures who are both legislators and subjects should be able to both transcend and participate in practices of justification.

[228] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 188.

[229] Jaeggi, 190. She writes, "Even though [immanent criticism] adopts and internal approach, it raises context-transcending claims and has transformative effects."

her variant of negativistic immanent critique is not prone to the same inside/outside objection which she applies to internal criticism. In my view, the "dialectical" contradiction or crisis, which she argues is immanent criticism's basis of criticism, entails the breakdown of internal/external criticism altogether. Further, given her conception of negativistic immanent criticism and *ideology critique* (and her calling attention to this fact),[230] one must remark the importance for ideology as having a real and material basis.

3.3.1 Cartesian Dualism

Consider Cartesian dualism. Descartes's philosophy considers God through the lens of being a *substance*, albeit not one univocally applicable to creation. At PP 1.51, Descartes writes,

> By *'substance',* we can understand nothing other than a thing which exists in such a way that it needs no other thing in order to exist. And indeed only one substance which needs absolutely no other thing can be understood; i.e., God. We perceive that, on the contrary, all others can exist only with the aid of God's participation. And consequently the term 'substance' does not apply to God and to those other things "univocally" (as is customarily {and rightly} said in the Schools), that is, no meaning of this term can distinctly be understood which is common to God and to created things.

From a quick glance, Descartes's view of substance is straightforward and well founded in the views of his philosophical predecessors. It is like what one could expect from a student of Aristotle. From the *Categories*, we know that primary substance boils down to being a 'this' (*Categories* 3b10). Ostensibly, we can indicate self-standing things which appear in our perception and can be expected to persevere in their existence without our perceptivity. Substance has no contrary, but it admits of contraries (*Categories* 3b25, 4a10-11). Of an individual book, there is no specific 'not-this-book.' However, the same book can become old and worn after being first acquired fresh and new. Descartes formalizes Aristotle's insight by highlighting the 'self-standing' nature of substance. For example, the desk, once assembled, requires nothing else for its being there. However, Descartes notes, this 'self-standing' characteristic is by no means absolute.

Although the wooden desk is self-standing once assembled, it initially required a woodworker to have carved the wood and a lumberjack to have first chopped and gathered the wood for its carving. Put simply, we are met with a regress problem concerning substance on Descartes's view without God as guarantor. Aristotle, on the other hand, was decidedly eternalist, and his conceptualization of secondary substances did not admit of either the extinction or genesis of a species; therefore, there is a sense in which Aristotle's substances can be self-standing insofar as they permit an infinite regress. Descartes's understanding, forged out of classical theism, admits of an ultimately partial but still fundamental distinction of God from creation. Thus, Cartesian substances are not in and of themselves self-standing without a regress blocker in the concept of God, the "one substance which needs absolutely no other thing." Other substances exist only through God's help for Descartes; thus, the idea of a 'substance' cannot be applied univocally to God and creation.

At a fundamental, ontological level, Descartes's substance dualism bifurcates reality into either Extension (*res extensa*) or Thought (*res cogitans*). In essence, each substance is

[230] Jaeggi, 174; 174n4.

primarily one or the other (PP 1.53). For instance, take the human body, which is an extended thing. The body can be hit, touched, felt, etc. Being extended is its *attribute*, or what is perceptually its essence. In addition, as mentioned, we have Descartes's largely borrowed but important distinction of created and uncreated substances. Descartes writes we can easily have two *clara et distincta perceptio*, of "created thinking substance" and "corporeal substance" because of our knowledge of a substance through its *attributes*, or the inherent and necessary affections of substance (PP 1.56).

Modes, on the other hand, are noninherent distinctions which inhere within substances. Modes, apart from their substance, cannot be conceived. Given Descartes's commitment to God's unchangeability, he must reject modal distinctions within God *a priori*. To ascribe a mode to God would effectively be to state something were accidental to His nature. As for the human body, however, it admits of many dispositions: sitting, walking, running, standing, sitting, etc. Note how none of these affections modify the essence of the body as extended. The body is always a body despite its sitting, standing, etc. Therefore, Descartes classifies them as merely modal distinctions of it, whereas its essence as extended remains the same throughout each of its many modifications. The concept of sitting requires the concept of body *and not vice versa* (PP 1.61). Again, to clarify, since God is unchangeable, modal distinctions must be flatly denied of God. Thus, when God is spoken of as varied, e.g., angry, saddened, etc., these must be *analogical* predications at best.[231] A clear and distinct idea of God's being uncreated and independent (i.e., necessary) comes from the clear and distinct ideas of our own created, dependent (i.e., contingent) nature (PP 1.14 and 1.54).[232]

Although the relationship between mind and body in substance dualism remains largely unclear or becomes even impossible, what is apparent on Descartes's view is that two species of substance exist, Extension and Thought. In his Replies to the Objections to *Meditations* III, Descartes clarifies his view, writing,

> I have also made it quite clear how reality admits of more and less [*plus & minus*]. *A substance is more of a thing than a mode* [substantia sit magis res quam modus]; if there are real qualities or [*vel*] incomplete substances, they are things to a greater extent than modes [*sunt magis res quam modi*], but to a lesser extent [*sed minus*] than complete substances; and, finally, if there is an infinite and independent substance, it is more of a thing [*est magis res*] than a finite and dependent substance. All this is completely self-evident (AT VII 185, emphasis mine).

Descartes is insistent against Hobbes's materialistic impulse on the way in which substance and mere modes differ. Although Hobbes argues for the substance/mode distinction as an early argument grounding materialism,[233] Descartes insists on a sharper metaphysical distinction. Substances are self-standing, whereas modes are dependent upon substance. God

[231] The history of thinking about God in terms of anthropomorphic labels, e.g., emotion, is denied in Spinoza at 1App. However, there is a rich history of thinking through how God can be said to be. The idea of *analogical predication*, primarily as discussed in Aquinas, involves making comparisons between God and creation which never amount to perfect, or even adequate, but only proximate comparisons of what God is *not*.

[232] Descartes is assuming the validity of the key point behind the cosmological argument here. Necessary things ground contingent things, and the world cannot be composed of contingent things *ad infinitum*.

[233] Hobbes' argument runs, briefly, that it is impossible for a purely mental or non-corporeal thing to really be modified and take on a new form; therefore, they do not exist, if substance is known through its modes, and if things are known through our perception of them.

is more of a 'thing' than my body. The body is more of a 'thing' than its present comportment of sitting in a chair, at the table, etc. Further, Descartes is sure of the self-evident nature of this distinction. If modes are understood properly as modifications of substance, they require substance for their conceptualization (as I have discussed fully in Chapter 1). If substance did not, at some level, exist as more of a 'thing,' as Descartes replies, than a mode, then modes could exist as detached from their subject. Whiteness, sitting, and crouching, for example, would be thinkable apart from human bodies, which is absurd. Therefore, Descartes would agree with Spinoza's thought that substance is prior to its affections (1p1) and Aristotle's idea that whiteness is predicable of a body (*Categories* 2b1-3). This comes from the very fact that modes are definitionally posterior to substance. In reference to God, the supreme substance or *ens realissimum*, Descartes considers how God, the infinite substance, is more of a 'thing' [*magis res*…] or *more real* than other substances. Recall from the *PP*, the idea of God comes from the negation of limited, created mental substance. It follows from the same logic that God cannot be created just as substance comes before its modifications.

To summarize Descartes's view, substances must be created or uncreated in addition to being corporeal or mental. A substance can simultaneously be neither at the same time. Thus, the body is never both mental and corporeal. Substance is prior to its affections; thus, modes must be understood as modifying substances, attributes as picking out perceptually inherent facets of substance. For example, God is a fundamentally thinking thing for Descartes. Also, the body is an extended thing and can be conceived of as sitting, standing, etc. Combining these thoughts, we have the idea that God cannot be a corporeal thing because of God's existence as a thinking thing. Further, Descartes's asserts that we also exist primarily as thinking things because of his imported view about the immortality of the soul. I can cut away bits of my body and retain my individuality, i.e., specific parts of my body seem not to be my essence. Therefore, Descartes argues that we must essentially be incorporeal.

3.3.2 Spinozistic Monism

The Dutch word for substance, in the young Spinoza's *Korte Verhandeling*, is *zelfstandighijd*.[234] Spinoza's view of substance, I argue, takes this word at its most literal, conceptual meaning. I argue for understanding Spinoza's substance monism as an *immanent critique* of Descartes's substance dualism and classical theism. A major influence on the Cartesian view is the authority of revealed religion on the following truths: (1) there are created substances, (2) God admits of no modal distinctions, and (3) human souls have personal immortality apart from the rest of nature. In this subsection, I will demonstrate how Spinoza's view takes the Cartesian metaphysics of substance, attribute, and mode more seriously than Descartes himself does to arrive at substance monism. In other words, Spinoza demonstrates how the Cartesian view cannot maintain the very distinctions that it posits because of the inherent contradictions which arise, e.g., in conceiving of a wholly transcendent God as somehow apart from Nature. In response to Descartes's view, Spinoza insists upon universal modal inherence in God as the tightest logical depiction of the substance-mode relation. In Spinoza's philosophy, only when abstract relationality begins to fade away can a true relationality emerge.[235] In brief, I find that Spinoza achieves this by

[234] In Modern Dutch, *zelfstandigheid*.

[235] Emanuele Costa has conceived of this idea under the tagline of "relations without *relata*." *Spinoza's World* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

taking on Cartesian distinctions in a more serious way than most Cartesians. To demonstrate this, I will show how the young Spinoza's immanent critique began to develop Descartes's principles of substance and of God further than Descartes himself in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* (*CM*) and the *Korte Verhandeling* (*KV*).[236]

Appended to Spinoza's PPC are the *Cogitata Metaphysica*. Spinoza teases apart a few key notions concerning the nature of God, modality, substance, mode, omnipotence, creation, and the minds of God and of humans. I discuss how Spinoza puts his finger here on dialectical tensions between God's omnipotence and necessity as well as the substance-mode relation. Although young Spinoza had yet to clearly articulate the full extent to which his own views differed from Descartes, a view finalized in the *Ethics*, the inadequacy of the Cartesian perspective was clear to Spinoza as early as 1661, the year of one of the first recorded exchanges Spinoza has with one of his many interlocutors.

First, let us return to Descartes's view of his own substance-mode distinction from the Replies to the Objections of *Meditations* III. He writes, I emphasize, "*a substance is more of a thing than a mode*." Continuing, he remarks how an infinite, independent substance is more of a 'thing' (i.e., has more reality or being) than finite, created substance. On Spinoza's view, Descartes does not take his distinctions to be as fine-grained as he intends them. Descartes *cheats*[237] by distinguishing between substances because he did not justify the conceptualization of different substances following his definition of them. If substance is self-standing, or "exists in such a way that it needs no other thing in order to exist," then the only thing which can be truly conceived of as a substance is God. Of course, this is the very same God which Descartes identified as having a primal, independent existence. Put crudely, God is the most *substancey* thing in existence because God, as a regress blocker, must stand (*sto*) under (*sub*) all things. Spinoza breaks down Descartes's commitment at PPC1p7L1pNote2, "more reality is contained in substance than in modes or accidents […] substance contains more necessary and more perfect existence than is contained in accidents," to argue that perfection is only being. A full conceptualization of a human adult requires their having first been a child, before that an infant, two biological parents, adequate resources, etc. On the other hand, properly conceiving of God requires and admits of nothing external if the concepts of God and substance are understood as they were initially advanced. Purely hypothetically, had Descartes taken his own understanding of substance to its rational limit, he would have needed to admit that God is the only thing in need of nothing else for an

[236] My core argument in this subsection is a reply to Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "A Glimpse into Spinoza's Metaphysical Laboratory: The Development of the Concepts of Substance and Attribute," in *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 272–86. Melamed writes, "We are accustomed to think of these paramount definitions as a fixed and settled formulation of the core of Spinoza's metaphysics, but if we look at the development of Spinoza's thought, the picture we get is quite different," citing the *Ethics'* definitions of substance, attribute, and God. Melamed's argument, in broad strokes, contends that Spinoza had yet to settle his views on these concepts, at least as they appear in his late works. However, as I show, the young Spinoza has his finger on the pulse of what he writes later in a more substantive way than Melamed suggests. The view that the young Spinoza's differences with Descartes are apparent has been argued by Denis Kambouchner, "Spinoza and Descartes," in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), 56–67. As Kambouchner states, "Spinoza's original distance from Cartesian conceptions, before becoming obvious in the metaphysical views of the *Ethics* (previously sketched in the *Short Treatise*), is already noticeable in the *TIE* (59).

[237] I borrow the idea of Descartes or of other early moderns as 'cheating' from Samuel Newlands's book on Spinoza and early modern substance. Samuel Newlands, *No Cheating! A Spinozistic Reading of Early Modern Philosophy*, forthcoming.

adequate conceptualization of it. God is therefore the one, perfect substance *par excellence*. Descartes himself *realizes* this, as he considers God's perfection and essence to be incomprehensible to the human intellect but still more clearly and distinctly understood than even any corporeal, sensible thing (PP1.19). As Spinoza states, having an adequate idea of an effect involves knowledge of its causes (1a4); thus, to think we have an accurate picture of anything caused without the full range of its causes would be naïve precisely because we are unaware of its causal history. Descartes, however, does not *admit* it: on the strictures of his own understanding of substance, he *cheats* with his borrowed delineation of created from uncreated substances.

Lodewijk Meyer states of Spinoza's PPC, published in 1663, that Spinoza does not mean to modify the views of "the illustrious Descartes" (PPC Pref). In fact, Meyer goes as far as to say that Spinoza *expands* concepts which Descartes initially advanced without proof. However, there are crucial tensions in Descartes which the PPC exposes and which Spinoza attacks in the *CM*, *KV*, and the PPC itself. Meyer himself suggests as much at the end of his Preface, as he writes, "the foundations of the sciences laid by Descartes and the superstructure that he built thereon do not suffice to elucidate and resolve all the most difficult problems that arise in metaphysics." In other words, Descartes's thought alone is insufficient to unlock the most fundamental concepts and how they potentially even hang together. "Other foundations are required if we seek to raise our intellect to that pinnacle of knowledge." In Chapter 2 of the PPC, Spinoza discusses a few unanswered questions in Descartes. Different from the Aristotelianism of the Scholastics, Descartes's modal voluntarist tendency is to absolutize the will of God.[238] One looming issue in light of the divine intellect is the essences of created things considering that our finite intellects cannot cognize the infinite. Descartes implicitly prioritizes *universalia ante rem* because of his prioritization of God's will. If the essences of things are wholly dependent on their ideas in the mind of God, an absolutely infinite, unknowable being whose existence and essence coincide, then how can we understand the essences of things?

Spinoza's reply to this issue is, ironically enough, to double down on the role of the divine intellect in establishing the essences of things. Thus, God has an adequate idea of the radical particularity of each derivative thing. For Spinoza, God only has knowledge of universals insofar as God has knowledge of the finite, human minds which possess them (CM 2.7). As Descartes argues, our understanding of created, finite things is dependent on our understanding of the uncreated, infinite God because God is the true cause of everything (*PP*1.24). PPC1p9d argues that "God is a supremely understanding being" because God is infinite. Therefore, the unlimited understanding of the divine intellect must comprise of wholly adequate ideas of all things, unless it is somehow limited, which is impossible because negation always comes from the outside. Spinoza thereby nullifies the role of creation and God's incorporeality from Descartes's account. In PPC1p9s, Spinoza points to his impending reversal of Descartes's article (PP1.23), "That God is not corporeal." Spinoza concedes God's incorporeality here (and at PPC1p16). However, Spinoza goes on to argue

[238] For example, Descartes's Creation Doctrine, coming out of correspondence with Mersenne and Arnauld. Descartes seems to think that God could change his laws after their establishment like a king in a kingdom. A recent article which analyzes this tendency is Sebastian Bender, "Descartes's Argument for Modal Voluntarism," *Inquiry*, 2022, 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2143889. One of the first and most important analyses of Descartes's Creation Doctrine, as mentioned, is Frankfurt, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths."

that the perfections of extension must not be withdrawn from God, only its imperfections. Further, the same is true of intellection, i.e., only its imperfections, limitations, and errors are denied of God. Logically, it is possible from this understanding that there are *few* or even *no* imperfections of Extension or of Thought, ergo, none to deny of God. Spinoza writes in CM 2.7, it is an untenable error to think of matter as external to God. In contrast, Spinoza argues that the object of God's knowledge is God's own self, and nothing else. As he writes, "outside God there is no object of his knowledge, but he is himself the object of his knowledge." Put differently, Spinoza argues that God's self-understanding is sufficient for understanding the various essences of things. Although Spinoza's substance monism is not articulated directly, it is advanced implicitly through his breakdown of the Cartesian God. Spinoza absolutizes the divine intellect further than Descartes to discover its role in grounding modes. As Spinoza continues, "[God] is his own knowledge" (CM 2.7).

Spinoza also introduces the concept of *Natura naturata* (1p29s) in CM 2.7. He explains whether God's knowledge of created things is manifold or uniform. In reply, Spinoza argues that God's omnipotence and necessary action entail the uniform, absolute knowledge of everything. Spinoza is remarkedly nominalist on this front. God understands each characteristic within the objects themselves. As a unique being, God can only have the idea of God. Skipping to KV 1.6, Spinoza claims that universal ideas are nothing. Spinoza surmounts the problem of God's knowledge of individual things through looking to the whole of Nature. Just as God's decrees must be one, we can consider Nature "as a single entity." Thus, "the idea of God, or his decree concerning *Natura naturata*, will be only one" (CM 2.7). As a result, all things are necessary with respect to God's determination (CM 2.8, 2.10), a common thread throughout Spinoza's work. Further, Spinoza's characterization of Nature as one, unified, and natural *thing* is already present.

Likely finalized just one year earlier, the first and second chapters of the KV handle God's necessity and certain proofs for this. Melamed suggests that Spinoza's definition of God and Spinoza's proof for God's existence are not dependent on substance; however, Spinoza implicitly refers to God's relation to substance in the footnotes. He writes, "The second chapter, titled "What God Is," opens with a definition of God that characterizes God as "a Being" [*een wezen*], rather than a substance."[239] Melamed takes Spinoza at his word, arguing that Spinoza's view of God in *Ep*. 2 also lacks a reference to substance when considering God's nature, considering God as just a being. Henry Oldenburg, future secretary of the Royal Society of London, kindly demands of Spinoza in 1661 to explicate his disagreement with the Cartesians. After a conversation between Spinoza and Oldenburg in Rijnsburg, where Spinoza was able to settle peacefully and write, Oldenburg asks for Spinoza to

> enlighten me on these two points: first, wherein you place the true distinction between Extension and Thought, and second, what defects you find in the philosophy of Descartes and Bacon, and how you consider that these can be removed and replaced by sounder views (*Ep*. 1)

To place Oldenburg's letter in context, Descartes's *Meditations* was published only 20 years earlier, in 1641, and the PP just three years later, in 1644. Therefore, Spinoza was only in his

[239] Melamed, "A Glimpse into Spinoza's Metaphysical Laboratory: The Development of the Concepts of Substance and Attribute," 281.

late twenties as he sought to establish the insufficiency of Descartes's Method, beginning composition on the fragmentary *TIE* circa 1658, only three years before his conversation with Oldenburg. Spinoza only begins writing the PPC and CM *after* his conversation with Oldenburg. Therefore, I argue, against the predilection that the anti-Cartesian arguments of the CM are indistinguishable from Descartes's own system, that Spinoza consistently aimed at the unraveling of Cartesian substance from itself *on its own lights*.

In his reply to Oldenburg, Spinoza defines God as "a Being [*ens*] consisting of infinite attributes, each of which is infinitely or supremely perfect in its own kind [*infinitum, sive summe perfectum in suo genere*]" (*Ep.* 2). Spinoza goes on to offer a definition of *attribute* which is eerily close to how he later defines substance. As Melamed notes, this is striking, and several commentators (e.g., Edwin Curley, Louis Loeb, Martial Gueroult, and Giuseppa Saccaro Del Buffa, to name a few) use this conflation to argue that Spinoza's God is composed of what Francesca di Poppa has called "substance-attributes."[240] Further, Spinoza offers three characterizations of substance as (1) unique, (2) uncreated, and (3) infinite (*Ep*. 2). In full, Spinoza writes of this third necessary condition,

> every substance must be infinite, or supremely perfect in its kind [*quod omnis substantia debeat esse infinita, sive summe perfecta in suo genere*]

Notice how this is coextensive with Spinoza's reading of God, *in the same letter*. In my view, therefore, it is most likely that Spinoza had yet to distinguish substance clearly from its attributes insofar as attributes are what the intellect perceives as substance's essence. Despite this, Spinoza's view still implies a kind of monism. Substance is understood in the way that he defines *attribute* to Oldenburg. Spinoza could also have parsed the statement as intentionally vague, intending *substance* as coextensive with *God*, albeit in a less direct fashion. In the *KV*, Spinoza runs a quick *reductio* on the possibility of two infinities. First, Spinoza borrows the Cartesian thought that God's idea entails God's existence *formaliter* and cannot come from within the finite intellect itself. Ultimately, two infinities must reduce to one by the principle of the identity of indiscernables. As Spinoza writes, "the infinite cannot be obtained by putting together divers [sic.] parts; that there cannot be two infinities, but *only one*; that it is perfect and immutable, and also that it cannot change" (KV 1.1). In a footnote, Spinoza writes,

> The cause of this change [of the infinite God into anything better] would have to be either outside, or in it. It cannot be outside, because no substance which, like this, exists through itself depends on anything outside it; therefore it is not *subject to change through it*. Nor can it be in it: because no thing, much less this, desires its own undoing; all undoing comes from outside. (KV 1.1 fn5)

In brief, if the infinite has no limit and is true to its definition, then it is conceptually complete and can admit neither any external nor internal change. Spinoza also holds that *there is no finite substance* (KV 1.2), echoing this footnote. Outside of the main text, Spinoza seems to understand God as *a* substance, possibly among many. However, all substances belong to the divine being (KV 1.2fn7). In a similar vein, Spinoza's argument for substance

[240] Francesca Di Poppa, "Spinoza's Concept of Substance and Attribute: A Reading of the *Short Treatise*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 5 (2009): 921–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608780903339087.

monism at the start of the *Ethics* does not presume the coextension of God and substance. Instead, Spinoza leads his reader to admit their preconceptions of God and of substance, taken to their logically *zelfstandig* nature, mutually entail one another. There is an informal, rhetorical layer to Spinoza's exposition which is important to understanding the development of his substance monism as an immanent critique of God and substance.

Spinoza's view echoes the infamous denial of actual infinity by Aristotle, who held that many *aporiai* arise if an actually infinite extended substance existed. In the *Physics*, Aristotle argues that it would necessarily destroy all other substances, be incapable of movement, and do everything all at once—unless this infinite substance were identical to Nature itself. As Spinoza writes, "Nature, which results from no causes, and which we nevertheless know to exist, must necessarily be a perfect being to which existence belongs" (KV 1.2). Extension, as medieval philosophers ranging from Augustine and Maimonides to Aquinas and Suárez have noted, deny corporeality of the divine essence. Spinoza, aware of the Aristotelianism of the Scholastic tradition, contends "we posit extension as an attribute of God; and this seems not at all appropriate to a perfect being: for since extension is divisible, the perfect being would have to consist of parts, and this is altogether inapplicable to God, because he is a simple being" (KV 1.2). Spinoza's reply is to make mereological relations into a false reality because 'part' and 'whole' are *entia rationis*. In other words, Nature possesses only logical separability but is not separable *in re*. A finite perspective understands the parts of Nature as distinct and broken up for ease of comprehension, but God's perspective and understanding are unified and complete. Later, in the Physical Excursus, Spinoza writes that Nature's hypothetical parts vary in infinite ways without change to the whole, mirroring this earlier response.

If every substance is infinite, no finite substance is demonstrable, and God is a substance, then it must be therefore granted that God is the only possible substance. The young Spinoza understands the nature of God's immanent causality as comprehensive, as there can be nothing outside of God since God is the cause of all things (KV 1.3). If God is perfectly free, complete, and contains no accidents, then it must be the case that whatever is produced from God is similarly as it actually is because it depends completely on God (KV 1.4). As a result, if a devil is something completely separate from or opposed to God, then devils do not exist (KV 2.25-6). Spinoza's understanding of good and evil are that they serve as comparative concepts. To be good or evil is to be good or evil in relation to something else and for a particular being. From the perspective of reason, however, they are nothing *per se*, that is, within Nature itself (KV 1.10). Analogously, the role of transcendent criticism as something which reaches beyond the confines of a particular moral, political, or ethical order is limited in scope based on Spinoza's immanentism. The relation inherent to transcendent criticism is one of a scope or critical perspective above or beyond a particular cultural logic. Through a Spinozistic lens, the possibility of relations like those involved in a transcendent perspective stands on questionable ground.

3.4 Conclusion

To my knowledge, Spinoza's critique of Cartesian metaphysics has never been considered as a progenitor to the immanent methodology in use by those in the Left Hegelian tradition. In discussing Spinoza's immanentism, I hope to join the theoretical and practical concerns of Anglophone and Francophone scholarship on Spinoza as well as critical theory alike. Despite apparent problems with the method discussed by Adorno and Fraser of its

undialectical nature and group agency respectively, reliable models of immanent critique must be both dialectical in an unwavering immanentism and consider only self-effacing principles as valid objects of criticism.

In this chapter, I introduced the popular concept of immanent critique and demonstrated its promise in developing the positive ends of an adequate critical theory, building towards a Spinozistic understanding of the concept. I show how Spinoza's radical immanent critique of Descartes's PP across the KV and CM reveal the inadequacy of the mature Cartesian program on its own lights. Spinoza's model of immanent critique is a promising route for critical theory because of its resultant immanentism. In Spinoza's method, the outcome of a serious dialectical engagement with conflicting views is not the abstract negation or abandonment of one over the other. Instead, Spinoza's *Ethics* begins with the definitions and views of his forebearers to demonstrate their self-effacing character. On Spinoza's substance monism, *ex nihilo nihil fit*. Spinoza's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason, as discussed in Chapter 1, means that ideas are not just ideas but have adequate causal antecedents. Thus, despite Adorno's fear of the immanent method for critique as hypostatizing ideology, Spinoza's immanent critique maintains that all ideology is related to truth. In other words, as Deleuze points out, only in substance monism's insistence on a single plane of being, immanentism, can the door for true difference remain open. In conclusion, I submit that Spinoza's model for immanent critique as a response to Descartes's dualism and Scholastic Aristotelianism is a paradigm for contemporary critical theory.

4 Diverse Unity

"Heidelberg, for the first time since the founding of the university, will have a philosopher—
Spinoza received a call from Heidelberg, but in vain as you undoubtedly know."

– Prorector of the University of Heidelberg to G. W. F. Hegel, July 1816

In the *Wissenschaftslehre*, written in the Jena period, the young Fichte argues for a crucial "choice" between dogmatism and idealism. In a word, Fichte contends that one must choose the kind of philosophy to which one will ascribe based on the kind of person that one is. Fichte's choice is between necessitarianism and libertarianism: the world of an illusory freedom *or* the absolute subjectivism of a self-positing ego. Neither worldview, according to Fichte, can refute the other successfully. There is only a choice between the two.

Pierre Macherey pits the idealist Hegel against the "dogmatist" Spinoza. Before him, Jean Hyppolite, Alexandre Kojève, Jean Wahl, Alexandre Koyré, Victor Cousin, and others turned *Hegel à la Française* into a dynasty. Macherey challenges their hegemony through his study, *Hegel ou Spinoza*, the start of the continental "renaissance" of Spinoza for political thought in the 70s-80s.[241] For Macherey, there is an indigestible core to Spinoza's view of substance which afflicts Hegel. As such, Hegel must return, often, to Spinozistic substance without the ability to refute it consistently, as his system is incapable of doing so. In a similar vein to Fichte, Macherey does not claim to settle the score on the part of either Hegel or Spinoza. Instead, as he reevaluates his position in 1990, it is more conciliatory: *Hegel sive Spinoza*.

I hope to short circuit these narratives through my own reading of Hegel's critique of Spinoza and the uptake of idealism in recent Spinoza scholarship. In my view, Spinoza's alternative view of substance for the history of philosophy is more than a choice, and it is also an irreconcilable one. I argue that Spinoza's immanentism is also the grounds for a celebration of the diversity of modes. Drawing on Goetschel, Balibar, and Deleuze, I rebut the Hegelian objection to Spinoza's substance monism of *acosmism*, the view that all individuality fades into nothingness and mere illusion. First, I detail Hegel's acosmist objection to Spinozism. I sketch Hegel's objection in three parts. Hegel disagrees with Spinoza's monism, his starting point, and, interestingly, his *Orientalism*. Next, I detail my account of why Spinoza's monism offers an immediate justification for diversity and the inclusion of alterity as a response to Hegel's critique and recent idealist interpretations of Spinoza. In conclusion, I argue for a new account of tolerance in Spinoza's *Ethics* as exemplified by the ability to "patiently bear whatever happens to us" (4App) and intolerance as *ambition* [ambitio], or flattery. Spinoza's metaphysics of power, in my view, aligns with ancient Stoic conceptions of *ataraxia* in the face of external objects and pressures, despite his protestations against such a view (5Pref).[242]

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[241] Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza, Althusser, and the Question of Humanism," *Crisis & Critique* 8, no. 1 (2021): 174.

[242] Here, Spinoza argues the difference between his view and Stoicism is that they believed in absolute control over one's desires, appetites, and affects, whereas he argues that in Nature, since external causes outnumber each individual, such a precise control of the affects is impossible (4a1, 4p4c). Michael LeBuffe has recently argued, however, that if Spinoza's account can be seen as an attempt to make *reason* into an active emotion, then Spinoza must allow for such a possibility to become undisturbed by external causes. Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

4.1 Acosmism

Parmenidean monism argues that all change is just an illusion, a consequence of his distinction between how things are and how things appear, the latter of which he reads as being *merely* appearances. Further, Parmenides erodes all real distinctions through his aptly named principle of the "One." For him, there is only the One, and there is no many. Relations like change and difference fade into nothingness for Parmenides. The Eleatic picture of reality, corroborated by Zeno, focuses on several key absurdities which arise on the possibility of change. Despite Zeno's *paradoxa*, Parmenides divides his poem into two distinct sections, the "Way of Truth (*aletheia*)" and the "Way of Opinion (*doxa*)." Parmenides may have intended the connection between the fragments to be tighter. As the goddess tells the youth, he *must* learn the ways of mortals, although in these, "there is no true trust (28B1.30)." Nonetheless, Spinoza's monism differs from Parmenidean monism insofar as Spinoza conceives of the connection between reality and appearance as parallel. Whereas Eleatic monism privileges the first level, Spinoza does not neglect or downplay the reality of the second layer. In fact, seeing both views as properly monistic, they delegitimate the possibility of any real distinction between either layer at all. Thus, Spinoza's theory of the affects and their role for political theory bring monism full circle.

In this section, I gloss Hegel's critique of Spinoza's substance monism in three respects. I analyze Hegel's views about Spinoza's (1) monism, (2) starting point, and (3) Orientalism.

4.1.1 Monism

In a way, much of German idealism can be viewed as a reaction to Spinozistic substance. Spinoza's *Ethics* starts with substance and never attains individuality, but Schelling's *System* starts from the self, the unity of the concurrence between objective and subjective, and negates from there. Nevertheless, Schelling argues that the goal of transcendental philosophy is to start with the self and move to nature ("make an intelligence out of nature"), whereas the opposite approach, which he calls *nature-philosophy*, makes the objective primary ("a nature out of intelligence").[243] The force of Hegel's transition from the Objective to the Subjective Logic is precisely the difference between his view and Spinoza's view. To borrow a distinction from the English poet Samuel Coleridge, there are two coherent systems of philosophy. The choice is to philosophize, like Spinoza, "*κατ'οντως οντα*," from the absolute, or, like Kant, "*κατ'ανθρωπον*," from the relative.[244] Ultimately, Hegel argues that Spinoza is unable to make monism anything more than *acosmism*, a denial of the world as it appears, because of the sealed coffin that his one, unified substance imposes. As Hegel states,

> [Spinoza] descends from the universal of substance through the particular, thought and extension, to the individual. He has thus all three moments of the Notion, or they are essential to him. But the mode, under which head falls individuality, he does not recognize as essential, or as constituting a moment of true existence in that existence; for it disappears in existence, or it is not raised into the Notion (LHP 3:264).

The essence of Spinoza's system is the deduction of certain necessary truths which follow from the self-grounded, universal substance. However, as Hegel states here, despite the

[243] Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, trans. Peter Heath, 5th ed (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 1:340-2.

[244] Lionel Hurtrez, "Nature and Subjectivity: Coleridge and Fichteanism," *Coleridge Bulletin* 18 (2001): 4.

apparent transition between individual–particular–universal, the three moments of Hegel's own Concept, Spinoza cannot complete his deduction of subjecthood or individuality. Instead, the individual consciousness falls out from the infinite substance: "it is not raised into the Notion."

The Hegelian critique of substance monism as *acosmism* reads Spinoza and the Eleatics as being 'trapped' in the first layer of substance or *pure being*, which passes into nothingness. As Hegel writes in the *Logic*,

> The *Eleatics* were the first to give voice to the simple thought of *pure being* – notable among them Parmenides, who declared it to be the absolute and sole truth. In his surviving fragments, he did it with the pure enthusiasm of thought which has for the first time apprehended itself in its absolute abstraction: *only being is, and nothing is not absolutely*. […] Those who zealously hold firm to the proposition, nothing is just nothing, are unaware that in so doing they are subscribing to the abstract *pantheism* of the Eleatics and essentially also to that of Spinoza (SL 21.70-2).

Hegel accuses Parmenides and Spinoza of pantheism, the view that "all is God." During Hegel's time, the charge of pantheism, after Jacobi, was tantamount to a charge of atheism. As I have noted, Spinoza's view is actually *panentheism*, as he articulates in 1p15, what Claire Carlisle has called a *superproposition* of the *Ethics* because of the sheer number of times which Spinoza revisits it to demonstrate other corollary points.[245] Under Hegel's conceptualization of Spinoza's substance monism, however, the distinction between the one and the many evaporates into the singular unity of substance. On this account, Hegel argues, the key principle is "*omnis determinatio est negatio*" (SL 11.376 and 21.101), and Spinoza's substance admits of no negation in itself because of how he conceives of finitude as negation (1p8s1). Therefore, individual determinations are bankrupt. Hegel categorizes Spinozism as a deficient view because it outsources all thought to God, what Hegel calls the absolute. All distinction, or determinateness, dissolves into the absolute for Spinoza (SL 21.380-1).

Hegel unpacks "*The unity of Spinoza's substance* [*die Einheit der Spinozistischen Substanz*]" as the consequence of his view that all determination is negation. In this picture, "substance is the total void of internal determinateness (SL 21.101)." Hegel's reading of Spinoza reduces his substance monism, therefore, to *acosmism*. The cosmos, or the world as it appears, is nothing in itself and only a mere appearance. Further, Spinoza's geometric method simply assumes the accuracy of its definitions on Hegel's interpretation. Spinoza's substance, Hegel writes, is "the absolute unity of *thought* and being or extension (SL 11.376)." Spinoza does not start with the absolute; instead, he reduces all to the absolute. Hegel flags a crucial issue: despite Spinoza's profession of an infinity of attributes, only two are known, Thought and Extension.[246] Moreover, these are *empirically* assumed, not deduced

[245] Clare Carlisle, *Spinoza's Religion: A New Reading of the Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

[246] Much work on Spinoza, to this day, leaves the question of the infinity of attributes untouched. Bennett assumes Spinoza meant *omnia* when he wrote *infinitus* concerning the attributes. Melamed's *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, Chapter 5, on the other hand, deals with the possible nature of the attributes outside of Thought and Extension. Hegel's view appears to collapse halfway, as Bennett did, the infinity of attributes onto the two we perceive. This is possibly because Hegel's view is that Spinoza did this himself through an empirical and not *a priori* deduction of the two. For Melamed's reading of Bennett, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "'A Substance

a priori. Even thought itself must consider everything under the aspect of eternity (*sub specie aeternitatis*) insofar as it proceeds from the light of reason, for Spinoza (2p44c2). Thus, subjective reason finds itself always subsumed under the banner of the unchanging, eternal absolute. As Spinoza himself writes, "[The attribute of] Thought and its affections—and consequently of the human mind as well—must necessarily be in God (2p20d)." As he also writes, "In the mind there is no absolute, or free, will (2p48)" because "The mind is a definite and determinate mode of thinking, and thus it cannot be the free cause of its own actions (2p48d)." In effect, Spinoza views the freely willed action of the human agent as illusion, superstition, or myth. Hegel, on the other hand, in his Fichtean inheritance, views the subject as spontaneously assertive.

The Hegelian critique of Spinoza culminates in the argument that Spinoza's modal metaphysics does not develop its progression from substance–attribute–mode in a necessary, essential manner. He writes, "missing are both the becoming of the identity and its determinations (SL 11.378)," implying that Spinoza leaves philosophy stuck at the level of mere postulation, a result of its Euclidian rigidity, which I explore in the next subsection. Although Hegel argues that the transition from substance to the attributes is one which Spinoza drew of necessity ("Denken *und* Seyn *oder Ausdehnung, die zwei Bestimmungen, die Spinoza nämlich vor sich hat, mußte er in dieser Einheit in eins setzen*") (SL 21.101), his philosophical viewpoint is anti-dialectical because there is ultimately no possible movement within his unitary substance. It is *Spinoza himself* who had to posit [*setzen*], dogmatically, the transition from one substance to the attributes. However, the composition of Spinozistic substance itself does not allow such a necessary leap in Hegel's view. Further, as Hegel sees it, Spinoza's resolution to focus on Thought and Extension is arbitrary altogether (LHP 3:269).

Spinoza cannot ultimately maintain the distinction between substance–attribute on his own lights. While what exists of its own essence is infinite for Spinoza, what depends on something else is limited, or finite. Since attributes are "distinctions made by an external understanding (SL 21.101)," they are always improperly drawn. The true unity of Spinozistic substance, Hegel argues, cannot be carved up into bits and pieces. If it is the case that attributes "do not have a particular subsistence, a being-in-and-for-itself," then they are "sublated as moments (ibid.)" within substance.

> SUBSTANCE (1d3)
>
> By substance I mean that which is in itself and is conceived through itself; that is, that the conception of which does not require the conception of another thing from which it has to be formed.
>
> *Per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est et per se concipitur hoc est id cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei a quo formari debeat*.
>
> ATTRIBUTE (1d4)

Consisting of an Infinity of Attributes': Spinoza on the Infinity of Attributes," in *Infinity in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Ohad Nachtomy and Reed Winegar, vol. 76, The New Synthese Historical Library (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 63–76, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94556-9.

> By attribute I mean that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence.
>
> *Per attributum intelligo id quod intellectus de substantia percipit tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens*.

It is ambiguous, given Spinoza's own definitions, whether the distinction made between substance and its attributes actually tracks a real distinction within the essence of substance *as it is* or if it only tracks a merely ideal division *as it is perceived*. In the *History of Philosophy*, Hegel contends that the transition from substance to attribute is required but not stated explicitly (LHP 3:260).

As I argue in Chapter 1, Spinoza's view of the three relations (conception, inherence, causality) are linked in difficult to discern but integral ways. Here, one remarks how Hegel must have seen this. Spinoza's definition of substance itself relies on the idea of *conception* for a view of how *causality* works. As Newlands and Melamed argue, to different ends, this may accord a certain priority to the attribute of *Thought* for Spinoza.[247] For Hegel, the fact that Spinoza uses the relation of *conception* to mark a division of any kind within substance is a self-contradiction. Since Thought is usurped by the one substance on Hegel's reading of Spinoza, Thought could never ground a real distinction within what already cannot be divided.

As Hegel opens the Subjective Logic, "the philosophy that assumes its position at the standpoint of *substance* and stops there is the *system of Spinoza*." Hegel summarizes his contention, which hinges on a transcendental assumption, "there cannot be any refutation of Spinozism for anyone who does not presuppose a commitment to freedom and the independence of a self-conscious subject (SL 12.15)." Describing the inadequacy of an external refutation, Hegel attempts in a Fichtean manner to "infiltrate the opponent's stronghold and meet him on his own ground (ibid.)." Hegel's immanent critique of Spinozism attempts to take substantiality beyond Spinoza's conception. For Hegel, being and non-being are one and the same thing. Similarly, substance, considered *in se*, leads back to the Concept and the freedom of subjective thought, unrestrained from substance. Subjective cognition, therefore, is impossible for Spinoza. Hegel sets the first chapter of the final part of the Objective Logic, "The Absolute," against Spinozism as he transitions to the Subjective Logic, which starts with the doctrine of the Concept (*Begriff*), away from the implicit and external *genetic exposition* of substance to the Concept's explicit and internal subjecthood (SL 12.11-2) and immanent genesis. Hegel argues the paradigmatic example of this is "one of the profoundest and truest insights to be found in the Critique of Reason […] the *original synthetic* unity of *apperception*, the unity of the '*I Think,*' or of self-consciousness (SL 12.17-8)." It is at this crucial juncture in the *Logic* where Hegel truly leaves Spinoza behind.

Della Rocca writes about the relationship between Hegel and Spinoza that the former reads the latter as an *existence monist*. In other words, following the distinction Jonathan Schaffer has drawn,[248] there are two key strands of monism. The stronger version, existence

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[247] Samuel Newlands, "More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza," *Philosophy Compass* 6, no. 2 (February 2011): 111–12, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-9991.2010.00377.x; Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), Ch. 5-6.

[248] Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole," *The Philosophical Review* 119, no. 1 (2010): 31–76, https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2009-025.

monism, holds that exactly and only one token exists. The weaker version, priority monism, holds that there is one fundamental object and its distinct variations which are still dependent on the fundamental thing. Hegel's attribution of acosmism to Spinoza entails that Spinozism is existence monism. As Hegel writes about Spinoza, "There is therefore no such thing as finite reality; it has no truth whatever," and "[Spinoza] is able to renounce all that is determinate and particular (*History of Philosophy*, pp. 281 and 258)."[249] Thus, for Hegel and Della Rocca's readings of Spinoza's monism, the reality of finite modes is actually an *un*reality. Where can individuated people arise, on this reading? Politics, ethics, and discussions of tolerance and agential responsibility lose all their meaning to the abyss of substance on this view. As Della Rocca writes elsewhere, "there is no such distinction between pure act and a world of other beings or agents or actions."[250] In short, Della Rocca rejects individuated action because he rejects the reality of finite modes, and consequently, he argues that ethical theories like deontology, virtue ethics, and utilitarianism rest on incoherent and unlicensed distinctions between individuals.

4.1.2 Starting Point

Spinoza's philosophy proffers the starting point of all philosophizing, according to Hegel.[251] "It is therefore worthy of note that thought must begin by placing itself at the standpoint of Spinozism; to be a follower of Spinoza is the essential commencement of all Philosophy" (LHP 3:257). To return to Hegel's discussion of Parmenidean monism, recall that Hegel views Parmenides as having voiced his monism "with the pure enthusiasm of thought which has for the first time apprehended itself in its absolute abstraction (SL 21.70-2)." These are not kind words from Hegel, as he denounces the absolute abstraction (*absoluten Abstraktion*) which results from this one-sided view of things operative in a flat, limited view of being. To transition to his discussion in the SL of essence, Hegel cites the formulation "*omnis determination est negatio*" as itself a "formless abstraction" in Spinoza's system. Although Spinoza's substance is a necessary step in the evolution of being into its full shape, it is still only a step. Hegel's criticism of Spinozism as acosmism comes, in part, because the *form* of Spinozism inevitably matches its *content* (as Hegel argues at SL 21.28). Spinoza's Euclidian exposition and derivations, for Hegel, are a deficient vehicle for any real philosophical development or achievement beyond dogmatism. To put it briefly, Hegel thinks that Spinoza has cheated.

According to Hegel, the starting point of Spinoza's philosophy is defunct. Hegel's own SL is built on a self-purportedly "presuppositionless" beginning. As he writes in the *Introduction*:

> Logic […] cannot presuppose any […] forms of reflection, these rules and laws of thinking, for they are part of its content and they first have to be established within it. And it is not just the declaration of scientific method but the *concept* itself of *science* as such that belongs to its content and makes up its final result. Logic, therefore, cannot say

[249] Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, eds., "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond," in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, trans. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 17.

[250] Michael Della Rocca, *The Parmenidean Ascent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 111.

[251] Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, 19–20.Hegel's idea that oriental history is the first stage of development in the consciousness of freedom, as he discusses in the *Philosophy of History*, is operative in his view.

> what it is in advance, rather does this knowledge of itself only emerge as the final result and completion of its whole treatment (SL 21.27).

Whether Hegel actually achieves his goal is a deeply contested issue which I cannot settle at present. In any case, what is clear from Hegel's own methodology and attempt at grounding pure thinking is the invalidity of Spinoza's stipulative, Euclidian starting points in definitions and axioms. Hegel's logic does not abstract from its content, as this would preclude logic knowing its subject manner "as it is in itself," as Hegel criticizes Kant's transcendental idealism as an abstract shadow (SL 21.31).

As I argue in Chapter 1, the crystalline structure of Spinoza's *Ethics* is paramount to Spinoza's historic position in the lineage of Enlightenment rationalism. Hegel's identification of Parmenides's "pure enthusiasm of thought" is shared by Spinoza, who takes the principle of sufficient reason to its logical ends. In Hegel's view, this shared enthusiasm has catastrophic results for their philosophical starting (and ending) points. Whereas Hegel's Logic touts a presuppositionless beginning, the beginning of Spinoza's *Ethics* sports eight definitions and seven axioms, and only a couple explications of two definitions. In Hegel's view, Spinoza's approach automatically divorces thought from being. According to Dean Moyar, the difference between Hegel and Spinoza's wildly different approaches is some variation of beginning with *concept acquisition* versus *substance* as the source of "what-is."[252] Drawing on Klaus Hartmann's famous 'non-metaphysical' reading of Hegel, Moyar distinguishes between a handful of variations on the following Hegelian thesis:

> Concept Dependence (*CD*) the only way to account for the-world's-what is through our concepts.

In essence, the widest range of recent interpretations of Hegel is covered by this basic idea. Hegel's recognitive structure of *Geist* makes sense on this thesis through our shared formation and 'living out' of our concepts. Now, contrast such a view with the Spinozistic starting point of substance:

> Substance Dependence (*SD*) the-world's-what stems from a single all-encompassing substance that is prior to and the source of our concepts.

It should be clarified that Hegel does indeed argue in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that he views Spinoza's starting point as substance. Hegel states, in his discussion of the skeptical tropes, "Spinoza pre-supposes definitions of the infinite, of substance, of attribute, etc.; and the rest follows consistently from them. Nowadays men prefer to give assurances and speak of facts of consciousness" (LHP 2:359). The starting point of Hegel's idealism, even if it were to be determined as grounded on this as a supposition, is the reality of the Concept and the finite. Spinoza's view, differently, views concepts—among other things—as remarkedly derivative.

On Hegel's view, Spinozism is rather simple to explain from a bird's eye view because of its exposition. Take the following description:

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[252] Dean Moyar, "Thought and Metaphysics: Hegel's Critical Reception of Spinoza," in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 199–201.

> As regards the philosophy of Spinoza, it is very simple, and on the whole easy to comprehend; *the difficulty which it presents is due partly to the limitations of the method in which Spinoza presents his thoughts*, and partly to his narrow range of ideas, which causes him in an unsatisfactory way to pass over important points of view and cardinal questions. Spinoza's system is that of Descartes made objective in the form of absolute truth. The simple thought of Spinoza's idealism is this: The true is simply and solely the one substance, whose attributes are thought and extension or nature: and only this absolute unity is reality, it alone is God (LHP 3:256, emphasis mine).

Spinozism is limited principally by its narrow method. The geometric exposition, while it clarifies the wholly logical structure and deduction of Spinoza's arguments, also exposes them as not only clear but *hollow*. If Spinoza's arguments are derivable completely from the definitions and axioms, then the whole truth of Spinoza's philosophy must be contained within the definitions as they are laid down. Spinoza's method chokes itself out, therefore, because it is incapable of any movement. The Euclidian method which Spinoza chooses, for Hegel, is more proper to mathematics, geometry, or the empirical sciences than philosophy or speculation. He states, "The mathematical method is, however, ill-adapted for speculative content, and finds its proper place only in the finite sciences of the understanding" (LHP 3:282).

In effect, Spinoza is out of place as a philosopher. While the point of view of knowledge for the geometer or mathematician as the identity of subject and predicate is sufficient, Hegel argues that Spinoza's *mos geometricus* is wildly inadequate as a basis or starting point for philosophy. The quasi-Archimedian point of Spinoza's definitions limits his possible grasp on the truth.

> Mathematical science, in its true propositions respecting a whole, escapes from the difficulty by proving also the converse of the propositions, in this way obtaining for them a special definiteness by proving each proposition in both ways. […] Mathematical science, in its true propositions respecting a whole, escapes from the difficulty by proving also the converse of the propositions, in this way obtaining for them a special definiteness by proving each proposition in both ways (LHP 3:284).

Bluntly, Spinoza's method does not respect the unidirectionality of truth. The dialectical approach which Hegel adopts privileges movement; more specifically, concepts like Bildung, recognition, and the Concept have key developmental or processional aspects. Hegel's example here is the Concept [*Begriff*]. Were the Concept to be defined as "that which is thus popularly conceived," it would miss the entire point of the Concept as such. It is the *immanent deduction* of the universal in philosophy which is the mark of its truth, whereas the universal in Spinoza's definitions is merely stipulative. As Hegel writes, "this unity of the two moments is the very thing which the proof has to demonstrate, it is the Notion or the essence" (LHP 3:284). The coldness of Spinoza's method is not suited to philosophy, which involves the reflections of a subject which is itself implicated in its analysis. While Kant's transcendental deduction involves the establishment of a subject who is doing the thinking, "the moment of self-consciousness [in Spinoza] is lacking; the 'I' disappears, gives itself altogether up, merely withers away" (LHP 3:286).

In sum, as Hegel states, and as commentators have remarked, the highest and proprietary goal of philosophy is to conceptualize the absolute: thought must think itself thinking.[253] Spinoza, *par contre*, swallows thought under a unified substance which does not permit a diversity of thought.

> The whole of Spinoza's philosophy is contained in these definitions, which, however, taken as a whole are formal; *it is really a weak point in Spinoza that he begins thus with definitions*. In mathematics this method is permitted, because at the outset we there make assumptions, such as that of the point and line; but in Philosophy the content should be known as the absolutely true. It is all very well to grant the correctness of the name-definition, and acknowledge that the word "substance" corresponds with the conception which the definition indicates, but it is quite another question to determine whether this content is absolutely true. Such a question is not asked in the case of geometrical propositions, but in philosophic investigation it is the very thing to be first considered, and this Spinoza has not done. Instead of only explaining these simple thoughts and representing them as concrete in the definitions which he makes, what he ought to have done was to examine whether this content is true (LHP 3:263-4).

The "one-sidedness of Spinoza" (LHP 3:290) is his highest defect. Hegel leaves Spinoza behind in the *History of Philosophy* in a similar manner to how he leaves him in the *SL*. The crucial junctures which open doors to the immanent development of self-consciousness, a transcendental argument for freedom, and the pursuit of absolute thinking are all missing in Spinoza's starting and ending points in definitions and substance. Hegel concludes, the "vital fire" of self-consciousness "is wanting" (LHP 3:289) in Spinoza's philosophy because of his geometrical method. Each of the crucial moments of the Concept in Spinoza's *Ethics* is transfixed, not sublated, into the eternal banner of substance.

4.1.3 Orientalism

Hegel's view of the Orient in the *Philosophy of History*, to say the least, is one-dimensional. In broad outline, Hegel is "orientalist" on Edward Said's paradigmatic account because Hegel uses the Orient as a steppingstone for the cultural supremacy of the Occident.[254] Although Hegel recognizes oriental history as a key contributor in the stage of world history, it is only the preliminary stage of freedom where only "one is free." It is, as Said points out, "essentially other" because Hegel defines it as oppositional, against the West. Nevertheless, while oriental philosophy is deficient, it also expresses a necessary point in the history of philosophy. Again, just as one observes with the starting place of Spinoza's philosophy, it is itself but a starting point to be eclipsed in a larger historical narrative. Although it is first, it is not foremost, a position which he reserves for the history of modernity, in which the collective consciousness of freedom [*Bewußtsein der Freiheit*] self-reflexively recognizes that "all are free."

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[253] Moyar, 212–13; Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in the Science of Logic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[254] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Jean-Yves Heurtebise, "Hegel's Orientalist Philosophy of History and Its Kantian Anthropological Legacy," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 44, no. 3–4 (2017): 175–92, https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-6253.12324.

Hegel's discussion of oriental philosophy in the *History of Philosophy* leads with the following:

> In the Eastern religions the first condition is that only the one substance shall, as such, be the true, and that the individual neither can have within himself, nor can he attain to any value in as far as he maintains himself as against the being in and for itself. He can have true value only through an identification with this substance in which he ceases to exist as subject and disappears into unconsciousness (LHP 1:118).

As I have shown, Hegel's reading of Spinozistic substance is that it admits of no movement, individuals, or freedom. The defect of Spinoza's method is that its start and end are the same: substance. Whereas Hegel's *Geist* is all about the immanent development of the Concept, he reads Spinoza's unitary God as inert and stagnant. Oriental philosophy and Spinozism, for Hegel, are of a kind because of their inherent limitations. The one substance, shared in Eastern religion and Spinozism, is the whole and complete author of history and all activity. Hegel's critique of orientalism as monism is not particular to him. Malebranche also viewed Eastern philosophy (Neo-Confucianism in particular) as largely monistic. In his *Entretien d'un Philosophe chrétien et d'un Philosophe chinois sur l'existence et la nature de Dieu*, Malebranche thinly veils an attack on Spinozism as an attack on Chinese philosophy.[255] In essence, Hegel's view is not far from Malebranche's because Spinoza's monism is equated with popular worldviews circulating in the Orient at large. Bayle takes the idea of Spinoza's substance as inert literally. In Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, according to Carlisle, Spinoza's substance is identical to the practices of the Chinese sects of Foe Kiao, "quietists" who sat completely still for long hours of the day in emulation of substance. Alexander Douglas remarks how "Bayle's 'Foe Kiao' is a corruption of the Chinese term for Buddhism (fójiào 佛教)."[256]

Hegel's challenge to Spinoza is the same one that he poses to oriental history altogether. In the total lack of inward division, how can the *subject* truly emerge? As Macherey states, Hegel sees Spinozism as its own ending point but as the real starting point for his own developmental account. Hegel writes,

> God is in truth assuredly the necessity or, as one might say as well, the absolute thing, but also at the same time the absolute person, and on this point we must agree that the philosophy of Spinoza falls short of the real concept of God, which forms the content of religious consciousness in Christianity. Spinoza was by descent a Jew, and it is in general the oriental view according to which all achieved finite being appears only as transient being, as being that disappears, that has found in its philosophy an expression that conforms to this intellectual system. It is certainly true that this oriental view of the unity of substance forms the basis of all real further development, but one can't stop there; it continues to be marked by the absence of the occidental principle of individuality.[257]

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[255] Gregory M. Reihman, "Malebranche and Chinese Philosophy: A Reconsideration," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (2013): 262–63, https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2012.718869.

[256] Alexander Douglas, "Spinoza's Religion: A New Reading of the Ethics," *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2022, https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/spinozas-religion-a-new-reading-of-the-ethics/.

[257] Ruddick's translation of Encyclopedia §151 at *Hegel or Spinoza*, 19–20.

Hegel essentially criticizes Spinozism as orientalism. In his time, Hegel must have been familiar with developments in Western thought about the Orient. To name a few examples, as Jean-Yves Heurtebise points out, Herotodus on the Persians as an unfree people, and Montesquieu on the Chinese as bound by *lex talionis*.[258] There was a remarkable fascination with the Eastern world in the Western world leading into the turn of the nineteenth century. In 1784, the philologist Sir William Jones founded the *Asiatic Society*, devoted to the study of the Asian world.[259] Undoubtedly, Hegel caught wind of this fascination, as he discusses both Chinese and Indian philosophy at length in the *History of Philosophy* in an impressively detailed section. For example, Hegel cites the *Die Philosophie im Fortgang der Weltgeschichte* of his fellow German philosopher Karl Joseph Hieronymus Windischmann to explain the transition from the *I Ching* to the *Analects* in the understanding of the principles of Yin and Yang. Hegel encountered and was familiar with a vast diversity of philosophical views, which explains how he can so quickly ally Spinozism with Orientalism. Finally, Hegel remarks how he personally viewed the manuscript of the Daoist classic, the *Daodejing*, by Lao Tzu. He states, "We still have his principal writings; they have been taken to Vienna, and I have seen them there myself" (LHP 1:124). Although Hegel's personal view of the Orient is highly limited, his attention to detail ensures that his philosophical take on Eastern philosophy was not *just* hot air.

In my view, we can take Hegel at his word when he equates Spinozism with Orientalism. Hegel's understanding of Oriental history, however limited, is like Pierre Bayle's worry about Spinozism. In the immediate impact of Spinoza's *Ethics*, many thinkers beyond Hegel, Malebranche, and Bayle likened substance monism to concepts trending in modern Eastern philosophy at large. Bayle argues that Spinoza's *Ethics* results in the absurd view that God is both good and bad, man and animal, and free and unfree because of the ascription of individual things as modifications of God. Hegel agrees with Bayle, in broad outline.

> The idea that all particular content is only a modification of God is ridiculed by Bayle, who argues from it that God modified as Turks and Austrians, is waging war with Himself; but Bayle has not a trace of the speculative element in him, although he is acute enough as a dialectician, and has contributed to the intelligent discussion of definite subjects (LHP 3:271).

Despite Hegel's general distaste for Bayle's skeptical method, we see here that Hegel agrees with him about Spinoza's philosophy insofar as substance monism makes the advent of the individual, free subject impossible. Bayle himself states of Spinoza's view, like Malebranche's reading, that it resembles Neo-Confucianism. According to Yuen-Ling Tai, "Bayle and Malebranche were led to link Chinese philosophy and Spinoza's metaphysics by the perception that both are species of monistic rationalism."[260] To Bayle and Malebranche, I add Hegel, who deals with Spinoza's monism in a similar fashion to them. Spinoza effectively locks thought into itself but externally. For Hegel, it is essential to characterize the inner determinations of *Geist* and the three moments of the Concept as an internal, immanent

[258] Heurtebise, "Hegel's Orientalist Philosophy of History and Its Kantian Anthropological Legacy," 177.

[259] Urs App, "Schopenhauer and the Orient," in *The Oxford Handbook of Schopenhauer*, ed. Robert L. Wicks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 88–107.

[260] Yuen-Ting Lai, "The Linking of Spinoza to Chinese Thought by Bayle and Malebranche," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 2 (1985): 153, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1985.0027.

movement. Spinoza's philosophy starts from the absolute and locks itself into a purely rationalistic mode of thought with insufficient and dogmatic presuppositions.

Hegel ends his discussion of Oriental philosophy in the *History of Philosophy*, transitioning to Greek philosophy, as follows.

> In the Eastern Philosophy we have […] discovered a definite content, which is brought under our consideration; but the consideration is destitute of thought or system because it comes from above and is outside of the unity. On that side there stands intellectual substantiality, on this side it appears dry and barren; the particular thus only has the dead form of simple reason and conclusion, such as we find in the Scholastics. Based on the ground of thought, on the other hand, the particular may receive its dues; it may be regarded and grasped as a moment in the whole organization. The Idea has not become objective in the Indian Philosophy; hence the external and objective has not been comprehended in accordance with the Idea. This is the deficiency in Orientalism (LHP 1:146).

Relationality drops out in Orientalism. As Hegel writes, the particular "only has the dead form of simple reason and conclusion," meaning that the immanent movement of the Concept is impossible in Orientalism. Like Spinoza's definitions and axioms, the purely rationalistic program, in all its enthusiasm of thought, contains no dynamic of subjectivity. According to Malebranche, Bayle, and Hegel, Spinoza is linked to Orientalism, a fatal objection for all three, but for world-historical reasons on Hegel's account.

Despite Hegel's orientalism and critique of Spinozism, he does not only liken Spinoza to monistic, oriental views. Hegel also compares Spinoza's sullen absolute to Plato. He says, "as is the case in Plato and Spinoza, the absolute has been made the unity of self-consciousness and existence, and not self-consciousness opposed to existence" (LHP 2:364). Plato, like Spinoza, is skeptical of the relation between the realms of appearance and reality. The British idealist F. H. Bradley, inheriting much from Hegel but more from Spinoza in some respects, argues against the logical possibility of relations. An idea with defenders ranging from Aristotle to Leibniz, Bradley argues that relations cannot be real entities because they suffer from a fatal regress problem. Della Rocca defends Bradleyan regress because it helps establish his view that relations are suspect by the principle of sufficient reason. Bradley's argument against the possibility of relations has roots in Plato's *Parmenides*. In effect, it is a version or paradigm of the problem of the one and the many. Plato writes, using Parmenides as a mouthpiece against Socrates's view,

> You see a number of great objects, and when you look at them there seems to you to be one and the same idea (or nature) in them all; hence you conceive of greatness as one […] And if you go on and allow your mind in like manner to embrace in one view the idea of greatness and of great things which are not the idea, and -to compare them, will not another greatness arise, which will appear to be the source of all these? […] Then another idea of greatness now comes into view over and above absolute greatness, and the individuals which partake of it; and then another, over and above all

these, by virtue of which they will all be great, and so each idea instead of being one will be infinitely multiplied.[261]

To paraphrase, imagine two *relata*, A and B. The two would be related, if Forms, universals, or relations exist, by a third thing, their relation, C. Now, if C is said to participate in what constitutes A and B, a requirement for its actual existence, i.e., C is a real entity, then A, B, and C must then be related by a fourth thing, D. The regress continues *ad infinitum*. It is not clear that subsequent Platonists saw this problem as an issue; however, Aristotle seems to think it is, given his famous statement in the *NE* to side with truth against the Platonists. "Good" and "bad," for Aristotle, are merely relational or relative terms. Spinoza's view of perfection in Nature is similar. Leibniz argues in 1676, to the same effect, that relative concepts (numbers, possibilities, relations, reflections) are themselves ontologically empty. Calling these "only mere intelligible things," Leibniz rejects their independent standing. Bradley, similarly, argues in *Appearance and Reality* that relations cannot stand on their own because of an "infinite process" involved in going from A, B, and C… to A, B, C, and a new relation, D… without end. Implicated in accepting such an argument, Della Rocca argues, is the very substance-mode relation itself. There is therefore, at bottom, only substance.

The crucial problem that Bradleyan regress would pose for my reading of Spinoza's monism comes in conceiving of any relationality in a diverse unity of modes. As Della Rocca has argued in several instances, if all relations are delegitimated by the principle of sufficient reason, then *all* bifurcations—talk of normative categories, individuals, races, difference—must be rejected. Bayle's objection to Spinoza, articulated in his *Dictionnaire*, argues that monism logically entails the rejection of ethical-political action because agential action is premised on real distinctions between individuals. As Balibar writes in the Foreword to his *Spinoza and Politics*, "Spinoza and politics: at first sight, even this simple formula is a glaring paradox! If politics belongs to the order of history, here is a philosopher whose whole system is […] to know God."[262] Many historical interpreters of Spinoza, following the Bayle-Hegel legacy, prioritize the first part of the *Ethics*, *De Deo*, which has little to no mention of the peculiarities of *human* ways of being. It begins philosophy in stale definitions, axioms, and postulation. Finally, it begins from a lower world-historical rung, which is superseded in modern history of the Occident. Thus, with Hegel's objections in view, I turn now to discuss how Spinoza's *Ethics* and political works, taken as a whole, can open the door to a pluralistic diversity *and* unity of individuals.

4.2 Diverse Modes

In sum, Hegel's acosmist objection to Spinozism seeks to show how Spinoza's own concept of substance cannot support its political derivations.[263] For Hegel, Spinozism culminates in the acosmism of Parmenides and other Eleatic monists. Even Salomon Maimon, sympathetic to Spinoza's view against Jacobi's charge of atheism, argues that "In Spinoza's system the unity is real while the diversity is merely ideal […] Spinozism should

[261] Plato, *Parmenides* 132a-b in *Plato: Cratylus · Parmenides · Greater Hippias · Lesser Hippias*, trans. Harold North Fowler, The Loeb classical library 167 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[262] Étienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon (New York: Verso, 2008), xxi.

[263] Hegel does not comment on the connection to Spinoza's politics here.

be called 'acosmism.'"[264] Instead, I argue that substance monism offers an immediate, substantial justification to contemporary arguments for the celebration of diversity, inclusion of difference, and democratic principles of tolerance. Despite the longstanding criticism echoed by Hegel of Spinoza as a "God-intoxicated man," Spinoza's philosophy preserves the power of individuals and absolutizes it—as a small fraction of the power of God.

Conceived as a mass concept, what Spinoza calls *potestas* is predicated upon the power of political institutions to act, state authority. On the other hand, what Spinoza calls *potentia* is the power of both an individual body to act and the power of the body politic.[265] In the chapter on "Natural Right" of the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza argues,

> Any natural thing can be adequately conceived, whether it actually exists or [*sive*] not. Therefore, just as the coming into existence of natural things cannot be concluded from their definition, so neither can their perseverance [*perseverantia*] in existing; for their essence in the form of idea [*essentia idealis*] is the same after they have begun to exist as it was before they existed. Therefore, just as their coming into existence cannot follow from their essence, so neither can their perseverance in existing. The same power [*potentia*] that they need in order to begin to exist, they also need in order to continue to exist. Hence it follows that the power of natural things [*rerum naturalium potentiam*] by which they exist, and consequently by which they act, *can be no other than the eternal power of God* [nullam aliam esse posse, quam ipsam Dei aeternam potentiam] (TP 2.2, emphasis mine).[266]

Therefore, *potentia* always underlies *potestas*.[267] In brief, Spinoza's argument rehearses core components of the view he advances in his *Ethics*. To start, an individual mode is insufficient for its own conceptualization. Spinoza effectively runs a sequence of conditional proofs to show that individuals are modes. Modes are conceptually posterior to substance. The child requires parents who require parents… *ad infinitum*. Therefore, each mode is, as Spinoza argues in 2p10s2, conceived always through God, or Nature, as the *causa secundum esse* et *fieri* of all things. 1p25 corroborates this claim. The essence of a thing is accordingly insufficient for the existence of it. Spinoza then closes this conditional proof: if something is an individual, then it is a mode. Ultimately, one must trace all the way back to God's eternal power [*potentia*], the enabling condition for the right of individual beings. As he continues in TP 2.4, natural right is therefore coextensive with God's power. This is because of the link between God's eternal, unrestrained power with the fractal essence of individual modes. God's power, an immanent feature of individual beings existing *within* God (1p15), is therefore a necessary condition for even the large-scale, state-authority of *potestas*.

Here, a sympathetic Hegelian might ask: if substance is all that truly exists as unified, then how can there be a real diversity of modes with their own powers and determinate

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[264] Solomon Maimon in Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Acosmism or Weak Individuals?: Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (January 2010): 79–80, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.0.0180.

[265] Several authors have explored the distinction in the history of Spinoza's political reception. Matheron, Negri, Deleuze, and Lord. More recently, see Sandra Leonie Field, *Potentia: Hobbes and Spinoza on Power and Popular Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[266] Spinoza makes the same argument in the TTP and rehearses it more quickly in Chapter 16.

[267] Goetschel, *Spinoza's Modernity*, 76. Goetschel argues that the difference between *potentia* and *potestas* is analogous to *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* in 1p29s respectively.

activity? Why would it be in Spinoza's interest to argue for diversity when his one substance, God or Nature, is indivisible? Aligned with Della Rocca's question, it seems that the required locus of individual action for political activity would be missing from modes in Spinoza's scheme. As Deleuze comments on Spinoza's view of modes, it is not *derisive* of Spinoza to make this characterization of individuals as modes. It may feel belittling to go from being created *imago Dei* to being just a small, immanent part of nature with no external power apart from God's free activity. However, as Deleuze writes,

> It should not be thought that in thus reducing creatures to modifications or modes Spinoza takes away from them all their own essence or power. The univocity of cause does not mean *that self-causality and efficient causality have one and the same sense, but that both are asserted in the same sense of a cause*.[268]

Spinoza flattens out formal, material, and final causality all onto efficient causality. Therefore, for Spinoza to argue that God is the direct, vertical cause of all things is to allow all things to partake or share in God's divine essence. Further, Spinoza's deeply relational account of being acknowledges the fact that no action, ideology, or concept exists in a vacuum. Each one is the product of a long chain of causes, leading inevitably back to a necessary substance.

Being a mode of God, then, is an *enabling* condition, not a disabling one, for political power and group activity. Spinoza argues in 1p26:

> A thing [*Res*] which has been determined to act [*operandum*] in a particular way has necessarily been so determined by God; and a thing which has not been determined by God cannot determine itself to act.

Spinoza's God is the essential locus for action, radicalizing the medieval concept of God as the *ens realissimum* or guarantor of all activity. Only a necessary, self-sufficient being can produce action in a way that avoids infinite regress. In 1p28s, Spinoza conceives of God as guarantor even in cases of lateral, horizontal, mode-to-mode causality (!) because "the effects of God can neither be nor be conceived without their cause." Therefore, Spinoza writes that God is not the *remote cause* but the *proximate cause* of things. One of Deleuze's core theses is that Spinoza establishes, like Duns Scotus *pace* Aquinas, a univocity of being. In other words, being can only be said in one way, and the same thing can be predicated of God and of God's creation. Just as in Parmenides's view that the same goes for thought as for being, for Duns Scotus and Spinoza, the same goes for God as for what flows from God's eternal essence. If God is a necessary being, then what flows from God's essence is necessary as well. For Duns Scotus, this is God's creation. For Spinoza, this is all of reality because whatsoever is in a natural being's power is a consequence of God's power because God is necessarily (1p16c2) their immanent (i.e., not transitive) cause (1p18d). Therefore, "Against Descartes, Spinoza posits the equality of all forms of being, and the univocity of reality which follows from this equality."[269]

Although modes are diverse and vary in immensely complex and inexhaustible ways, with each organism itself containing an infinite multitude of organisms (2p13sPost1), Spinoza maintains their tight connection, always within the whole of God, but as logically

[268] Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, 165.
[269] Deleuze, 167.

conceivable in their diversity. The multitude of individuals join together to form the *facies totius Universi* (2p13s, Ep. 64). While the essence of substance itself remains indivisible, its fashions of arrangement vary in infinite ways without affecting the one substance's indivisible essence. In short, all modes cohere. As Leibniz notes, there is not a single drop in the ocean which is not connected to the rest of the ocean which is not connected to the rest of the entirety of creation. If Leibniz is correct that the universe is effectively all of one piece,[270] then all beings are *compossible*. All their configurations are (both individually and collectively) logically and substantially consistent with one another. Spinoza's TTP argues that all religious difference is compatible within the infinite intellect of God. In fact, the diverse existence of modal reality entails a diverse reality of imaginative representations.

Insofar as we are rational, we agree (4p35). It is therefore to our advantage to act in accordance with reason (TTP 16.6) because we cohere more readily as collective agents and collaborative reasoners. Spinoza argues in the final chapter of the TTP that freedom of speech cannot be stifled because individual expression always finds its way back into discursive structures. Spinoza shows in this argument how his substance monism justifies the principles of tolerance and of freedom of expression (*libertas philosophandi*). Each person, in their own power, must have the ability to worship and believe what they desire about God because it is their inalienable right. In fact, as Spinoza boldly intones in the Preface, political absolutism and the right of the sovereign absolutely *depends* on tolerance. Spinoza claims that "Nobody is bound by natural right to live as another pleases [*nemo iure naturae ex alterius ingenio vivero tenetur*], each man being the guardian of his own freedom" (TTP Pref). Since belief is a personal matter ["all men cannot think alike" (TTP 20)], it cannot be forced. The right to self-defense cannot be alienated without peril to the State itself because citizens cannot be forced to mentally obey the State in all circumstances. Such an attempt would only lead to cognitive dissonance, or when "men would be thinking one thing and saying another" (TTP 20). In Chapter 17, Spinoza establishes how command cannot be fully exercised over an external being because it retains a conative drive. Anticipating the potential for mass ideology, Spinoza concedes that "there is no absurdity in conceiving men whose beliefs […] and every single emotion is under the sole control of the governing power" (TTP 17). However, he also writes, "preservation of the state depends mainly on the subjects' loyalty and virtue and their steadfastness in carrying out orders" (TTP 17). Just as Plato conceives of the tyrannical government as the least stable possibility in his *Republic*, Spinoza's conatus doctrine entails that subjects can never be forced to disobey their desire to exert themselves completely. Therefore, the State and rulers have a vested, pragmatic interest in permitting the freedom to philosophize or in tolerance of diverse viewpoints. How, then, do we explain the myriad examples of *intolerance* which plague even purported democratic forms of life?

Spinoza advances an essential Machiavellian idea to explain the phenomenon of intolerance, a political reality as inevitable as the multitude of opinions. In the *Ethics*, he diagnoses ambition, adulation, or flattery [*ambitio*] as a sharply negative affect. He defines ambition as "immoderate desire for honor" (3DefAff44) and writes that it notably *encourages and strengthens other emotions*. Therefore, as he explains, referencing Cicero against the pursuit of renown, ambition can "scarcely be overcome" (3DefAff44E). Machiavelli first described this affect as *adulazione* [flattery], fiercely advising rulers to avoid those who curry

[270] Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 47. He suggests a similar idea across his *Theodicée* and the Letters to Bourget.

favor at all costs. In Chapter 23, Machiavelli writes, "men are so easily flattered and are so easily taken in by praise, that it is difficult for them to defend themselves against this plague [*peste*]." Machiavelli's *The Prince* is itself counsel written to advise a ruler; it is not *advice* which is the issue but unsolicited advice. The wise ruler must therefore seek counsel from others often. Machiavelli holds, without exception, that "A ruler who is not himself wise cannot be given good advice."

Spinoza famously reduces the political affects to two driving emotions, hope and fear. All other affects are derivative and can be traced back to these two fundamentally inconstant feelings of attraction or repulsion towards or away from something perceived as fundamentally beneficial, or pleasant, or detrimental, or painful to oneself. The root cause for such a seemingly flat account is 3p7, Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine, which states that the "actual essence of [a] thing itself" is just "*The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own being*" (3p7). The consequences of this view culminate, for us, as desire [*cupiditas*, also, when we are conscious of it, appetite (3p9s)] being "the very essence of man" (3DefAff1). By desire, Spinoza means the varied lot of "man's endeavors, urges, appetites, and volitions" (3DefAff1E). In Spinoza's psychology, everything desires to be proximate to other things which agree with their essence. Contrarily, everything does not desire to be near other things which conflict with their power of acting. In a long string of propositions (3p12-24), Spinoza builds a chained argument for the power of a subject's imagination to affect their emotions premised on the ability to modify what one imagines (*imaginatur*) as present to the mind (*mens*). If one recalls Spinoza's parallel between the order and connection of ideas and things (2p7), as well as the fact that the mind is but an idea of a corresponding body (2p13), then one must read Spinoza's references to the imagination as a tangible and powerful faculty. Since each idea possesses a corresponding body, ideas are not simply ideas. The idea, for example, of sabotaging rivals for one's benefit, has a potentially material existence. When a person imagines something like them preserved, they inevitably feel joy and pleasure (3p19). However, when a person imagines something unlike them, contrary to their nature, and imagines this thing they hate destroyed, they will feel pleasure (3p20). In both cases, Spinoza argues, we endeavor to realize both realities, or engender what is pleasant and remove what is unpleasant (3p28).

What distinguishes the tolerant person from the intolerant one? Spinoza never defines tolerance, but Michael Rosenthal proposes a Spinozistic account which understands tolerance as a *virtue*. In Rosenthal's view, tolerance is understood as "disapproving some conduct and yet allowing it to continue,"[271] from the etymology of the Latin *tolerare*, to endure. John Christian Laursen muses that Spinoza's *Ethics* and TTP may seem, at first glance, to be open to acceptance of either tolerance or intolerance because good and bad are relative terms in the former work and the sovereign has final authority over matters of religion in the latter. However, ultimately, Spinoza's arguments place him as the most radical champion of both practical *and* theoretical reasons for tolerance, exceeding even Locke's commonly heralded *Letter on Toleration*.[272] Many commentators of Spinoza's TTP have remarked and expanded on his arguments for *libertas philosophandi.* On the other hand, many Anglophone Spinoza

[271] Michael A. Rosenthal, "Spinoza's Republican Argument for Toleration," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 11, no. 3 (September 2003): 320–37, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9760.00180.

[272] John Christian Laursen, "Spinoza on Toleration: Arming the State and Reining in the Magistrate," in *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Toleration in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 186.

scholars regard the *Ethics* in a less political light. In the remainder of this subsection, I turn to detail the primarily 'theoretical' but neglected reasons from the *Ethics* behind why I argue that Spinoza's substance monism gives us a justification of contemporary ideas of diversity and inclusivity.

Spinoza's view of *virtue* is coextensive with force or power, *vis* or *potentia*. In Part IV, Spinoza freely switches between *vis* and *potentia*. 4d8 reads:

> By *virtue* [*virtutem*] and *power* [*potentiam*] I mean the same thing, that is [3p7], virtue [*virtus*], insofar as it is related to man, is man's very essence, or nature [*essentia seu natura*]

The Latinate origin of virtue makes this point apparent because it is derived from *vis*. Spinoza uses his *conatus* doctrine (3p7) to clarify how virtue and power are related. Insofar as a thing exists, its essence is constituted by its ability to persevere. Virtue and power must be coextensive, then, because increases to one's ability to persevere directly increase one's essence if essence is understood as *conatus*. In the *Ethics*, one's virtue comes from one's ability to bring about these advantages conducive to one's existence. In short, simply, virtue is human power. Spinoza's two models of an ideal life are of the free man (*homo liber*) of Part IV and the wise man (*sapiens*) of Part V. Both archetypes for his readers' emulation involve an adequate knowledge of the true causes of things. Although Spinoza's metaphysics of power, as Laursen's suggestion runs, does not appeal *prima facie* to tolerance, these models serve as exemplars for how his account aligns itself with tolerance and a peaceful traversal of the infinite diversity of modes with which we inevitably affect and contact.

At the very end of the Appendix to Part IV, Spinoza indirectly defines what I will simply call 'tolerance.' Since individual modes are inevitably stricken by an indefinite number of external causes which dramatically outnumber us, maintaining one's *conatus* is a difficult task. He writes,

> But human power [*humana potentia*] is very limited and infinitely surpassed by the power of external causes, and so we do not have absolute power to adapt to our purposes things external to us. However, *we shall patiently bear whatever happens* [eveniunt] *to us that is contrary to what is required by consideration of our own advantage* [nostrae utilitatis ratio postulat], if we are conscious that we have done our duty [*officio*] and that our power was not extensive enough for us to have avoided the said things, and that we are a part of the whole of Nature whose order we follow [*partem totius naturae esse cujus ordinem sequimur*]. *If we clearly and distinctly understand this*, that part of us which is defined by the understanding, that is, the better part of us, *will be fully resigned and will endeavor to persevere in that resignation* (4AppC32, emphasis mine).

In a fitting end to the section on human bondage, Spinoza argues that insofar as we are finite modes of God, we are by definition weak, inadequate, and limited. Thus, our highest virtue consists, as Spinoza shall continue in Part V, in *amor intellectualis Dei*, intellectual love of God, or rational understanding and acceptance of Nature. Thus, I propose Spinoza's account of *tolerance* in the *Ethics*, as he writes, as the ability to

> patiently bear whatever happens to us that is contrary to what is required by consideration of our own advantage

Tolerance is therefore an absurdity. What is most conducive to our advantage is to permit what is least advantageous to our essence, virtue, power, or *conatus*. As finite beings, the number of things external to us and out of our control are bound to outnumber us greatly. Therefore, there is a greater serenity achieved in permitting the diverse existence of the multitude of things as they are. The ability to 'patiently bear' other modes means allowing for their diverse existence as unimpeded by ours to persist. If tolerance can be understood as a virtue, then the ability to tolerate others must increase one's *conatus*. As Spinoza stresses, "No virtue can be conceived as prior to […] the conatus to preserve oneself" (4p22). Further, the *conatus'* self-preservation is the only grounds for virtue, "and no virtue can be conceived independently of it" (4p22c). Finally, "To act in absolute conformity with virtue is […] to act, to live, to preserve one's own being […] under the guidance of reason, on the basis of seeking one's own advantage" (4p24).

Paradoxically, then, the toleration of external things which could impede one's own *conatus* is still an increase to this very same *conatus*. How could this be so? Spinoza's substance monism, understanding each individual thing as a fraction of God's infinite power, allows for the possibility of what Melamed and Costa have termed 'weak individuals.' For Spinoza, the bodily confines of an individual mode is not merely that mode's body and mind. Instead, insofar as modes cohere, they constitute one conglomerate being. The Physical Excursus is purposefully ambiguous on the constitution of 'individual thing' or 'union of bodies.' As I argue more forcefully in the following Chapter, Spinoza's view of the State, like Hobbes's view, is that it constitutes one individual comprised of individuals, who cohere in various respects. Thus, since no individual mode is a regress blocker in their own right, only substance is completely one. A family, for example, is a unit which functions most effectively when each member exists in harmony with the others. A dysfunctional family, then, cannot function effectively because of the strife between its parts. Spinoza's monism does not allow for *actual* strife within God; therefore, each of the parts is possibly coherent. Tolerance is still as an increase in one's *conatus* because it involves the recognition of others and a surrender of control over them. To 'patiently bear' others, I argue, is to consider their actions and beliefs as harmonious with my own, despite the apparent contradiction. Spinoza's own understanding of *libertas philosophandi* compounds the issue because it is inevitable that any individual's actions and beliefs conflict with others.

Spinoza argues in the TTP as a major reason why the sovereign must tolerate freedom of expression is that everyone always has the power to think what they please. Therefore, everyone has the *right* to think what they please. For Spinoza, whatever is in one's right is whatsoever is in one's power. By nature, "fish are determined […] to swim, and the big one to eat the smaller ones" (TTP 16). Each mode, Spinoza argues, has an individual, sovereign right to do as it pleases. By nature, the sage lives according to the dictates of reason, and the ignorant live according to the dictates of appetite or desire. From a sage, one can expect rationality. From the ignorant, one can expect ignorance. From the cat, one cannot expect a lion's courage. Therefore, by "sovereign natural right," Spinoza writes, each person can "seek [anything] by any means, by force, deceit, [or] entreaty" (TTP 16). As Spinoza establishes in Part IV of the *Ethics*, good and bad are relative terms. Thus, the *Ethics*, for example, could be considered a good book to a Spinozist but a bad book to a Cartesian, although in actuality it is nothing but what it is (3p51s). Similar to the *statu naturali* of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Spinoza argues for the absolute self-governance and autonomy of each individual. Individuals often

establish a "covenant," however, between themselves, in hope of a collective good and fear of greater loss. In the *TP*, Spinoza articulates his view more sharply, predicating it on the fact that each individual is a particle of the divine power. Because an individual's conceptualization is insufficient without that of God, the fact that individuals have power is a consequence of their derivation of this power from God's omnipotence. He writes,

> from the fact that the power of natural things by which they exist and act is the very power of God we can readily understand what is the right of Nature […] it follows that every natural thing has as much right from Nature as it has power to exist and act. For the power of every natural thing by which it exists and acts is nothing other than the power of God, which is absolutely free (TP 2.3)

More forcefully, then, we can see how Spinoza maintains a tight connection between God's self-standing nature and individual modes' derivative, fragmentary natures. Spinoza hypothesizes that were it in our nature to live according to the dictates of reason, then our essence would be rational; however, "men are led by blind desire more than by reason" (TP 2.5), and so our appetites tend to guide us.

I argue that Spinoza gives us an indirect definition of intolerance through a Machiavellian critique of ambition, or flattery [*ambitio*]. With Spinoza's understanding of *vis* in mind as completely coextensive with *ius*, consider the relationship between the intolerant and the diversity of modes. Spinoza argues,

> This conatus to bring it about that everyone should approve of one's loves and hates *is in reality ambition* […] So we see that it is in everyone's nature to strive to bring it about that others should adopt his attitude to life, and *while all strive equally to this end they equally hinder one another, and in all seeking the praise or love of all, they provoke mutual dislike* (3p31s, emphasis mine).

As I describe above, Spinoza views ambition as an affect which amplifies other affects. The ambitious person, Spinoza argues, seeks praise from others because it is natural for like beings to seek love from one another, even in cases of strangers to whom there has been no history or emotional draw (3p29). In the scholium, Spinoza gives another reading of *ambitio* as "This conatus to do, and also to avoid doing, something simply in order to please men" (3p29s). Spinoza defines *acquiescentia in se ipso* as pleasure with the accompaniment of an internal cause, or "man's contemplation of himself and his power of activity" (3p30s, 3DefAff25). I understand intolerance as its contradictory concept, pain with the accompaniment of an external cause. Spinoza's descriptions of the ambitious person highlight their highly intolerant nature and inability to permit potential disapproval from others.

4.3 Conclusion

Spinoza's accounts of tolerance and intolerance in the *Ethics* are an underexplored gloss of key political concepts in a theoretical context. Despite the critical Hegelian reading of Spinoza's acosmism, defended historically by Maimon and more recently by Della Rocca, there are adequate political grounds to challenge this reading. As Goetschel, Balibar, and Deleuze argue, Spinoza's substance monism opens the door to a celebration of the diversity of modes and the multifaceted interactions of varied individual beliefs and action. Further, Spinoza's theoretical and practical accounts are linked, with neither fully reducible to the other. Instead, as I have explored, both mutually enrich one another.

5 Social Organicism

> When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together to form one body or individual thing, which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies.
>
> – Baruch Spinoza, *Ethica*, 2p13s *Definitio*

Comparisons between entire societies and lone individuals are commonplace the history of social philosophy, stretching all the way back to Plato's hypothetical *kallipolis*. How seriously we should take these comparisons, however, is unclear. It seems immanent criticism may entail as much as a strict or literal analogical scheme if only internal or *organic* ethical norms are relevant targets of its criticism. Since, as I have noted, the dominant approach to normative foundations in critical theory comes through this immanent criticism of society's institutions and their norms, such a difficult-to-defend analogy must come under scrutiny. I find a stronger version of the analogy in social organicism to be a defensible view in grounding social relations, leading up to a reinforced defense of immanent criticism based on theoretical upshots of the society-organism analogy.

I discuss how I see social organicism as relevant in debates on the possibility of immanent criticism and to what degree we can see our shared sphere of ethical life as a source for unearthing immanent criteria for social criticism out of social institutions and attempts at actualizing them.

5.1 Why the *State*?

The history of social philosophy is rife with treatments of society, a collection of individual people, as analogous to an individual organism's life. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates attempts to demonstrate the good or justice of the individual soul by using its macrocosm, the *kallipolis*, or the city-in-speech, as an exemplar. Socrates constructs the *kallipolis* to be a model of the well-ordered soul writ large (*Republic* 369a). The structure of society seems to mirror closely the structure of the individual for Socrates; thus, he even briefly conceives of the "city with a fever" or the "feverish city" (*Republic* 372e) to help foster his tightly knit society-organism analogy.[273] Hobbes's *Leviathan* compares the collection of individuals bound by the social contract, the *commonwealth*, to a single body united under and by the sovereign's authority, which is their own right manifest under a necessary obligation. The sovereign speaks for benefit of the collection of individuals as their locus of decision, and Hobbes thinks the sovereign's decisions are the people's decision. In the lesser read *De Cive*, Hobbes states this clearly: "[a] commonwealth, then, (to define it) is *one person,* whose will, by the agreement of several men, is to be taken as the will of them all" (*De Cive* V.10). Hobbes repeatedly emphasizes in Chapter V that the commonwealth is to be taken as constituting a *single civil person* in what is seemingly a non-metaphorical sense.[274] Spinoza

[273] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[274] Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, trans. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

theorized in his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and *Tractatus Politicus* that the State,[275] like individual people, possesses a conative drive to persist in its existence. The power of nature is the same as the power of God, which is the same power in *individuals* as for *collections of individuals*. In Spinoza's social philosophy, as for his *Ethics*, right is coextensive with power. He compares the idea of people holding rights in common as them being "guided, as it were, by one mind [*una veluti mente*]" (TP 2.16). The definition of this common right, "the power of a people," Spinoza calls *sovereignty* (TP 2.17).

Despite the plethora of historical examples, it is *prima facie* unclear whether these cases can or should indicate a perfect analogy or comparison. How seriously are we to take this juxtaposition? Does it achieve the status of a strong 1:1 analogical relation, or is it merely a comparison for the sake of illuminating a certain feature of the social world as emanating from our collective *individual* right? It seems, for Hegel, given the beginning of the *Philosophy of Right*, that individual right *in its immediacy and abstractness* is most proper as the starting point of a speculative analysis of right. In arguing for the theoretical upshots of viewing society as having an analogous existence to an organism, I attempt to think through the link between Hegel and Spinoza vis-à-vis *social organicism*, the view that society consists of a self-structuring unity, in what follows.[276] [277] It is important to distinguish Hegel's social organicism from social holism, a common misconception about Hegel's system, dating back to Kierkegaard's understanding of *Aufhebung*. Such a misunderstanding, I find, misses the point of Hegel's vendetta against Spinoza's substance monism.

Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* culminates in the final sphere of ethical life, the State. Similarly, Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* ends Chapter 16 with the fundamental basis of the State, inspired by Hobbes's *De Cive*, and the democratic State, the superior form of government. Despite their stark differences, it is the State which is the final arena of natural right and social freedom for both Hegel and Spinoza. The State, for Spinoza, must be organized in such a way that it guarantees certain outcomes and possibilities for all citizens. For all Hegel's complaints about Spinozistic substance, their views about what the State affords its citizenry (and why) are similar. I choose to focus closely on the State because both Hegel and Spinoza viewed it as the zenith of modern social organization. As Hegel puts it in

[275] I use "State" to designate a political body or collection of individuals under a government to disambiguate from a certain "state" of affairs.

[276] I find a robust discussion and good starting place for the issue of Hegel's social organicism in Nicolás García Mills, "Hegel's Ethical Organicism," *Inquiry*, September 30, 2022, 1–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2022.2126395. The essential line of argument is that "[Hegel] insists that the state as well as the family and civil society, and the social whole that comprises all three institutions of modern ethical life, exhibit the same structure as living organisms" (1). I add "self-structuring" to his definition because of my discussion below of the nature of organisms according both to Kant on organisms and Neuhouser on Hegel's social philosophy. Mills discusses Wolff, Sedgwick, and Neuhouser's views of Hegel's social organicism as well, each of which concern Hegel's philosophy of biology, views on determinacy, and reaction against dualism respectively.

[277] There is another important sense in which I find we must see society as a specifically *self-structuring* unity. I take this to be the effort of Marx's introduction to his criticism of Hegel's concept of right, where he writes that the first step in the critique of society must be the critique of religion. We are the authors of our own history if we are to see it and society as changeable. Part of this view, and what I argue Marx salvages from Hegel, is going to be viewing society as at least analogously an organism, albeit *one without full control of itself*. In this sense, the analogy is *not* perfect and begins to break down. Thus, as he writes in the *18th Brumaire*, "[m]en make their own history, but they do not make it as they please" (SW 329).

the transition to International Law, the State is a State among States. "Without relations with other states, the state can no more be an actual individual [*Individuum*] than an individual [*der Einzelne*] can be an actual person without a relationship with other persons (EPR §331)." While the present work does not explicitly tackle questions concerning international affairs or the historical emergence of the nation state in modernity, the acknowledgement of real political situations and power imbalances would be important to discuss elsewhere. I proceed, through a speculative lens, to argue that the State is the exemplar of modern social organization because it guarantees freedom in an internally necessary way based on its complex individuality.

Social organicism does *not* imply the erasure of the individual within society. Instead, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* is all about the coming together of individual subjectivities as eventually—and collectively—constituting the very will of the State in a more necessary relation. Spinoza's *Ethics* prescribes the guidance of reason leads men to society to persevere together. Frederick Neuhouser's book, *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, relies explicitly on the view that "a theory of social pathology is committed to thinking of human societies on the model of animal organisms"[278] (2021, 29). He includes in this understanding Hegel and Marx. Although Neuhouser's treatment of the society-organism analogy (he does not refer to Hegel's theory as "social organicism") is remarkable and his careful analysis of Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim on social dysfunction is equally rich, Neuhouser does not fully consider the theoretical framework which stands behind the reasons for accepting the analogy found in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, which I argue buttresses a defense of immanent critique.[279] Hegel's social philosophy factors in heavily on Neuhouser's account (esp. Chapters 11 and 12 on objective Spirit and the idea of social reality as the living good) but the framework of Hegel's speculative method does not, although it is key to understanding the immanent deduction of the Concept [*Begriff*], which factors in his conception of ethical life. Hegel's "speculative mode of cognition"[280] takes reason to be negative,[281] generating something positive through the acquisition of the universal through attention to how particulars and individuals differentiate themselves.[282] Further, Neuhouser does not fully

[278] Frederick Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology: Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Durkheim* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

[279] Part of Neuhouser's reasoning, as I take it, is his rejection of the stronger analogy behind social organicism. Describing Chapter 2 of the book, he states, "theories of social pathology do and do not rely on a picture of human societies as akin to biological organisms and [Chapter 2] argues for a limited version of that analogy" (xiv). Neuhouser does briefly consider the relevance of immanent critique to the society-organism analogy at pp. 14-18 but does not explore this thread much further—a thread which deserves much attention and yet has had little exploration, a problem I attempt to rectify in this chapter.

[280] Although Hegel takes the beginning of this method to be "presuppositionless" at SL *21.27*, which is supposed to transfer into the *EPR*, I take issue with the claim. Hegel's statement is controversial considering Miles Hentrup's recent paper on the Logic's presuppositionless beginning, which recounts the debate between commentators like Houlgate, Kierkegaard, Maker, and the question whether Hegel could have actually seen it as such. By presuppositionless, Hentrup understands self-mediated (for an immanent deduction of the categories) and not free from mediation. Please see Miles Hentrup, "Hegel's Logic as Presuppositionless Science," *Idealistic Studies* 49, no. 2 (2019): 145–65, https://doi.org/10.5840/idstudies2019115107.

[281] As Marx wrote in the Paris Manuscripts, the greatness of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is the dialectic of negativity "as the moving and creating principle," with "man as the result of his own labour" (SW 109).

[282] I think of Hegel, Adorno, and Derrida as three examples in this camp of "negativism," where we acquire concepts by how they differ from other things, not of a direct and immediate acquisition of their essence.

consider the multitude of references in Hegel's EPR where he outright claims the State as an organic unity which is self-related, arguments considered in what follows.

In light of the question of the society-organism analogy, I remark on an underexplored line Marx writes in praise of Hegel on this very question of the analogy between living organisms and human societies and how social organicism offers theoretical benefits for social critique. Marx writes in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, "[i]t is a *great advance to consider the political state as an organism*, and hence no longer to consider the diversity of powers as [inorganic], but rather as living and rational differences" (CHR 11-2, emphasis mine).

The goals of the chapter are simultaneously exegetical and programmatic, as I aim to reconstruct Hegel and Spinoza's views of the State as itself an organism while glossing Marx's curious moment of praise amidst otherwise critical scrutiny of Hegel. The first moments of ethical life instantiate freedom in a less necessary but still crucial way from the State. As Marx remarks concerning both the family and civil society, they are only *external* necessities,[283] whereas the State (re)produces itself in an *internally necessary* way, thereby preserving itself indefinitely (EPR §269Z, CHR 6). Next, I analyze the State as:

(1) the arena where freedom is most realized (for Hegel, "actual [*wirklich*]")

(2) an organism (for Spinoza, "*res singularis*")[284]

Marx states that Hegel's uncritical social philosophy conflates analysis and description with demonstration (of truly ethical relations) (CHR 37). Ultimately, Marx still considers Hegel's organicist conception of the state to be a conceptual advancement, despite his overall criticism of Hegel's *EPR*. Finally, I open a line of inquiry to suggest to critical theorists committed to the now commonplace, post-Kantian view of immanent critique the need to reconsider the society-organism analogy on questions concerning the sources of normativity because Hegel meaningfully retrieves the Aristotelian category of species-concepts, of life,[285] as being already an immanent, normative force through a commitment to a conception of internal purposiveness and life with deep roots in idealist forebearers Kant and Schelling. This view, as I discuss in my conclusion, is opposed to Jaeggi's more narrow view on the concept's normativity precisely because of its necessary link to Hegel's organicism. Jaeggi

[283] Take, for an example of why, Hegel's idea that civil society "works behind the backs" of its members.

[284] As Costa notes, Spinoza never uses the word "organism" as we understand it today. Instead, the concept of an individual thing will stand in because of 2p13 as a being composed of other subordinate organs or parts. See Emanuele Costa, "Spinoza, Jonas, and the Theory of Organicism," *Interpretationes Studia Philosophica Europeanea* 3, no. 2 (2013): 63–70.

[285] Hegel distinguishes between self-conscious life and biological life, a distinction important to make but which I cannot explore in full here. Karen Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.4.2; Neuhouser, *Diagnosing Social Pathology*, 290–96. Self-conscious life is effective *spiritual* (*geistig*) life. Society itself forms a spiritual being in Hegel's sense, being a spiritual being composed of spiritual beings. Neuhouser's conclusion (Ch. 14) explores this in more detail. Neuhouser also uses this distinction to help break down a stronger analogy between an organism and society, despite Hegel's rather unambiguous statements. Society as an animal organism would seem to do damage to the character of its "organs" or "cells," themselves spiritual beings who have unassimilable interests and aims.

rejects the idea that concept and organism must coincide, instead thinking of *Lebensformen* as adaptive to their environment (such that they are problem-oriented on her account).[286] I find the issue here is her pragmatism eclipsing Hegel, who himself pursues the stronger claim that *Lebensformen* are spiritual *and* organic for reasons that I think are inalienable to an immanent criticism of imperfectly instantiated norms from within social structures. Although Jaeggi would defend herself on the grounds of the nature/spirit distinction,[287] Hegel's view that the State is an organic unity of the immanent development of Idea is helpful—as I will demonstrate—because it allows us to think of social reality as all-encompassing and historically mediated. If we are to reject external criticism and pick normative criteria out of latent contradictions in our socio-institutional ties, then the stronger analogy standing behind social organicism is the only one which makes sense for the immanent critic to adopt.

To this end, I find Hegel's focus on the Idea as the unity of a concept and objective reality (and the immanent deduction of concepts themselves) to be helpful for elucidating why this is useful for critical thought.[288] Hegel argues that only in the immanent development of the concept which mirrors the immanent, self-constructing soul of actual content can philosophy become objective, demonstrative science (SL 21.8). My focus here is not completely argumentative concerning contemporary critical theory, but programmatic, drawing out theoretical reasons for accepting social organicism, something Marx admitted constitutes a real advancement in thinking despite his sharp criticisms of Hegel's *EPR*, especially in light of the widespread prevalence of immanent criticism in the Frankfurt School. Social organicism stands over other alternatives on the origins of social life to preserve the strongest argument for immanent critique—most notably, contractarianism, which takes a 'state of nature' or 'original position' as a starting point or heuristic.

5.2 Hegel and Spinoza

Hegel's social philosophy considers the State insofar as it analogically has life, is a living being, or is itself an *organism* composed of members of its body politic. In this section, I will begin by first (1) analyzing the conception of the State as organism, then (2) reconstruct Hegel and Spinoza's view of the State [*der Staat*, *civitas*] as the zenith of social freedom.

Living things, Aristotle informs us, all have natural tendencies. The Aristotelian function (*ergon*) argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* takes what is good (and bad) for any being to be function-relative to that being. In other words, we understand what makes a specimen such by virtue of it performing what it naturally does particularly well. If wild cats try to make quick

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[286] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 34–35; Emerson Bodde, "The *Lebensform* as Organism: Clarifying the Limits of Immanent Critique," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 47, no. 9 (November 2021): 1076, https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453720948402.

[287] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 300–301.

[288] My point here can be seen as a reply to Finlayson, "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism." He argues Hegel is *not* the originator of immanent critique in any meaningful sense, at least as an influence on Adorno, to whom he attributes 'austere negativism' about social change and our condition (1157). He writes, "Hegel is not the inventor or originator of immanent criticism in any interesting sense" and "Hegel's dialectical method cannot be reduced to the commonplace idea of immanent criticism" (1153). Further, I see my thesis as similar to that of Ng's view of ideology critique, which links Hegel's *Idee* to Marx's *Gattungswesen*: critique must become *social* critique when it meets reality. Ng, "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory," 399.

work of prey with teeth and claws, a fast cat with sharp teeth and claws will be an effective hunter and therefore cat. Cats are predators, so a good hunter is a good cat. Hegel's organicism appropriates the kind of species-concept oriented thought inherent to Aristotle's function argument in his development of the theory of concepts to respond to transcendental idealism's purposiveness-as-*regulative*-idea. If the determination of the concept relies on some *causa sui* existence, then concepts bring themselves into actuality in the same manner as organisms do. Thus, the concept has normative force as a life-form judgment based in the idea of a genus. What a given thing *ought to be* is based on what it *actually is*.[289] Spinoza's *conatus*, in my view, is another expression of the same idea. It is based on our essence, Spinoza argues, that we must come to the conclusion that obedience to reason is greater than slavishness to other passions.[290] The models of *homo liber* and *sapiens* are based on the recognition of the benefit to our own *conatus* through tolerance and understanding.

5.2.1 Organization as Organism

The starting points in Hegel's philosophy are never static. Hegel's method demonstrates the development of a singular concept at hand—which is not an inalterable substance and never identical to itself by the end.[291] Such was Hegel's grudge against the immobility within Spinoza's substance. Hegel tells us in the preface to the EPR that his method there is the same as the *Logic*: that of dialectics unfolding, of speculative reason (SL 21.8, EPR Preface). This "speculative mode of cognition" takes reason to be negative, generating something positive through the acquisition of the universal through attention to how particulars and individuals differentiate themselves.[292] In this sense, real universals are concrete, not abstract. Put more directly, Hegel's speculative thought can itself encourage concrete thought and critique, despite Marx's infamous self-conception of standing Hegel "on his head" by extracting the rational kernel of dialectics out of a mystical, idealist shell.[293]

Hegel states in the EPR that freedom will manifest itself universally (and out of necessity) in the final level of *Sittlichkeit* (ethical life): we end with configurations of the State and world history. In Hegelian language, abstract or purely individual freedom is only freedom at the level of immediacy—freedom as it appears in its most undetermined, amorphous, and protean form. For Hegel, that which is more determined [*Bestimmtheit, bestimmt*, *Bestimmung*] is more concrete and realized than anything in its immediacy (non-mediatedness) [*Unmittelbarkeit*]. In the *Logic*, Hegel considers his dialectical method of *Spekulation* to offer a 'presuppositionless' beginning that starts only with unmediated being (SL 21.27). It would be myopic, however, to remain at this kind of pure immediacy as we first grasp it. In the *EPR*, this is the abstract freedom or right of the individual. The

[289] Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life*, 166, 187, 195; Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 119–21.

[290] For Spinoza, reason is itself generative of passions. For him, there is no strict duality of reason/emotion as authors like Genevieve Lloyd and Beth Lord point out. He states this in several places, e.g., 5p7.

[291] Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 12.

[292] I think of Hegel, Adorno, and Derrida as three examples in this camp of "negativism," where we acquire concepts by how they differ from other things, not of a direct and immediate acquisition of their essence.

[293] Marx, *Capital*, 1:103.

presuppositionless beginning of the speculative mode of cognition seeks to demonstrate to readers the development of the concept at hand as it actually unfolds—in a dialectical fashion. In this vein, Hegel will often appear to contradict himself.[294] As Hegel says in the *Logic*, pure being moves quickly towards something else, as he writes that "*pure being and pure nothing are* […] *the same*" (SL 21.69). These cede the way to "becoming," and then the more determinate concept of *existence*. Accordingly, neither Hegel nor Marx will ignore the roles of the more mediated, organic relations of a State or in democracy in securing what Hegel calls in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* the universal, distinctively Modern consciousness of freedom where we recognize that "all are free."[295] Although Marx critiques purely formal emancipation in *Zur Judenfrage* in his critique of Bauer, the formal, bourgeois, *de jure* recognition of equality (political emancipation) that comes with the Modern era is still an objectively useful baseline and advancement in theorizing socio-political relationships (SW 54).

Hegel divides the EPR into three main parts: abstract right, morality, and ethical life. These correspond to three *Momente* of the concept [*Begriff*] in Hegel's system: individuality, particularity, and universality. "The universal concept that we now have to consider contains the three moments of *universality*, *particularity*, and *singularity*" (SL 12.32). The process itself is an *immanent* deduction, meaning that we ascend not from conditions of possibility to the justification of a given thing, but *from real things* to their form in a self-actualizing manner. Following Ng, Hegel contrasts his immanent genesis of the concept to Kant's transcendental deduction of apperception.[296] Additionally, the immanent progression of the three moments of the concept line up with the division of the three parts of the *EPR*: abstract freedom, subjective freedom, and finally, objective freedom. In §33 of the *EPR*, Hegel states that the "ethical substance" is itself split in a similar manner as the development of right. The family is the highest stage of right in its individuality, civil society in its particularity, and the State, which is "freedom [...] equally universal and objective in the free self-sufficiency of the particular will" is "this actual and organic spirit of a people." Hegel splits the final sphere of the State into a triadic and evolving relation between States themselves, where all history dissolves into world history.[297]

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[294] Rocío Zambrana, "Subjectivity in Hegel's *Logic*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 302.

[295] I find it important to point out that although Hegel sees the Germanic/Modern world as having come to this realization that "all are free," Hegel does not seem to think of this state itself as universal. The Negro, for instance, only becomes free with the assistance of Christian Europe. Please see Alison Stone, "Hegel and Colonialism," *Hegel Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (2020): 256–57, https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2017.17. Stone offers an example from Hegel's *Philosophy of Mind* regarding Haiti and the Haitian Revolution. The Haitian has become free through his relation to Europeans in Hegel's view.

[296] Karen Ng, "From Actuality to Concept in Hegel's *Logic*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hegel*, ed. Dean Moyar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 270.

[297] This kind of universality, if understood as *negativity* (which Hegel himself seems to suggest, given his dialectical method), can compel us to see this as a kind of *negative* world history with a distinctly critical dimension. Please see Karen Ng, "Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History: The Dialectics of Species-Life," in *Creolizing Hegel*, ed. Michael J. Monahan, Creolizing the Canon (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), 113–33. In addition, I find Benjamin's *Theses* to be useful in conceiving world history negatively, or critically. Given all of this, Hegel's world history may actually be more "universal" than it appears *prima facie*, at least in the *Philosophy of History* where Africa is left out in the introduction as a continent shrouded in the "dark mantle of night."

Abstract right begins with the individual as an independent will, as an immediate and wholly abstract concept that distinguishes itself from things [*Sachen*]. This leads Hegel to posit the necessity of property as the first means of making one's will objective (EPR §46). Property leads to contractual relations between individuals *about* property, or a ground where freedom has its *existence (*EPR §71). In addition, Hegel says that it is reason itself which leads us to possess property and makes it necessary to enter into contractual relationships with one another (EPR §46). With the onset of contract, I can alienate (here, Hegel uses *Entäußerung*)[298] my possessions, labor, or services to another with some limiting condition (EPR §80). The existence of wrong [*Unrecht*] is implied by the very nature of a contract as an agreement. At this final stage of abstract right, wrong is the negation of right in relation to its own mediation (EPR §82). Just as being passes over into nothing in the *Logic*, abstract right has to pass to the concept of 'unright' and back. At this point, it becomes necessary for wrong to be nullified [*aufheben*]. Marx is highly critical of Hegel's views on property and contract, as Hegel justifies the possession of private property as independent of the universal property of the State—and ultimately of capital itself (CHR 98). Hegel makes the private wealth of German princes appear as if it became state property (CHR 57), while Marx argues it became usurped *for* the creation of capital[299] and the destruction of individual, decentralized private property. Hegel humanizes private property as it exists (CHR 101), which ends in a contradiction considering how Marx conceives of the "ignorant, unethical, crude will" which "appears to be the highest synthesis of the political state" in the idyllic justification of bourgeois private property (CHR 101).[300] Following Marx, Hegel's story about property as the first externalization of the will is mythical; however, it naturally leads to the idea of *contracts* between people who find that others can fail to live up to obligations and normative expectations because Hegel thinks that everyone should own property as the necessary externalization of an individual, self-conscious will (EPR §45-6).

With the concepts of right and wrong in play, we see that an entire enterprise of morality is already assumed within the sphere of abstract right, though it does not exist substantially in its immediacy. Crime and wrong are nullifications of right, which themselves must be nullified (in the sense of being overcome) by the new, positive force of morality in subjective freedom. For Hegel's speculative method, instances of unfreedom (*Unrecht* in this case) can lead us closer to freedom precisely because they are instances where we fail to live up to our own values, which are often implicit. Knowing the function of an organism is necessary for us to see how *Lebensformen* can fail to live up to their concept adequately. Hegel's master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* itself is a tribute to this style of speculative argumentation—negativity reigns over immediacy every time.

Subjective freedom passes from the will in its individuality to its particularity. Morality is not purely abstract right because it is not completely relative or undetermined: morality is

[298] Here, I find it to be important to distinguish between the specific usage of what can be translated as "alienation" in Marx's account as opposed to Hegel's. *Entfremdung*, Marx's concept of alienation, implies an ethical wrong. We should read Hegel's account the same way we would read Smith on alienation of one's labor or property, as a contractual agreement. Also, at times Hegel will use *Veräußerung* to the same effect.

[299] Marx, *Capital*, 1:895.

[300] Marx, 1:929–30.

not just the negation of immorality but based on the subjectivity of the will in relation to universality (EPR §108). At the level of morality, my subjective ends are no longer immediate but related to other wills (EPR §112). This is distinct from abstract right and the transition from property to contract because there, I relate to others through my belongings (i.e., still *Sachen*) and not from individual will to individual will. The moments within subjective freedom, or morality, are responsibility, welfare, and duty. Hegel has the least to say about responsibility, where we own up to *our* actions as having sprung from our will, with certain consequences following necessarily. This will lead to welfare and duty because I know that I am responsible for my actions, as do others for their own: "to act therefore means *to submit oneself to this law*" (EPR §118). Hegel notes at the level of welfare that the right of others can beat out the right to one's own property here. This is the *right of necessity* (EPR §127). With much more to say about duty and the good will, Hegel launches into a discussion about Kant's deontology, especially what Kant outlines as the duties to oneself and others. Hegel's famous critique of the categorical imperative ends up being that Kant's law is devoid of any real content. The categorical imperative, in reality, is empty: "*identity without content*," wholly abstract and indeterminate (EPR §134-5). Accordingly, Kant's deontology becomes the rhetoric of "*duty for duty's sake.*" With Kant out of the way, Hegel conceives of the final transition of subjective right to objective right (ethical life) as a transition from what *ought to be good* to what *is good in actuality*: ethical life possesses right and freedom as Idea (EPR §141). Here, Hegel may have stacked the deck with his definition of *Idea* as the real unity of object and concept. Marx writes: "Hegel has done nothing but resolve the constitution of the state into the universal […] he has developed the determinate reality out of the universal Idea. He does not develop his thought out of what is objective [*aus dem Gegenstand*], but what is objective in accordance with a ready-made thought" (CHR 14).

Objective freedom begins with the family, passes through civil society, and reaches its end in the State. Hegel could simply have stated that ethical life and what flows from it (markets, laws, institutions, international relations, etc.) are merely useful or the best set of arrangements available. Instead, he sees ethical life as what exists in actuality as good and rational in itself. Ethical life, as mentioned and based on Hegel's dialectical method, is abstract freedom come full circle from individuality to universality. The family is ethical life in its own immediacy or individuality—Hegel's view of the family and the nature of marriage is unsurprisingly patriarchal, with women taking a subservient role as opposed to the *paterfamilias* (EPR §165-66).[301] The family takes on a new form in its "*determinate individuality* [*bestimmten Einzelheit*]" when the family begins to "break down" and its members begin to operate as independent persons. The family, of course, is only a singular "element" or unit of the collective reality of the community [*Gemeinwesen*], but it is brought together into a negative unity by spirit [*Geist*], the power of the whole (PhG §451). Marriage, as the "*immediate ethical relationship*," is not the most concrete moment of ethical life (EPR §161) but only its starting point in unity.

[301] Hegel actually uses Antigone as an example here of the "law of woman" as "family piety." This is associated with divine law as opposed to human law (Creon's role) in Hegel's PhG. Please see PhG §445. Although I generally try not to rely on the accuracy *à la lettre* of the *Zusätze*, Hegel also may have stated that women were "not made for the higher sciences" (EPR §166Z)

With the natural disintegration of the family comes the second sphere of ethical life. Civil society is the "world of appearance [*Erscheinungswelt*]" of the ethical (EPR §181). It is also the closest thing to the Modern idea of the *state of nature* in social contract theory that appears in Hegel's theory of right and social relations. Each person counts as a unique individual with their own powers, deficiencies, etc. in this sphere. Although each person acts purely in accord with their own self-interest in civil society, something akin to Smith's principle of the *invisible hand* takes effect: the *cunning of reason* operative in what Hegel calls the *system of needs*. "In this dependence and reciprocity of work and the satisfaction of needs, *subjective selfishness* turns into a *contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else* (EPR §199). By appealing to the passions and our material needs as human beings to sustain life, Hegel argues that in fulfilling one's own subjective, individual, and self-interested motives, the interests of the many are served. In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel goes over Napoleon as an example. In service of building a legacy (and loyal French civil servants) for his own egoistic interests, Napoleon actually worked to the benefit of the French people by instituting a *lycée* system and implementing widespread educational reforms. Although everyone is a "*son of civil society*," (EPR §238) civil society still contains an element of arbitrariness and lacks the kind of relationship of necessity present between members of a body politic in the State. Again, as Marx remarks concerning both the family and civil society, their necessity is merely external. The State, on the other hand, (re)produces itself in an internally necessary way, thereby preserving itself indefinitely (EPR §269Z, CHR 6).

Since Hegel's State is like a living being, it too has a natural tendency, namely, the "protection of life and of property" that is missing in "despotic states and tyrannical governments" (SL 12.214). "Kant's great service to philosophy," Hegel writes in the *Logic*, was to reintroduce the conception of life as itself a category with the reintroduction of teleology[302] and the distinction between external and internal *Zweckmäßsigkeiten*.[303] Kant, however, argued that when we observe life-forms in nature, we must assume that a creator designed them with an *ergon* in mind, although we cannot demonstrate this idea because of the limits inherent to reason. Hegel swings in the opposite direction of Kant, calling reason itself purposive activity, or constitutive of the real relations between things in nature (Ng 2020, 24). In other words, reason governs the world.[304] As a principle of idealism, mind directs all things because the combination of objective reality and its concept in the determinate Idea is the "rational element and rhythm of the organic whole" as a principle of speculative philosophy (PhG §56). Hegel also states that speculative philosophy thinks in

[302] Recently, this view of Hegel's teleological affinities has been called into question by Thompson, where he opens boldly: "Hegel's philosophy is not teleological" (171). "Contra Teleology: Hegel on Subjective and Objective Purpose," *Hegel Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (2023): 171–93, https://doi.org/10.1017/hgl.2022.43. Even if Thompson is correct, his conception of what internal purposiveness is helpful for my ends: "intrinsic purposiveness—objective purpose or logical life—takes the basic structure of an organism, a natural purpose (*Naturzweck*), inherited from Aristotle by way of Kant, as its model and this model is defined by the activity of final causality" (172). Even if Hegel's system were itself not to be teleological or if teleology itself were problematic, that the structure of social relations is still based on an organic model is my key focus.

[303] I am inspired on this line by Chapter 2 of Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life*.

[304] Hegel cites Anaxagoras in the introduction to the *Philosophy of History* and the preface to the PhG as the first to argue that mind (*noûs*) directs all things (PhG §55, Philosophy of History §15).

terms of applying concepts to things [*begreifenden*] in an immanent, negative, and determinate movement or process (PhG §59) that will apply to things with internal purposiveness, life-forms. The particularly *immanent* process involved explains why judgments about life forms is possible on Hegel's account. Kant informs us that living beings with natural ends (*Naturzwecke*) must be viewed as *causa sui* and self-organizing.[305] By this latter idea, Kant means that organisms not only move themselves but *form* themselves; they possess both motive and formative powers (*KU* 5:374). Schelling, building on Kant, completely secularizes the concept of a self-organizing life-form and argues for the knowability of an organism's natural ends as the constitutive principles in that organism's existence.[306]

Schelling, Hegel's former roommate, writes that "blind mechanism [...] is nonetheless purposive"[307] to explain how nature possesses a self-standing element alongside its purposiveness. As the simultaneous cause *and* effect of themselves, living beings are conative; they strive towards self-preservation and the reproduction of their species. Connecting this to the State, Hegel writes that "[t]he [political] disposition [of the State] takes its particularly determined *content* from the various aspects of the organism of the state. This *organism* is the development of the Idea in its differences and their objective actuality." Further, Hegel adds that "the various powers [within the state] with their corresponding tasks and functions [...] continually *produces* itself" (EPR §269). Kant's "great service to philosophy" should extend to how we view the organic relations of a body politic; Kant was the first in the modern German philosophical tradition to relate the State to an organism, a living thing. Fichte points out in a footnote how "Kant [...] compares the state to an organism in the *Critique of Judgment*" while arguing against the view that the State is a mere aggregation of individuals. Fichte remarks that although others have related the organization of branches of government to an organic product of nature, thinking the relationship of the "civil condition as a whole" as an organic unity is to think the concept alongside reality[308] (208, pp. 180-1, fn. 3) in what Hegel will simply call the *Idea*. In other words, as Hegel notes (PhG §56), this is a formalism which ceases to be merely formal, or "external" in his words. We must see the civil condition as coming to be what it is supposed to be—which may well involve its failure to do so. In either case, judgments about a good, bad, or middling State

[305] Of course, Kant argues *against* the idea of teleology as a formative or constitutive principle, relegating it to the status of a merely regulative idea by appealing to a distinction in the knowability of these internal and external *Zweckmäßigkeiten*. Here, I find that Kant's examples and terminology are not only helpful for my argument about the State as organism but already the very ideas about life that Hegel and other German idealists were working closely with. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant / General Ed.: Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 5:376.

[306] Bodde, "The *Lebensform* as Organism," 1066–68.

[307] Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism (1800)*, 609–10.

[308] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right: According to the Principles of the Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. Frederick Neuhouser, trans. Michael Baur, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 208 (pp. 180-1n3).

correspond to an Idea of the State, or its theoretical purpose as should be fulfilled in a properly functioning State.[309]

Hegel divides the Idea of the State into three modes: *constitutional law, international law,* and *world history* (EPR §259). This too is reflective of ethical life in its individuality, particularity, and universality. Constitutional law concerns one State, and international law concerns several. Finally, world history contains the complete and most universal account of the relationship between "national spirits" where the universal world spirit [*allgemeinen Weltgeiste*] reigns whose "*right* is *supreme*" (EPR §33). The State considered under the banner of constitutional law (i.e., one State) is my focus here. In a Fichtean manner, Hegel will argue that the State posits a theoretical barrier between itself and other beings (States) while establishing itself through a constitution. "The political constitution is, *first*, the organization of the state and the process of its organic life *with reference to itself*, in which it differentiates its moments within itself and develops them to *established existence* [*zum Bestehen*]" (EPR §271). Hegel goes on to argue that this established existence is the State as a State-among-others. The outward determinations of a State will manifest themselves first across international law, then world history. The first *Moment*, the self-organizing property of the State, is the State positing its own boundary through the political constitution or its self-formation. Fichte conceived of the essence of the *Ich* as erecting (*setzen*) a boundary between inner and outer elements. The very conception of a self involves the distinction between itself and the *Nicht-Ich*, everything external. The initiation of a State on Hegel's view is similar to this boundary-setting, as he sees the realm of international affairs as based on this reality.[310]

Spinoza defines a special type of individual in 2p13s. Not unlike Fichte's self-positing subject, there is a specific kind of individual which erects boundaries around individuals who erect their own boundaries. These are *composite bodies* [*compositus*], to which he turns after simple bodies [*simplex*] in motion, which move at varied speeds, have a particular ratio of motion and rest, and are affected by other bodies. He writes,

> When a number of bodies of the same or different magnitude form close contact with one another through the pressure of other bodies upon them, or if they are moving at the same or different rates of speed so as to preserve an unvarying relation [*ratione*] of movement among themselves, these bodies are said to be united with one another and all together to form one body or individual thing [*omnia simul unum corpus sive individuum componere*], which is distinguished from other things through this union of bodies.

[309] Here, Hegel may have stacked the deck with his definition of Idea as the real unity of object and concept. Marx writes: "Hegel has done nothing but resolve the constitution of the state into the universal […] he has developed the determinate reality out of the universal Idea. He does not develop his thought out of what is objective [*aus dem Gegenstand*], but what is objective in accordance with a ready-made thought" (CHR 14).

[310] This is Hegel's infamous rejection of all cosmopolitan ideals, especially Kant's. Hegel is firmly on the side of nationalism. For an interesting treatment of the possibility of a Hegelian Cosmopolitanism as well as an overview of literature reviewing what are traditionally considered Hegel's firmly nationalistic tendencies, see David Edward Rose, "A Brief Sketch of the Possibility of a Hegelian Cosmopolitanism," *Critical Horizons* 17, no. 1 (2016): 40–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2016.1117812.

In essence, although composite bodies do not differ in respect to their essence from simple bodies because they are still bodies, there are peculiarities to composite bodies. The State, in its combination of humans (themselves composite bodies (2p13sPostulate1)), is therefore an unwieldy behemoth. Spinoza uses *sive* here to highlight how the unity of individual things is itself another individual thing. For Spinoza's conceptualization of mode, it helps to think in terms of a literal modification. The "affections of substance" are always in another thing and conceived through that more fundamental thing. Each individual thing must be conceptualized through its *fundamentum*, substance (1p1). Therefore, there is no true autonomy in any individual thing's essence (1p24, 2p10) because it is always dependent upon substance. As a result, whether one analyzes the State or a human being, their essence is derivative and secondary. From the vantagepoint of substance, anything else is fragmentary and partial. The only way individual things can gain any substantial power, then, is to clump together with 'likeminded' individuals and form bonds. Spinoza views the most advantageous thing for a rational man is other *rational* men (4p35c1). Any individual thing prefers like individuals and derives power from their agreement (3p11). As Andrea Sangiacomo has remarked, "agreement in nature" is a concept in Spinoza which creates a cyclical loop in social interactions.[311] The tolerant person, as I have argued, is able to remark how everything "agrees" in nature—everything hangs together in a rational whole.

For the State to be a rational whole, for Spinoza, it must be the result of the mutual recognition of advantage and not just based on the avoidance of strife. To understand how Spinoza conceives of the State as a composite body, it will help to contrast his view with the reading which Honneth gives of modern social theory to explain the young Hegel's turn to recognition. In my view, Spinoza's understanding of composite bodies in the *Ethics* helps to see how substance monism is inclusive of difference and mandates a tolerant outlook implicitly in the same way that Hegel saw recognition in social theory as a way to demonstrate relations between individuals in a materialist way. Spinoza's understanding of body, although many dispute whether his view is materialism or parallelism, in either case, is functionally materialist.[312] Spinoza analyzes the structures in which real, material conditions arise which give birth to the State. Although Spinoza is open to the various trajectories which different people will take in different circumstances, he describes the general trends in affect, motion, and agreement in a materialistic way. Spinoza's *Ethics* treats humans not as a kingdom within a kingdom (*imperio in imperium*) but as any other individual things which obey natural laws. Thus, one must see Spinoza's account of how the natural right to all possible action is surrendered as itself a natural, organic process for the mutual benefit of the affected individuals. The implicit surrender of natural right and the tacit consent to the State involved in social life results in a direct increase to social freedom. The "mutual confidence" of the State results, ideally, in an individual gaining protection from the complex of the State (4p37s2).

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[311] Andrea Sangiacomo, *Spinoza on Reason, Passions, and the Supreme Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 165–66.

[312] Even if one reads 2p7 or 2p7s as expressing a kind of parallelism, one must still be committed to understanding body in terms of body and body alone. Therefore, even parallelism, if applied consistently, is materialistic in its outlook on body.

Spinoza's idea that insofar as a collection of individuals act as a simultaneous cause of an effect, they constitute an individual, applies to the State in one more key respect. The State must be understood as what Spinoza terms a "fluid" or "liquid" individual [*partes inter se moventur, fluida vocabo*] (2p13sAxiom3), which entails that its organic unity is a historically contingent matter. The specific shape of the State is variable; it is a work in progress which will derive its essence from the requirements or interests of specific groups. Like Hegel's understanding of the State, it is a necessary, adaptive relation between mass amounts of people which continues indefinitely. Unlike the family, which is built to be dissolved, the State holds the highest form of liquidity, therefore, because it can vary in infinite ways without substantial change to the form [*forma*] of the individual which it is (2p13sLemma4). Accordingly, Spinoza argues that "We thus see how a composite individual can be affected in many ways and yet preserve its nature" (2p13sScholium).

5.2.2 Social Freedom

The individual constitution has three elements for Hegel: legislative power, executive power, and sovereign power (EPR §308). We are citizens of individual States, whose essence as an organism *is* the political constitution (EPR §269), the collection of institutions where the union of freedom and necessity lies (EPR §265). The idea of Hegel's speculative thought helps to give an account of the complicated reason how Hegel can conceive of citizenship as a *duty* (EPR §258). We should connect this to the idea of the State as the domain of concrete freedom. Citizenship is the highest and most complex form of social living, having grown out of our individual freedom in service of its actualization. In §258, Hegel seems to also state that a contradiction arises if we view citizenship as optional in the same way that he conceives of membership in civil society. Again, this view has a corollary in Aristotle—it is only appropriate for gods and beasts to live outside the city; therefore, we must live inside them (*Politics* 1253a29).[313]

Spinoza likewise argues that the person who is guided [*ducitur*] by reason has more freedom in a State with laws which guarantee social freedom than in solitude (4p73) precisely because it is in his interest and an increase to his *conatus*. This complicated reason is likely the largest gap between theories of right and freedom with how most people conceive of their own personal freedom.[314] Although our freedom would be most realized in the State, it is easiest to still conceive of freedom in the abstract. Being a citizen is one's highest duty and the most concrete way of realizing freedom for oneself alongside others. For Hegel and Spinoza, this is *social* freedom, its highest and most perfect instantiation. In fact, Hegel goes as far as to say in the *Zusatz* to §261 that "duty and right are *united* within the state *in one and the same relation* [*Beziehung*]." As Marx remarks, the spheres of family and civil society are finite ones, while the State is the actual Idea (of freedom) (CHR 7, EPR §262). This is what Hegel means in the introduction by the true (Idea of the) will as "*the free will which wills the free will*" (EPR §27). To desire the concretization of freedom in the State under a constitution is the ultimate paradigm of freedom itself. For Spinoza, the free man who is guided by reason actually gains freedom in his sociality and the enshrinement of his freedom

[313] *Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle and Lloyd P. Gerson (Grinnell: Peripatetic Press, 1986).

[314] Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 162, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511624773.

in social structures (4p73d). Thus, if we want to grasp freedom for what it is, then we must strive to our duty as self-reflectively endorsing citizens. Abstract freedom must come full circle in ethical life as the manifestation of what it always had the potential to become, the objective, determined, and concrete Idea of itself.

The State, being the actuality of concrete freedom, is also itself a recognitive structure between us as citizens and its elements: legislative power, executive power, and constitutional monarch. As a "self-related organism" (EPR §259), the State consists of *concrete freedom* that has reached its fullest development and passed over to the universal, actively pursuing it as its own and ultimate end (EPR §260). According to Hegel, individuality comes back into substantial unity with the whole in the State—the individual is sublated into the Absolute. Sublation [*Aufhebung*] is both a supersession and a preservation, referring to how the body politic is both greater than the sum of its parts just as well as being composed of each of its parts. In a dialectical appraisal of the *Gestalt* principle, Hegel says that "[e]verything depends on the unity of the universal and the particular within the state" (EPR §261Z, §270). The constitution also reflects the absolute unity of each of Hegel's *Momente*.[315] Each of the powers is distinct but "is in itself the *totality*" as each moment is "active" (EPR §272). The apex of Hegel's political State is the constitutional monarchy, as it possesses the power of the sovereign as the "apex and beginning of the whole" (EPR §273) which acts as in the stead of the whole as one individual (EPR §279). According to Marx, this is a misstep; Hegel transforms the self-determinations of the will into aspects of the monarch (CHR 25). Spinoza's view, on the other hand, even in the *Tractatus Politicus*, looks to a purely democratic organization as the superior guarantor of social and political freedom. While monarchy can function for Spinoza, it has the deficit of alienating us from our own decision-making process.

Marx argues that Hegel's presentation of the concept of the State obscures what would be its *true* organic unity.[316] Marx's critique of Hegel's social philosophy is not wholly negative; he praises Hegel for the insight of the State as organism, although he lambasts Hegel for his appraisal and defense of the "irrational actuality" of the Western European status quo. Marx's engagements with Hegel are never *abstract* negations. Often, the "rational kernel" in Hegel's work is a meaningful discovery. As Marx wrote in the Paris Manuscripts,

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[315] These are individuality, particularity, and universality. Zambrana describes Hegel's argument in the *Logic* as a *reductio* of each taken in its singularity, pointing to the need to describe them as functional only in unison. Identifying "these cats" as members of a larger group, "cat," requires a species concept, the species concept depends on the conjunction of the multitude of cats, and my cat presents as an individual member of the species. Although it seems contradictory for Hegel to refer to the development of the Concept as constituting a circle, Zambrana offers an excellent explanation based on the idea of mediation. Zambrana, "Subjectivity in Hegel's *Logic*," 302.

[316] Neither Hegel nor Marx will ignore the potential role of the more mediated, organic relations of a State or in democracy in securing what Hegel calls in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* the universal, distinctively Modern consciousness of freedom where we recognize that "all are free." Although Marx critiques purely formal emancipation in *Zur Judenfrage* in his critique of Bauer, the formal, bourgeois, de jure recognition of equality (political emancipation) that comes with the Modern era is still an objectively useful baseline and advancement in theorizing socio-political relationships (SW 54). I find it important to point out that although Hegel sees the Germanic/Modern world as having come to this realization that "all are free," Hegel does not seem to think of this recognition itself as universal. The Negro, for instance, only becomes free with the assistance of Christian Europe.

the greatness of Hegel's *PhG* is the dialectic of negativity "as the moving and creating principle," with "man as the result of his own labour" (SW 109). Also, recall as Marx states that "[i]t is a great advance to consider the political state as an organism, and hence no longer to consider the diversity of powers as [inorganic], but rather as *living and rational differences*" (11-2, emphasis mine). In both instances, what Marx calls abstraction and mystification in Hegelian idealism are its limitations: "[r]eal man and real nature become mere predicates or symbols of this hidden, unreal man and unreal nature […] [this is] a mystical subject-object" (SW 117). Marx critiques this "Idea-Subject" or "Idea-become-man" in the CHR as Hegel transforming the real, concrete relations of a State into an abstraction.

Marx takes serious issue with Hegel's view on the relation of external necessity of the family and civil society early on in the notes of his *Critique* for three main reasons: (1) Hegel arbitrarily separates the family and civil society from political life in the State, (2) Hegel relates the family and civil society to the State through the Idea and concept, not concrete relationships between individuals (Marx's historical materialist thesis), and (3) Hegel's concept of *die Stände*, the Estates, is an empty concept that does not track what he wants it to as the deputies of civil society that mediate between civil society and the State. Recently, Yeomans has argued that Hegel's theory of the Estates has gone largely underappreciated because it serves as a social prerequisite for the visibility and participation of class interests in the State's affairs (2017 475-6).[317] I follow Marx's criticism that they become a merely formal placeholder for the actualization of human agency as a mediating body.

First, Marx argues that Hegel's separation of human beings into civil society and the State bifurcates what was once a natural relationship. Alienation remains between people as *sons of civil society* and as *political citizens*. Civil and political life become split, but Hegel only recounts this separation without explaining the rationale behind their separation. Marx speculates that it could be that atomism somehow recurs in the political state as an abstraction out of the family and civil society, two arenas where atomism already vanishes. In other words, Marx finds that Hegel again substitutes justification for mere analysis (the uncritical character of the *EPR*). As Marx writes, *ein Gemeinwesen* is not a part of *das Gemeinwesen* by an inherently communal existence in modern society, but through a third thing such as labor, chance, etc., highlighting the atomism of this society. Since "the political state is an abstraction of civil society [and the family]" in Hegel's social theory, "[b]y expressing the strangeness [*das Befremdliche*] of this occurrence Hegel has not eliminated the estrangement [*die Enfremdung*]" (CHR 79-81).

Second, Marx finds that Hegelian idealism turns the Idea into a subject. The *Idea-Subject*, Marx writes, is anti-materialistic because the Idea parcels out real relations as an achievement of its own doing, not the concrete relations of the mass. This "mystery," Marx writes, is the entire mystery of Hegelian (idealistic) philosophy (CHR 9). As Marx states alongside Engels in *The Holy Family*, (absolute) idealism sublates objects into their abstract

[317] Although his account is robust, Yeomans completely fails to mention any of Marx's criticisms of Hegel's theory of the Estates, and instead focuses on the relation between Montesquieu and Hegel. Christopher Yeomans, "Perspectives without Privileges: The Estates in Hegel's Political Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 55, no. 3 (2017): 469–90, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2017.0050.

concepts, such that the real fruits become 'Fruit,' or the essence of my idea (SW 150-151). In other words, although Hegel claims that concepts are immanently deduced and made real in their unity with reality, Marx maintains that the Idea is a "ready-made thought" that Hegel transforms into the absolute subject.

Finally, Marx makes the case that Hegel's theory of the Estates is a mere abstraction, pure superfluity, or pure formality (CHR 64). Civil society itself has no legislature, so it needs advocates or deputies to the State that "bring the universal interest [*Angelegenheit*] into existence [*Existenz*] (EPR §301). The Estates correlate to what Marx will call classes, although Hegel turns them into illusions of civil society in service of the State. Ultimately, they make no contribution to the affairs of the State itself (CHR 63). Hegel's Estates come out of the corporation, the association of individuals in civil society that bridge the family with civil society: "[t]he *family* is the first *ethical* root of the state; the *corporation* is the second, and it is based in civil society." Welfare, Hegel says, is actualized in the union of a corporation based on particular needs but only substantially unified in the family (EPR §255). The Estates, then are supposed to have the welfare of the group in view in relation to the government or State as a mediating body (EPR §302).

The hermeneutic issue that Hegel's EPR poses, particularly for those interested in interpreting the *Doppelsatz*, is whether Hegel's social theory of the emergence of right, ethical life, and the modern State is ultimately descriptive or normative. Formulating each view as a series of questions, (a) [the conservative view] does Hegel approve of the structure and outcomes of the modern nation-state, despite what the clear issue of the inevitability of the rabble? Instead, (b) [the progressive view] does Hegel present an idealized picture of the modern State as a model by which we ought to judge particular States? Or, following Stern, (c) [the neutral view] does Hegel seek to express an aspirational point about philosophical rationalism, making the matter-of-fact point that social philosophy seeks the reasons *why* the institutions that produce us exist as they do?[318] Marx finds (a) to be the case and takes serious issue with this.

Marx criticizes Hegel's *Doppelsatz* because it presents the rational as the actual, although we live in an irrational actuality (CHR 64). In fact, Marx states that Hegel actually "takes pleasure in having demonstrated the irrational to be absolutely rational" (CHR 33). Although these passages seem to indict Hegel, I contend that Marx's analysis and critique of Hegel are more nuanced than they initially appear. Marx ends up going as far as saying that the State would actually be *dissolved* in a true democracy [*der politische Staat untergehe*][319] (CHR 31) in his criticism. Marx responds to Hegel's support of constitutional monarchism that "democracy is the truth of monarchy [...] Monarchy is necessarily democracy in contradiction with itself" (CHR 29). If quotes like these are to be understood as having philosophical import alongside Hegel, then Marx's critique cannot be taken at face value.

[318] Robert Stern, "Hegel's Doppelsatz : A Neutral Reading," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44, no. 2 (2006): 235–66, https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2006.0032.

[319] Further, dissolve is a poor (but reasonable) translation of *untergehen*, what Socrates does in the *Republic*, and what Zarathustra does in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. *Untergehen* is akin to "going under," with the connotation of doing so in order to save something else, for a redemptive moment.

Marx's fragmentary text does not disprove the whole of the EPR as an account of what *is*, rather it points out that what Hegel thinks of as actual to have a much different and insidious origin and character.

Avineri's progressive reading of the *Doppelsatz*[320] hinges partially on one of my points in Hegel's theory of the State as organism, because it is the technical usage of actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] as the real combination of a thing's essence and existence that Hegel invokes when he states that the rational is actual.[321] Only when a thing lives up to its concept is it, properly speaking, 'rational' on this view. We can glean what could be better about our social arrangement based on an analysis of a thing's concept. If the State is an organism, a 'failed' or 'bad' State will be one that cannot do what a State should do, based on its self-directed internal purposiveness and ability to reproduce itself. The issue, Marx points out, is that Hegel's State is itself an abstraction. "Hegel could just as well conclude that because the individual man is one the human species is only a single man" because of his conclusions regarding the constitutional monarch as the truth of sovereignty personified (CHR 26-7). Since in Hegel, sovereignty belongs to the State, *das Volk* is not the real state, it "is an abstraction; the people alone is the concrete" (CHR 28).

Further, Marx writes of Hegel's ministers of the State: "these provisions themselves are not proven simply by analyzing them, and this is all Hegel has done. The whole uncritical character of Hegel's philosophy of right is rooted in this confusion" (CHR 37). Marx says that Hegel actually conflates the normative with the descriptive throughout the *EPR*. However, Marx's conclusions in most of his other writings for universal suffrage, human emancipation over merely political emancipation, and the fight for democracy seem not to contradict at all Hegel's view that the State is where concrete freedom would arise, despite what some would see at first glance as Marx's anarchism. In fact, before his political and writing career, Marx writes to his father that he left behind idealism (Kant and Fichte) but does not include Hegel, praising his philosophy for helping him bridge the gap between the "is" and the "ought," despite its "rockiness" (SW 12).

Before penning either political treatise, Spinoza first discusses the State [*civitas*] and man in society [*civili*] at 4p37s2. Here, Spinoza quickly surveys the Hobbesian argument for the partial surrender of natural right under the sovereign in order to live peaceably. The State and society appear as a solution to the problematic of right in the *statu naturali*, where "every man does what follows from the necessity of his nature." Social freedom arises in Spinoza as the recognition of the need for *tolerance* meets social conflict. Spinoza writes, "it is the fundamental purpose of democracy to avoid the follies of appetite and to keep men within the bounds of reason, as far as possible, so that they may live in peace and harmony" (TTP 16). In both cases, in the *Ethics* and the TTP, Spinoza recalls his argument which I detailed in the previous chapter about the need for natural right of individuals to flow from the supreme laws of nature.

[320] Avineri in "Hegel's Doppelsatz," 237, 256.

[321] By the word "actual" as in that which simply exists, Hegel will use most likely use *Dasein* (or *Existenz*).

Only the assurance of the State can guarantee social freedom for Spinoza because it is in the State where the freedom to philosophize gains the highest recognition. It is the assurance of *stability* which Spinoza believes is required for true social freedom. As he writes,

> It is of the first importance to men to establish close relationships and to bind themselves together with such ties as may most effectively unite them into one body, and, as an absolute rule, to act in such a way that serves to strengthen friendship [*firmandis amicitiis*] (4AppC12).

Therefore, Spinoza conceives of democracy as the greatest organization of the State in the TTP because it allows for the greatest amount of social freedom. Spinoza writes that democracy seems "the most natural form of state, approaching most closely to that freedom which nature grants to every man" (TTP 16). Put differently, the kinds of beings which we are, naturally free, is the best way to determine how we should be. Immanent critique, on this view, bridges the gap in the old problem of a leap between the 'is' and the 'ought' through a social analysis of what our nature 'is' which guides what a thing ought to be. Further, such a view is more naturalistic because it proceeds from recognizable grounds.

Spinoza's view has not, in all recent history, been understood as social organicism. Notably, Matheron was among the first to advance seriously the view that the State is *literally* an individual on Spinoza's account.[322] Although many have agreed with Matheron in various respects, there are dissenters to his view on various grounds.[323] The answer to the question hinges primarily on whether States fit cleanly into 2d7.

> By individual things [*res singulares*] I mean things that are finite and have a determinate existence. If several individual things concur in one act in such a way as to be all together the simultaneous cause of one effect, I consider them all, in that respect, as one individual.

Must citizens partake in the same activity for them to cohere as a joint individual? If two partisan groups of citizens vote for vastly different policies, are they two individuals, or only for the purposes of polling? Do members of a State simultaneously cause *anything* if the contents of their minds differ? Spinoza admits (4p4, 4p6) that human beings are subject to emotion, which is highly volatile and varies greatly from person to person. As he writes, we are pulled in several directions. In fact, even "the same man […] is variable and inconstant" (4p33). If a State is an individual, does this mean that Hegel could have been right about the lack of moments in substance monism? If their individual wills must concur, then are they swallowed into the non-concrete universal?

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[322] Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1988). LeBuffe seems to agree in Michael LeBuffe, "Citizens and States in Spinoza's *Political Treatise*," *Mind* 130, no. 519 (2021): 809–32, https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzaa028. For a few others, see Justin Steinberg, "Bodies Politic and Civic Agreement," in *Spinoza and Relational Autonomy Being With Others*, ed. Andrea Sangiacomo, Keith Green, and Aurelia Armstrong (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 132–48; Hans Blom, "Spinoza on Res Publica, Republics, and Monarchies," in *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Hans W. Blom, John Christian Laursen, and Luisa Simonutti (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 19–44, https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442684607-003; Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*. Matheron has recently defended his view against fifteen (!) critics in Alexandre Matheron, "Is the State, According to Spinoza, an Individual in Spinoza's Sense?," in *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*, ed. Filippo Del Lucchese and David Maruzzella, trans. Gil Morejón (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 179–200.

[323] E.g., Den Uyl, McShea, Rice, and Barbone. The first, I believe, was Joachim, in 1901.

LeBuffe writes about 2d7, "Here, Spinoza's language is explicitly causal: insofar as individuals collectively cause some effect, they are a singular thing."[324] LeBuffe also draws on Spinoza's *Tractatus Politicus*, which includes a multitude of comparisons between individual people and States, to argue that if the State is a complex combination of individuals, who are related in various ways, then the State must be itself an individual. It is no matter whether the citizens of a State personally view one another as political, moral, or legal equals. If they are all citizens, then they constitute the effect of a simultaneous, determinate cause. Two important examples which LeBuffe uses are TP 3.2 and 5.1, in which Spinoza argues, first, that right is coextensive with power for individuals and the State, and, second, that self-preservation is a command of reason for individuals and the State. As Balibar argues, "The State must therefore be imagined as an individual or, more exactly, as an *individual of individuals*."[325] The idea of a "body politic" is literal on this account.

Like the narrative which Honneth defends about modern social theory, however, citizenship can easily be construed as agonistic and artificial. Society, for Machiavelli and Hobbes, is about self-preservation in the face of threats and antagonism. As I added in Chapter 3, one could easily add Spinoza to the list, whose *conatus* doctrine could be said to make all beings effectively into egoists. Whatever increases one's power of action, which is also one's virtue, is a good course of action. As Spinoza writes in the *TTP*, Nature creates individuals, not States (TTP 17). Therefore, it could be the case that States are wholly arbitrary, *artificial* lines between citizens of different States. As Hobbes calls it, the sovereign is the "artificiall man" constructed for the purpose of keeping the peace. However, as both Hobbes and Spinoza remark, one's natural right can never become complete forfeit to the sovereign. Consequently, the State is not an organic unity.

However, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Spinoza's account of tolerance makes such an interpretation untenable. Spinoza's *conatus* cannot be an egoistic grasp for self-assertion if it is our essence. Such an understanding is unsustainable because one will inevitably burn out much too soon in the attempt to convert or subdue others. Instead, as Spinoza argues in the political works, one goal of the State is to promote *libertas philosophandi*, the freedom to philosophize, because State actors cannot reasonably convert or subdue everyone. Just like Hegel's remark that the State is always a State among States, Spinoza's view that finite beings are coupled by other finite beings means that the emergence of other States, with divergent interests, is an inevitable fact. Balibar writes, "All societies are threatened by war, because States relate to one another in the same way as do individuals in the state of nature."[326]

Additionally, the view that Spinoza's State is *not* an organic unity of individuals is difficult to defend because of the importance of his naturalism. For Spinoza, the very distinction between "artificial" and "organic" is one which begins to break down in the face of his metaphysical rationalism. If there is only one plane of being, in which individual things are modifications of the one substance, then how can another finite mode be subject to a new set of completely distinct laws? The very concept of political science, which has birthplace in Hobbes's idea of a *scientia civilis* in *De Cive*, is based on the thought that humans obey observable laws of nature, just as any other thing does. Spinoza is the most direct inheritor of

[324] LeBuffe, "Citizens and States in Spinoza's *Political Treatise*," 812.
[325] Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, 64.
[326] Balibar, 67.

Hobbes's legacy on this issue, and one of his key starting points in all his philosophical works is that humans are not a kingdom within a kingdom but a part of Nature.

5.3 Role for Immanent Critique

My reconstruction of social organicism may appear amenable to Jaeggi's formulation of *Lebensformen* as outlined in *Critique of Forms of Life*, where she argues that liberalism's normative quietism regarding an index of good and bad living is deeply problematic because it ignores the impact of ethical judgments relative to *Lebensformen*. However, her solution to the adaptability problem in *Lebensformen*, ironically enough, offers a normatively thin account of the power of immanent critique in terms of both its inability to critique capital or set limits on justifiable practices in forms of life. On Jaeggi's account, Bodde writes, we become incapable of legitimately criticizing (e.g.) capitalism as a failed *Lebensform* because it actually fits her criteria of having adapted well to its circumstances and being adept at problem-solving, achieving both ideological hegemony and homeostasis amidst varied internal and external crises.

On the other hand, owing precisely to my understanding of Hegel's commitment to a stronger organicism concerning the relation between a thing's concept and actual existence, I find that Bodde's critique of immanent critique does not consider the *specificity of concepts*, or, for my purposes, the configuration of *the particular organism of the State* which Hegel calls the "actuality of concrete freedom." Bodde writes that immanent critique would need to hybridize itself and some form of external criticism to be productive because immanent critique's ground of an internally purposive entity is "for the most important autopoetic social organizations, [...] useless."[327] I return to the passage from Hegel's *Logic* that Jaeggi cites at length and that Bodde reproduces as the crux of his point on the necessary organicism of immanent critique and *Lebensformen*:

> Therefore, although an actual thing will indeed manifest in itself what it ought to be, yet, in accordance with the negative judgement of the concept, it may equally also show that its actuality only imperfectly corresponds with this concept, that it is bad. Now the definition is supposed to indicate the determinateness of the concept in an immediate property; yet there is no property against which an instance could not be adduced where the whole habitus indeed allows the recognition of the concrete thing to be defined, yet the property taken for its character shows itself to be immature and stunted. In a bad plant, a bad animal type, a contemptible human individual, a bad state, there are aspects of their concrete existence that are defective or entirely missing but that might otherwise be picked out for the definition as the distinctive mark and essential determinateness in the existence of any such concrete entity. A bad plant, a bad animal, etc. remains a plant, an animal just the same. If, therefore, the bad specimens are also to be covered by the definition, then the empirical search for essential properties is ultimately frustrated, because of the instances of malformation in which they are missing; for instance, in the case of the physical human being, the essentiality of the brain is missing in the instance of acephalous individuals; or, in the

[327] Bodde, "The *Lebensform* as Organism," 1081.

> case of the state, the essentiality of the protection of life and of property is missing in the instance of despotic states and tyrannical governments (SL 12.213-4).

In a rare moment of elegance, Hegel notes that we ascertain the idea of a 'bad' State based on its imperfect correspondence with its concept, which he implies must necessarily be deduced immanently out of individual and particular instances. For example, the judgment, "this house is bad for so and so reasons" implies a rich and vibrant concept of what a house should be.[328] Thus, he says that the "empirical search for essential properties" will always come out of its search as frustrated. The capitalist mode of production, if demonstrated to be harmful to establishing the universality of real individual property or of promoting human life and flourishing, would corrupt the State and people that continuously allow the continued practice of capital's self-valorization. This standard can be based, I find, on a State's internal purposiveness or *conatus*, without reference to an external standard that might be the result of an "empirical search" for a standard. What distinguishes judgments about States from houses is the organic nature of the State, which is not shared by any particular house or their concept, House.

Spinoza argues in TP 5.2 that

> The best way to organise a state is easily discovered by considering the purpose of civil order, which is nothing other than peace and security of life. Therefore the best state is one where men live together in harmony and where the laws are preserved unbroken.

Put briefly, Spinoza is saying that the State's function is drawn from the inner necessity which calls for its very formation. Like Hegel, it is the concept of the State, which is derived immanently, which pushes our judgment of particular States as better and worse. Aaron Garrett argues that the essence of a particular State can be described as more actualized when it achieves its goal of peacekeeping.[329] As he notes, Spinoza differs from Hobbes because he views peace as more than just the absence of war—it is also a virtue in its own right rooted in "strength of mind." Further, as Sandra Leonie Field has argued, the difference between Hobbes and Spinoza is clarified when one examines their models for political engagement. For Spinoza, it is civic strengthening. For Hobbes, on the other hand, it is a more repressive egalitarianism.[330]

The concept of a State itself can help inform us what relations would need to attain within a State to allow for the potential of human flourishing. For example, the practice of declawing a cat requires no external standard to determine its unsuitability for the well-being of the organism. As mentioned above, if a good cat is a good hunter, and if being a good hunter requires having sharp claws, then a cat who has his claws taken away cannot be an

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[328] Ng characterizes this judgment, an apodictic judgment of the Concept, as an "ought-to-be" relationship between the subject and its predicate. As Hegel also wrote, "everything rational is a syllogism" (EL §181). As Ng writes, the idea that "this house is good" elevated beyond a merely subjective claim would imply a syllogistic form of reasoning like so: "All houses that provide shelter from the elements are good. / This house provides shelter from the elements. / Therefore, this house is good." Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life*, 202.

[329] 7/18/24 5:27:00 PM

[330] Field, *Potentia*, 13.

effective hunter. Similarly, capital's practice of self-valorization, which does not promote concrete freedom, protection of life, or property rights, could be considered, on Hegel and Spinoza's account, as despotic or tyrannical, without the need to defer to an external standard. *Lebensformen* that promote and maintain capitalism can be criticized without an external ground if Hegel is correct about the nature of the concept of the State as organism and the possibility of launching an Aristotelian, species-based, *ergon* critique in addition to a demonstration of capitalism thwarting a key feature in the makings of a State. Marx's normatively thick language about capitalism's wrongs helps see why it is deficient for actualizing our *Gattungswesen*. Hegel writes the substantial unity of a people would be "the actuality of concrete freedom" that requires "that personal individuality and its particular interests should reach their full *development* and gain *recognition of their right*," passing over into the organization of the State by their own collective self-reflective endorsement as an ultimate, universal end. As a result, Hegel says in Rousseauian fashion, the unity of the universal of the State only arises out of the volition of the particular directing their wills to the universal end (EPR §260). In other words, subjectivity *fulfills itself* in the ideal State, a process which is made difficult by the capitalist mode of production, especially if Marx is correct about the multiple senses in which we are alienated under this system from our very own species-being.

On my view, Marx approves of Hegel's social organicism (but rejects what are in his view the conservative and retrospectively focused specifics of the EPR) because it allows for normatively thick criticism of *Lebensformen* that remain grounded in specifically immanent and internally necessary criteria. The fundamental theoretical issue with the EPR for Marx is that Hegel approves the irrational actuality of the *status quo*, not that Hegel's understanding of the essence of the proper State as the actuality of concrete freedom or his social organicism are *eo ipso* ideological. Put simply, Marx's quarrel is that Hegel mystifies real, simple relations and how they come into existence. The dialectical method borrowed from the *Logic* reinforces the immanent genesis of the State out of abstract freedom and right, from the abstract, unmediated individual to the concrete, mediated universal. When we consider the State as an *organism*—following Hegel—and if human beings have a *Gattungswesen*—following Marx—then the measure by which we determine the good of the *Lebensform* of the State must correspond to its immanent development: its ability both to (re)produce itself and guarantee a domain of concrete freedom.

The alternative to immanently grounded criteria will either be, as Axel Honneth has stated, independently or constructively derived criteria. He writes in *Freedom's Right*, comparing the immanent procedure to Rawls's and Habermas's Kantian views, "we should follow Hegel in abstaining from presenting a free-standing, constructive justification of norms of justice prior to immanent analysis" (Honneth 2014, 5). Ultimately, these kinds of views offer external determinations of social reality (Honneth 2014, 6). As Marx attempts to demonstrate in his *Critique*, the external determinations of civil society and the family are

part of why they fall short of capturing a holistic view of freedom.[331] As Hegel stated (and Marx agreed), the State reproduces itself in an internally necessary way. The upshot of Hegel's social organicism over other kinds of independently derived criteria is that it retains a historical specificity. The issue with contractarianism, for example, on a Hegelian view, is that it "detaches" people at some level from their social arrangement in a kind of atomistic relation. If Honneth is right, it also can engender social pathologies because of the detached nature of its social analysis (2014, 114-118) because we cannot fully let go of our existing social structures and norms, as attractive an option the independent criterion is and would theoretically suggest.

As Neuhouser remarks in his discussion of viewing society as analogous to a living organism, the concept of society as a living whole entails a strong rejection of methodological abstraction. I find this point dovetails well with Honneth's criticism of much of contemporary social criticism from the vantagepoint of nonhistorical criteria. Our social philosophy will have as much to do with social theory as deriving suitable norms for rule-following and -application. Nonpolitical life, e.g., Neuhouser writes, is "intertwined with the practices of social life more generally" (2021, 30). The strongest version of being able to identify social miasma and launch social criticism against these ills relies on viewing society as something which can be dysfunctional in different respects. To put it pithily: society is sick, and the social critic prescribes medicine to aid it.[332]

Another upshot of viewing the State and social relations organically is that it facilitates (and necessitates) a kind of social critique from *within* instead of from an isolated vantage point. I think this is an upshot of Jaeggi's general approach to critique of *Lebensformen*, although as I note above, I think she does not take it far enough along Hegelian lines (instead preferring pragmatic solutions). Ultimately, Honneth also makes this point to ground his analysis of why the immanent method is preferred. He writes, "it must also be possible to criticize [existing ethical life] in light of embodied values. And the relevant criteria […] are the very same that guide normative reconstruction itself."[333] Going back to Jaeggi and in other words, immanent critique seeks social transformation as a crucial facet of its ends and does not wrap itself up in the guise of the internal critic,[334] who only

[331] Marx takes serious issue with *Hegel's* view on the relation of external necessity of the family and civil society early on in the notes of his Critique for three main reasons: (1) Hegel arbitrarily separates the family and civil society from political life in the State, (2) Hegel relates the family and civil society to the State through the Idea and concept, not concrete relationships between individuals (Marx's historical materialist thesis), and (3) Hegel's concept of *die Stände*, the Estates, is an empty concept that does not track what he wants it to as the deputies of civil society that mediate between civil society and the State.

[332] This view, of *homeopathy*, is suggested by Adorno as a means of addressing concepts and critique. Further, see García Mills, "Hegel's Ethical Organicism," 21. He discusses how, analogically, social reform is supposed to heal the sick organism of society. Finlayson also discusses this view briefly, rejecting it in "Hegel, Adorno and the Origins of Immanent Criticism."

[333] Axel Honneth, "The Diseases of Society: Approaching a Nearly Impossible Concept," *Social Research* 81, no. 3 (2014): 9.

[334] For the key example of Jaeggi's idea of a merely internal critique, she uses Walzer. Honneth discusses Walzer's dichotomy between internal/external critique in Honneth, "The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society." For a perspective rejecting Honneth and Jaeggi's takes, see Marco Solinas and Italo Testa, "Immanent Critique of Capitalism as a Form of Life: On Rahel Jaeggi's Critical Theory," *Critical Horizons* 22, no. 2 (2021): 111–15, https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2020.1719630.

argues dysfunctional social practices result in a society's actors having "given up" on ideals of freedom. Instead, the immanent critic, who I think must view social orders as having actualized themselves in an organically driven process, does a deeper kind of species-based *ergon* critique to state that the organism of the State, at present, fails at its very own self-actualization because of its own practices. Jaeggi writes that "forms of life [are] criticizable based on norms that they themselves posit,"[335] which I find is most feasible and effective on a stronger, Hegelian view of social organicism.

Finally, I will address one likely criticism of the view, which is a variant of skepticism about knowing the purposes, ends, or concepts of things. Although I am abstracting from her specific formulations and philosophical commitments, Jaeggi herself outlines this skeptical view discussing approaches to critique of capitalism, where she tries to suggest the need to blend the three methods of criticism she outlines. One approach that she thinks is dubious is the "functional argumentative strategy" that I appraise here through my argument for a more serious analogy of social organicism. We can condense the main line of argument as follows:

> P1: The purpose of social organization *x* is to φ.
>
> P2: Capitalism promotes systemic dysfunction of φ.[336]
>
> C: Therefore, capitalism is unsuitable for operation of *x* because it is rendered ultimately incapable of φ.

In other words, capitalism "thwarts" the basis on which *x* can φ. However, Jaeggi states that the specificity or scope of P2 is always unclear, or in her words, "the thesis of the systematic dysfunction and 'self-undermining' of the capitalist system is not as easy to pose as it appears."[337] The reason is that we need to distinguish between the φ of P1 and P2. Otherwise, we run the risk of conflating separable or separate aspects of *x*. Ultimately, she says we "inevitably [engage] in *teleological* and value-laden judgments"[338] with a functional deficiency critique of capitalism because capitalism's very function is not clear (is not immediately given) apart from subjective, possible interpretations. The issue is that normative assumptions are dubious in relation to functional critique in certain key respects. The main examples she states boil down to the idea that this strategy remains dependent on norms it fails to explain or make explicit[339] with the further issue of specifying how P2 is actually specific to its subject, the capitalist mode of production.

My reply to this skepticism is on roughly speculative lines. Some supposedly teleological judgment is necessary in species-based *ergon* critique. The final end of the human being is precisely what I think Hegel has an eye towards when he discusses the failed possibility of determining a purely empirical or external view towards normative criteria

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[335] Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 173.

[336] I take this to be the structure of what Jaeggi means by "not merely a chance or empirically contingent" non-functionality of capitalism. See Jaeggi, "What (If Anything) Is Wrong with Capitalism?," 49.

[337] Jaeggi, 50.

[338] Jaeggi, 50.

[339] Jaeggi, 51–52.

(e.g., a bad state, a bad plant, etc.) as flourishing. In Spinoza's view, we possess a less cohesive conative drive, insofar as we constitute one individual in a bad State. I have also attempted to establish what Marx pulled from Hegel's philosophy, or the breakdown between the 'is' and the 'ought,' which I think comes out clearly in Marx's appraisal of Hegel's social organicism. Further, the immanent critic is faced with what is embedded in the social order as it stands in actuality; thus, the concern of looking for faults specific to capitalism is less relevant unless we assume talk of possible worlds in the bad-making features of society for criticism worthwhile—in this one, capitalism is the dominant mode of production and structures most (if not all) facets of our lives in a meaningful sense. Unless we are to appraise independently grounded criteria which run the risk of engendering social pathologies in critique or defend the possibility of discovering transhistorical concepts to avoid overdetermination of P2, social organicism remains the superior alternative because it refuses methodological abstractions or to abstract fully from historical determinations. Instead, social organicism grounds social relations in what is internally necessary, the concept of the State as immanently deduced from natural social tendencies.

5.4 Conclusion

"[T]he fundamental motif of Hegelian philosophy," Adorno writes, "[is] that it cannot be distilled into any 'maxim' or general principle and proves its worth only as a totality, in the concrete interconnections of all its moments.[340] As such, Adorno also writes about Hegel's totality:

> He does not make the parts, as elements of the whole, autonomous in opposition to it; at the same time, as a critic of romanticism, he knows that the whole' realizes itself only in and through the parts, only through *discontinuity, alienation, and reflection*.[341]

The whole depends on the parts, and the parts depend on the whole. Hegel's dialectical *Gestalt* principle serves as a summary for his social organicism as well. It is unquestioned that Hegel is a system builder; however, I find we must stress the system is remarkedly *organic*. It is also true, as Arvi Särkelä has noted, that Hegel's organicism is also *antagonistic*.[342]

In this chapter, I have analyzed Hegel and Spinoza's "self-structuring" view of society through arguing for a stronger view of the society-organism analogy, in line with

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[340] Adorno, *Hegel*, 2.

[341] Adorno, 4. Emphasis mine.

[342] Arvi Särkelä, "Negative Organicism: Adorno, Emerson, and the Idea of a Disclosing Critique of Society," *Critical Horizons* 21, no. 3 (2020): 222–39, https://doi.org/10.1080/14409917.2020.1790752. Särkelä has called this Hegel's "antagonistic organicism." For instance, Hegel identifies a key issue within civil society, the rabble problem, which is inevitable given the very structure of civil society. Poverty also seems inevitable from the structure of Hegel's social organicism. According to Hegel, civil society stands in the State's way in remedying poverty, thus rendering it insoluble. While commentators have criticized Hegel's citation of the inevitability of the rabble problem, of poverty, and of his use of the idea of colonization to alleviate poverty, I take these features as a structural upshot of Hegel's social organicism because he is attentive to the fact of social antagonism. Unless we assume starting from and ending with ideal conditions, these issues *are* inevitable, although the purported insolubility of these issues should be called into question. Särkelä discusses Hegel's view and identifies Adorno's *negative* organicism as both antagonistic and negative in relation to a disclosing critique of society, whereas Hegel's is antagonistic and positive. I take Hegel's social organicism could also be negative precisely because of its antagonistic character, although Särkelä does not take this approach.

historical antecedents on social relations, going at least as far as Plato's *Republic*. Further, the method of immanent critique, widespread in critical theory, seems to function best on a view akin to social organicism, which takes the society-organism analogy seriously. If immanent critique is worth upholding, it comes at the cost of foregoing access to external grounds for social criticism, gaining instead the ability to scavenge normative resources out of society's deep-seated self-contradictions, a method preferred by many strands of critical, post-Kantian philosophy. On this view, we avoid methodological abstraction and the possibility of engendering social pathologies through setting unrealistic standards for ethical life. Instead, immanent critique, alongside social organicism, sets forward a purely immanent ground for advancing social criticism through an understanding of society as already a *Lebensform* which is dysfunctional or ill, by its own standards. Therefore, immanent criticism holds that society must also be made better, by using its own standards to push beyond them.

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I hope to have shown that Spinoza's philosophy has significant resources to address some of the fundamental questions and recent trends in critical theory. Substance monism, while it is a difficult view to articulate, holds key benefits for social philosophy. Spinoza's approach is well equipped to offer a social dimension to the critique of reason, establish immanent criteria for social criticism, and address the dialectic of immanence and transcendence. I acknowledge that the conclusions drawn from Spinoza's substance monism could be difficult to accept because of their conceptual baggage. Much work has been done, as I have shown through Hegel's extensive criticisms of Spinoza, to move away successfully from the perception of Spinoza's philosophy as rooted in heavy-handed and "scholastic" views of substance. In other words, the widespread perception of Spinoza as a "God-intoxicated man," beginning with Novalis, may still haunt his philosophy.

Nevertheless, if one takes the careful time and attention to read between the lines, Spinoza advances his substance, *Deus sive Natura*, precisely to strip away the conceptual baggage behind the concepts of God and substance. Spinoza's immanent critique of Descartes leads into his critique of normative categories, power, and the issues of social unfreedom and intolerance. Therefore, students of Spinoza's *Ethics* and his political treatises must pay close attention to both dimensions of his thought, theoretical and practical, as he discloses them together in each work. Spinoza's social philosophy, as a result, draws on the ontological implications of his substance monism, and his modal ontology emerges most clearly in its inseparably social dimensions.

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