

new normativity and the normativity of the new in adorno

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THE DILEMMA OF NORMATIVITY

The third generation of the Frankfurt School, following Jürgen Habermas' objection to the problem of normativity in Critical Theory, has acknowledged that any critical social theory which seeks normative aims and conclusions must account for its normative foundations. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas pointed out this problem and wrote: "...from the beginning, critical theory labored over the difficulty 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.”¹ After this criticism, many have followed and acknowledged Habermas’ objection and have attempted to discover or reconstruct the normative basis of Adorno’s critical project.

The problem of normativity arises when Adorno’s philosophy presents an indispensable commitment to both *negativism* and *critique*. Adorno’s negativism is usually conceived as the unavailability of the experience and knowledge of the good within an evil society which solely avails the bad. Nevertheless, Adorno seems to appeal to some understanding of the good in his critiques; after all, any critique inevitably involves normative judgments and therefore assumes an understanding of the good. In fact, if he eschewed *all* conceptions of the good his theory would be merely descriptive or explanatory rather than *critical*.² Moreover, although he avoids formulating a full-fledged moral theory, Adorno’s theory has moral judgments and imperatives. The dilemma that we find in Adorno is that his critical and moral claims are inherently normative, whereas his negativism seems to ban any form of normativity, either as the standard of judgment or as a demand from the individual to act in a particular way. As Fabian Freyenhagen frames this dilemma, it seems Adorno must either give up his negativism, which would imply “losing the substance of his theoretical stance”, or should erase all traces of normativity from his thought which would consist in dropping the critical standpoint of his thought and losing all his ethical claims.³ James Gordon Finlayson refers to the same problem, arguing that this “justification gap” can be resolved neither by “weakening the normative conclusions” (to make them adequately “supported by the available premises”) nor “strengthening the moral premises” (to support the conclusions). He claims neither of the two solutions are available to Adorno, as weakening the conclusions would result in a theory that is *less critical* and *more descriptive*, and strengthening normative grounds would counteract the spirit of Adorno’s thought, which avoids theorizing normative standards.⁴ This unresolved paradox, according to Finlayson, threatens to leave Adorno’s theory unsupported and incoherent.

Axel Honneth also argues that any social theory must account for the normative

basis of its critique, which consists in “describing and justifying a standpoint from which society and its institutional practices can be meaningfully theoretically criticized.”⁵ This *standpoint*, akin to the problem of normativity, can be established based on either transcendent or immanent approaches. Honneth holds that the central problem of social theory is formed in the face of these two strategies in treating the problem of normativity. On the one hand, any critical standpoint which lacks a *transcendent* normative reference point seems unjustified insofar as it does not rely on the normative standards of evaluation and criticism. On the other hand, any social critique must aim to have a foothold in the given social reality and *immanently* presuppose a certain affirmation of the prevailing moral culture in the society at stake. The advocates of immanence, according to Honneth, claim that any normative principle must correspond to the preexisting axiological horizon of the given society; that any transcendence with respect to the local value horizon and any appeal to “external universalist moral principles” necessarily becomes too distanced and indeed irrelevant to its addressees. The transcendent approach is accused of being disconnected from social reality, claiming an elitist or theological knowledge that can be abused for manipulative purposes, and being exposed to different forms of paternalism or despotism. In turn, the immanent method is criticized for relying on particular moral principles contingently available in society and failing to offer a defensibly reliable normative reference point. All immanent models, Honneth claims, require “an additional step to justify why the ideal raised by one’s own culture should have normative validity.”⁶

At this juncture, it becomes crucial for Honneth to show that the methodology of Critical Theory overcomes the shortcomings of both models. On the one hand, Honneth aims to surpass the *weak criticism* of Walzer (1987), wherein moral principles are interpretatively drawn from the values of the given society, arguing that merely *hermeneutic* criticism would fail to justify the normative validity of its ideals. On the other hand, he attempts to surmount the *strong criticism* of John Rawls (1971), which is indebted to Immanuel Kant and appeals to a universally

accepted process of *construction* for the establishment of norms. Honneth argues that the Frankfurt School has accomplished this task by adopting a left-Hegelian strategy which differentiates it from both weak and strong models while also mediating between the two. Left-Hegelianism enables a mediation between immanent and transcendent aspects of each model, which is called *immanent transcendence*⁷, affirming that normative principles “are available as ideas within the social reality, and they express an embodiment of social rationality.”⁸ The *transcendent* moment of this model resides in its left-Hegelian conception of reason which takes history “as a process of the realization of reason” and then serves as a normative reference point for the justified critique.⁹ At the same time, it remains committed to *immanence*, since reason is incarnated in existing social practices, and normative ideals can be discovered within the given social reality since they are the embodiment of social reason. Honneth stresses that the Frankfurt School members, including Adorno, have concurred with this left-Hegelian model of immanent transcendence.

Given this brief glance at Honneth’s treatment of the problem of normativity, it remains unclear how this left-Hegelian account of *transcendence* can be compatible with Adorno’s far-reaching *immanent* critique. First, Honneth’s account of immanent critique is not equivalent to Adorno’s understanding of this concept. For Adorno, immanent critique does not remain committed to the axiological horizon of society. Second, the Hegelian metaphysics of history that assumes a process of reason’s realization in the actual society is incompatible with Adorno’s negativism that evinces the convergence of “the intellectualist disenchantment of the world” and “societal rationalization.”¹⁰ Indeed, Honneth’s solution seems to be unavailable to Adorno and in that case, the paradox of Adorno’s negativism, accompanied by his critical (and moral) standpoint, would seem to call into question the coherence of his overall theory. However, as will be discussed, Adorno’s immanent critique does not match with any of Honneth’s methods of critique (immanent, transcendent, or Left-Hegelian immanent transcendence). This new space is where Adorno’s new normativity is formed, where his negativism

and critique do not exclude one another.

This article argues that Adorno's idea of nature-history can be connected to his notions of suffering and experience as the structural moments of transience and transition. This reconstruction of concepts will show that the ideas of nature-history, weaved into suffering-experience, have the structure of ought, which then enables a new normativity tied to critique and negativism, without requiring to rely on transcendent or immanent norms (in the sense that Honneth and others define them). This discussion will unfold in following steps. In the first section, I will explore Adorno's critique of moral philosophy, showing why any positive philosophical endeavor to establish normative grounds would resurrect new forms of oppression. This will foreground the significance of Adorno's immanent critique for achieving a new metaphysics and ethics. But if we grant that critique activates or unblocks the new, then, it will become essential to unravel the philosophical status of this novelty for Adorno. This will lead us to the second section, wherein we will examine the dialectic of nature-history, and its associated moments of transience and transition, which is structured through an *ought*. Then, in two sections, Adorno's idea of natural-history, in his early lecture, will be connected to his mature notions of suffering and experience, which will further elucidate Adornoian normativity. Finally, it will be shown how the experience of a work of art and the experience of dispersed fragments of reality can hold a promise, a possibility, and an ought.

THE CRITIQUE OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY

As noted, the question of normativity has been one of the preoccupations of both Anglo-American political thought and the new generations of the Frankfurt School. But, Adorno avoids normative commitments and refrains from rooting his critique in normative foundations drawn from deductive and inductive reasoning. In fact, instead of reconstructing the normative ideals based on the incarnated reason in social practices (Honneth), Adorno stresses a thoroughgoing failure and bankruptcy of historical reason, moral principles, and any form of normative

ideals. History has proven that the whole culture and the enlightened reason not only failed to give rise to universal liberation but swayed humans into barbarism.

In *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, *Minima Moralia*, and *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno reflects on the dialectical interrelationship between morality and domination.¹¹ He draws attention to the dialectical entanglement of normativity and morality with domination and illuminates how normative principles instead of grounding critique or utopia reify into different forms of totalitarianism. Adorno's critique of moral philosophy reveals that, despite their intention to guide ethical action or uphold justice, normative principles replicate social antagonisms and, hence, "there is no right behavior within the wrong world."¹² Adorno holds that Kant's theory of morality overlooks its own contradictions and its correspondence to the universal domination of bourgeois society, such that the categories of his practical philosophy exhibit ambiguity and ambivalence in a manner that freedom involves unfreedom. Adorno's method to criticize Kant's practical philosophy consists in unraveling these internal oppositions and making explicit the sedimented socio-historical conflicts concealed in the Kantian concept of freedom. However, this critique does not involve barring morality as such, just as the critique of our disenchanted world, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was not to bar reason as such. In his critique of morality, Adorno strives to disclose the tacit threads of domination, weaved into moral categories, to activate a form of *resistance* to the oppressive dimensions of morality. He asks "whether moral philosophy is possible today."¹³ Adorno cannot claim that his critique of "moral philosophy can be used to establish a canonical plan for the good life, because life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live the good life in it."¹⁴ Instead, the only thing that can be claimed "is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds."¹⁵ This "negative prescription" involves resistance to the dominating dimension of morality that is made visible only through critique; "the power of resistance to all things imposed on us, everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us."¹⁶ Critique, by uncovering what is involved

in “joining in” with the existing order, as Adorno puts it, makes us conscious of how we contribute to what is wrong, and “then everything we do ... will be a little different from what it otherwise would have been.”¹⁷ Hence, Adorno’s conception of “good” or “good life” is characterized by enacting resistance to the forms of the bad life. Although a positive canonical plan for the good life is not accessible, the forms of the bad life can be disclosed and resisted.

Adorno’s gesture of articulating a negative moral philosophy goes hand in hand with his materialist project of going beyond German Idealism. Adorno insists that the attempts to surmount idealism cannot simply claim to perform a fresh start and then establish the foundations for a new system. This is not possible for two reasons. First, idealism, Adorno holds, is not a mere intellectual error and involves certain moments of truth insofar as it makes the antagonisms of social reality visible. The commodity form of bourgeois society corresponds to Kantian subjectivity. Just as the fetishized commodities are severed from their social conditions and invested with an abstract exchange value, the logicized object in Kant’s idealism exposes the abstract separation of content (concept) from form (intuition). Thus, any attempt to simply dismiss idealism would blur this moment of truth. Second, every attempt to start a *new* metaphysical system beyond idealism, by the positive act of a thinking subject (philosopher), will inevitably relapse into idealism because it will covertly assume the autonomy and self-sufficiency of a subject that, divorced from its socio-historical conditions, can found a new system. This endeavor, whilst claiming to surpass idealism, will ineluctably recapitulate idealism. As is well-known, Adorno’s strategy to tackle this dilemma is *immanent critique*. It is only by means of the immanent critique of idealism that we might overcome idealism. This critique entails disclosing and “retranslating” how the theoretical concepts of idealism express “an antagonistic system in itself—antagonistic in reality, not just in its conveyance to the knowing subject,” and intensifying these conflicts “so that its concept would force its self-liquidation.”¹⁸ It is in this framework that Adorno aims to use “the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity.”¹⁹ Transcending

idealism is only conditioned by immanent criticism, which fractures the structure of idealism by disclosing its inherent contradictions and pushing its categories via their intrinsic logic to the point of self-liquidation; it reveals how “the coercive state of reality, which idealism had projected into the region of subject and the mind, must be retranslated from that region.”²⁰ The critical disclosure of this coercive reality embedded in idealism is pivotal and it is in the course of negating and resisting these antinomies of reason *and* reality that Adorno’s materialistic dialectical metaphysics can emerge.²¹

Now, a similar strategy is at stake in Adorno’s negative moral philosophy. The only way to condition a new morality is through the immanent critique of the idealist moral theory and the explication of its repressive moments (which reflect the socio-historical reality) to shun its dominating force. Otherwise, every positive intention to establish a new moral system, without this dialectical negation, will naively restore the old oppressive moments of bourgeois morality. As seen in Kant, moral concepts can be dialectically linked to the contradictions inherent in society.

The three cardinal propositions of Kant—the existence of free will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God—are expelled, by Kant, from his theoretical philosophy. Adorno claims that this exclusion is concerned with *experience* in two senses. It means, “we can neither obtain any answer to these questions from our experience, nor do they really enter effectively into the apparatus of our categories” as the constitutive forms that organize experience.²² This separation is problematic, Adorno holds: “practical philosophy cannot really be separated from experience in any absolute sense.”²³ Adorno finds the separation of form and content in Kant’s practical (and theoretical) philosophy problematic because any “action involves empirical realities” and relates in some way or other to empirically existing beings.²⁴ He adds that Kant has a highly tendentious idea of practice: practical reason is always pure, that is, “the *a priori* ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil” and, thus, from the outset is cut off from experience.²⁵ This exclusion of experience and undervaluing of its role means that

“[t]he material of my feelings, therefore, and indeed everything that comes to me from outside, everything that is not me in the sense of being my own reason, is really no more than a stimulus.”²⁶ An action is practical only if it is independent and bound to me as a rational being. Adorno argues that the prototype of the bourgeois social reality is recognizable here, as in Kant’s philosophy, “something like a supreme metaphysical principle has been created out of the idea of the emancipation of the bourgeois individual – the idea of bourgeois autonomy.”²⁷ At the end of the eighteenth century, the philosophical theories reflected the “struggle for bourgeois emancipation from tutelage” and this freedom became the supreme principle of philosophy and, as the pinnacle of philosophy, was equated with reason. For Kant, Adorno notes, freedom and reason are identical; he can after all resolve the problem of *freedom* and *law* by invoking the categorical imperative and the fact that the principle of freedom must be itself nothing but pure reason so that it is not subject to any external, alien, and non-rational factor. Kant’s rigorism, then, ties freedom to the suppression of the natural impulses, to the suppression of affection and sympathy.²⁸ Moreover, the moral law, being a *fact*, a *given*, allows Kant to deduce the existence of freedom. However, Adorno contests that our problem with this moral philosophy is that “there might be a real contradiction between such a law, between the idea of a good and moral action and the ability to put it into practice.”²⁹ What is absent in Kant’s moral theory is whether, in our sociohistorical circumstances, this *ability* is available. Kant overlooks the possibility “that the idea of the good can exist, and the obligation to do good and act in conformity to the law likewise, but that human beings might be denied the possibility of so acting by the general social context from which they cannot escape.”³⁰ Hence, Adorno points out that the problem of contradiction between different principles, like *freedom* and *determination*, is not resolved by Kant’s gesture of combining freedom and necessity in the concept of reason and, indeed, the demand for the good life leads us to insoluble and ineliminable contradictions. He writes in *Negative Dialectics*, “[p]hilosophy had an unexpressed mandate from the bourgeoisie to find transparent grounds for freedom. But that concern is antagonistic in itself. It goes against the old oppression and promotes

the new one, the one that hides in the principle of rationality itself.”³¹

Adorno’s treatment of moral philosophy, which is aware of the inadequacy of merely formal attempts to eliminate the contradictions in thought, consists in criticizing Kant’s moral theory and revealing the “concrete specificity” which lies hidden in the underlying substance of Kant’s abstract concepts.³² This concrete specificity, disclosed in the process of critique, exhibits the dual character of morality, its *oppressive* and *emancipatory* character. Adorno remarks that Kant’s moral philosophy can be conceived as bourgeois in its *positive* sense, that is, implying the idea that the subject can freely give himself a law, in opposition to traditionalism in forms of corporatist, feudal, or absolutist order. Adorno holds that abstractness in Kant “may be seen to express the increasing rationalization and emancipation of society from the blind, organic elements which serve mankind as a guide to its behavior.”³³ This abstractness, itself a sociohistorical category, reflects the youthful bourgeois class that strives to extricate itself from all sorts of tutelage. However, this moral system is also bourgeois in a *negative* sense in that its absolutized concept of reason leads to the “universal suppression of nature.”³⁴ And, as Adorno and Horkheimer discuss in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, this universal suppression and domination over nature are associated with two other sorts of domination: the repression of human nature and its impulses, *and* social domination over individuals. Therefore, Adorno argues that the inherent contradiction in the bourgeois moral system is that it conditions emancipation and at the same time thwarts it. Indeed, morality is inextricably entangled with domination in both social *and* intellectual life, and Adorno’s strategy of immanent critique is an endeavor to disclose this dialectical mediation and, thereby, rob the actuality and concept from their coercive power over human’s real *and* intellectual life. This double dialectical negation dovetails with the coincidence or intersection of the intellectualist disenchantment of the world and the rationalization of society, a nihilism pervading intellectual reason and practical rationality.

Thus, Adorno notes in *Negative Dialectics*, “[f]reedom means to criticize and change situations, not to confirm them by deciding within their coercive structures.”³⁵

However, this critical position toward morality, as pointed out by Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, does not lead Adorno to an “affirmative countermorality,” nor to an “abstract negation of morality.” Instead, through “determinate negation,” he tries to sketch out “when and to what extent morality itself becomes immoral... so that the productive core of moral philosophy is further sublated.”³⁶

It is at this point that Adorno’s conviction in the kinship between negativism and critique is brought to light. Negativity implies the unavailability of a positive endeavor to erect a new metaphysics (beyond idealism), a new moral theory, or a normative foundation because, as shown, despite going against the old oppression, it will promote a new oppression. Hence, facing this dilemma, it is only an immanent critique that by demythifying the contradictions of real and intellectual life may give birth to a new metaphysics or a new normativity. Therefore, Adorno’s response to the objection of lacking the normative ground of critique seems to be threefold: First, critique will be guided by suffering and experience. Second, the critique can proceed because it engages with the internal contradictions of a system, without being forced to rely on Honneth’s transcendent, immanent, or Left-Hegelian methods of grounding critique. Finally, a new normative ground is not capable of justifying our critical standpoint since these grounds are themselves subject to critique, given their trait of resurrecting new forms of oppression. Thus, it is an immanent critique that, restoring the emancipatory capacity of our actual normative principles, may give rise to a new normativity stripped of its oppressive dimensions. Adorno’s negativism, the unavailability of living rightly in a wrong life, does not repudiate the possibility of any new ethics. Indeed, just as his critique of idealism aimed at inducing the creation of a new materialistic dialectical metaphysics, his critique of the wrong state of things, embedded in morality and normativity, also serves to unleash the possibility of a new normative horizon. However, the new ethics is made possible by the critique rather than the idealist endeavor of reason to found a new normative basis (the transcendent model) or the extraction of normative ideals out of the incarnations of reason in existing social practices (immanent transcendence).

This leads us to the notion of the *new* in Adorno's thought. If in the omnipresence of nihilism, in the rationalization of intellectual *and* practical life, the only way to philosophize is through immanent critique and negative dialectics, which might condition a new metaphysics and ethics, then we need to say more about the status of novelty for Adorno. It is, hence, essential to assess the significance and sense of this concept, showing how it marks a recurrent motif in Adorno's thought, namely, the dialectic of nature and history.

NORMATIVITY AND THE DIALECTIC OF NATURE AND HISTORY

In "The Idea of Natural History" (1932), Adorno develops a notion of natural-history, which is, as noted by Max Pensky, "among the most persistent and influential theoretical structures in Adorno's work," playing "a crucial and, typically enough, often subterranean role in virtually all of Adorno's works."³⁷ Adorno engages with the classical problem of historical experience and phenomena in contrast to nature, as the eternal and ahistorical essence which is regarded as the substance in history. Nature is that which stands beyond the reach of reason and exercises a mythical power over individuals who possessing no control over it submit to it as a timeless fate. In contrast, history is "that mode of conduct established by tradition that is characterized primarily by the occurrence of the qualitatively new: it is a movement that does not play itself out in mere identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs, it is a movement that gains its true character through what appears in it as new."³⁸ Though, in this early lecture, Adorno is not concerned with a static account of nature and history but with their dialectical relation and interdependence: How a historical being, where it is most historical, can be comprehended as natural being and how nature, where it rests most deeply in itself as nature, can be comprehended as historical being?³⁹

To explicate this relationship, Adorno refers to the concept of natural history in György Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* and Walter Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*. Lukács' concept of "second nature" allows Adorno to describe one

dimension of the idea of natural-history. Second nature is the mythical appearance of the historical phenomena as ahistorical, absolute, and natural. The world of conventions portrays an ossified history that exhibited a strict lawfulness and, as described by Susan Buck-Morss, “wielded a mythical power over men reminiscent of primitive societies in which ‘first nature’ dominated as an inexplicable force.”⁴⁰ Adorno’s question is how “this world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers” can be interpreted.⁴¹ How can this reified dead world, that takes on the countenance of nature, obscuring its historical genesis, be decoded and deciphered? This cipher-character and strangeness of the ossified history is foregrounded in Lukács’ formulation of second nature as “a charnel-house of rotted interiorities.”⁴²

With Lukács, Adorno depicts the metamorphosis of the historical into nature and, drawing on Benjamin, articulates another dimension of natural-history: “nature itself is seen as transitory nature, as history.”⁴³ What Adorno underscores through Benjamin’s interpretation of the “baroque allegory” is the exposition of nature qua *transience*. In allegory, the death and mortality of nature and the corporeal are not presented as a kind of redemption but are manifested as ungarnished transience. Benjamin writes, “in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history ... Everything about history that, from the beginning, has been, ultimately, sorrowful and unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death’s head.”⁴⁴ Although this horrifying face, this figure of the most extreme subjugation to nature, has lost all its symbolic freedom of expression, enunciates the nature of human existence and the biographical historicity of an individual in the form of a riddle.⁴⁵ Invoking this bare expression of transience, Adorno regards transience as “the deepest point where history and nature converge.”⁴⁶ Nature is also transitory like history: “whenever a historical appears it refers back to the natural element that passes away within it.”⁴⁷ Thus, nature exhibiting an inherent ambivalence or ambiguity, claiming to both timelessness *and* transience is, indeed, natural *and* historical. On the other side, history also exhibits a natural and historical character. History is *discontinuous* insofar as it contains “structural

disparities” and is not transformable to a “structural whole.” History, on the one hand, presents itself as the “mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been”—that is, as nature—and, on the other hand, as “dialectically and emphatically new.”⁴⁸ Transience is the deepest point where nature and history converge; this point is deepest and convergence asymptotical because nature and history never become identical in a third term. Adorno stresses, “all being or everything existing is to be grasped as the interweaving of historical and natural being,” but this convergence does not mean that nature and history are “fused with each other, rather they break apart and interweave at the same time [...]”.⁴⁹ Nature and history do not resolve into an identity in or through transience because transience itself, rather than being a static concept, involves internal ambivalences and movements.

To illuminate the inherent tension of the concept of transience, I refer to Max Pensky and Iain Macdonald, as their discussions elucidate different connotations of this notion. As already discussed, Benjamin’s account of transience presents nature bereft of its claims to eternity and timelessness, to coherence and continuity. In “Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno,” Pensky stresses that transience denotes an individuality “whose presence [...] can only be defined by its absence.”⁵⁰ Transience is an uncanny essence, defining a presence by its absence, its “impending non-existence.”⁵¹ To show the relation of transience to forgetting, Pensky notes that transitoriness is always constituted *retrospectively* when the transient turns out to be that which “can no longer be remembered.”⁵² Transience “marks all the huge portions of a shared lifeworld that vanish without a trace as the lifeworld moves through time; elements that are non-recuperable.”⁵³ The “incapability of being remembered” in transience, Pensky stresses, implies that “conditions that render persons transient or unmemorable, non-recuperable in this sense are social conditions that make impossible the memory of historical suffering.”⁵⁴ Indeed, modernity with its disruptions and transformations in the faculty of remembering can be envisaged as a “memory crisis” in which the predominance of rationality is connected to the compulsory

forgetting of suffering. Transience, in this sense, is the product of the social circumstances that force the bodies to forget their suffering and, for Pensky, this assertion implies the normative dimension of the possibility of a “critical memory” that resists the evaporation of suffering in time, a remembrance that resists reification and its associated refusal of the registration of suffering in memory.⁵⁵

Thus, *transience* evokes the false compulsory historical *forgetting* and effacement of suffering which unsurprisingly underlies historical progress. However, transience also has another face that is portrayed in Macdonald’s *What Would Be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno*. In light of Adorno’s account of history as the movement “in which the new occurs and gains its true character through what appears in it as new,”⁵⁶ Macdonald regards transience as one of the constitutive moments of history. As he remarks, history marks the emergence of the *new*, and “as the new, it is that which ‘makes history,’ as it were, by breaking with archaic nature and time-honored concepts that turn out to be contingent—even false—despite their venerability. As such, history implies both radical *transience* (the downfall of the ever-same) and *transition* (the emergence of the new), which properly occur in the moment of liberation from nature as ideology.”⁵⁷ The reified second nature does not necessarily end up in a historical impasse, and Adorno’s insistence on the riddle-character of nature, according to Macdonald, suggests that the “promise of something new” is detectable “within the ossified forms of the old.”⁵⁸ This time, transience is associated with the disclosure of the contingency and transformability of the heteronomous force of second nature, or in other words, the activation of the dialectical movement from nature to history, the transfiguration of what has hitherto been marked as necessity into the possibility of its transgression.

Thus, transience, here, instead of implying the *forgetting* of suffering points to the *remembrance* of the fact that what is presented as nature with its imposed inescapable necessity is, indeed, historical, contingent, and surmountable. This internal tension within the notion of transience explains why transience, despite

being the cross point of history and nature, is not where they become identical since, like nature and history, transience also dialectically oscillates between its own multidimensional references. Transience is the compulsory social effacement of the memory of suffering but, simultaneously, denotes the transitoriness and contingency of the petrified social mechanisms of forgetting. The source of our confinement concurs with the condition of our liberation.

Though, transience, in Macdonald's view, is not the only moment in the history-becoming of nature. History involves both transience, the downfall of the mythical ever-same, and *transition* as the emergence of the new.⁵⁹ The moment of transition plays out the promise or the emergence of the new. However, since transience is often followed by an unsurmountable historical impasse rather than transition (like in Benjamin's study of the mourning play), Macdonald explicates Adorno's treatment of this "blocked possibility" and unfolds the possibility of transition in the conceptual pairs of society/individual and history-of-art/artwork which are, indeed, different figures of the nature-history dialectic in Adorno's later works. After a decisive analysis of the traces of the ideas of natural-history and blocked possibility in Adorno's *oeuvres*, Macdonald maintains that "society is a figure of nature in its denial of transience and transcendence" (or transition), whereas the "pathos of singular" and the "artistic more" are the epitomes of history—the new—that incarnate the possibility of the different.⁶⁰ Having sketched out the incarnations of the dialectic of nature-history in the concepts of society and art, Macdonald asks how this movement is related to the Adornian "ought." To articulate this normative implication of nature-history dialectic, he invokes Adorno's account of socially conditioned suffering and notes "when suffering is *shared* because society universally and systematically produces it in us" and when these are "*contingent* and *socially remediable* forms of suffering that are falsely presented as being necessary and natural," then this understanding may take on the form of the "imperative of a suffering that *ought not to be*." Macdonald writes:

The imperative of suppressed possibility is, as Adorno puts it, "Woe says: pass" (*Weh spricht: vergeh*). It is the imperative of a suffering that *ought*

not to be, however unable the individual sufferer may be to name the suffering adequately. More specifically, as the German *vergehen* (to pass, wear off, fade) suggests, it is an imperative of transience and transition from a painful actuality to another actuality that has eliminated the prior actuality's condition: a particular kind of transition from essence to existence that operates on the basis of the "ought" of possibility rather than remaining on the level of the "is" of what happens to be real. It is here that the nature-history dialectic begins its work of revealing necessity to be contingency; and likewise, it is here that the "ontology of the wrong state of things" reveals its driving force: "The lived moment tells cognition that suffering ought not to be, that things ought to be different. (ND, 203)"⁶¹

Macdonald's formulation of the "imperative of transience and transition" accords a normative impetus to these concepts. Accordingly, I attempt to carry this idea farther and focus on the normative dimension of transience/transition in relation to critique/creation and suffering/experience. *Transience* is intimately bound to the disclosure of a *critical* perspective that deciphers the natural order and drains it of its claim to necessity, and as such, it may lead to *transition* or, alternatively, the *creation* of the new. In this transfiguration toward history, transience is tied to critique and transition to creation. Now, it can be suggested that, for Adorno, the normative standard of the good rests on a *process* rather than a product in the forms of a static image of utopia or a deduced rational principle: the process of transposition from the natural necessity of "what has always been" to the possibility of novelty. The normative, instead of involving another ideal image of morality or health, is a process that opens up the possibility of criticizing the existing normative framework and creating a new horizon of normativity by unleashing its emancipatory moments. It is in this sense that the process of novelty (and not simply the state of mere newness) has normative dimension.

Adorno does not install a static normative ground as it will turn into a reified nature, cut from history, serving as an origin or ground with a claim to mythical timelessness and repetition. Nevertheless, he cannot idealistically vindicate

mere groundlessness, like a history dissociated from nature, which would naively appear as a perpetual production of novelty. It is only through a dialectical relation between nature and history that a moment of transition would be conditioned. The intersection of nature and history promises a coincidence of critique and creation. This new normativity qua movement is reflected in Adorno's purposeful use of ambivalent concepts and dialectical maneuvers, which aim to frustrate identity thinking and its perpetual categorizing tendency. Critique as the moment of transience is supposed to crack the ossified surface of existing norms and creation, as the moment of transition, unblock the production of unprecedented possibilities.⁶² There is an inner *ought* in the experience of possibility, in this promise of otherness.

For Adorno, the normative process of becoming-history, with its constitutive moments of *critical transience* and *creative transition*, is often out of reach. First, critique is not often available and must be first enabled in a society that imposes a universal marginalization and suppression of all forms of critique. Thus, resisting this repression and conditioning the critique is, for Adorno, the "lifeblood" of philosophy.⁶³ Moreover, even after the critique is made possible, the moment of transience does not always inaugurate the new but often lapses into a "historical impasse" and an incessant return of the experience of hopelessness and impotence.⁶⁴ Hence, Adorno's philosophical project consists in making the critique-transience possible and, then, thinking the possibility of surmounting such impasses to open up a space for transition-creation. Indeed, many of Adorno's concepts can be construed in this framework. Two of these notions that are pivotal for understanding this critical/creative transience/transition are the Adornian concepts of *suffering* and *experience*.

SUFFERING, CRITIQUE, AND TRANSIENCE

The significance of the concept of suffering for Adorno is made manifest when we are faced with the pressing question of how the subject can experience the reification of which it itself is the result. How the deformed and pathologized

reason can diagnose its own deformation and can recognize what is wrong and ought not to be? Honneth discusses this question in *A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life*, and correctly points out that Adorno's resolution to this problem lies in the category of *suffering* which "is 'transcendentally' presupposed everywhere there is the justified suspicion that human beings have to experience loss of their distorted self-realization and happiness through the restriction of their rational capacities."⁶⁵ Adorno holds (inspired by Freud) that reification or any constraint on reason, any deformation or loss of our rational capacities, entails a reaction with a somatic feeling of suffering. Thus, reification can be experienced based on the embodied impulses of suffering. Furthermore, suffering is tied to the "pre-reflective desire" for freedom and the ability of *resistance*.⁶⁶ In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno calls pain and negativity "the moving forces of dialectical thinking."⁶⁷ This "somatic element" is "the unrest that makes knowledge move;" this physical moment of suffering "tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different."⁶⁸ He also asserts that "freedom follows the subject's urge to express itself. The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth."⁶⁹

In the absence of normative ground, critique is driven by suffering and its implied knowledge and normative impetus that things should be different. Thus, critique qua transience in the dialectic of nature-history is intimately linked to suffering. As already shown, the material suffering which is subject to compulsory forgetfulness (the first sense of transience) is that which must be remembered in the critique. Put succinctly, the critique conditions the transience (second sense) or the downfall of nature by disclosing what has become transitory (first sense) or impossible to remember, that is, the suffering of the first nature. Transience is, as we saw, that which its presence is defined by its absence. If nature erases gradually the historical entities, social conditions also, replicating nature, force a compulsory forgetting of suffering; these conditions, as the very causes of historical suffering, cannot kill the pain (just like the usage of chloroform in surgical operations) so just render its remembrance impossible. Transience,

as forgetting suffering, should be critically remembered to activate transience, in the sense of denaturalizing history. Critique animates this movement from transience to transience. The dilemma of critique, for Adorno, is the paradoxical quest for remembering the forgotten suffering, presenting something that has slid into absence. That perhaps explains why Proust is a pivotal figure for Adorno. In Proust, Adorno discovers an “immersed gaze” through which “the present is virtually transformed into prehistory, into childhood.” This struggle with transience, or natural history, is expressed in Proust’s endeavor to discover the possibility of interconnection between “the childhood potential for unimpaired experience” (as it “has at his disposal infinite possibilities of experience”) and “the reflectiveness and awareness of an adult”⁷⁰; a dialectical coincidence of reason and mimesis. *Remembrance of Things Past* is a response to transience, with its involved suffering, to “overcome” transience qua “aging and death” through memory. If “[t]he polarity of happiness and transience directs him [Proust] to memory,” the inherent disparity of transience directs Adorno to a memory qua critique. Adorno writes: “Total remembrance is the response to total transience, and hope lies only in the strength to become aware of transience and preserve it in writing. Proust is a martyr to happiness.”⁷¹ This directs us to the second reason for the cruciality of Proust for Adorno. As was the case with Adorno’s method of transcending Idealism (through immanent critique) which was itself his materialist dialectical philosophy in action, his endeavor to criticize intellectualist moral philosophy is his new normativity in action. This is also seen in Proust. As Roland Barthes has noted, the subject of Proust’s book is the book itself: “The Narrator wants to write but he cannot; when he finally reaches the inauguration of his work, Proust’s book is finished: the real book was only the failure of the desired book: in exhaustion, the fantasy produced the book of its exhaustion.”⁷² Proust writes the impossibility of writing, and Adorno thinks the impossibility of thinking. With a tiny twist in Barthes’ reading, we might say that the narrator’s movement toward the activation of the work is itself the work in action. Likewise, in Adorno, the movement of conditioning a normativity through transience/transition is his normativity in action. It is also in this sense that critique and creation coincide.

EXPERIENCE, CREATION, AND TRANSITION

After examining the relation of suffering to critique and transience, we are led to Adorno's notion of *experience*. The reified nature in which suffering is forgotten also results in the deformation and decay of experience. Experience (*Erfahrung*) is a concept that can account for the *transition* out of nature's spell to history. The atrophy of experience is associated with the disenchantment and rationalization of the historical that reverts to nature, whereas experience, in its undistorted form, is a condition of transcendence.

Here, it is worth noting that suffering and experience, associated with transience and transition, are not two separate steps because experience involves a sort of suffering. As Jay Bernstein puts it in *Disenchantment and Ethics*, "to have an experience is to undergo something, to suffer something, and to do so in such a manner that one is changed thereby ... Experience is the arena of what we learn through 'suffering.'" Modern society with its petrified nature of conventions and excessive archaic familiarity destructs experience. As Bernstein describes it in broad terms, "what is experienced is something that one had not anticipated or predicted, something that occurs counter to expectations."⁷³ Thus, in the prevalence of the naturalness of everything, even human suffering, what is excluded is experience.

Bernstein articulates three characteristics of the structure of experience: "First, novelty and transformation are intrinsic to the structure of experience."⁷⁴ We will return to these elements of *novelty* and *transformation* that will clarify how experience underlies the transition toward history. Second, it is the object which determines the state of the subject that undergoes a transformation. The subjects must be "*present*" and "*exposed* to what they experience;" experiences of love, death, war, childbirth, beauty, and so on, "expose individuals to a domain of meaning that nonetheless remain bound to the events and objects precipitating the exposure." Thus, in Bernstein's view, the communication of experience tends to be "aesthetic" and "narrative" in character. Experience is necessarily inscribed

and communicated in the form of a contextual narrative. Finally, experience, along with the transformation of the individual, also entails “the emergence of a new object domain of consciousness.” Then, Bernstein relates the experience to history and writes, “the image of life without experience is ultimately the image of life without history ... There can be no meaningful historical life without experience; and only lives articulated through experience can be fully and self-consciously historical.”⁷⁵ Lives articulated through experience are endowed with transformation and novelty and, hence, fully historical. Consequently, the moment of transition in the idea of natural-history is inseparable from experience.

A few points are worthy of note here. One of the motivations of Adorno’s critique of identity thinking lies in the fact that what is expelled in it is precisely the *narrative* character of experience. Identity thinking abstracts and decontextualizes the object and, thereby, decays experience and its contextual narrative character. Indeed, the social mechanisms which attempt to destruct experience are those that also seek to establish a universal forgetfulness. Hence, experience is intimately tied to critical remembrance. Proust’s involuntary remembrance involves recovering the experience of an event that happened to us but was never experienced. Therefore, experience is bound to the moments of transience and transition inasmuch as it resists forgetting. The normative claim of suffering and experience lies in their relentless demand for the remembrance of what has become unmemorable, the remembrance of the nature-becoming of history in which the actual historical progress has suppressed and effaced its underlying material suffering.

Thus far, it was shown how experience is connected to suffering and critique. Now, let us see how it characterizes the moment of transition and the possibility of novelty. For Adorno, experience names a relation between subject and object in which the coercive and dominating character of this interaction is transcended. Experience is supposed to rupture this coercive mechanism which is nothing but a blockage of history. Adorno’s conception of experience, indebted to Hegel, enables the possibility of a dynamic subject-object relation wherein both the subject and object can be transformed. As Adorno quotes Hegel, experience is a

“dialectical movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object” in a way that the “new true object issues from it.”⁷⁶ This subject-object interaction can be described as a dynamic dialectical process in which subject and object mutually constitute and alter one another.⁷⁷ As described by Martin Jay, experience “comes only with an encounter with otherness in which the self no longer remains the same” and to remain undamaged must “treat the other in a nondominating, nonsubsumptive, nonhomogenizing manner.”⁷⁸ A redeemed, undamaged or authentic experience, Jay notes, means “a nondominating relationship between subject and object ... A passive suffering or undergoing through an encounter with the new and the other, which moves us beyond where we, as subjects, were before the experience began.”⁷⁹

Thus, Adorno’s notion of experience involves an uninhibited openness to the unexpected, an encounter with otherness and the new, and characterized by transformation and novelty, echoes the moment of *transition* in the dialectic of nature and history. It might be said that the openness of experience marks the unblockage of history, an openness that can untether the dialectical *transition* and the *creation* of the new. Experience, being irreducible to a mere epistemological or metaphysical problem for Adorno, carries a normative dimension, an inherent ought.

Suffering and experience involve resistance to the reification of consciousness. The reified consciousness “is a consciousness blinded to all historical past, all insight into one’s own conditionedness, and posits as absolute what exists contingently.”⁸⁰ In a reified world, to which this reified consciousness corresponds, the utopian image is also petrified. Adorno points out in *Resignation*, “the utopian moment in thinking is stronger the less it...objectifies itself into a utopia and hence sabotages its realization.”⁸¹ This statement has an important implication. It implies that what is barred in Adorno’s critical theory is not the utopian moment in thinking but its *objectification*. This is different from a conception of negativism which presumes Adorno’s theory advocates a thought deprived of any utopian moment. Here, Adorno endorses the utopian moment in thought and even seeks

its conditions for realization, but what he denigrates is the objectification and reification of this utopian moment. The ossification of the normative figures of the good life as a sort of transcendent standard that imposes itself on individuals and demands the adjustment, obedience, and conformity of lives will sabotage the realization of the utopian moment because it will restore domination, shun the critique and block the transition. Thus, when Adorno depicts the *figures* of right life his theory is not incoherent; his negativism does not forbid thinking the figures of the good.⁸² What he eschews is reifying them into *correct* images that, imposing rectitude and rectification, escape the ruthless critique, and adhering to these images as ends in themselves invested with a fetishized character. Negativism is thus reconcilable with thinking the good on the condition that the quest for the right life is practiced in terms of the Adornian *experience* and subject to ceaseless renewable critique.⁸³ Suffering and experience, critical transience and creative transition, portray Adorno's solution to belie the reification, with its involved forgetfulness, and becoming-nature of the utopian moment in thought and, thereby, unclog its realization.

Thus, Adorno's theory does not exclude every utopian or normative moment in thought.⁸⁴ He even seems advising "to hold fast to moral norms" and "the question of right and wrong," but this must involve a constant critical consciousness of the fallibility of the authority corresponding to these norms.⁸⁵ In "Why Still Philosophy?," Adorno writes: "Dialectic is not a third standpoint but rather the attempt, by means of an immanent critique, to develop philosophical standpoints beyond themselves and beyond the despotism of a thinking based on standpoints."⁸⁶ This formulation of immanent critique can be put in contrast to what we quoted from Honneth earlier about the requirement of a justified standpoint for social criticism. The immanent critique, contrary to Honneth's conception, does not entail an affirmation of the value horizon of the existing society or the reliance on contingent moral principles but rather involves the criticisms issued against the despotism of the existing normative standpoints to unblock their emancipatory moments. Also, in contrast to Finlayson's formulation, immanent critique does

not solely imply that its standard belongs to or inheres in the object of criticism but, more significantly, consists in disrupting the reification of every normative standard, using the inherent ambivalences and contradictions of the object of criticism, and unveiling how they replicate the coercive social reality.⁸⁷ This critique is *immanent* insofar as it enables its own conditioning; thus, it critiques that which makes the critique impossible, that is, any utopian image that might turn into an objectified despotic standard. The immanent critique must have immanent conditions. This self-conditioning of critique implies that transcendent normative standards are banned inasmuch as they block the relentless critique of the normative image and violate this immanent conditioning.

PROMISE, POSSIBILITY, AND OUGHT

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno inquires into the possibility of metaphysical experience. Metaphysical experience seems to be conditioned through a space opened between logical and actual possibility. If the moment of transition, in the dialectic of nature-history, shall be explained by an experience, which is supposed to be intramundane, then the question is how a worldly experience will be an experience of a possibility that is neither actual nor logical. This question is formulated by Bernstein, “how can we have an experience of something that is neither fully actual nor fully nonactual?”⁸⁸ Adorno’s response seems to be found here: “The concept of the intelligible realm would be the concept of something which is not, and yet is not merely nothing.”⁸⁹

Curiously, this state of “is not” without being “nothing” echoes Gilles Deleuze’s notion of the *virtual*. The virtual is also not actual, without any actual existence, yet it is not nothing, being real without being actual. Hence, its status is subsistence/insistence rather than existence. Adorno and Deleuze, despite their differences, are seeking a way to surpass the identity of the concept, the former through *nonidentity* and the latter through *difference*. This complicated though interesting relationship between Deleuze and Adorno requires independent research, but it suffices here to note that establishing this connection with Deleuze’s virtual, can

open new interpretative paths in both thinkers, helping us to see the status of possibility in Adorno, and also unveiling the ethico-political connotations of the virtual by benefiting from Adorno's rich critique of society.⁹⁰

This peculiar modality of neither being fully actual nor fully nonactual is also the modality of what is *experienced* in *transition*, a possibility of otherness. Modern artworks, for Adorno, offer a semblance that exhibits such a possibility. They are worldly material entities that while being real exhibit a kind of unreality. They are actual *and* not actual; actual as material things but "not fully or practically actual," as Bernstein notes, since they lack "purpose, function, or practical use." Indeed, artworks turn into "non-fungible material object of attention only in virtue of their not being beholden to the norms that govern the rest of social practice."⁹¹ In this sense, they are both more and less; like Adorno's possibility. "Art is semblance," according to Adorno,⁹² and being non-representational and owing nothing to the concept, establishes a "meaning" and "order," as noted by Bernstein, just through "the medium and the matter;" consequently, "works of art say that nature *can* be like this;" and this can is "a promise."⁹³ Bernstein writes: "Like a promise, a work of art is a fully (materially) substantial present object; like a promise, a work of art 'intends' a future that is not legible from the present other than through its very being, only providing a sign that a certain nonpredictable future will come to pass; and finally, like a promise, a work of art is impotent in the face of future reality."⁹⁴

This notion of promise expresses the peculiar modality of possibility, which in our formulation, is *experienced* in *transition*. Artworks, exhibiting an incommensurability with the actual world, which is also shown in their state of being *useless*, serve as a promise of another order, a promise of novelty. This promise involves an *ought*; a *can* that slides into an *ought*. Hence, it is in this sense that Adorno's normativity can be depicted by suffering/critique/transience and experience/creation/transition.

However, is there any other metaphysical experience, other than artworks? As Bernstein notes, art has a special status insofar as it holds this modality

systematically, “that is, in accordance with the demands of the practice itself.”⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Adorno seems to be claiming that such experiences are also found in social practice. As foregrounded by Bernstein, this promise of otherness is also “found in social experience,” and this implies that Adorno’s negativism cannot be absolute. In *Negative Dialectics*, after evoking Kafka’s writings, Adorno notes, “[i]t resists all attempts of a desperate consciousness to posit despair as an absolute. The world’s course is not absolutely conclusive, nor is absolute despair; rather, despair is its conclusiveness. However void every trace of otherness in it, however much all happiness is marred by revocability: in the breaks that belie identity, entity is still pervaded by the everbroken pledges of that otherness.”⁹⁶ These pledges, or promises of otherness reveal that the disenchanted world, as notes Bernstein, “is not utterly closed in on itself;” indeed, “[i]f despair were truly total, we would not be speaking of despair,” and “the assertion of total negativity belies it, necessarily bespeaking the hope that is denied.”⁹⁷ Consequently, there are “fragmented and heterogenous” moments of happiness, which are incompatible with the course of the world, but precisely, “[i]n not fitting, these negative others promise otherness – the world enchanted.”⁹⁸ There are small intramundane events that despite their actual occurrence, due to their incommensurability with the world, promise otherness. Adorno holds, there is intense despair in a concentration camp, and “yet the lightening up of an eye, indeed the feeble tail-wagging of a dog one gave a tidbit it promptly forgets, would make the ideal of nothingness evaporate.”⁹⁹ This can be connected to our earlier discussions of natural-history. It seems here animality-nature fuses dialectically with humanity-history. Ironically, one finally discovers some traces of humanity, where it is not supposed to be, in an animal; and instead finds animality in the camp’s brutal humans. The lightening of an eye, or the tail-wagging of a dog, are the experiences of some dispersed fragments of reality that carry a promise, a possibility and an ought.

Returning to Bernstein’s reading, he stresses that despite the undeniable significance of metaphysical experience, Adorno cannot say anything further “*philosophically or conceptually*” about it “beyond this negative determination,” since

it would entertain the risk of subsuming it under the domination of a concept.¹⁰⁰ Bernstein writes: “The point of the doctrine of metaphysical experience is that it cannot be conceptually prescribed, that the sort of meaningfulness such events reveal cannot be conceptually or rationally grounded because *they* represent all the grounding that is possible: the dog’s tail-wagging itself the reason for any further reasons one might have for wishing to live and live a human life.”¹⁰¹

Adorno’s ought cannot be conceptually or rationally grounded. Instead, there is an implied ought in the structure of suffering-experience. Experiencing the possibility of otherness, with its anomalous modality, involves a passage from *can* to *ought*; what can happen, ought to happen. And experience is weaved into suffering. In Adorno’s example, it is perhaps in the concentration camp and its associated suffering that some tail-wagging can evoke an *experience*, possessing the structure of a promise, a promise that its realization is perpetually deferred. Metaphysical experience is then constituted in suffering and its involved critique, or critical memory. Remembering is connected to both suffering and experience: Remembering an eradicated suffering, and remembering, through experience, that the social order could be otherwise. The former is a *critical memory* and the latter a *creative memory*; critical memory is a denaturalization toward history and creative memory is the experience of transition, in the mode of a promise. Proust, in the face of suffering (transience), appeals to memory, and it is for this reason that Adorno can discover transcendental experiences in Proust. The Proustian experiences are often the remembrance of an anonymous childhood, which leads to the fusion of child and adult, a dialectical fusion of nature and history.

Adorno’s normativity is therefore implied in the structure of ought which informs the opened space for the modally anomalous notion of possibility. This possibility, a promise of novelty and otherness, is disclosed in suffering-experience. As is the case with Adorno’s method of surmounting idealism, he cannot attempt to construct (or reconstruct) a new normative foundation (to support the construction of critical and evaluative judgments) because far from bringing about genuine novelty, it will tacitly incarnate the old and resurrect the intertwinement

of domination and morality which will, thereby, guarantee its failure to ground the social critique. We are reminded in *Negative Dialectics*, that “[i]t is a moment of dialectics that the new is the old, and otherness is familiarity.”¹⁰² In order to avoid a new form of oppression while constructing a new positive normativity, Adorno must call for the critique of the established normative order to rob it of its repressive dimension.

This analysis attempted to foreground a constellation of concepts around two moments in the dialectic of nature and history. Drawing on Macdonald’s moments of transience and transition, and developing Adorno’s notions of suffering and experience through Pensky and Bernstein allowed us to foreground Adorno’s ought, which characterizes these two moments and their dialectical movements. In this process, suffering gains a voice and expression in the critique of nature as the trammel of norms. Adorno’s critique discloses the antagonistic totality of society that blocks remembrance and experience. This fracture in totality expresses the promise of a thought that “can perhaps catch a glimpse of an order of the possible and the nonexistent, where human beings and things would be in their rightful place.”¹⁰³ This involves a moment of freedom and experience which, in turn, might untether the *more* from the spell of social reality and unleash its blocked novelty. Indeed, what is at stake, rather than a normative *ground*, is a normative *process-force* meant to fuel this dialectical movement. What Buck-Morss observed about Adorno’s metaphysics¹⁰⁴ is no less true about his conception of normativity: the process of arriving at a new normativity (critical transience/creative transition) is itself the new normativity in action. This is a new normativity, the normativity of the new.

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NOTES

1. Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy. (Cambridge: Polity, 1987), 374.
2. Fabian Freyenhagen, "No Easy Way Out: Adorno's Negativism and the Problem of Normativity." In *Nostalgia for a Redeemed Future*, ed. Stefano Giachetti Ludovisi (Rome: John Cabot University Press, 2009), 50–1.
3. Freyenhagen, 50–1.
4. James Gordon Finlayson, "Morality and Critical Theory: On the Normative Problem of Frankfurt School Social Criticism." *Telos* 146, no. 7 (2009), 23.
5. Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) 43.
6. Honneth, 48.
7. See Piet Strydom, *Contemporary Critical Theory and Methodology* (London: Routledge, 2013).
8. Honneth, 52.
9. Honneth, 50.
10. Jay M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9–10; Bernstein summarizes this problem: "Adorno's philosophy is routinely interpreted as directly embodying the pessimism implied by the intersection of the sociological picture of rationalized society and the philosophical dilemma of being left without a usable conception of reason. If there is a rationality deficit in modernity, and all subject positions are forms of hurt or flight, damaged, then how might a critical analysis of ethics advance? The acuteness of the social situation and Adorno's own commitment to some form of historicism in which there is no access to forms of reason and rationality that are not historically embodied appears to lead to an ethical cul-de-sac without recuperative possibilities" (Bernstein 2001, 20).
11. For Adorno's works, after their first citation, abbreviations are used: *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, MP; *Negative Dialectics*, ND; "The Idea of Natural History", NH; *Critical Models*, CM; *Hegel: Three Studies*, HTS.
12. Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), 174.
13. MP, 167.
14. MP, 167.
15. MP, 167–8.
16. MP, 168.
17. MP, 168.
18. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 10; 26.
19. MP, xx.
20. MP, 10.
21. Adorno writes, "Thought as such, before all particular contents, is an act of negation, of resistance to that which is forced upon it" (ND, 19).
22. MP, 68–9.
23. MP, 69.
24. MP, 69.
25. MP, 70.
26. MP, 70.
27. MP, 71.

28. MP, 71.
29. MP, 75.
30. MP, 75.
31. ND, 214.
32. MP, 152.
33. MP, 152.
34. MP, 152.
35. ND, 226.
36. Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, "Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 336.
37. Max Pensky, "Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno." *Critical Horizons* 5, no. 1 (2004), 228.
38. Adorno, "The Idea of Natural-History." In *Things beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 253.
39. NH, 360; see also Philip Hogg's *Communication and Expression: Adorno's Philosophy of Language*, trans. Antonia Hofstätter (New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017), where he reconstructs Adorno's philosophy of language and develops the theory of language acquisition drawing on Adorno's idea of second nature and natural-history.
40. Susan Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: Free Press, 1977), 55.
41. NH, 261.
42. György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Bostock Anna (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 54.
43. NH, 262.
44. Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: NLB, 1977), 166.
45. Benjamin, 166.
46. NH, 262.
47. NH, 264.
48. NH, 266.
49. NH, 264.
50. Pensky, 241.
51. Pensky, 241.
52. Pensky, 241.
53. Pensky, 242.
54. Pensky, 242.
55. Pensky 243–4.
56. NH, 253.
57. Iain Macdonald, *What Would be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 59.
58. Macdonald, 61.
59. Macdonald, 59.
60. Macdonald, 77; 91; 94.
61. Macdonald, 95–6.
62. These possibilities have a new modal status. As stressed by Macdonald, this blocked possibility is a new space opened between Hegel's formal and real possibility. Formal possibility,

what can be thought without contradiction, “contains the ‘ought’ (Sollen) or that which ought to be” but it is “powerless in the face of actuality,” insofar as it is construed as that which actuality cannot produce, “the possible, but under the shadow of the impossible” whose actualization is suspended or “indefinitely postponed.” (Macdonald 2019a, 3-4) Real possibility, taking real actuality “as its criterion and content,” refers to “the sum total of real circumstances that are at the same time the real conditions for the further development of actuality.” (Macdonald 2019a, 4) In Hegelian metaphysics, all real possibilities become actualized and all remaining non-real possibilities are formal “so have no claim on actuality.” (Macdonald 2019a, 5) It is not a Hegelian real possibility, “since the circumstances-conditions of actuality have not produced it and do not seem on the point of producing it;” yet, rather than a formal possibility, “a vain hope or a mere ought,” it is “a real possibility that has been ‘cheated’ of its actuality.” (Macdonald 2019a, 6).

63. Adorno writes in “Why Still Philosophy”: “Philosophy...has its lifeblood in the resistance against the common practices of today and what they serve, against the justification of what happens to be the case” (Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords, trans. Henry W. Pickford and Lydia Goehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005a), 6).

64. Like Benjamin’s analysis of the mourning play, as discussed by Macdonald, which depicts an unsurmountable impasse, where the transience encounters a blockage that makes the transcendence out of reach. The era does not offer any possibility of redemption and gives rise to a sort of “melancholy impotence.” (Macdonald 2019a, 61-63).

65. Honneth, 68.

66. However, Honneth believes that suffering and its claimed cognitive content needs to be justified. He takes Adorno’s occasional empathetic account of childhood as an effort to anchor suffering in a normative image of childhood. But as shown, Adorno would not need this justificatory normative image, as he aims to ensure the movement of the critique and creation of the normative horizons.

67. ND, 202.

68. ND, 203.

69. ND, 17.

70. NL, 315.

71. NL, 317.

72. Roland Barthes and Bernard Comment, Marcel Proust: mélanges (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2020), 179.

73. Bernstein, 114.

74. Bernstein, 114.

75. Bernstein, 115.

76. Adorno, Hegel: Three Studies (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 54.

77. As Adorno writes in Negative Dialectic, “they constitute one another as much as—by virtue of such constitution—they depart from each other” (174).

78. Martin Jay, “Is Experience Still in Crisis? Reflections on a Frankfurt School Lament.” In The Cambridge Companion to Adorno, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 140–1.

79. Jay, 145.

80. CM, 200.

81. CM, 292–3.

82. On the usage of “figure” in Adorno, see Honneth, “A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life,” wherein he discusses the constellation of figures which reveals a historical cipher and

indicates the objective meaning of the historical condition. Honneth compares Adorno's notion of figure to Weber's "ideal type." (Honneth 2009, 58).

83. For more on correctness and rectitude see Macdonald's remarks (Macdonald 2019a, 1-2) in parallel to the relationship between normativity, norm, and normalization (Genel 2019, 70-88).

84. Finlayson writes, "we can have no positive conception of the good, and that what they call variously 'reconciliation,' 'redemption,' 'happiness,' and 'utopia' cannot even be thought" (Finlayson 2009, 29) Stressing this negative utopianism which is associated with the theological ban on graven images, Finlayson notes that "no standard of goodness or rightness is available" (Finlayson 2009, 30).

85. MP, 169.

86. CM, 12.

87. Finlayson writes: "What makes a criticism immanent is that the standard of criticism belongs to or inheres in (in a suitably specified sense) the object of criticism." (Finlayson 2014, 1144-5).

88. Bernstein, 435.

89. ND, 393.

90. Curiously, there is also intriguing literature about the coincidence of critique and creation in the work of Deleuze, which can be examined in relation to Adorno. See in particular *Difference and Repetition* trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), where Deleuze writes, "the conditions of a true critique and a true creation are one and the same" (Deleuze 1994, 139); and Daniel W. Smith's intriguing articulation of the relation between normativity and the principles of critique and creation in Deleuze (Smith 2003, 299).

91. Bernstein, 435.

92. ND, 404.

93. Bernstein, 436.

94. Bernstein, 436.

95. Bernstein, 437.

96. ND, 404.

97. Bernstein, 438.

98. Bernstein, 438.

99. ND, 380; Bernstein, 440.

100. Bernstein 440

101. Bernstein, 441.

102. ND, 64.

103. CM, 15.

104. "[T]he process of arriving at such a philosophy [dialectical and materialistic] was itself the new philosophy in action" (Buck-Morss 1977, 64).