The Theory of Communicative Action and the Aesthetic Moment:
Habermas and the (neo)Nietzschean Challenge

by

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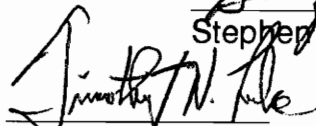in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

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(Abstract)

This thesis seeks to explore the viability and limitations for democratic politics found at the intersecting philosophical orientations of Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action and (neo)Nietzschean conceptions of an aesthetic, affective ethos of self-formation. Despite his recognition of the pathological hubris of modern, instrumental forms of rationality, Habermas argues that a careful consideration of rationality's full breadth suggests the social potential to reach understandings about our moral-practical problems and our aesthetic-expressive disagreements that could serve as the foundation for a democratically negotiated politics of action. Habermas takes exception to those thinkers - such as Nietzsche and his heirs - who have abandoned rationality in favor of a disruptive aestheticism that remains bound to a subject-centered philosophy of consciousness and that lacks the self-critical mechanisms characteristic of rationality's intersubjective potential. The totalizing tendencies of a subject-centered perspective leaves such a thought vulnerable to the mystifying appeals of a demagogic politics, to the pull of commodification, and to the dangers of an unchecked moral relativism.

The negotiation of action through consensus that underwrites Habermas's project, however, tends to obscure our right to be different and

underthematizes the difficulty that certain voices have in getting to the negotiating table in the first place. By challenging the model of learning that informs Habermas's "ideal speech situation" with variants of Nietzsche's notion of "mnemothechnics," I suggest that resistances to the colonizing advances of instrumental rationality cannot ignore the resources offered by Nietzschean/Foucauldian suggestions about the extra-discursive, affective possibilities for self-formation. William Connolly's vision of an "agono-pluralism" suggests that these resources might be deployed within a democratic politics that shares Habermas's concern with an intersubjective system of checks and balances.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

This thesis reflects an ongoing interest in the possibilities and limitations of Western, post-traditional political orders. No longer bound up with an eternal order that had secured the hierarchical politics of traditional and religious societies, the turn towards a modern politics originally promised a liberating escape from religious superstition and ascribed inequalities. The increasing rationalization of society, it was hoped, would allow humanity to escape the infelicities of its "self-incurred tutelage." In time, that escape would eventually suggest the possibilities of a more enlightened, democratic self-reliance. The forward looking optimism of this enlightenment, however, has turned back upon itself; the reason that would liberate has increasingly revealed its complicity with the reified inequalities of entrenched market economies and state bureaucracies, the horrors of state sanctioned terror, and the debilitating loss of existential meaning. The dominant political metanarratives of modernity, liberal capitalism and Marxism, are increasingly thought to be incapable of adequately addressing these issues. Because both of these metanarratives have become increasingly reliant on an instrumental reason capable of meeting societal demands for material wealth, it has been difficult for either to offer a critique of what, in effect, is its sustaining principle. It is within this context that contemporary political theory has sought to formulate a democratic politics that at the same time is capable of resisting the recurrent pathologies associated with the increasing rationalization of society.

I have attempted to explore some of the possibilities for such a resistance by engaging the tension between the philosophical projects of Michel Foucault

and =ürgen Habermas. Certainly, their attempts to respond to the rationalization of modern society have typically been counterpoised against one another. Foucault, as he is typically portrayed, offers a radical critique of modernity that undermines its most cherished moral and rational assumptions. Habermas, by contrast, proclaims modernity to be an "incomplete project" whose rational potential remains unfulfilled but within our reach. Such distinctions, no doubt, point to serious differences that separate these two thinkers. They also remind us, however, of the common philosophical terrain over which both Foucault and Habermas travel. In fact, it may not be so much the substantive content of their thought, but its varying degrees of thematic hyperbole and understatement that drives the polemics that have marked much of the recent academic debate between the "Foucauldians" and the "Habermasians." In Foucault, and in his intellectual precursor Friedrich Nietzsche, moments of ecstatic, literary exaggeration often undermine the ethical implications of their work. Habermas's more soft spoken emphasis on the consensual possibilities generated by his theory of communicative action, on the other hand, often obscures qualifications and particulars that he offers to counter charges of an empty foundationalism. In any case, these differences, at some points, give way to an interesting set of congruencies.

Foucault and Habermas are both, for example, concerned with the relationship between modern forms of reason and their implications for modern politics, morality and ethics. Philosophizing within the context of (post)modernity, both thinkers are wary of philosophical reason itself. Philosophy, Habermas argues, has in large part lost its capacity to "refer to the

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whole of the world, of nature, of history, of society, in the sense of a totalizing knowledge."[1] Instead, modern "philosophical thought has withdrawn self-critically behind itself;" it raises questions "of what it can accomplish with its reflective competence ... it has become metaphilosophy." Philosophy, he maintains, is now an investigation of "the formal conditions of rationality."[2] Likewise, Foucault suggests "that the central issue of philosophy and critical thought since the eighteenth century has always been, still is, and will, I hope, remain the question: What is this *Reason* that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers?"[3]

Furthermore, "both thinkers," as Jon Simons has noted, recognize "a paradox at the root of modern Western politics" that assumes certain notions of individuality which at the same time promote deadening and constraining forms of homogenization.[4] For Foucault, such a "modern political rationality" is characterized by "the constant correlation of individualization and normalization."[5] In Habermas, the same paradox is reflected in the ways that "both free-market liberalism and its social democratic alleviation undermine subjective capacities of agency at the same time as they provide the space or material resources for it."[6]

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[1] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 1: *Reason and The Rationalization of Society,* trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 1.

[2] Ibid., 1-2.

[3] Michel Foucault, "Space, Knowledge, Power", interview by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Christian Hubert, *The Foucault Reader* (Pantheon Books: New York, 1984).

[4] Jon Simons, *Foucault and Politics* (Routledge: New York, 1995) , 110.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 111.

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This thesis seeks to demonstrate how the different ways that Foucault and Habermas thematize their affirmative responses to these shared concerns can actually work to buttress one another, shoring up each other's weaknesses in ways that would better illuminate the connections between the possible strategies of criticism and resistance inherent in their politics. More particularly, it explores the relationship between Foucault's notion of the aesthetic subject and Habermas's theory of communicative action.

Though this thesis turns to Foucault's work to challenge what it understands to be the incompleteness of Habermas's theory of communicative action, it does not issue that challenge in order to "prove" Foucault right or to "prove" Habermas wrong. To begin with, the Foucauldian response articulated here is not meant to refute a Habermasian perspective, but to complement it; thus, though the tensions that one would expect between a theorist of consensus and a theorist who sees power as an omnipresent force keep each of these discourses at an agonal distance from the other, this thesis makes an effort to bring them into the same room. Hopefully, the tension that separates their thought can be a productive one - marking out the limits of Foucault's asymmetrical ethics of power while at the same time moving beyond the minimal criteria of Habermas's intersubjectively sanctioned discourse ethics. Second, the aesthetic challenge to Habermas's discourse ethics is not shouldered by Foucault alone; the ethical implications of Foucault's work, and particularly his possible responses to Habermas's explicit criticism's of the Foucauldian project, are best fleshed out in concert with others who share his neo-Nietzschean heritage. If Foucault is important in foregrounding the ethical

and political problems attendant to the Nietzschean project, he in turn needs help in developing an affirmative response to those problems. I have attempted, therefore, to present Foucault's thought as a development of central ideas introduced by Nietzsche and Bataille and, in his aftermath, modified by William Connolly's neo-Nietzschean model of an "agono-pluralism."

In order to explore these issues, I begin by tracing Habermas's reconstruction of Weber's analysis of modernity and his response to its pessimistic conclusions. Such an exposition will allow me to establish the contours of reason's relationship to the political and the social. I then turn to his positive program of communicative action in order to highlight how that program privileges the moral-practical aspects of reason in ways that tend to obscure the essential relationship between meaning, particularly as it is tied to one's sense of identity and freedom. In particular, I try to trace the ways in which Habermas's analysis of formal pragmatics and his claim that the structure of language tends towards an "unconstrained consensus" is dependent on his understanding of how individuals gain their linguistic competence. I look at how that model of learning gains its impetus from Habermas's reading of George Herbert Mead's understanding of the process of individuation and Lawrence Kohlberg's schema of the stages of moral development. That process, as Habermas reads it, offers a social model that neatly supports Habermas's claims about the universality of consensual possibilities.

My narrative responds to this model and its social implications by considering how a model of learning more sensitive to the aesthetic dimensions of cognition and socialization might help us reassess the

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connection between meaning and freedom. Thus, after briefly surveying Habermas's sense of the aesthetic, I selectively trace how the notion of an aesthetic self is developed in a line of thought moving from Nietzsche through Bataille to Foucault. I discuss certain elements of this tradition to uncover its implications for both Foucault's critical impulses and his gestures towards a positive ethics. Foucault's neo-Nietzschean sense of the aesthetic self, it is argued, might operate as a necessary complement to the normative emphasis of Habermas's communicative ethic. The subordinate role of the aesthetic in that ethic underplays its pervasive presence in political and ethical negotiations. If we reappropriate the thoughtful but unquestionably more radical allegiance to an aesthetic subjectivity suggested by Foucault, it is possible to engage the implicit dangers of Habermas's intersubjectively wrought, consensual morality. This engagement could work to break up the momentum of consensus that dominates the theory of communicative action and which, unless contested, would tend to reinscribe a limited notion of how individuals emerge as competent actors (speakers) according to Habermas's theory of communicative action.

The Nietzschean/Foucauldian response to Habermas's theory of communicative action centers on an interrogation of modern subjectivity. Though this response concurs with Habermas's attempts to work past a subject-centered philosophy of consciousness, it insists that Habermas's turn towards intersubjectivity cannot, in itself, overcome the limits of the subjective orientation that it seeks to escape. In order to get clear about the limits of Habermas's attempts to move beyond a philosophy of consciousness, we will

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look at the ways in which Nietzsche's "will to power" deconstructs the modern notion of subjectivity. We then look at the ways in which Foucault's project seeks to uncover the ways in which the modern subject is a construction of various disciplinary practices associated with the rise of the human sciences and modern capitalism. For both Nietzsche and Foucault, an analysis of the ways in which our identity is molded by the contexts in which we find ourselves and which always remain somewhat beyond our control is crucial to our efforts to work on becoming who we are. Within the limits of circumstance, we can work to question and modify those limits. This "work on the self" is developed by looking at the ways in which Foucault makes use of Georges Bataille's notion of transgression.

It is precisely at this level of analysis, in its conceptions of how individual identities are formed, that a Foucauldian/Nietzschean approach makes its most radical departure from Habermas's post-subjective orientation. Identity, as a process of individuation, is at least in part formed by disciplinary processes that precede the cognitive-rational model of learning favored by Habermas. Nietzsche's discussion of "mnemotechnics" and Foucault's treatment of disciplinary techniques reveals the experiential, embodied context in which Habermas's communicative rationality necessarily occurs. In thematizing the limits of Habermas's model of learning, Nietzsche and Foucault's disciplinary emphases suggest that the self-critical powers of rationality are themselves limited. Political resistances, in other words, must be directed, at least in part, to the ways in which one's subjectivity is formed in specific circumstances. Such resistances are not as concerned with escaping "a rationality that we are

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fortunately committed to practicing" as it is with working on the unproblematicized limits of that rationality. How, these resistances ask, does one recognize and work against the ways in which the particular and concrete manifestations of the rational work to reinforce the asymmetries of power inherent in ethical/political contexts?

Foucauldian/Nietzschean resistances recognize that a rational critique that places its faith in the rational competency of communicative actors fails to account for the pre-rational limits in which that competency is developed. Such a rational critique needs to be complemented, it is argued, with what Nietzsche describes as the necessity of giving style to one's character, what Foucault calls the "care of the self." This form of resistance demands that we reengage the physical habits that are such an ineluctable part of who we are. It also forces us to account for the ways in which our understanding of our "meaning" remains an unavoidable part of our political and ethical negotiations. By placing these concerns at the heart of our political and ethical enquiries, the Foucauldian/Nietzschean tradition offers a challenge to the limits of Habermas's expansion of liberal neutrality.

William Connolly, in fact, has sought to develop these insights in ways that would expand traditional models of pluralist politics. His "ethos of pluralization" shakes the sedimented oppositions of pluralism; it not only recognizes that these oppositions are grounded in a mechanistic and over-simplified understanding of the ways in which identity is formed and maintained, it also brings to the surface the ways in which these understandings support and are in turn are supported by prevailing economic

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structures. Connolly appeals to the Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition in order to work through what is perhaps the salient tension of the liberal tradition since at least the late writings of John Stuart Mill: how to simultaneously promote individual development *and* economic equality. Thus, though a Foucauldian/Nietzschean, aesthetically inspired ethic shares in Habermas's recognition that the most salient forms of political resistance "are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life,"[7] Connolly's approach suggests that it would be a mistake to think that a Foucauldian/Nietzschean approach is necessarily antithetical to issues of *economic* equality. It is argued, in fact, that such an approach offers a basis for challenging the ideological foundations of the liberal capitalist order. In particular, it remembers to account for how the circulation of desire, beyond animating our resistances, would continue to characterize a post-capitalist society. Thus, though this thesis does not explicitly thematize a set of concrete proposals for overturning the economic inequalities inherent in the structures of capitalism, it does work to suggest a mode of living compatible with a post-capitalist democratic order. This is not meant to suggest that more concrete proposals are somehow amiss, but rather to argue that the work on the ethical framework in which those proposals are pursued mark important sites of intervention into the workings of any political order.

In order to explore elements of this ethical impulse that remain underthematized by Foucault, I appeal to Connolly's attempts to extend this ethic in ways that would render it compatible with "the *refiguring* of the pluralist

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[7] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* Volume Two: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functional Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 392.

imagination" (my emphasis). I look at how his analysis of Foucault's reading of a Kantian subjectivity in *The Order of Things* implies an ineluctable connection to an "otherness" that allows us to make sense of how the asymmetry of human relationships remains a necessary, positive part of any communicative ethics. Finally, I briefly comment on how such an ethics might inform a political ethos that could square the demands for economic and social equality with an insistence on the right to be different, the right to choose for oneself a path to become who one is in ways that protect the space for an affective individualism.

CHAPTER TWO: BEYOND REIFICATION: HABERMAS ON THE RATIONALIZATION OF SOCIETY

A. HABERMAS ON WEBER'S ANALYSIS OF MODERNITY

Jurgen Habermas has noted that his "main concern" in writing *The Theory of Communicative Action* "was to develop a theoretical apparatus with which the phenomenon of 'reification' could be addressed."[8] Habermas examines how this theme evolves within a line of thought, running from Weber through Lukács to Adorno and Horkheimer, that seeks both to sustain and rework the Marxist tradition. For these thinkers, the pathologies of modern capitalist societies reflect modern humanity's increased reliance upon and infatuation with a one-sided, instrumental reason. Weber's "existential-individualistic critique of the present age" recognizes these pathological effects in "two trends": a "loss of freedom" and a "loss of meaning."[9] Habermas, too, is sensitive to these losses, but he hopes to uncover the analytical and empirical deficiencies of Weber's critique, and, in doing so, overcome what he perceives as its critical impotence for social theory.

Ultimately, Habermas argues, the analysis of reification inaugurated by Weber founders because it remains bound to a philosophy of consciousness. Such a philosophical orientation, he contends, cannot account for the rational potential that is embedded in the organizing structures of modern, post-traditional societies. Habermas attempts to recapture this potential by shifting the analysis of reification from the paradigm of a philosophy of consciousness to a paradigm of communicative action. Such a shift, he argues, allows one to gain a foothold for the critique of, and resistance to, what Weber and his heirs perceived to be the advancing encroachment of instrumental reason into all

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[8] Habermas, *Justification and Application*, trans. by Ciaran P. Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993), 170.

[9] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action,* Vol. 1, 247.

areas of modern life.

Habermas sees Weber as attempting to resituate Marx's notion of alienation within a post-Kantian framework of a knowing subject. In order to make such a fit possible, according to Habermas, Weber comes to discard Marx's faith in the liberating potential of instrumental reason and inverts the Marxian belief that consciousness is merely epiphenomenal; he thus pursues "the problematic of rationality on the level of structures of consciousness" in order to explain the "rationality phenomenon ... on the level of society."[10] To Habermas's thinking, this commitment dooms Weber to ultimately mischaracterize, and thus limit, the necessarily interactive processes of modern, democratic society in terms of a solitary consciousness frustrated by the limits of its certainty.

Weber seeks to reveal the contours of this consciousness by arguing that the rationalization of modern "structures of consciousness" proceeds from a *"disenchantment in the history of religion"'* that fulfills "the necessary internal conditions for the appearance of Occidental rationalism."[11] Occidental rationalism," in other words, "is preceded by religious rationalization." Weber thus deliberately brings the "universal-historical process of the disenchantment of mythical-interpretive systems under the concept of rationalization."[12]

Weber sketches the disenchantment of religion as it emerges against the backdrop of the explanatory and instrumental successes of "the mathematical sciences of nature."[13] Buoyed by the success of this model of modern science,

[10] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 1, 178.
[11] Ibid., 143.
[12] Ibid., 167.
[13] Ibid., 145 - 46.

and by the power of Newtonian physics in particular, the philosophers of the French Enlightenment looked optimistically to reason's liberating potential. These thinkers were confident that a scientific method based on observation, experiment, and calculation could serve as "a paradigm for knowledge in general" that not only revealed traditional morality and thought as the "mere opinion" of "scholastic debates," but that could also account for the problems particular to these superstitions.[14]

The tools of modern science, it was thought, would go beyond unlocking the secrets of the natural world, and would, in fact, serve to demystify the complexities of human social life, culture, and politics. The human capacity to learn, particularly as it became manifest in the scientific method, promised more than cognitive transparency; it betokened moral progress as well. Moral concepts, like natural facts, could be observed in their interrelationships and fitted to general, law-like patterns that could serve as guides to human conduct. As Habermas notes, Enlightenment thinkers expected "that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces but also an understanding of the self, moral progress, the justice of the institutions and even the happiness of human beings."[15] In their minds, "the concept of the enlightenment functions as a bridge between the ideal of scientific progress and the conviction that the sciences also serve the moral perfection of human beings."[16] In mapping the achievements of a nascent scientific sensibility onto areas of politics, morality, and aesthetics, the Enlightenment was able to

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[14] Ibid., 149.

[15] Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture*, ed. Hale Foster (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), 9.

[16] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol 1, 147.

triumphantly "conceive the history of mankind on the model of the history of modern science, that is, as a process of rationalization."[17]

The ascension of rationality as a guide to the natural world and as the arbiter of human conduct implied a freedom from the superstitious constraints and distortions of mythico-religious world views. In accepting the standard of rationality, humanity, it was thought, might escape what Kant would call its "self-incurred tutelage"; it now might shape its own destiny. Famine, disease, poverty, inequality and servitude could no longer be perceived as the ineluctable consequences of humanity's fall from grace, merely to be endured; they became problems that could be solved. "Learning," Habermas notes, had come to mean "intelligently overcoming obstacles."[18]

Weber, then, understood the distinction between modern and premodern societies as resting on the increased rationalization of the modern world. On Habermas's reading, Weber understands this process of increasing rationalization most clearly as it emerges in the Protestant ethic's approximation of a "*methodical-rational conduct of life.*" Such conduct is oriented towards the synthesis of two categorically distinct forms of rationality: the "purposive-rational" and the "value-rational." Purposive-rational conduct organizes the employment of appropriate, efficient means and the choice of relevant ends. Value-rational behavior, on the other hand, is organized around a broad range of affective "action preferences" that are measured by "formal properties" that "are so fundamental that they can ground "*a mode of life based on principles.*"[19] In combination, these distinct categorical types yield what

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[17] Ibid., 146.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 171.

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Habermas describes as "practical rationality in its entirety."[20]

It is the ability of persons and groups to "generalize" the methodical-rational conduct of life "over time and across social spheres" that mark the importance of the rise of the "Protestant vocational asceticism of Calvinism and the early Puritan sects."[21] In Weber's words, "only the vocational ethic of ascetic Protestantism produced a principled, systematic, and unbroken unity of an inner-worldly vocational ethic with the assurance of religious salvation." This orientation of Protestantism posits "the world, with all its creaturely depravity" as possessing "an exclusively religious significance as the object through which one fulfills one's own duties."[22] As long as this orientation toward the world maintains a balance between purposive and value-rational actions, its status as a unifying locus for humanity's self-understanding and action orientations could remain valid. Other historical forces, however, that are informed by Protestantism's methodical-rational conduct of life, and which no doubt stand in somewhat of a reciprocal relationship to it, threaten to upset this precarious balance by amplifying humanity's increasing entanglement with the purposive-rational. Ironically, in Weber's estimation, the powers set free by the Protestant ethic would lead to the demise of its own religious self-understanding.

Habermas follows Weber's argument that the cognitive potential that accompanied the emergence of modern science and Protestantism's rationalization of worldviews "could not have an overall impact on those traditional societies in which the process of disenchantment took place" without

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[20] Ibid., 173.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, 2 vols., eds. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Berkely, 1978) 26, quoted in Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 173.

the presence of certain other factors. Such an impact awaited "a combination of external factors," marked by "the differentiation of a market regulated economic system and a complementary state apparatus." The rationally driven "transition to modern society calls, of course, for a complex explanation that takes into account the interplay of ideas and interests" and which rejects either "a naive idealism or materialism." Weber "regards ideas and interests as equally primary" to the process of modernization. Modernity is thus necessarily read from both "above" and "below," from above as "the motivational anchoring and embodiment of structures of consciousness," but also from below "as the innovative mastery of conflicts of interest arising from the problems of economic reproduction and the struggle for political power."[23] These two perspectives, of course, cannot remain clearly distinct; modern humanity's "motivational" impetus informs and is informed by its penchant for an "innovative mastery." Such a distinction, however, allows Weber to take a first cut at sorting out the complex circularity that marks the modern relationship between those motivational and ideational causes that can be seen "from above" and those economic and material causes that are recognized "from below." In particular, Weber's focus on the motivational and the ideational can be seen as a starting point for contesting the ideological underpinnings of an ascendant instrumental rationality.

For it is "from above" that Weber, departing from Kant, argues that modern "structures of consciousness" become embodied in "cultural spheres" that in turn steer "the differentiation of societal subsystems or spheres of life." The advance of rationality initiated by the protestant ethic's methodical rational

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[23] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 216.

conduct of life, he argues, had brought about the decomposition of substantive reason - that totality of thought formerly present in religious and metaphysical world views. This decomposition marked the separation of substantive reason into three value spheres: science, morality, and art. Weber maintains that the loss of meaning experienced in modernity accompanies a competition that "arises among the autonomous value spheres" and "which can no longer be settled from the superordinate standpoint of a divine cosmological order."[24] Weber finds the "distillation of every sphere that crops up in the world" leading to "ever harsher incompatibilities and conflicts that are grounded in the inner logic" of those value spheres.[25] These incompatibilities signal "the return of a new polytheism, in which the struggle among the gods takes on the depersonified, objectified form among irreducible forms of value."[26] The totality that is lost by a rationality that splits off from itself is exacerbated by what Weber diagnoses as the inevitable tendency of "some value spheres becoming predominant at the expense of others."[27] The more holistic sense of self, the substance of a more complex practical rationality, begins to atrophy to the point that it is increasingly dominated by its cognitive-instrumental sphere. As a result, any appeal to the moral-practical or aesthetic-expressive spheres and their specific reflective capacities becomes increasingly ineffectual. Such appeals are made even more unlikely by the rift that begins to open up between expert culture and everyday understanding. The rationality specific to each sphere becomes increasingly relegated to that sphere, unable to nourish

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[24] Ibid., 247.

[25] Ibid., 183.

[26] Ibid., 245.

[27] Ibid., 183.

the typical inhabitants of modern culture.

Again, in contrast to an orthodox Marxism that maintains that these spheres are "merely secondary manifestations of economic modes of production," Weber informs Habermas's insistence that these spheres "do not follow economic or system imperatives," but *that they evolve according to their own logic.*[28] As we have intimated, Habermas does not read Weber as naively disregarding the role of capitalist development in the differentiation and institutionalization of cultural modernity. Habermas, in fact, argues that Weber demonstrates the complex interplay of capitalist imperatives and the problems inherited from traditional worldviews worked to organize rationality according to "specific acts of validity" (truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty) "that could then be handled as questions of knowledge, or of justice and morality, or of taste" by professionals expert in each domain.[29]

These professionals, in effect, become the custodians of cultural modernity, continually refining the knowledge claims inherent in their realms of expertise. This refinement, in turn, reveals the structures "of cognitive-instrumental, of moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive rationality" whose lay understanding comes more and more to be mediated through "the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these ways than other people are."[30] Weber, however, recognized in these differentiations the structural imperative from "above" for the growing disenchantment of modernity's social and cultural self-perception. The "meaning" of human life had been radically attenuated by the rise of rationality, for in liberating humanity

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[28] Michael Pusey, *Jügen Habermas.* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1987), 41.

[29] Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project," 9.

[30] Ibid.

from its old dependencies, reason destroyed all the assurances of traditional, religious worldviews.

In the wake of the destruction of these assurances, modern humanity has sought meaning elsewhere. The possibility of human meaning could no longer be relegated to an otherworldly, and thus uncontestable promise of salvation; it instead offered itself in this world as the notion of unbounded and illimitable progress. Of course, in seeking to demonstrate that

> ... from reasoning and from facts, that no bounds
> have been fixed to the improvement of the human
> faculties; that the perfectibility of man is absolutely
> indefinite; that the progress of this perfectibility,
> henceforth above the control of every power that
> would it, has no other limit that the duration of the
> globe upon which nature has placed us,

Condorcet is typical of the effort to transfer what had been a promise of individual salvation to that of a greater humanity, but there can be little doubt that he and other voices of the Enlightenment understood such a transference as reaching to the roots of individual self-understanding.[31] In the worldly paradise that Condorcet envisioned, in fact, even the limit experience of death could be held at bay. With the elimination of criminality, degeneration, misery, and sickness, he foresaw "the day ... when death will be due to only extraordinary accidents. In Habermas's phrase, Condorcet articulated a belief "in eternal life before death."[32] The Enlightenment, in effect, strived to extend the promise of the sciences as a secular alternative to the sense of unity maintained by religious world views.

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[31] Wiser, 247.

[32] Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1., 148.

The scientistic perspective that had come to dominate Enlightened thought, however, precluded this totality. Habermas thus stresses that "Condorcet's expectation that death could be done away with is not simply a curiosity." Rather, this liberation from our mortal limits soon proves illusory; its very imposition highlights that residual that lies beyond the reach of enlightened rationality and which reveals "the value of problem-solving based on science alone" to be "palpably relativized." The quasi-religious faith assigned to reason by the enlightenment begins to implode in its attempts to account for "all problems to which religious and philosophical doctrine previously supplied answers."[33]

Thus the salvationism that had traditionally granted religion its power to motivate various forms of social organization has been transformed by the rise of modern rationality. What eternity might mean for modern humanity is radically different than what it had meant for its premodern counterparts. Modernity's radical departure from the philosophical and religious grounding of traditional culture had signaled a loss of meaning that, in a tradition stretching from Condorcet through Hegel to Marx, can only be attenuated by turning to an "image of history as a uniform process that generates problems," in which "time becomes a scarce resource for the mastery of problems that arise."[34] The "pressure of time" generates an ethos that refuses the complacent passivity oriented beyond this world; it demands instead a creative engagement with a moment that cannot be allowed to pass. Meaning becomes inextricably intertwined with material progress; the "now" can only be "distinguished from

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[33] Ibid., 149

[34] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures.* trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 6.

the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future," positing itself as the "epochal new beginning" that "is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new." Modernity's self-understanding as a break with the past, in other words, demands a *"continuous renewal."*[35]

Perfection ceases to be equated with the prefigured essentialism of the Aristotelian and Scholastic traditions; "it signifies instead a process of improvement that does have a direction but is not teleologically limited in advance."[36] Paradoxically, the temporal limits of the human condition become the drive mechanism of a self-perpetuating, forward-looking optimism that sustains the Enlightenment's promise of an intramundane paradise. Like a shark that must continue to swim lest it sink to the bottom, Enlightened thought remains bound to its own insistence on perpetual motion, maintaining the possibility of "meaning" in its constant refusal to focus on the existential limits of its being. Again, the changing perspective worked out "from above" is inseparable from its implications for what occurs "below": the dynamic logic of "meaning" in modernity is inextricable from the logic of a capitalist ethos that premises itself on the productive potential of a "creative destruction."

The disintegration of practical rationality in its entirety, then, is exacerbated when the cognitive potential unleashed by these "structures of consciousness" is transformed into tools for the "innovative mastery" of economic and political problems. The concrete application of an enlightened reason, far from recapturing the totality of religious and traditional worldviews, had, as the impetus for Protestantism's methodical-rational conduct of life,

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[35] Ibid., 7.

[36] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 146.

given rise to a set of privatistic impulses that reinscribe the logic of a cognitive-instrumental rationality within the moral-practical and aesthetic spheres of rationality. As we shall see, Weber's diagnosis of these pressures, particularly in the hands of Adorno and Horkheimer, leads to the pessimistic conclusion that the critical potential inherent in the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive spheres gives way to a state of affairs where the moral becomes solely a matter of efficiency and the aesthetic merely a matter of "saleability." In any case, as modern structures of consciousness became more clearly articulated, the logic specific to the cognitive-instrumental sphere would make the rise of modern economic and political subsystems possible.

Such subsystems are themselves embodied in the institutional complexes of the capitalist economy and the modern state. Weber explains these complexes as being manifestations of *"the purposive rationality of entrepreneurial activity."*[37] Habermas delineates the functional requirements that Weber draws out of this action orientation:

> (a) purposive-rational action orientations on the part of a labor force that is integrated into a systematically organized production process; (b) an economic environment that is calculable for capitalist business enterprise, that is markets for goods, capital, and labor; (c) a legal system and a state administration that can guarantee this calculability; (d) a state apparatus that provides sanctions for the law and itself institutionalizes purposive-rational action orientations in public administration.[38]

Weber thus finds that the institutional complexes of capitalism and bureaucratic

[37] Ibid., 218.
[38] Ibid., 218-19.

administration are the result of the transformation of structures of consciousness attached to a process that the Enlightenment had celebrated as "the ethical rationalization of worldviews."

For Weber, however, this ethical rationalization works in ways that not only transform the meaning of "meaning," but which also reduce the potential for human freedom. In his analysis, in fact, these two trends - the loss of meaning and the loss of freedom - remain inextricably bound. The "Christian asceticism" that "undertook to remodel the world and work out its ideals in this world," he argues, made possible "the vast and mighty cosmos of the modern economic order" that "determines, with irresistible force, the lifestyles of all the individuals born into" it. "Victorious capitalism, since it rests on mechanical foundations," increasingly shed the religious underpinnings that once supported it; entrapping, atomizing, and isolating humanity in an "iron cage."[39] Or as Nietzsche remarked, "once we possess that common economic management of the earth that will soon be inevitable, mankind will be able to find its best meaning as a machine in the service of this economy - as a tremendous clockwork, composed of ever smaller, ever more subtly adapted gears."[40] Capitalism and the bureaucratic administration that necessarily accompanies it has produced Nietzsche's "last men." The death of God has not emancipated humanity; the meaning he provided has been exchanged for a new set of dependencies and hollow assurances. In the wake of these losses, the horizon of human potential begins to shrink, becoming more and more

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[39] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York, 1958), 180-82, as quoted in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 248.

[40] Friederich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, trans. (New York, 1967), 298, quoted in James Miller,*The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 69.

narrowly defined by the dictates of a cognitive-instrumental rationality. For critics such as Marx, Weber, and Nietzsche, this fuller potential is endangered by the encroachment of the entrepreneurial ethic into all areas of modern life.

It is this aspect of Weber's analysis of the disenchantment of modernity, in fact, that would be employed in the twentieth century thinkers who sought to rework the Marxist tradition and its critique of liberal-capitalist societies in light of experiences that had by, the 1940's, "converged in the disappointment of revolutionary expectations."[41] In the eyes of these critics, Marx's notion that "the productive forces of capitalism" could serve "as an objective presupposition for overcoming it" and by extension, that they formed "the essential subjective preconditions" for proletarian revolt was increasingly untenable.[42] Lukács would transpose Weber's concern with the creeping advance of a disenchanting purposive-instrumental rationality into his concept of a reification that "penetrates to the very depths of man's physical and psychic nature." Lukács, writing in the early 1920's, was able to hold out hope that the proletarian masses were still capable of resisting this reification by arguing that the advance of societal rationalization was ultimately limited by the "formal character of its own rationality." Echoing a Hegelian faith in the synthetic powers of a dialectic movement, he argues that in "virtue of the split between human beings who objectivate themselves as commodities, the situation is one of which they can also become conscious."[43]

While this may have been a plausible defense of Marxist aspirations in the early 20's, the unfolding events of the 30's would convince Horkheimer and

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[41] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 366.

[42] Ibid., 367.

[43] Ibid., 368.

Adorno of the hopelessness of a faith in the proletarian revolt. The experience of the Soviet Union had not been the realization of human freedom and equality, but instead a confirmation of Weber's prediction "of an accelerated bureaucratization" that also validated "Rosa Luxemborg's critique of the Leninist theory of organization." Fascism, on the other hand, revealed the reactionary extremes of which advanced capitalist societies were capable in the face of revolutionary change. In the United States, the empirical evidence suggested that the "integrating powers of capitalism" were not dependent on "open repression"; rather, the workings of mass culture had effectively "bound the consciousness of the broad masses to the imperative of the status quo." It was against this backdrop that Horkheimer and Adorno were forced to account for the empirical evidence "that the subjective nature of the masses was sucked into the whirl of societal rationalization without offering resistance and that it accelerated rather than retarded the process."[44]

Horkheimer and Adorno, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, seek to explain the malleability of the masses by radicalizing "Lukács' theory of reification in socio-psychological terms"[45] and tracing "the process of reification back behind the beginnings of the modern age into the very beginnings of hominization."[46] They would have us return "to the origins of instrumental reason" to that point before reason had distorted the totality, a point at which it might reclaim its professed potential for "discovering the truth." The appeal to rationality in other words, is one of infinite regress that thwarts its enlightened aspirations of "a universal reconciliation, an emancipation of man through the resurrection of

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[44] Ibid., 367-68.
[45] Ibid., 372.
[46] Ibid., 366.

nature."[47]

Habermas recognizes in this gesture the abandonment of a rational approach to the reconstruction of a society fettered by the aporias of a one sided, instrumental-purposive rationality in favor of a dangerous and conceptually limited aestheticism.

The theory of mimesis by which Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to account for the possibility of a "universal reconciliation" is particularly troublesome to Habermas because it offers no mechanism for recognizing its own fallibility. Mimesis and the "negative dialectics" by which it is achieved are caught in a performative contradiction - they must speak of their capacity to critique reason in terms of that reason, a proposition that they have formally rejected:

> Horkheimer and Adorno can only suggest this
> concept of truth; for if they wanted to explicate those
> determinations that, on their view, cannot inhere in
> instrumental reason, they would have to rely on a
> reason that is before reason.[48]

The aesthetic impulse, the desire to broach those affective issues that lie beyond the grasp of an instrumental reason, is not foreign to Habermas's system of thought. He is aware of the necessity of aesthetic reflection. He worries, however, that unless the normative possibilities of modern rationality can be recaptured, there will be no check against the fusion of "meaning," "feeling," and action that continues to be characteristic of mystical acquiesences and that fuels the rhetoric of the most dangerous kinds of demagogic politics.

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[47] Ibid., 382.
[48] Ibid.

Habermas, then, defines his project in opposition to those critics of the Enlightenment "who seem to turn their back on the social hope of liberal societies."[49] He sustains this project on a philosophical level by attacking the insistence of post-Kantian attempts to work out the implications of modernity "from within the bounds of the subject."[50] "The principle" of such a "subjectivity is not powerful enough to regenerate the unifying power of religion in the medium of reason," and as a consequence, it stands impotent against the advances of the cognitive-instrumental sphere.[51] Habermas shares the post-Nietzschean sense that the philosophy of consciousness is exhausted, but he seeks to demonstrate that much of the critique directed against it remains ensnared by its own aporias.[52] For Habermas, the epistemic perspective inherent in a subject-centered philosophy also has problematic implications at the level of social analysis. It is such a perspective that leads Weber, and by extension those twentieth-century Marxists that draw from his insights, to mistakenly characterize the steering media of money and power as the embodiment of a rationality no longer capable of balancing the distinct value spheres within its purview.

Habermas challenges these implications of a philosophy of consciousness in developing his theory of communicative action. In doing so, Habermas argues that Weber's grand pessimism flows from his failure to understand the separation of rationality into different spheres "against the

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[49] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[50] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, 31.

[51] Ibid., 20.

[52] Stephen K. White, *The Recent Works of Jügen Habermas: Reason, Justice, and Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 4.

background of what was structurally possible."[53] In contrast to a Weberian fatalism, Habermas asks "whether the path of rationalization taken in Europe is one among various structurally possible paths."[54] The road not taken, Habermas argues, holds out the possibility of making all the difference. If, in fact, we retrace Weber's steps to that point where rationality separates out into its operative dimensions - into spheres of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive rationality - we might relocate the normative and value-rational potential of post-traditional societies. These "normative and value-rational elements are *not necessarily* destined, as Weber supposed, to vanish altogether or else to remain only in the form of mere conventions enforced *only* through a mixture of sanction and habit."[55] Rather, Habermas argues, such a reading is decidedly one-sided, representing "one view of modernity" that he seeks to put in perspective.[56]

B.   FORMAL PRAGMATICS AND THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

For Habermas, the totalizing critique of reification proffered by Weber, Lukács and Horkheimer and Adorno cannot account for the ascendance of a means-ends rationality because it remains bound to the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. Such a stance, he argues, lacks the conceptual apparatus to account for the systematic productivity necessary for the maintenance of modern society's complex material needs. As is discussed below, he handles

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[53] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*,Vol. 1., 223.

[54] Ibid., 221.

[55] Pusey, 83.

[56] Ibid.

this necessary productivity by assuming the perspective of a functional

rationality. In short, Habermas recognizes that complex action-producing

systems of modernity (such as systems of economic distribution) cannot be

totally modeled on or accounted for by the notion of an intentional

consciousness. At a descriptive level, Habermas recognizes that such a model

cannot account for the unintended consequences of social interaction. In

response to the failures of the orthodox Marxism of Eastern Europe, he argues

that the complexities of supply and demand cannot be adequately handled by a

central command economy.

The normative core of Habermas's project, however, the key that is to

unlock Weber's "iron cage," is to be constituted by recapturing a rationality

capable of some degree of rational guidance. Whereas his functional critique

of orthodox Marxism seeks to demonstrate the ultimate unmanageability of *all*

of our systems by intersubjective forms of social interaction, his turn from a

philosophy of consciousness to the paradigm of intersubjective communication

is a plea for the possibilities of integrating these systems into a broader,

rational, and more democratic context.

The ground for this shift away from a philosophy of consciousness is to

be found in the relationship of the structure of language to its role as the

primary medium for a large variety of social interactions. It is undeniable, he

argues, that the "necessity for coordinated action generates in society a certain

need for communication, which must be met if it is possible to coordinate

actions effectively for the purpose of satisfying needs."[57] Even more strongly,

Habermas proclaims that

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[57] *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 274.

> what raises us out of nature is the only thing whose
> nature we can know: language. Through its
> structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for
> us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the
> intention of universal and unconstrained
> consensus.[58]

These structural characteristics and their promise of "unconstrained consensus" have obvious sociological ramifications. Habermas thus offers the social necessity of communicative action and the structural imperatives of language itself as an alternative to the limits of Weber's subject-centered theory of action.[59]

In Weber's theory of action, "what counts as fundamental is not the interpersonal relation between at least two speaking and acting subjects - a relation that refers back to reaching understanding in language - but the purposive activity of a solitary acting subject."[60] His "monologically conceived model," however, founders in its attempts to account for "social action." This is because his action typology -- consisting of the purposive-rational, the value-rational, affectual and traditional modes -- "rests on a categorization of *nonsocial* actions." The "moral consciousness" that animates the social potential of "post-conventional structures of consciousness" is instead, Habermas argues, "related to the regulation of interpersonal conflicts of action."[61] Habermas's theory of communicative action, in which "the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of

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[58] Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (London, 1972), 314.
[59] Ibid., 279.
[60] Ibid., 280.
[61] Ibid., 281.

success but through acts of reaching understanding,"[62] suggests that one cannot imagine a society organized purely in terms of a subject-centered, strategically oriented rationality. The strategical orientation towards social interaction that would inform such a social structure, in fact, would challenge our common-sense understanding of what it means to be rational.

As Stephen K. White has noted, we intuitively question the rationality of an individual in whom there is "the total absence of any interest in or even understanding of what it means to participate in interaction governed by intersubjectively valid norms." As an example of this irrationality, White points to the anthropologist Colin Turnbull's account of "the radical disintegration of any intersubjective orientation among the Ik, a tribe in northern Uganda." In the face of pressures "beyond their control," any "intersubjective orientation" within their society has "increasingly been displaced by [an] exclusive concern for individual survival." The elderly and children are no longer thought of as dependents to be cared for; they are regarded "simply as competitors for scarce food." In such circumstances, however, the Ik run the risk of an auto-genocide arising from the pervasiveness of a strategic action orientation, creating a social void that "seems in some way to be beyond the bounds of reason as that concept applies to human action."[63]

Habermas maintains, then, a distinction between a debilitating strategic action, as social action oriented solely towards success, and communicative action, as action oriented towards reaching understanding. He maintains and clarifies this distinction by analyzing the "structural properties of processes of

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[62] Ibid., 285-86.
[63] White, 17.

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reaching understanding from which we can derive general pragmatic presuppositions of communicative action" that describe "the pretheoretical knowledge of competent speakers, who can themselves distinguish situations in which they are causally exerting an influence *upon* others from those in which they are coming to an understanding *with* them, and who know when their attempts have failed."[64]

The very structure of speech, Habermas argues, makes such an analysis possible; "reaching understanding," he maintains, "is the inherent telos of human speech." Habermas defends these weighty claims by reconstructing what he calls the "formal pragmatic" rules of language. These rules "establish the criteria" to which "competent actors conform" when they interact communicatively. "The formal-pragmatic approach to meaning theory," Habermas maintains, "begins with the question of *what it means to understand an utterance*." The understanding of a speech act occurs," he continues, "*when we know what it makes it acceptable*."[65]

It is important to note that Habermas does not naively claim that "every linguistically mediated interaction is an example of action oriented to reaching understanding." His argument is much more subtle. There are no doubt cases, he admits, of indirect understanding, in which one subject implies a meaning that is not immediately apparent to an addressee, as well as cases in which the "already habitual communicative practice of everyday life" is used by one subject to manipulate the actions of another. He claims, however, "that the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the *original mode*

[64]Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1., 286.
[65] Ibid., 297.

of language use, upon which indirect understanding ... and the instrumental use of language, in general, are parasitic."[66]

Habermas turns to J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts to work through the logic of this claim. Austin distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary elements of speech acts.[67] Locutionary acts refer to "the content of propositional sentences"; in other words, they "typically proffer statements about an object."[68] In performing the locutionary elements of speech-acts, a speaker makes an "objective reference to something in the external world that is offered for assessment as true or not true."[69]

Illocutionary acts, by contrast, are those in which "the speaker performs an action in saying something."[70] To properly understand the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary components of speech acts is to distinguish "propositional content from the mode of speech acts as analytically different aspects."[71] Illocutionary acts typically establish "the mode of a sentence ... as a statement, promise, command, avowal or the like" by the use "of a performative verb in the first person."[72] The illocutionary mode that is selected frames the locutionary contents of a speech act. To state that "I hereby promise you (command you, confess to you) that p"[73] is the case (or will occur) is to point "to the vast array of tacit warnings, guarantees, admonitions, cautions, recommendations and promises and the like, that are just as much

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[66] Ibid., 288.
[67] Ibid., 288, and White, 28-30.
[68] Pusey, 76.
[69] Ibid., 78.
[70] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 288.
[71] Ibid., 292.
[72] Ibid., 289.
[73] Ibid.

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part of ordinary speech as the propositions offered in the *cognitive use of language*."[74] Truth, in other words, is not the only "validity claim reflected in the formal structures of speech".[75] By considering the illocutionary force of speech, speaker and hearer are oriented "to the establishment of legitimate interpersonal relationships in 'our' intersubjectively shared world of society."[76]

Actors, as we have noted, however, are capable and willing to strategically navigate their way through social circumstances. Actors do not merely offer a series of contestable claims for adjudication; in perlocutionary acts, for example, "the speaker produces an effect upon the hearer," without the actor declaring or admitting "his aims as such."[77] Habermas, however, insists that "the instrumental use of language, in general, ... [is] parasitic" on illocutionary constructions.[78] He argues that strategic actions in general and perlocutionary actions in particular are "necessarily and unavoidably, socially coordinated through the medium of language."[79] Habermas suggests that "we conceive of perlocutions as a special class of strategic interactions in which illocutions are employed as means in teleological contexts of action."[80] Obviously, if "the hearer failed to understand what the speaker was saying, a strategically acting speaker would not be able to bring the hearer, by means of communicative acts, to behave in a desired way."[81] Even though perlocutionary

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[74] Pusey, 77.

[75] Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), quoted in Pusey, 77.

[76] Pusey, 78.

[77] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 289.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 288.

[80] Pusey, 81.

[81] Ibid.

effects have the "peculiarly asymmetrical character of concealed strategic actions," they continue to depend on the fiction of an ideal speech situation intimated by illocutionary speech acts.[82]

Though locutionary acts, as propositional statements about an external world, and illocutionary acts, as those elements of speech that coordinate or bring about specific behaviors in an intersubjective world, are congruent with cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical rationality, Austin's schema does not explicitly thematize how the expressive attitude taken up by actors in relationship to their subjective world reflects rationality's aesthetic-expressive dimension. Habermas turns to this attitude to account for how this relationship is marked by the capacity of an actor to offer a presentation of self that "reveals to a public something to which he has privileged access."[83] Here, expressive speech, as that aspect of language that orients the hearer "to an assessment of" a speaker's "authenticity," is fundamental in securing the intersubjective potential of language.[84] The claims an actor makes about the sincerity or truth of his "inner feelings, needs, and intentions" are those that a hearer can check for consistency or accuracy over time. Because Habermas only counts "as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims, and only illocutionary aims, with their mediating acts of communication,"[85] his appeal to the illocutionary force of speech can only be maintained when "those obligations to prove trustworthy that the speaker takes on with expressive speech acts have direct relevance for

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[82] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 292.

[83] Ibid., 309.

[84] Pusey, 78.

[85] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 291.

the continuation of interaction."[86] Habermas's valorization of the illocutionary force of language is thus limited by its own paradoxical relationship to an aesthetic form of understanding that cannot be merely parasitical. It can be argued, in fact, that the parameters of perlocutionary, aesthetic-expressive forms of speech, far from being dependent on the illocutionary force of language, are themselves a condition of possibility for illocutionary speech. To privilege the logical structure of either sphere as necessarily prior to the possibility of the other is to impose an arbitrary hierarchy on an issue that remains essentially undecidable.

This undecidability is not unimportant. Nonetheless, Habermas's attempts to rigorously separate out the various logics inherent to different modes of speech points towards what he considers "the most comprehensively rational form of communication" possible.[87] These aspects of speech combine in the possibility of the "intersubjective commonality of a communicatively achieved agreement" that "exists at the levels of normative accord, shared propositional knowledge, and mutual trust in subjective sincerity."[88] This series of agreements reflects the structural capacity of language to mediate the distinct validity claims inherent in the different value spheres that Habermas, following Kant and Weber, argues distinguish modern consciousness. Communicatively achieved agreement, in other words, is measured against exactly three validity claims; in coming to an understanding about something with one another and thus making themselves understandable, actors cannot avoid embedding their speech acts in precisely three world-relations and making validity claims for

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[86] Ibid., 303

[87] Pusey, 80.

[88] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 308.

them under these aspects. Someone who rejects a comprehensible speech act is taking issue with at least one of these validity claims.[89]

The formal separation of reason into the spheres of the cognitive-instrumental, the moral-practical, and the aesthetic-expressive is revealed, Habermas argues, by these structures of language. The validity claims inherent to each sphere and their relationship to their respective "worlds" clarifies the ways in which rationality is correlated with a form of argumentation that "is governed by formal conditions of procedural justice." Habermas calls these conditions "the ideal speech situation." As an idealized form of discourse, implicit in the illocutionary force of language, the ideal speech situation operates as an imagined discursive space "in which validity claims can be hypothetically criticized independently of everyday pressure to succeed, so that interlocutors can recognize one another as sincere and rationally accountable." This discursive space is structured by "the unavoidable presuppositions of an argumentative practice that can only be pursued in common with others."[90] That argumentative practice makes possible a considered, public debate of the justification of any given normative practice. Habermas, of course, does not expect language to constantly function in these terms, but the ideal speech situation points to the critical potential contained in the rational structures of language. It serves as the stage from which reason draws its critical power; it functions as a perpetually self-critical mechanism that challenges reason's tendencies towards reification, power, and domination.

Habermas, however, remains concerned as to whether his approach can

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Habermas, *Justification and Application* , trans. by Ciaren Cronin (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1993),1.

be developed into a "useful sociological theory of action."[91] Communicative

action, he insists, should not be reduced to "the purely linguistic analysis of

speech-acts at the surface of social interaction."[92] Language coordinates

actions through speech-acts; it "does *not co-incide with them.*"[93] What

Habermas wants to point out is that communicative action works to promote our

conscious participation in the *"communicative reproduction of society.*"[94] It is "in

coming to an understanding with one another about their situation" that

"participants in interaction stand in a cultural tradition that they at once use and

renew."[95]

Communicative action, Habermas points out, "always takes place within

a lifeworld" that forms the "prereflective" web "of taken-for-granted background

assumptions and naively mastered skills."[96] The lifeworld is always "at the

backs"[97] of actors "as the horizon within which communicative actions are

'always already' moving."[98] Paradoxically, the lifeworld "to which participants in

communicative action belong is always present, but only in such a way that it

forms the background for an actual scene." As soon as a situation becomes

relevant to actors, "it loses its triviality and unquestioned solidity" as part of the

lifeworld. Conversely, only "the limited segments of the lifeworld brought into

the horizon of a situation constitute a thematizable context of action oriented to

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[91] Ibid., 328.

[92] Pusey,82.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2,137.

[96] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 335.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 119.

understanding."[99]

Pure communicative action, then, would ideally serve as the mechanism for a selective reproduction of society. On the one hand, it fosters a "process of reproduction" that "connects up new situations with the existing conditions of the lifeworld," maintaining "processes of social integration and of socialization" within cultural spheres and social spaces and across generations.[100] This capacity to selectively reproduce traditional understandings grants a certain solidity to the meta-processes of communicative action. For here, it is the lifeworld that functions as a "conservative counterweight to the risk of disagreement that arises with every actual process of reaching understanding," storing "the interpretive work of preceding generations."[101] The transformative power of communicative action is muted by both the breadth and weight of the taken-for-granted background assumptions of the lifeworld and by its own tendencies to affirm and reproduce the cultural social circumstances that it encounters.

On the other hand, communicative action opens up the possibility for changes in the cultural self-understanding that informs those background knowledges covered by the concept of the lifeworld. As cultural knowledge is made explicit in specific "situation definitions," it is "exposed to a test"[102] that demands that actors take "yes/no positions' on any proposed continuity or solidarity as a set of "criticizable validity claims."[103] The advancing

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[99] Ibid., 124.

[100] Ibid., 137.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 139.

[103] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 70.

rationalization of Western societies marks the cognitive capacities of modern humanity to decenter their egocentric understanding of the world. The more the world-views become decentered,

> the less the need for understanding is covered in advance by an interpreted lifeworld immune from critique, and the more this need has to be met by the interpretive accomplishments of the participants themselves, that is, by way of risky (because rationally motivated) agreement.[104]

Our capacity for discourse prevents our attempts to negotiate social understandings and collective action from merely reiterating the status quo of the lifeworld in which those negotiations arise. To underthematize this capacity in Habermas's work is to distort one of its fundamental critical insights: the essentially open-ended nature of a discursive, democratically negotiated form of governance. Nonetheless, it might be worth challenging the ways in which Habermas's focus on an action oriented consensus might threaten our ability to maintain a discursive distance in our democratic negotiations. It is precisely at the level of Habermasian "discourse" that reading Foucault and Nietzsche back against Habermas can help us more clearly focus our attention on the ways in which challenges to a lifeworld's status quo can be initiated and sustained within the framework of a minimally outlined politics of action.

At this point, it is enough to say that Habermas develops the descriptive elements of his critical theory in a way that implies a less radical approach to the creation of a more rational society. The potential for a discourse that openly contests a problematic segment of the lifeworld, particularly when that discourse is situated within the legal framework of contemporary legal

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[104] Ibid.

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democracies, seems more likely to produce piecemeal reform than any type of sweeping structural change. Habermas seems to move critical theory away from the revolutionary pretensions of an orthodox Marxism in favor of a more reformist evolution. To do otherwise, of course, would seem to fall prey to the totalization of society that he has worked to escape while failing to tap the intersubjective potential inherent in rationality's critical capacities.

C. HABERMAS ON SUBJECTIVITY, AUTONOMY AND INDIVIDUALITY

Such a reformist impulse, however, opens up the questions of how one might evaluate the individuality and autonomy of actors partaking in communicative action, and, by extension, their capacity and willingness to participate in a more fully pluralist politics. Habermas's sketch of their socialization as communicative participants in the historical and cultural continuum of the lifeworld seems to paint a process of individuation that reinforces the status quo of that continuum. Such a charge, of course, would have dire consequences for the emancipatory claims made under the banner of a theory of communicative action. If the learning processes of actors are themselves bound up in the consensual mechanisms of communicative action, it is a plausible concern that the ethical discourse in which these actors participate might tend to obscure challenges to those lifeworld structures always at the backs of participants. Communicative action, it might be argued, could not sustain its claim to ground the universalizing aspects of morality in the structural properties of speech and the procedural rules that it derives from them. Rather,

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it would necessarily have to turn its attention to the "attitudes and attributes the subjects - for their part - have to be able to bring to a discussion for it truly to be regarded as a moral discourse."[105] Attention to these attitudes would thematize the formation of subjectivities in society and engender an engaged response to such formations. Or to use Habermas's own language, his theory of communicative action would be obligated to further flesh out the relationship of the aesthetic-expressive dimension of speech to the overall coherence of communicative action. Bereft of this attention, communicative action would risk being guilty of a series of ironic complicities: rather than securing individuality and autonomy, it might foster homogenization; rather than promote solidarity, it might encourage a lack of empathy for the "other;" and rather than pulling aside the mask of power, it might leave unchallenged the unexamined assumptions that undergird entrenched power formations.

In order to evaluate the merit of these charges, we might look in further detail at Habermas's reconstruction of George Herbert Mead's analysis of how the dual processes of individuation and socialization occur within the parameters of inetersubjective communication. Habermas turns to Mead to suggest that both communicative understanding and one's self-awareness as a unique subject are dependent on one's ability to imagine themselves in the role of a communication partner. Mead claims that, in opposition to Kant's subject-centered point of departure, "original self-consciousness is not a phenomenon inherent in the subject but one that is communicatively generated."[106]

Habermas traces the interrelationship of our self-awareness and

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[105] Axel Honneth, "The Other of Justice", in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, edited by Stephen K. White (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 301.

[106] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 177.

intersubjectivity to Fichte's metaphor of "self-positing," which claims that one becomes aware of one's freedom in the conscious recognition of the demands made by others. In positing oneself in the position of the other, one can glimpse the expectations of autonomy and free will that are typically associated with individuality.[107] Fichte's formulation, however, remains caught in "the circle inherent in every philosophy of consciousness:" By separating itself from itself in order to assure itself of itself, "the knowing subject unavoidably makes itself into an object, and it thereby falls short of itself as the antecedent source of all accomplishments of consciousness, a source that precedes all objectivication and is absolutely subjective."[108] The necessity of an (at least fictive) audience, cannot, in and of itself, break free from the problems generated by Kant's formulation of an antecedent subjectivity. Habermas points out that Fichte's circular logic, whose legacy has been revisited by Husserl and Sartre in this century, always devalues the individuality that it claims to isolate in favor of its metaphysical point of origin. Individuality, derived against the backdrop of an originary subjectivity, can never be more than the "accidental" separation from what amounts to a "universal egohood."[109]

Mead, too, relies on the notion of an "alter's" relation to "ego" in order to explain consciousness and its relevance to individuality. Mead, however, emphasizes the necessary temporal element that accompanies an "alter's" consideration of an "ego." The "I," which for Kant represented an originary subjectivity, is for Mead, a "shadow" that can be "given to me only in memory." The "I" can never be the origin of purely spontaneous action; it is a historical

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[107] Ibid., 160.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 161.

fiction. Furthermore, as we shall see, what is important for Mead is that the relationship between the "I" and the "me" that retrospectively recognizes it cannot be limited to the attitude of a third person seeking epistemic clarity; self-awareness is also generated by the performative attitude of an "I" in a "conversation" with its "me."[110]

Without considering this performative orientation, the addition of a temporal element cannot, of course, break the circle of the philosophy of consciousness. It can, however, focus our attention on the socio/political dangers of the form that it gives to individuality. It is along these lines that Mead recognizes that the "me" that secures our recognition of an individual "I" ... "proves to be a conservative force." This "'me' is the bearer of a moral consciousness that adheres to the conventions and practices of a specific group." In particular, a conventional morality individuates in terms of the "roles" ascribed by traditional society. An individuation secured on these terms, however, does not square with our commonly held notions of individuality; it in fact tends to drive "everything that spontaneously deviates out of the individual's consciousness" in favor of an agency that "mirrors the forms of life and the institutions that are practiced and recognized in a particular society."[111]

But whereas traditional societies could remain relatively indifferent to the communicative challenges to its static hierarchies, the increasing complexity of the modern world demands a greater flexibility. Both modern individuality and the transition to a post-conventional morality is made possible, according to Mead, by the performative attitude characteristic of communicative action;

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[110] Ibid., 177.
[111] Ibid., 180.

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individuated agency arises through the process of intersubjective communication in response to those problems that demand social action. Accordingly, Mead notes that it is only by examining the relationships between problem solving organisms that we can account for how "habitualized behavioral expectations might be problematicized by the unpredictable reactions of the opposing side" and how this process might be rationalized to one's advantage.[112]

Problematizing these expectations, however, not only broadens the ability of a society to handle the increasingly complex demands of social action; it also breaks up the unquestioned authority of a traditionally sanctioned moral code that could be assumed to cover in advance the totality of any particular ethical choice. Mead notes that as the "concrete forms of life and institutions of a particular collective" that had provided the material for "conventional identity formation" disintegrate "under the pressure of societal differentiation ... the moral" (in which a code of conduct covers in advance the possible responses to a given circumstance) "and ethical dimensions" (in which specific encounters must be negotiated in terms that escape the purview of an unalterable code) "become separated form each other." Increasingly, the process of individuation demands "both *autonomy* and *the conscious conduct of life*": escaping the rigid, "socially enforced" roles ascribed by traditional societies means that the individual is now burdened with "moral decisions of his own and, ... with an individual life project arising from the processes of ethical self-understanding."[113]

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[112] Ibid., 175.
[113] Ibid., 183.

This escape, however, cannot be total: "the self from which these independent achievements are expected" remains "socially constituted," unable "to step outside of society altogether and settle down in a space of abstract isolation and freedom."[114] Again, it is the structural demands of intersubjective communication that directs individual appeals *"in the same direction* in which the civilization is already pointed."[115] As Mead notes, "one appeals to others on the assumption that there is a group of organized others that answer to one's own appeal - even if the appeal be made to posterity."[116]

The assumed forum of "organized others" in turn establishes "a universe of discourse" that paves the "transition to a post-conventional morality." In such a universe, actors "place themselves outside the community order as it exists" opening up that "idealized form of communication" that would "preserve a moment of unconditionality for the discursive procedure of will formation."[117] According to this formulation, what Habermas calls the ideal speech situation, as the forum in which specific validity claims are voiced, contested and defended, creates the space for *"the differentiation of unique identities.""* For all "individuated being," the "moment of idealization" remains dependent on one's assumptions about "the perspective of others." In particular, it depends on an idealized audiences' "recognition of my claim to uniqueness and irreplaceability." Such an audience responds "to the guarantee that I consciously give, in light of a considered life project, for the continuation of my life history." It is that idealized space, "in which everyone can take up the

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[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society*,168, in Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 183.
[117] Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, 184.

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perspective of everyone else and can count on recognition by everybody," that allows "for individuated beings to exist within community - individualism as the flip side of universalism." The ideal speech situation is revealed as the ground for regarding my life history "as if it were the product of decisions for which I am responsible."[118]

Needless to say, "the strong interpretation of universalization" that undergirds any attempt to bind individual recognition with the normative argumentation of moral discourse can be undone by the refusal of actors to be bound by the rules of that post-conventional argumentation.[119] Such a refusal, of course, implies "that such agents reject at least some value orientations," and that, by extension, to the degree that communicative action can claim to offer a counterfactual normative ideal, the illusion of its structural inviolability is diminished.[120] Habermas is nonetheless convinced that the core of his communicative paradigm can be protected against large numbers of potential participants opting out. In particular, he hopes to strengthen his argument that reciprocity is an ineluctable prerequisite for self-understanding and self-formation by reconstructing Lawrence Kohlberg's "claims about stages of moral judgment" in the maturation process of individual humans. In particular, he seeks to fuse Kohlberg's claims about moral development with the perspective of reciprocity inherent in communicative action. Thus, in moving from the preconventional level of stage one, in which "there exists only incomplete reciprocity between actors ... based typically on fear of punishment or desire for gratification on the part of the child" to a postconventional level at stage six, in

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[118] Ibid., 186.

[119] White, *The Recent Works of Jügen Habermas*, 57.

[120] Ibid, 58.

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which the complete reciprocity necessary for Habermas's ideal speech situation is accomplished, Kohlberg's sketch of an individual's development can serve Habermas as *the naturalistic kernel of moral consciousness.*[121]

Kohlberg's schema supports Mead's philosophical speculation about the necessary relationship between individuality and the structure of intersubjective communication by arguing "that the viewpoint of reciprocity arises naturally, as the maturing individual learns to take part in increasingly complex forms of interaction." Individuation occurs within the matrix of expectations that makes communicative action possible, which in turn assures the social forum against which individuality must necessarily define itself.[122] Envisioning individuation in these terms supports Habermas's contention that mature individuals can be expected to participate in the discursive construction of norms. Such participation, he argues, can work to resist the conservative forces inherent in both traditional and modern societies; more precisely, rationality, as the idealized context in which individuals learn, retains its power to liberate the individual from specific limits endemic to its lifeworld context while at the same time it offers a structural alternative to the systemizing effects of a means-ends rationality. Habermas's use of the complementary concepts of the lifeworld and communicative action allows him, then, to reevaluate the "reification" of modern society explored by Lukács, Adorno, and Horkheimer in the wake of Weber's analysis of its "disenchantment." Purposive action oriented towards success has not, in post-conventional societies, usurped the full breadth of rational potential. Rather, it has been channeled into specific

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[121] Ibid., 62.
[122] Ibid.

subsystems, or what he calls steering media. These media - money (in the forms of capitalist structures and imperatives) and power (in the form of expanding bureaucracies) in particular - develop an inner logic that remain resistant to communicative challenge. While power, as well as entertainment and information cultures, remains somewhat dependent on communicative structures, money, by definition, is a delinguistified media - it is totally decoupled from the linguistic structures that embed communicative action in the lifeworld. Habermas recognizes the productive nature of such a decoupling: "the far-reaching uncoupling of system and lifeworld was a necessary condition for the transition from the stratified class societies of European feudalism to the economic class societies of the early modern period." Societal steering media are inextricably linked to the complex functional requirements of modern societies; they in large part provide for the material reproduction, administrative efficiency and political stability that in any case would overrun the capacities of focused, directed, rational consideration. Such decouplings, nonetheless, reflects "the capitalist pattern of modernization" that is marked by "a deformation, a reification of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld." The imperatives of these systems threaten to invade and colonize all aspects of modern life, creating the iron cage of a modern capitalist society of which Weber despaired.[123]

In collapsing the distinct concepts of system rationality and action rationality, however, the analysis of reification carried on from Weber to Adorno remains mired in the subject-centered predispositions of Western thought, mistakenly suggesting "that the rationality of knowing and acting subjects is

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[123]Habermas,*The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, 283.

systematically expanded into a purposive rationality of a higher order." "The concept of instrumental reason," as "a totalized purposive rationality," is incapable of "adequately separating the rationalization of action orientations within the framework of a structurally differentiated social systems."[124]

Habermas argues that the totalizing critique "of a means-ends rationality that has been demonized as instrumental reason" cannot articulate a response to the advance of that reason except in the "irrational power" of a dangerous aestheticism.[125] At best, an infatuation with "the mimetic power of art and love," he argues, signals a withdrawal from the politics that would resist colonization.[126] Echoing Weber, he maintains that the refusal of the "utilitarian life-style of 'specialists without spirit,'" degenerates in an equally extreme and unbalanced "aesthetic-hedonistic life-style of 'sensualists without heart.'"[127]

Such sensualism is not, to Habermas's mind, a stable basis for resisting the colonization of the lifeworld. In the world of practical politics, such resistances can be too easily marginalized as the mere "impotent rage" of a Bohemian revolt.[128] Where the counterculture of the sixties, for example, imagined that it was laying the foundations for a new diversity of political alternatives, conservative forces have found an inviting target that allows for the confirmation of conservative political identity. "Liberals" are conflated with "hippies," or with the entertainment industry, and dismissed as being irresponsible, dangerous and/or irrelevant. A Newt Gingrich's rhetoric about

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[124] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 333.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid., 333.
[127] Ibid., 323.
[128] Ibid.

"the excesses of the sixties" or a Bob Dole's indictment of Warner Brothers are but two examples of such opportunistic backlash.

Furthermore, and not unimportantly, such a withdrawal often binds one's "private conduct of life" all the more tightly to a consumerist attitude driven by the logic of the market.[129] The affective orientation in which one pursues the "meaning" of one's life to easily becomes the target of an endlessly repetitive commercialization. Rather than serving as a site of resistance, an aesthetic orientation seems just as likely to lead to the acquiescent thrall of late capitalism's consumerist economies.

At worst, the call for a "spontaneity ... not yet in the grips of the reifying force of systematic rationalization" becomes manifest in "the charismatic power of the leader," in the mesmerizing appeal of a demagoguery that seeks to escape rational contestation. The emotional void at the center of modern life can be exploited in ways that appeal to the call for "meaning," that move beyond the utilitarian promise of the "greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people." As George Orwell noted in his review of *Mein Kampf,* Hitler could thrive, despite imposing "intolerable burdens on" the German people, because of the psychological acuteness of fascism: "Whereas Socialism and even capitalism, in a more grudging way, have said to people 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them 'I offer you struggle, danger and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet."[130]

For Habermas, the aesthetic alternatives to reason's complicity in the reification of modern society, presented in different guises, by Adorno, by

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[129] Ibid., 323.

[130] George Orwell, Review: *Mein Kampf* by Adolf Hitler, from *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell,* in *Writers on World War II*, 42.

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Nietzsche, and most recently by Foucault, do not offer a viable vision of a more just or more free society. Such alternatives can only operate, he argues, in ways that either threaten to slide back towards the status quo that they seek to oppose or towards even more disastrous social and political consequences. His analysis of a modern, aesthetically driven philosophy of consciousness points to the dangers of a "meaning" that refuses to be held accountable by the self-correcting mechanisms of an intersubjective reason. In breaking the bonds of such a reason, he warns, we run the risk of validating demagogic appeals to a mystical notion of a higher "truth."

Against the evidence of the colonizing encroachment of the cognitive instrumental sphere into all areas of modern life, Habermas works at an historical juncture when the optimism of the Enlightenment has been shattered. He recognizes that the cognitive potentials that find their voice in the distinct spheres of science, morality, and art, as the province of specialist, have lost their capacity to inform "the hermeneutics of everyday communication."[131] Furthermore, he realizes that the "concentration on one aspect of validity alone," as the very possibility of specialized knowledge, severs the interrelationships between "cognitive meanings, moral expectations, subjective expressions and evaluations" that are necessary for "everyday communication." "Communicative processes," he argues, "need a cultural tradition covering all spheres."[132]

He hopes, however, that the processes of reaching understanding anchored by the ideal speech situation can both reintegrate the expectations

[131] Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project," 9.
[132] Ibid.

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inherent to each value sphere in a "rational interconnectedness via the transfer of validity that is possible in the performative attitude" and rejoin the breach between expert and everyday culture.[133] The clarity gained by carefully working out the world relations and the validity claims specific to each value sphere, he suggests, points beyond the limitations and excesses that are associated with a philosophy of consciousness to a more artfully balanced awareness of our cognitive, subjective, and political/social selves.

D. HABERMAS ON THE ROLE OF THE AESTHETIC-EXPRESSIVE IN THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Having explored the positive core of Habermas's theory of communicative action, we are now in a position to work back against its limitations and dangers by examining some of the difficulties that it encounters when it seeks to integrate the aesthetic-expressive with the moral-practical and the cognitive-instrumental. The aesthetic-expressive sphere, particularly in its relationship to the political and the moral-practical, remains the most problematic category of Habermas's thought. Though Habermas has strong reservations about those aesthetic approaches that he feels break totally with the rational tradition, he still recognizes that the aesthetic-expressive sphere remains an indispensable component of rationality's full potential.   Habermas, as we have seen, must resort to the expressive attitude in securing the space for communicative action's ideal speech situation: the attitude taken up by actors in relationship to a subjective world ensures, across time, the authenticity of a speaker's intentions. The normative potential of communicative action thus remains

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[133] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2,327.

inextricably bound up with its aesthetic-expressive dimension.

The fit between an aesthetic-expressive orientation and the normative architecture of a theory of communicative action, however, is not seamless. This is not surprising; the tension between a moral orientation and an aesthetic one is not a problem that is particular to Habermas. Undoubtedly, morality's dependence on the truth of its underlying assumptions as its own regulative ideal finds it squarely in opposition to an orientation allied with "art, in which precisely the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience."[134] Furthermore, the validity claims offered in the context of the aesthetic-expressive sphere are not amenable to the consensus that Habermas imagines undergirds the structure of claims made on behalf of the moral-practical and cognitive-instrumental spheres. The aesthetic mode of evaluation more typically must consider claims as alternatives that should be allowed to coexist rather than contesting elements in an argumentative sequence that points to the necessity of a consensual synthesis.

How might these contradictory impulses be handled by a discursive ethics derived from a theory of communicative action? Habermas, to this date, has not offered a systematic account of the aesthetic dimension. He does, however, recognize that the aesthetic expressive sphere can work in ways that would challenge the self-assurances that serve to sustain the cultural consciousness of modern societies.

Habermas looks at the implications of "the process by which the aesthetic dimension," as art, has evolved into "an autonomous cultural sphere

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[134] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books,1989), 155. Cf. *Alexander Nehemas, Life as Literature* ,136-37.

in the modern world."[135] In this sense, the aesthetic-expressive sphere is the space in which claims of existential aspiration, singularity, and authenticity are professed, compared, defended, and made available to a critical public. This space reengages communicative action with the radical contingency of an individual speaker's "passionate self-consuming participation in the reality of the historical moment"[136] and exposes communicative action's intersubjectively negotiated constructions and frameworks "to what is pre-rational or what is left out or unassimilated."[137] As such, the space opened up by the aesthetic-expressive sphere, as it is manifested in art and art criticism, can remind the individual that his or her consensual achievements are inevitably ironic, that the structures within which this subject moves are *always constraining* in potentially serious ways, even when they appear on balance to be the *most enabling one's available.*"[138] Such a position, in fact, would ally Habermas's appreciation of the aesthetic sphere with many of the ideas that we will take up in discussing Nietzsche and Foucault's conceptualization of the aesthetic self, suggesting that one approach does not preclude the other.

By extension, Habermas has felt it necessary to address a range of thought that would connect the aesthetic with the ethical, "reflective self." On one hand, this impulse finds expression in the concerns of neo-Aristotelean and communitarian thinkers, ranging from Alisdaire MacIntyre to Charles Taylor, who argue that notions of the good and the existentially authentic

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[135] White, *The Recent Work of Jügen Habermas*, 148.

[136] Habermas, "Taking Aim at The Heart of the Present," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Hoy, ed., 103.

[137] White, 149-50.

[138] Ibid.

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remain essential to a society's moral sensibilities. Habermas, himself, is not

insensitive to these concerns. When questioned about discourse ethics'

"exclusive focus on justice," however, he insists that we have little choice but to

"concentrate on those questions that are amenable to impartial judgment." He

is quick to point out that this does

> not mean that questions of justice are the only
> relevant questions. Usually ethical-existential
> questions are of far more pressing concern for us -
> problems, that is, that force us, the individual or
> group to clarify who they are and who they would like
> to be.[139]

Nonetheless, Habermas recognizes that a theory of communicative action's

consensual mechanisms cannot produce "a generally binding answer when we

ask what is good for me or for us or for them." Ethical-existential questions, and

the aesthetic mode of expression with which they are bound, "may well be of a

greater concern for us than questions of justice. But only the latter are so

structured that they can be resolved equitably in the interest of all."[140]

It is within the context of this distinction that Habermas moves to ease the

tension that exists between the ethical-existential-aesthetic and the moral by

simply redefining it in a way that distracts attention from the most difficult

aspects of the problem. Habermas imagines that maintaining the distinction

between "moral questions" and "evaluative questions" is commensurate with a

society in which "socialized individuals would enjoy not only autonomy and a

high degree of participation but also relatively broad scope for self-realization,

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[139] Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 151.
[140] Ibid.

that is, for the conscious projection and pursuit of individual life plans."[141]

At this point, Habermas's argument is not far removed from the liberal tradition: questions of identity remain subordinate to the formal structures that would legislate their interaction. Habermas can make room for a plurality of "viewpoints and interest structures and differences in individual self-understandings and worldviews" within communicative action's moral point of view by maintaining a distinction between "justification" and "application."[142] "Analytically," he argues, "' the right thing to do in the given circumstances cannot be decided by a single act of justification - or within the boundaries of a single kind of argumentation - but calls for a two-stage process of argument consisting of justification followed by an application of norms."[143]

The justificatory impulse inherent in Habermas's ideal speech situation, as we have seen, "compels ... participants to *transcend* the social and historical context of their particular form of life and particular community and adopt the perspective of *all* those possibly affected." This "principle of universalization ... is solely that of justifying generalized behavioral expectations or modes of action, that is, of justifying the norms that underlie a general practice."[144] But such a justificatory process, if it is to sustain the moral point of view's "ideal of impartiality," must necessarily "take into account a norm's rational acceptance among all those possibly affected with reference to all situations of application *appropriate* to it."[145] Habermas argues that we cannot expect justificatory

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[141] Ibid., 153.
[142] Ibid., 58.
[143] Ibid., 36.
[144] Ibid., 24.
[145] Ibid., 36.

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discourse, in and of itself, to meet this dual demand. Such a moment of unqualified discursive moral clarity could only occur if participants in argumentation "had unlimited time at their disposal or were privy to complete knowledge that enabled them to predict reliably all situations that possibly could arise."[146] Norms, rather, must remain responsive to "particular constellations of unforeseeable situations of application." The idea of impartiality, moving beyond the limits of justificatory discourse, requires the "further discursive step" to "the changed perspective of a discourse of application" that can account for the appropriateness of a norm in a world of constantly changing contexts.[147]

Such a view, then, squares with a discourse ethics that could claim an "intermediate position between a liberal, "deontological understanding of freedom, morality and the law" and the communitarian, "intersubjective understanding of individuation as a product of socialization."[148] Habermas's schema, in fact, promotes a general theoretical framework for a formalized, minimal approach to politics that settles down in the heart of the liberal/communitarian impasse. This intermediate position, however, is far from unproblematic. To begin with, the liberal promise of freedom has been alternatively hollowed out and trivialized as a commodity form that is perpetually resold to the masses; under a liberal capitalist regime, one's "right" to become who he or she is has typically been reduced to the socially enforced necessity to participate in the latest display of bougeoise conformity. By Habermas's own accounting, liberal-capitalism has in practice shown a

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[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., 37.
[148] Ibid., 91.

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remarkable tendency to overwhelm the traditional social contexts of the lifeworld that forms the basis of the communitarian impulse. The momentum generated by Habermas's "justification," in other words, may work to render the moment of "application" irrelevant.

Furthermore, one wonders whether the homogenizing force of a liberal-capitalist neutrality can be adequately opposed by a communitarian ethic that is itself invested in notions of a transparent conformity. In attempting to overcome the distance between liberal notions of a consensual morality and the specific social contexts in which ethical encounters necessarily occur, Habermas's occupation of the middle ground between liberalism and communitarianism points to the ways in which these strains of thought tend to mutually reinforce one another. It is just such a circularity, in fact, that "justifies" the apparent contradictions of the modern conservative movement. The bounds of tradition are invoked as the moral/ethical framework in which market economies operate; those market economies in turn dictate the norms of those traditions. Habermas's account of Weber's protestant ethic, in fact, has told us as much.

It is at this point that an engagement with the Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition can assist, though not without significant modifications, Habermas's attempts to account for the concrete application of his discourse ethics without reinscribing that ethics within the dictates of a given community's normative standards. In reorienting our focus on the aesthetic-expressive sphere to the level of individual self-formation, Foucault, working through and pointing beyond Nietzsche, allows one to challenge the untenable abstractions of liberalism and the inescapable bounds of communitarianism. The

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Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition dismisses the idea of a subject "oriented ...

around making the body and its needs the object of *knowledge or judicial*

regulation " in favor of a self as "the object of aesthetic self-formation."[149] The

Nietzschean/Foucauldian philosophical project offers itself as an ongoing

attempt to uncover the ways in which individual subjectivities arise within the

tension between the moral-practical, on the one hand, and the existential, the

aesthetic, and the ethical, on the other.

In order to make some sense of how this tradition handles this tension, in

the next chapter we will examine how Nietzsche and Foucault problematize the

received notions of subjectivity that have dominated the Western philosophical

tradition. Nietzsche's "will to power" and Foucault's subsequent work on

"subjectivization" offers an epistemic alternative to the unified perspective that

continues to support Habermas's notion of a "decentered" subjectivity. That

alternative thematizes the ongoing necessity of self-formation that always

confronts actors engaged in communicative processes. As such, it is an

alternative that challenges the assumed symmetry and neutrality that remains

submerged in Habermas's account of ideal speech and its discursive potential.

By complicating Habermas's understanding of individuation and socialization,

the Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition can both illuminate the limits of a

consensual ideal and suggest ways of sustaining its potential for a more

complete democratic governance. We can best sustain that potential, it is

argued, by cultivating an ethos that challenges the received imposition of the

limits that define our sense of self. Such an ethos would inform a sense of

agency critical of the limits in which one always already finds oneself and which

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[149] White, *The Recent Works of Jürgen Habermas*, 146.

would go some way in overcoming the ways in which these limits deform the potential for democratic politics. In order to draw out the contours of this ethos, we will move to consider how George Bataille's notion of a "general economy" suggests the ineluctability of our contestation of these limits. Though his notion of transgression tends to obscure the demands of responsible social action, it informs Foucault's more carefully considered work on a transgressive attitude that would work *at* the limits of our self-understanding, exposing those limits to an ongoing contestation. In Foucault, the "permanent reactivation of an attitude" can be linked up with the life-affirming asceticism suggested by Nietzsche's fascination with "becoming who you are." It is in the dynamic of this linking that the affirmative possibilities of a Nietzschean/Foucauldian ethic begin to emerge.

CHAPTER THREE: FROM NIETZSCHE TO FOUCAULT: THE FORMATION OF THE SELF

A. FROM HABERMAS TO FOUCAULT: THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

The possibilities and limits of the knowing subject, particularly as it is formulated by Kant, remain a central focus of the paradoxical tension between Habermas and Foucault. Both thinkers are wary of the Kantian contention that the human subject functions as the originary source of cognition. As we have seen, Habermas would reconceptualize the formation of individual identity within Mead's communicatively oriented analysis of social roles. Foucault, likewise, has argued, in *The Order of Things,* that Kantian subjectivity reveals an essential aporia of modernity's "form of knowledge." Foucault recognizes that in Kant "this aporia" is transformed "into a structural principle of his epistemology" that reinterprets "the limitations of the finite faculty of cognition as transcendental conditions of a knowledge that progresses on into infinity."[150] Man comes to recognize himself, in the wake of Kant, as a transcendent-empirico doublet - as both a finite object that can be known in the context of its specific and contingent contexts, and as that which knows from the superordinate perspective of an infinite subject capable of giving order to a multitude of human phenomena.

Foucault's response to Kant also thematizes the suspicion of enlightened reason's complicity in the two trends of which Weber speaks, "the loss of freedom" and the "loss of meaning." Foucault, in the tradition of Nietzsche, Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer, suggests that knowledge, far from solely opening up the possibilities of human freedom and securing a sense of meaning in a world bereft of transcendental assurances, is itself implicated in

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[150] Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," 153.

forms of power and domination; the advance of a cognitive-instrumental rationality can only make good on its progressive aspirations by mastering and controlling a world that it posits as an objective reality. As "the subject" reaches "the limits of its structure," it can only respond with a logic that demands ever increasing amounts of knowledge. This demand can only be met by an increasing desire to master the contingencies of experience; knowledge and power are thus connected in an ever expanding spiral that overruns and occupies the normative-practical and aesthetic-expressive range of human possibilities.[151] The freedom from a self-incurred tutelage promised by the Enlightenment is replaced by a growing dependency on the technological mastery of an objectivated external field of enquiry, the promise of meaning lost in the Sisyphean task of its pursuit.

As we have seen, a similar analysis moves Habermas to shift both his analytic and prescriptive commentary away from the paradigm of a philosophy of consciousness toward a paradigm of communicative action. Habermas hopes that this shift will avoid the snare that repeatedly entraps Western thought: the preoccupation with a monological subject acting on and reacting to an external world. Such a shift, of course, does not efface the knowing subject, but rather decenters it. The theory of communicative action remains dependent on an autonomous, responsible subject, capable of the intersubjective competence necessary for the coordination of action and the defense of validity claims.

The implications of a communicative action's decentered subjectivity, however, immediately raise the suspicions of those, such as Foucault,

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[151] Ibid.

sympathetic to the Nietzschean tradition. On the one hand, those working within this tradition suggest that Habermas's notion of communicative action, despite its claims to the contrary, remains too closely bound to a traditional subjectivity. According to this line of thought the demands for autonomy and responsibility generated by communicative action place too great a faith in the free will of actors and reinforces the often unexamined senses of identity that they embrace. As William Connolly, for one, has argued, identities secured on these grounds tend to reinforce those demarcations of who "we" are in opposition to an "other" that we are not. Such differentiations, he notes, are, at some level, unavoidable: there can be no identity without difference. He worries, however, that the momentum towards consensus generated by communicative action is often invoked in ways that too conveniently mark such differences as dangerous, seeking their outright exclusion or marginalization.

Nietzschean inspired critics of communicative action also find its minimalist, formalist prescriptions relatively indifferent to those "fugitive experiences of *intrasubjective* ... difference" that are essential to the best aspects of a pluralist democracy.[152] These critics, in other words, worry that Habermas's shift away from a monological subjectivity comes at too great a price, devaluing the connection of a democratic ethos with notions of identity and self-realization that value the individual search for meaning. Habermas, they imply, throws out a baby with the bath water in dismissing the monological subject.

Post-Nietzschean criticisms of Habermas, then, proceed along a front tied to the paradoxes of modern identity. Foucault's thought comes to

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[152] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization,* XViii.

Habermas having laid the groundwork for one aspect of these criticisms, that a discourse ethics retains *too much* subjectivity, in honing his response to what he understands as the naive, even dangerous, optimism of Sartrean existentialism. Sartre, nourished on the subject-centered analysis of Husserlean phenomenology, came to endorse an ineluctable humanism that "condemns man to be free." Ultimately, such an analysis argues, the individual escapes the yoke of transcendental guarantees and interpersonal assurances by assuming responsibility for one's own actions.

Foucault's work to escape the Sartrean tradition can serve as an instructive counter to Habermas's faith in the intersubjectively secured autonomy of the competent speaker. Foucault's project has worked to uncover the ways in which individual subjectivities are constructed and maintained, both through processes of exclusion and normalization, in ways that belie the benign, public transparency that must ultimately undergird a theory of communicative action. This is not merely a matter of claiming that the will is never free. Such a position, in and of itself, would find Foucault, as many critics contend, incapable of any coherent critical response to the constraints that give form to a particular subjectivity. Rather, Foucault contends that the construction of subjectivity occurs in ways that occlude its imposition -- creating the illusion of an immediately knowable field action in which one's free-will might be exercised and tending to disempower the self-critical capacities of communicative action that Habermas finds so compelling. Communicative action's mechanisms for consensus in such circumstances, in and of themselves, Foucault would argue, cannot resist the unproblematicized power

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formations of an entrenched status quo and the processes of homogenization that it encourages.

To understand how Foucault might help us center a response to these dangers, we need to understand how Foucault's notion of critique itself extends lessons he absorbed from the Nietzschean tradition. In this regard, Alexander Nehemas's interpretation of Nietzsche's will to power is very useful.

B. NIETZSCHE: ON POWER AND THE SELF

Habermas has observed that Foucault's thought reflects a "tension, which resists easy categorization, between the almost serene scientific reserve of the scholar striving for objectivity" and his "passionate self-consuming participation in the reality of the historical moment."[153] This tension, however, does not necessarily reveal, as Habermas implies, that Foucault's work is ultimately mired in a series of performative contradictions. Habermas himself notes Foucault's remark that

> For a long time I was dominated by a badly resolved conflict between a passion for Blanchot and Bataille on the one hand, and an interest in certain positive studies like those of Dumzeil and Levi-Strauss on the other. But actually, both these directions, whose single common denominator is perhaps the religious problem, have contributed in the same fashion toward leading me to the idea of the disappearance of the subject.[154]

As this comment indicates, there is, rather than mere contradiction, a movement in Foucault's work that allows him to reevaluate the cool objectivity that marked

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[153] Jurgen Habermas, "Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present," 103

[154] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, 238.

his early, "archaeological" period. His radical rejection of the hermeneutical/phenomenological subject was, no doubt, nourished in part by the structuralist explosion of the 1960's. As his position matured, in the decade from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, and as the original promise of structuralism faded, however, Foucault came to endorse a more dynamic view of the self, its formation, and its relationship to its cultural and social environment. In turning his attention more fully to a set of themes inspired by Nietzsche and his heirs, Foucault finds conceptual ammunition for his critical diagnosis of history and modernity, and for his affirmative response to the web of constraints uncovered by that analysis.[155] Perhaps more importantly, in turning away from structuralism and towards Nietzsche, Foucault is able to undercut the privileged position granted to subjectivity in the Western philosophical tradition without sacrificing an appreciation for the experiential elements of the human condition.

It is in Nietzsche's formulation of the will to power and its implications for the individual's self-formation, that Foucault finds a dramatic alternative to the monological subjectivity long implicit in Western thought and given a formal unity by Kant. For Nietzsche, "the will to accumulate force is special," not only "to the phenomenon of life," but for all the "cosmic order" in general, "so the only reality is the will to grow stronger of every center of force - not self-preservation, but the will to appropriate, dominate, increase, grow."[156] The immediate sense of such a notion, particularly if it is dragged from the overall context of

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[155] Foucault's structuralist impulses, of course, cannot be ignored. As is discussed later, these impulses inculcate in him a wariness of interpreting power as an unvarying, constant and irreducible force that some have read in Nietzsche and Bataille.

[156] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 689, as quoted in Nehemas, 75.

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Nietzsche's thought, is unsettling. As Nehemas points out, it seems either "a barely plausible and quite horrible theory of behavior" or, alternatively, a vision of a totally "voluntaristic universe."[157]

Nehemas, however, builds upon such passages in a more sympathetic fashion. Nietzsche, he argues, proclaims the "right to determine *all* efficient causation univocally as - *will to power*" in order to challenge commonly held notions of the will.[158] In typically paradoxical fashion, Nietzsche's proclamation of the will to power denies the existence of the will: "there is," he announces, "no such thing as the will."[159]

The will, Nietzsche argues, cannot be separated from the chain of thought and action with which it is inextricably bound. Nietzsche, according to Nehemas, "believes that behavior consists of long complicated events with neither obvious beginnings nor clear ends."[160] Such a view, by extension, radically challenges the possibility of a monological subject capable of action on a purely external set of phenomenon. "We separate ourselves, the doers from the deed," Nietzsche maintains

> and we make use of this pattern everywhere - we seek a doer for every event. What is it we have done? We have misunderstood the feeling of strength, tension, resistance, a muscular feeling that is already the beginning of the act, as the cause ... A necessary sequence of states does not imply a causal relationship between them ... If I think of the muscle apart from its "effects," I negate it.[161]

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[157] Nehemas, 75.

[158] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 36, as quoted in Nehemas, 76.

[159] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, VI,3, as quoted in Nehemas, 76.

[160] Nehemas, 76.

[161] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 551, as quoted in Nehemas, 77-78.

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[160] Nehemas, 76.

[161] Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 551, as quoted in Nehemas, 77-78.

Willing cannot be considered as belonging solely to the province of a conscious want or desire. Rather, it is part and parcel of a "complicated activity," and "not a causally privileged part of human behavior but that behavior considered provisionally." In short, "a 'thing,'" including what we typically regard as human subjectivity, "is the sum of its effects."[162]

Nietzsche himself, in placing quotes around "thing," points out the paradoxical nature of this formulation. In explaining away the thing-in-itself in terms of the overall interconnectedness of all "things," he raises the question of how we can even speak of these "things" that are interconnected. The strangeness of this paradox can be clarified if, following Nehemas's implicit suggestion, we think of Nietzsche's thought as what we might call a "dynamic structuralism."[163]

Twenty years after Nietzsche stopped writing, Saussere would offer the notion of "the linguistic sign as a 'differential unit.'"[164] "In a language," he argued, "there are only differences. Even more important, a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences *without positive terms*."[165] For Saussere, the role of any given phoneme is dependent upon its *difference* from all other phonemes within a given linguistic system. As parts of longer compounds composed of other equally arbitrary signs, the difference in phonemes can be connected up in ways that demarcate different ideas as words and phrases.[166]

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[162] Ibid.

[163] This same idea is explored by Gilles Deleuze, in different terms, in his *Nietzsche and Philosophy*.

[164] Nehemas, 81-82.

[165] Ferdinand de Saussere, *Course in General Linguistics*, 120, quoted in Nehemas, 82.

[166] Nehemas, 82.

Nietzsche, Nehemas argues, both prefigures and moves radically beyond Saussere in looking at the whole world in these terms. Nietzsche, in other words, thinks of the world in textual terms, looking at it "as if it were what can only, at least in retrospect, be construed as signs."[167] We make sense of what appears to be coherent groupings, much as we would a literary character, by marking out the difference of that grouping from all others.[168]

Unlike Saussere, though, whose structuralism sought to explain ordered systems of communication, Nietzsche wants to call into question our tendency to impose a structure on a world that is always in flux.[169] "The will to a system," he maintains, "is a lack of integrity."[170] Our capacity to recognize any coherence, any "thing," within the flux of coherence must remain provisional. Furthermore, our capacity to recognize "things" is constantly being reconditioned by our changing perspective. Such a view, Nehemas reminds us, does not deny the reality of the world or the objects that constitute it.[171] Rather, it denies that the world can be known from any superordinate position, freed from the necessity of interpretation, that would "always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye that is turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpretive forces, through which alone seeing becomes *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand from the eye an absurdity and nonsense."[172]

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[167] Ibid.

[168] Nehemas, 89-90.

[169] Nehemas, 82.

[170] Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/ The Antichrist,* trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 25.

[171] Nehemas, 83.

[172] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, III, 12.

C. FOUCAULT: ON POWER, GENEALOGY, AND SUBJECTIVIZATION.

The "self" that inhabits the "serious fluidity" of this world is itself, Nietzsche thus argues, open to constantly shifting reinterpretations. There has been a tendency, however, to willingly accept the assurances organized around a stable, monological subjectivity without taking into account the price for those assurances. Foucault extends Nietzsche's critique of subjectivity by seeking to explore how notions of the subject have been organized in specific historical circumstances and how such notions have worked to limit the possibilities open to the human individual. In doing so, he calls into question Habermas's sketch of how the competent individual emerges from and within the context of its lifeworld. Whereas Habermas links individuality and autonomy with the potentials for transparency and reciprocity inherent in the structure of speech and the field of social action, Foucault finds human agency to be more firmly constrained by the density of discursive practices and by the ways power infiltrates and modifies the social self.

Foucault maintains that his project is unified in its objective "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made into subjects."[173] He explains that he has pursued this task in three distinct ways. First, he has sought to examine the claims made on behalf of those "modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences" and which objectify as their field of study various notions of the subject.[174] Second, he has studied the objectivization of the subject in what he calls "'dividing practices,'" those

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[173] Foucault, "The Subject and Power," 208.
[174] Ibid.

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rational, rhetorical, and disciplinary techniques that secure the identity of any "we" by opposing it to a "them."[175] We secure our sanity, for example, by excluding any elements of madness that would unsettle that security. Third, in the final phase of his work, Foucault explored "the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject,"[176] He asks how, for example, Western man has come "to recognize himself as a subject of desire."[177]

These thrusts of his analysis have not been without their methodological implications. Foucault's study of those sciences that posit the human subject as their object of study - economics, linguistics, and human biology, for example - are organized around the "analysis of discursive practices" that make "it possible to trace the formation of disciplines (*savoirs*) while escaping the dilemma of science versus ideology."[178] This is Foucault's notion of an "archaeological method," an approach that is heavily indebted to the influence of structuralism and which predates the more mature development of his post-Nietzschean thought. Archaeology demands a "distanciation," or bracketing, "of truth and meaning" that allows one to isolate the elements of a specific scientific discourse as "mere meaningless objects."[179] These elements can then only be understood by their relationship to all the other elements within that discourse. Such an approach, it is hoped, will allow "access to a level of description which shows that what remains incomprehensible is not without its

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

[177] Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality*, Vol 2, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 6.

[178] Ibid., 4.

[179] Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 13.

own systematic order."[180] Archaeology describes "in theoretical terms the rules governing discursive practices" in a way "that is free of the influences of both the theories and practices" that the archaeologist "studies."[181] From such a perspective, the statements offered by the practitioners of any given discourse appear to be "unknowingly governed by precise structural 'codes of knowledge.'" What we usually accept as the "meaningful truth claims" of such discourses can now be recognized as being "governed by similar arbitrary structures."[182]

Foucault eventually recognizes that the contingency of a discourse's truth claims implies that "there can be no question of interpreting with a view to writing a history of the referent."[183] "Discursive formations," in other words, "*produce* the object about which they speak." Madness, for example, cannot, "as he had earlier assumed," be thought of as "an object or limit experience outside of discourse" which a discourse seeks "to capture in its own terms."[184] Madness, he comes to argue, is a phenomenon "constituted by all the statements that named it, divided it up, described it, explained it, traced its developments, indicated its various correlations, judged it, and possibly gave it speech by articulating, in its name, discourses that were to be taken as its own."[185] The objects of discursive consideration in the human sciences, particularly its conceptualizations of human subjectivity, are products created by those discourses, not transcendental truths waiting to be uncovered.

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[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid., 102.

[182] Ibid., 13.

[183]*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 47, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 61.

[184] Dreyfus and Rabinow, 61.

[185]*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 32, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 61.

Furthermore, as the archaeologist who isolates monuments of discourse, Foucault does not seek to recapture an hermeneutic understanding of the subject who makes statements within its discursive field, "to revive lost meaning by" reconstructing the internal logic that would fill "out its horizons of intelligibility."[186] The archaeological approach insists on the *fiction* that the rules of a given discourse are *not* ways individuals assure themselves that they are making sense and will be taken seriously."[187] Archaeology imposes the discipline of a "neutral ... perspective" that views these rules as those of an "anonymous truth game."[188] These rules "operate therefore according to a sort of uniform anonymity on all individuals, who undertake to speak in this discursive field."[189]

Foucault's archaeology, as a particular methodological perspective, is obviously not without its ambiguities. Foucault's reluctance, to impute an *"atemporal"* structure to the discourses he analyzes, for example, makes it difficult for him to explain the continuities, overlaps, and ruptures that mark the succession of specific discourses through history.[190] In seeking to isolate in any such discourse the "historical ... conditions of possibility," Foucauldian archaeology lacks the conceptual mechanisms for explaining what generates these conditions.[191] To argue that discourse alone accounts for these conditions seems naive - it fails to account for the ways in which certain practices create the conditions in which a certain discourse might take shape. To ignore the

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[186] Dreyfus and Rabinow, 14.

[187] Ibid., 61.

[188] Ibid.

[189] *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* 63, in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 70.

[190] Dreyfus and Rabinow, 15.

[191] Ibid.

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effect of discourse on practice, of course, is misleading, but to impute to discourse nearly exclusive generative and causal powers seems equally extreme.

In order to move past these difficulties, Foucault adopts what, following Nietzsche, he calls genealogy. This is not to imply that Foucault completely abandons archaeology; it remains an important "tool for attaining a relative degree of detachment" in studying the human sciences, but in Foucault's later works, it "is subordinated to genealogy."[192] The human sciences, themselves, are now only "intelligible as part of a larger set of organized and organizing practices" in whose spread they "play a crucial role."[193] Rather than focusing on the unvarying elements of a discursive system whose elements remain frozen in time, from the perspective of a "detached spectator of mute-discourse monuments," the genealogical method allows for an "analysis of power relations and their technologies" that make it "possible to view them as open strategies while escaping the alternative of a power conceived of as domination or exposed as a simulacrum."[194] Furthermore, Foucault's genealogical approach does not insist on the "fiction" of detached observation; rather it recognizes that the investigator is always "involved in, and to a large extent produced by, the social practices he is studying."[195] Under the banner of genealogy, Habermas notes, "the iceberg" of archaeology "begins to move."[196]

Genealogy works to uncover subjectivization both as a dividing practice

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[192] Ibid., 103.

[193] Ibid.

[194] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2., 4.

[195] Dreyfus and Rabinow, 103.

[196] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 253.

and as a process of normalization. This "objectivizing of the subject" led

Foucault "to expand the dimensions of a definition of power."[197] Such an

expansion, in Foucault, does not necessarily lead to a final "theory of power."[198]

Foucault rejects the Nietzschean and, as we shall see, the Bataillian contention

that power operates as an essential and ineluctable cosmological force. For

Foucault, the study of power, rather, "brings into play relations between

individuals (or between groups);" it is, in short, a study of power as a an

ongoing social construction that continually changes as the relationships

between living actors reconfigure themselves.[199] One does not write a theory of

power; one engages in an "ongoing conceptualization" that implies "critical

thought - a constant checking."[200]

Foucauldian genealogy is thus consonant with a critical theory that holds

power to be "tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of

itself."[201] Genealogy, however, is not employed to divide and classify power and

by extension to uncover the ways in which it operates merely as an oppressive

force; it seeks to avoid the trap of an unending differentiation between an

oppressive "power over" and an enabling "power to." Such a process of

differentiation, Foucault fears, allows the micropractices of power to elide

analysis, escaping recognition behind the banner of its positive effects.

Perhaps Foucault's most important contribution to the way we think about the

link between power and subjectivity, in fact, is his effort to consider the ways in

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[197] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 209.

[198] Ibid.

[199] Ibid., 217.

[200] Ibid., 209.

[201] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, 86.

which power, particularly in its modern forms, is paradoxically both oppressive and productive. Power does not work merely to constrain.

Foucault thus brackets out critical theory's attempts to "clarify what power is and why it exists, focusing instead on the "flat and empirical" question of "how" power operates. In granting primacy to the "how" of power, by asking "'By what means is it exercised?' and 'What happens when individuals exert [as they say] power over others?'", Foucault does not want "to eliminate questions of 'what' and 'why,'" nor does he want to completely invalidate critical theory's effort to draw a distinction between a positive "power to" and a negative "power over." He does focus our attention, however, on the ways in which power is most dangerously effective in modern societies to the extent that it is both productive and dominating. He stresses that we should not expect, at any given time, that the overlap between the negative and positive aspects of power to be either constant or uniform, but he suggests that we might better understand the multidirectional complexities of power relations if we look at specific "'blocks' in which the adjustments of abilities, the resources of communication, and power relations constitute regulated and concerted systems," what he calls "a block of capacity-communication-power."[202]

It is in analyzing these specific blocks, or disciplines, that Foucault traces a transformation, beginning in the eighteenth century, in which "an increasingly better invigilated process of adjustment has been sought after - more and more rational and economic - between productive activities, resources of communication, and the play of power relations."[203] Foucault's genealogies

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[202] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 217-18.
[203] Ibid., 219

suggest ways in which the currents in post-classical scientific discourse came to be embodied in new forms of "governmentality."[204] There is more at work in the move away from the old sovereign power that sought to control a territory and its inhabitants with the threat of death than indications of a more humane world; rather, it marks the way in which the governance of populations becomes increasingly dedicated to "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life." This shift in theories of rulership manifested itself in a new "bio-power," which, as strategy, proceeds along two lines. First, it seeks to regulate individual bodies by the enforcement of various disciplinary techniques (at the level of the factory, schools, and law, and in the sciences of medicine and psychiatry). Second, it reflects a move to control the body social, or the population at large, through techniques associated with statistics, demographics, and biological potential. Bio-power emerges as "an indispensable element in the development of capitalism," which "would not have been possible without the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and adjustment of the phenomenon of population and economic processes." Bio-power thus seeks as its ultimate goal a method "capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general without at the same time making them more difficult to govern."[205]

Bio-power, as an attempt to create bodies that are simultaneously productive and docile, is characterized by the fiction of an all encompassing gaze. This gaze, in order to manage whole populations and in an effort to

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[204] Foucault, "Governmentality", trans. by Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 102.

[205] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 139-41.

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administer large scale economic production, should "be permanent in its function; even if it is discontinuous in its action," reducing "the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on who it is exercised."[206] As is well known, Foucault finds both an explicit example and a perfect metaphor for this pervasive surveillance in the architectural design of Jeremy Bentham's ideal prison, the Panopticon.

At the center of the panopticon is a guard tower with large windows looking outward on individual cells located in a circular building on the periphery. Each cell has two windows, one on the inside of the ring facing the guard tower and another on the outside that allows for the passage of light. From the center tower, the resultant back lighting makes each cell appear as "so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible."[207] The prisoner, however, could never be sure whether or not he was being watched; the windows of the central tower were to be darkened as to make the presence or absence of an inspector unverifiable.

The prisoners uncertainty, in fact, is the key to the Panopticon's effectiveness as a regulatory mechanism. The possibility that one is being watched makes an actual observer unnecessary; the prisoner "inscribes in himself the power relation in which he plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."[208] As such, the spatial arrangement of the Panopticon inculcates in the individual prisoner "a state of conscious and

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[206] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 206.
[207] Ibid., 200.
[208] Ibid., 202-03.

permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power."[209] Yet this "automatic functioning of power" does not only exercise its hold over those incarcerated at the periphery. A director would at any time be able to monitor the actions of his employees, and he himself could not escape from his role within the workings of the prison.[210] He that sees cannot escape from that which he must watch. "Visibility is a trap"[211] that ensnares everyone within the Panopticon, revealing a field of power that "is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the 'privilege', acquired or preserved by the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions - an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated."[212] Power can no longer be thought as a force that imposed without; it is carried within.

As manifested in a Panoptic gaze, power in its modern form reflects the ways in which "the modern Western state," in an effort to administer a positive bio-power, "has integrated in a new political shape, an old power technique which originated in Christian institutions," namely, pastoral power.[213] Importantly, this power, in its paradigmatic form, operates through a pastor, who as a counselor and confidant, seeks "to assure" the "individual salvation" within the life of the larger community. This pastoral power seeks to promote individual well-being in ways that would promote the well-being of the entire flock. This power cannot operate, however, "without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their

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[209] Ibid., 201.
[210] Ibid., 204.
[211] Ibid., 206.
[212] Ibid., 26-27.
[213] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 213.

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innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it."[214] This final aspect of pastoral power, in fact, is what links pastoral power to those modern forms of individuation and totalization maintained by disciplines connected to the rise of the human sciences: pastoral power "is linked with the production of truth."[215]

Foucault thus offers the Panopticon as more than a mere "dream building." Rather he finds it suggestive of the "power relations in terms of the everyday life of men," manifested in specific disciplines and augmented by the technique of the confessional perfected by the ruling structures of early Christianity, and locating in its mechanisms a technique of power "which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others must recognize in him." For Foucault, "power: is not the "possession of agents who exercise it to define the options of others, but," rather, "a set of pressures lodged in institutional mechanisms which produce and maintain such privileged norms as the subject or the primacy of epistemology."[216] This power makes a subject of the individual, allowing for his integration into the political and social order on the condition that he submit his or her individuality "to a set of specific patterns."[217]

Foucault thus calls into question the set of epistemological assurances that Kant draws out of his engagement with the limits of human understanding.

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[214] Ibid., 214.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 233.

[217] Foucault, "The Subject and Power, 214.

He teaches us that the stable ground provided by the modern subject is not given to our experience; rather, it reflects an ongoing performativity whose performative nature has been forgotten. Foucault's genealogical/archaeological approach to the self does not suggest "a history that would be concerned with what might be true in the fields of learning, but an analysis of the games of truth and error through which being is historically constituted as an experience; that is, as something that can and must be thought."[218] The dynamism of this thought is opposed to a form of subjectivity that could unproblematically call upon a prefigured set of moral dictates regardless of the specific existential context in which they were needed. Such an opposition calls into question the epistemic security that underwrites the entrenchment of a liberal consensus. As Connolly has recently argued in support of this Foucauldian opposition, "to give primacy to epistemology is to think either that you have access to criteria of knowledge that leave the realm of ontology behind or that your epistemology provides neutral test procedures through which to pose and resolve every ontological question." Kantian subjectivity, however, as the origin of epistemic possibility, sets up what Connolly, here following Heidegger, calls a "mode of 'truth'" that "is a mode of revealing that enables judgments of correctness and incorrectness within its frame." Such modes of truth, in the various historical manifestations, are thus ineluctable as both the "revealing" that they claim to be *and* a concealing. Even at a metaphilosophical level, the productive possibilities of being work to construct its own bounds of thinkable thought. In this context, "'Untruth' is deeper than truth and falsity;" it "is that which cannot achieve sufficient standing

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[218] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*, 6-7.

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within the terms of discourse of a time without stretching contemporary standards of plausibility and coherence to their limits."[219]

Foucault's genealogies of the self thus call into question the hermetic circle that neatly ties together the notions of socialization and individualization in Habermas's reconstruction of Mead. The competence to respond to validity claims in a communication sequence with either a "yes" or a "no" that establishes the emergence of individual being in Habermas, Foucault's approach suggests, tends to occlude that which is "not up for debate or reflection within a temporally constituted register of the true and the false."[220] The "yes" and "no" of Habermasian discourse are, in this reading, part of a process of homogenization that reinscribe the unproblematicized assumptions that circulate within any given cultural perspective and which, as the illusion of choice, tie the individual to him or herself.

Foucault's notion of power, by contrast, fosters a sense of resistance to those forms of cultural, political, and economic organization that submerge the moments of unfairness and oppression upon which their claims of a neutral justice and freedom are grounded. An ethic that has absorbed Foucault's understanding of how power circulates in modern societies, it should be noted, does not seek to dispense with the notion of justice. Rather, it would seek to uncover the strategies by which a received or consensually agreed upon standard of justice deflects interrogations of its purported naturalness, transcendence, or neutrality and thus protects its regulative principles. By complicating these founding claims, a genealogical approach stirs the settled

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[219] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 5.
[220] Ibid.

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air in which new identities and new voices struggle to find a viable political space. Obviously, then, the pursuit of a post-Foucauldian ethic expresses a movement towards freedom that is dependent upon some preexisting form of democratic governance and pluralist sensibility. As Foucault himself notes, his analysis of power is not meant to speak to relations of outright physical constraint. He maintains that where "the determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains."[221] Foucault does not, of course, mean to imply that relationships of physical constraint should not be identified and combated. Genealogical analysis, however, is directed against the more insidious forms that power tends to assume in the context of democratic negotiations; it looks to uncover the contingency and contestability of power's positive values at that point where that power remains contestable.

Does Foucault's sense of how one becomes what one is within the constraints imposed by a given culture's or society's games of truth, however, allow for an affirmative response to the imposition of power and the determination of subjectivity? In order to explore his formulation of a politics of resistance and to situate his work's implications for a truly affirmative ethic, we must first take account of his assimilation of George Bataille's unconventional notion of transgression. By engaging Bataille's understanding of transgression, one not only comes to further appreciate of how the strong pull of an "otherness" that exceeds any particular moment of self-understanding informs Foucault's work, one is also forced to face the dangers of the subterranean desire that is valorized in Nietzschean and neo-Nietzschean responses to

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[221] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 221.

modernity.

D. BATAILLE: THE WILL TO POWER AS TRANSGRESSION

Though deconstructing the modern subject seems to have the immediate effect of liberating thought from the demands of a subjectivizing mastery, the question immediately arises as to what forms of human self-understanding could possibly arise in its wake. How might a notion of the self grounded as an absence, or, in William Connolly's term, "ontalogically," be understood as a positivity? What might a positive account of an ethical substance formulated against this backdrop look like?

Foucault's affirmative response to the challenge of these questions reflects his familiarity with Bataille's extension of Nietzsche's will to power, the notion of transgression. Nietzsche's suggestion of the will to power as a first principle becomes in Bataille the notion of the general economy, the constant and uncheckable flow of energy across the planet that expresses itself in the dialectical movement of history. The human, for Bataille as for Nietzsche, is not the subject that inveighs against chaos. Rather, it is but one of many loci that would constrain an ineluctable impulse towards an useless expenditure.

As such, the long march of societal, religious, and economic forms are, for Bataille, the succession of movements that seek to escape their limits. The first of such movements, the transition from animal to man is indicative of all subsequent successions. This movement, above all else, exists as a negation of all that is animal. Of course, this event dissolves in the mists of pre-history, but for Bataille "nothing is better known." By not accepting the natural given

world, but by negating it, man "changes the natural external world; he derives from it tools and manufactured objects that form a new world, the *human world*."[222] In words that hearken back to one of the central arguments of the *Genealogy of Morals* and which looks forward to Foucault's fascination with the relationship between the aesthetic and the ascetic, Bataille argues that man "trains himself; he refuses, for example, to give to the satisfaction of his animal needs that free course on which the animal placed no restraint." This refusal can be marked by various taboos and prohibitions that are peculiar to human beings: the incest taboo and the rules governing sexuality, in general, for example; or the relegation of excreta to a darkness where its mere mention is "deemed less than human."[223]

There is, in this epochal making transition, something akin to what Bataille considers essential, or what he calls sovereign, in humanity. Never "since that time," he argues, has humanity ever "had a more astounding, more glorious moment." Nonetheless, "to the extent that we take part in being human, we want to have something to do with a more important and more fascinating moment than any before it." So much so, in fact, that "it is as if life might be nothing more, in sum, than a continual re-creation, which more often than not implies a disregard for that which others have created before us." "Stage by stage," Bataille muses, "we may have traveled an immeasurable distance since then, without ceasing to take leave of ourselves (to leave the slumber that had overtaken us each time) in ceaseless, repeated movements of creation, once the dance had begun whose first figures were already those of

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[222] Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Vol. II, The History of Eroticism* (New York: Zone Books, 1993), 52.
[223] Ibid., 53.

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self-consciousness."[224]

Thus a "revolt, a refusal of the offered condition, is evinced in man's attitude at the very beginning," suggesting "that domain which all history down to us was to explore relentlessly, always going further."[225] Of course,

> as soon as nature, which a spirit of revolt had
> rejected as the given, ceased to appear as such, the
> very spirit that had rejected it no longer considered it
> as the given (as what compelled and alienated the
> spirit's independence); it then regarded nature's
> antithesis, prohibition, as the given - that prohibition
> to which at first it submitted, as a way of denying its
> subordination to nature.[226]

Yet this overcoming of what we are, this self-consciousness, has from the first precluded an unproblematic return to nature. Perhaps this is for the best, for "If it is true that man is first of all that autonomous existence which refuses to be simply subjected to the limits of the past, it can be disconcerting to see him return so quickly to his vomit." The prohibitions that separate man from his animality serve as a constant reminder of man's unique relationship to the world. Furthermore, they create a "regular order of things" in which "the movement of life is restrained, controlled the way a horse is by a good rider." These prohibitions contribute to "the prolonged life of old people that stabilizes the course of social activity."[227] This very stability, however, and the prohibitions that mark its limits, seem irresistibly to call for their transgression. The

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[224] Ibid., 75.

[225] Ibid., 76-77.

[226] Ibid., 77.

[227] Ibid., 98. This view not only parallels Nietzsche's views on how knowledge and behavior is passed from generation to generation (discussed above), it also echoes Habermas's awareness of how such a passage is a necessary part of his "proof" of the superiority of Western culture.

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very constraints that differentiate the human from the animal, in their effort to restrain the effusive sexuality of the living, seem to offer themselves up to destruction.

One might consider, for example, man's relationship to death, the ultimate limit on human freedom. As the limit of what man is and might be, death elicits in the human a strange mixture of repulsion and attraction. Death repulses us, Bataille argues, not as "the bitter annihilation of being," but rather as a return to the nature of which "*humanity* is the negation." At the same time, as that which always remains beyond, by definition, our consciousness of the order of things, death exerts the strange pull of the unimaginable and ultimate freedom beyond our servile attempts to hold it at bay. This pull, no doubt, must remain somewhat illusory. The secret joy that death promises, to be succinct, would put an end to all our joys. Nonetheless, the to and fro, the negation and return, that are embodied in our complex of attitudes toward death suggests the general movement by which humanity, in the numerous forms of social organization with which it has experimented, has attempted to modulate the ineluctable flow of energy across the face of the earth.

Our desire to move towards death, according to Bataille, reflects a desire to escape a subjectivity that is defined in relationship to a world of objects, or things. Again, it is that initial movement away form animality, that burgeoning self-consciousness, that dooms man to the iron cage of utility. "The intellect fails, in fact, in that with its first impulse it *abstracts,* separating the objects of reflection from the concrete totality of the real."[228] All things become known only in terms of their use value. "Nowhere," Bataille laments, "do we find a *totality*

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[228] Ibid., 122.

that is an end in itself, that is meaningful as such, that doesn't need to justify itself by pleading its usefulness to some other thing."[229] Even our gestures toward such a totality cannot totally escape their connection to the world of things. God, as the totality which as the first and final cause of all action, is implicated in the vast causal chain that link "the mental process of abstraction" into "a cycle in which one thing is related to another ." God is perhaps man's best, though ultimately failed, attempt to reserve for himself that *sacred* animality from which he self-consciously departed so long ago.

Nonetheless, the march of reason, the triumph of abstraction, made the death or at least the departure of our gods inevitable. Increasingly, man has abdicated the sovereign totality of his sacred animal existence in favor of its antithesis: the pure cause and effect of the mechanical. The question that drives both Nietzsche and Bataille, in fact, and what gives them their continuing sharpness, revolves around the disenchantment that sacrifices the *sacred* in favor of a more efficient accumulation. In explicating Weber's exegesis of the connections between the tenets of Protestantism, and in particular Calvinism, Bataille phrases the question in these terms: *"How can man find himself - or regain himself - seeing that the action to which the search commits him in one way or another is precisely what estranges him from himself?"*[230]

Bataille's indictment of reason, in fact, is not radically different than that developed by Adorno and Horkheimer's refinement and extension of Weber and Lukács. For Bataille too, reason had first appeared as a dissident knowledge, capable of freeing humanity from its animal nature, only to evolve

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[229] Ibid.

[230] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. I, *An Essay on General Economy* (New York: Zone Books, 1991),131.

into a tyrannizing efficiency which, in effect, reinscribes a new transcendent authority. By extension, the successes of modernity cannot be separated from its failures; its implosion is the product of its own inner-antinomies. Pivotal, in fact, to the advances of rational man has been his capacity to forget that rationality itself is a construction and that identity is necessarily performative. This "forgetting" is continually reinforced by the normative scaffolding that has been erected around it - delineating the demarcations between right and wrong, good and evil, friend and foe. If we are to remember the contingency of these delineations, if we are not to lose sight of how rationality remains myopic where it claims to be panoptic, we are compelled to examine how it offers itself as a liberating "power to" when it is in fact enmeshed in a repressive "power over." Bataille, as a central figure in the continuum from Nietzsche to Foucault, continues to stimulate the responses that we might bring to this sleep of reason.

The legacy of this stimulus, however, is highly contestable. His call to transgress the strictures of rationality is guilty of its own transcendent gesture; it imagines a space beyond the realm of contestation. Bataille, for example, insists that

> We escape this empty and sterile movement, this
> sum of objects and abstract functions that is the
> world of the intellect, only by entering a very different
> world where objects are on the same plane as the
> subject, where they form, together with the subject a
> sovereign totality which is not divided by any
> abstraction and is commensurate with the entire
> universe.[231]

This collapse of the subject/object dichotomy and its concurrent appeal to the

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[231] Bataille, *The Accursed Share*, vol. 2, 112.

totality of the entire universe seems to dance beyond the reach of language. Bataille's language, at times, wants to instruct us in how we might imagine the erotic and the sacred as one - recapturing a mysticism in which "two desires fully respond to one another only when perceived in the transparence of an intimate comprehension."[232] Such impassioned rhetoric makes it nearly impossible to separate out the erotic destruction that underpins this totalizing universality. Bataille's language might easily, in isolation, be used to depict our prostration before demagoguery - it is the justification of an unproblematic belief. In the next section we will look at how Foucault modifies the Bataillian notion of transgression, an idea that seems dangerous to the hope for order, in ways that inspire the active movement of Foucault's gestures towards an affirmative ethic.

E. FOUCAULT AGAIN: THE CARE OF THE SELF: AN AESTHETIC-ETHIC

The early Foucault, no doubt, had not freed himself entirely from the mystical promise of Bataillian transgression. In the preface to *Madness and Civilization*, he speaks of that moment that would overrun the boundaries that define us and that gives form to the reason that we use, which, in the history of madness, is "that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself."[233] He imagines, with a certain ironic nostalgia, the "oblivion" of "all those stammered,

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[232] Ibid., 113.
[233] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), ix.

imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made." "The language of psychiatry," he laments, as "a monologue of reason about madness," merely reaffirms "the basis of that silence." Its discourse forms part of the boundary that confirms man's self-assurance as a reasonable being, yet at the same time this boundary hints at a region beyond its configuration that promises the *sacred* other of reason. The bounds of a rational subjectivity cuts the self off from itself, defining the self within its narrow confines, ignorant of a reality in "which the death of God leads to an experience in which nothing may again announce the exteriority of being, and consequently to an experience which is *interior* and *sovereign*."[234] Meaning, confined and extinguished in the rationalization of the modern world, comes now to be equated with an unequivocal freedom. It is in the artistry of certain prophets of madness - Nietzsche, Van Gogh, Artaud and de Sade - that Foucault hears echoes of this untamed exteriority that has been turned inward and the movement of freedom that it motivates. Yet even at this point in his intellectual development, Foucault is hesitant to fully embrace the implications of this equation. He cannot escape the troubling conclusion that "nothing in itself, especially not what it can know of madness, assures that the world is justified by such madness."[235]

Foucault, at any rate, comes to modulate the hyperbolic call for an "essential freedom." He argues, rather, for an "'agonism' that recognizes the reciprocal incitation and struggle" that join adversarial identities together.[236] He

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[234] Foucault, "The Preface to Transgression," from *Language, Counter-memory, Practice*, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 32.

[235] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 289.

[236] Foucault, "The Subject and Power", 221-22.

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modifies the notion of transgression for just these purposes. Moving away from

Bataille's Romantic embrace of a "paradigmatic experience of ecstatic self-

unbounding and orgiastic self-dissolution" that fosters "the eruption of

heterogeneous forces into the homogeneous world of an everyday life that has

been compulsively normalized," Foucault comes to reject "any evocative

access to the excluded and the outlawed."[237] After the implication of such

excesses in *Madness and Civilization* (and no doubt in response to charges of

an inverted "transcendentalism" leveled against it), Foucault comes to deny that

"heterogeneous elements" can any "longer promise anything."[238]

Nonetheless, the general movement towards the limits that define our

subjectivity remain an important source for Foucault's sense of how emergent

identities might begin to fashion their voices within the dominant forms of

ethical and political discourse. Foucault, in fact, works to rechannel

Habermas's description of modernity as a "constant renewal" into a prescription

for an affirmative and critical   "attitude of modernity:" a "mode of relating to

contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a

way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and

the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit

no doubt, like what the Greeks called the an *ethos*."[239] This *ethos* is bound up

with transgression in that it works to *at* "the contemporary limits of the

necessary.'"[240] Foucault's archaeological/genealogical approach has sought to

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[237] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* 241.

[238] Ibid.

[239] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment", trans. by Catherine Porter, in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 39.

[240] Ibid., 43.

expose those limits in a way that "problematicizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous being."[241] Those analyses, we have seen, reveal the link between modern notions of individuality and the exercise of power. The utopian dream of escaping those aspects of our historical circumstance that oppress us, however, ignores the ways in which the promise of that dream continually reconfigure the boundaries of who we are. Transgression, for Foucault, thus calls forth an effort "to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries." The task "nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are."[242]

The ethos of refusal marks an important preliminary and tactical departure from Habermas's notion of a discourse ethics. Habermas, we have seen, has sought to clarify the ways in which our intuitive preunderstanding of the rules of speech suggests the criteria for moral argumentation. Moral judgments and the norms that they represent can thus be subjected to a universalization test that would take into account the position of any actor possibly affected by such judgments. Habermas's entire schema is underwritten by this promise of equal treatment.[243] Within the space of discursive argumentation all voices are given their chance to enter into the negotiation of consensus.

Foucault, on the other hand, articulates an ethic that insists on the careful cultivation of the individual voice as it comes to contest the limits that have been

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[241] Ibid., 42.

[242] Foucault, "Subject and Power", 216.

[243] Axel Honneth, "The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism", 307.

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imposed from without and within. This ethic reflects a concern with the ways in which one's voice is configured by the terms of a specific discourse, and how, within the terms of that discourse, the drive for consensus might overwhelm the right to be different or one's desire to become different. Foucault pushes past Habermas's construction of a universally verifiable field of discourse "oriented retrospectively toward the 'essential kernel of rationality'" in order to come to grips with a social reality characterized by the asymmetrical and overlapping play of power.[244] Within such a social forum, Foucault recognizes the need to consider the *how* of one's self-formation as the component of an ethical orientation that necessarily precedes discourse. Foucault understands this self-formation as an ongoing process: "the permanent reactivation of an attitude - that is, of a philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era."[245]

Foucault has shown us that the self (what post-Kantian Western philosophy has privileged as the subject) is produced by the intersection of socially mediated symbolic representations and the disciplinary practices that have grown up around them. The individual can never completely escape these socio-historical constructions; their imprint is too deep, too much a part of one's cognitive and imaginative capacities, to ever be completely eradicated. One can, however, call into question the unexamined assumptions that undergird these constructions. By problematizing these assumptions, one in turn suggests that identity is contingent rather than inevitable, historically situated rather than atemporal, fluid rather than fixed. Furthermore, rather than

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[244] Ibid., 43.
[245] Ibid., 42.

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passively internalizing the normalizing gaze of the panoptic society, one can find in its field of vision the stage upon which one might reimagine the possibilities of one's self. Martin Jay has noted the denigration of visual metaphors in Foucault's writing, but it also seems that Foucault recognizes the indispensable, if ambiguous, possibilities for self-formation presented by the field of social vision.[246]

Foucault's later work, his attempts to forge an aesthetically inspired affirmative ethic, not only challenges the neutrality of Habermasian and liberal ideals, it reveals the tactical potential inherent in what Habermas calls the aesthetic-expressive sphere. Whereas Foucault's archaeological/genealogical method considered the ways in which identity is contingent upon the background of one's historical and social contexts, his work on the aesthetic self seeks to extend this critical project by imagining how the individual might use the visual field in which it finds itself in order to work "experimentally and cautiously upon itself and the relationships through which it is constituted."[247] For Foucault, the ways in which the boundaries of our subjectivity are drawn mark out the sites at which we can profitably contest the imposition of those boundaries. Thus, the critical function of Foucault's genealogical/archaeological approach serves as the hinge from which his affirmative response to these impositions proceed. If we are inevitably constituted by the discursive practices and disciplinary arrangements in which we are situated, Foucault asks, is there an approach to ourselves that would

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[246] For Jay's discussion of Foucault's critique of the primacy of visual metaphors in Western philosophy, see his *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 381 - 435.

[247] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 69.

allow us to resist the full weight of their imposition? Can such an approach
escape, to any degree, the ways in which discursive interventions themselves
tend to inscribe, sometimes furtively, unexpected constraints on our sense of
identity? In what ways does our presentation of self, as a necessary element of
social interaction, provide an opportunity to call into question the status quo of
our social environment and its criteria of individual agency, responsibility, and
competence?

One of the ways of attending to these questions is to examine the rule of
asceticism in Nietzschean/Foucauldian thought. In his discussion of
Baudelaire, Foucault argues that the attitude of modernity "is not simply a form
of relationship to the present. It is also a mode of relationship that has to be
established with oneself."[248] It is here that Foucault, returning to Nietzsche in
order to sustain the experiential thrust of his *post*-structuralist thought, suggests
that an affirmative ethic entails the ongoing organization of a multiplicity of
forces organized around the unity of the body.[249] In Foucault, as in Nietzsche, it
is at the site of the "elementary unity" of the body that one modifies and crafts
the compulsive flow of the will to power. "The deliberate attitude of modernity
is" thus "tied to an indispensable asceticism. To be modern is not to accept
oneself as one is in the flux of the passing moment; it is to take oneself as
object of a complex and difficult elaboration."[250] Foucault does not offer the
ancient metaphysical dream of arresting the passing moment, but rather
demands our conscientious attempt to work at its *ongoing* construction.

In thus offering the body as the site of a constant elaboration, Foucault

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[248] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment," 41.

[249] Nehemas, 83.

[250] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment", 41.

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suggests a model of learning discussed by Nietzsche in *On The Genealogy of Morals*. This model and its implications for human agency, paints a less flattering, more dangerous picture of human development than one encounters in Habermas. Habermas imagines that socialization is grounded in the reciprocity demanded by intersubjective communication and that this socialization is capable of producing the free and autonomous individuals capable of defending themselves in rational argument. For Nietzsche, on the other hand, "the long story of how *responsibility* originated" entails the cultivation of "an active *desire* ... for the continuance of something desired once, a real *memory of the will*."[251] The human animal only secures "*the right to make promises*," he argues, to the degree that he becomes "*calculable, regular, necessary*, even in his own image of himself."[252]

Nietzsche recognizes that this "memory of the will" is cultivated in opposition to, or at least in tension with, the necessary act of "forgetting." Forgetting, as "an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression,"[253] acts as "a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette."[254] It is, in short, a way in which humanity has learned to filter and regulate the uncheckable inflow of cognitive and sensory stimuli. But if forgetting is necessary to human health, it does not follow that its hypertrophy marks the healthiest humans. To the contrary, too much forgetfulness would doom humanity to the distorted confines of an endless series of "presents," to what Bataille has called the immanence of animality. Humanity has freed itself

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[251] Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, 58.

[252] Ibid., 57-58.

[253] Ibid., 57.

[254] Ibid., 58.

from that kind of servitude, at least, by erecting a code of behavior, grounded in the tenets of its various moralities, that turns the human capacity to sustain an activity across time into a second nature.

Nietzsche speculates that the attitude engendered by the moral code of the Christian West, what he calls the "'morality of mores,'" in part represents the great effort by humanity to inculcate in itself the capacity for deferred gratification. It is this "labor performed by man upon himself during the greater part of the existence of the human race," despite all of the "severity, tyranny, stupidity and idiocy" carried out in its name, that has made humanity calculable. Though he called himself an immoralist, and though he argues that morality itself is inextricably bound up in what we commonly call immoral, Nietzsche does not doubt that "the social straight jacket" of morality has been an indispensable part of humanity's ascendance in the world.[255] That ascendance, however, has not come without a steep price.

For how, Nietzsche asks, "can one create a memory for the human animal? How can one impress something upon this partly obtuse, partly flighty mind, attuned only to the passing moment, in such a way that it will stay there?"[256] Nietzsche offers an answer far removed from Habermas's detached readings of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Mead. Before we can speak of how actors negotiate the cognitive processes inherent in communicative action, Nietzsche's answer to how memory is created suggests that we must first offer an account of how humanity has learned to learn.

Nietzsche speculates "that the answers and methods for solving this

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[255] Ibid., 59.
[256] Ibid., 60.

primeval problem were not precisely gentle." Unsettlingly, Nietzsche argues

that the cultivation of memory, what he calls humanity's self-imposed

"*mnemothecnics*," harkens back to what is "most fearful and uncanny in the

whole history of man." "Man," he assumes, "could never do without blood,

torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself," for

if "something is to stay in the memory it must be burned in, only that which

never ceases to hurt stays in the memory."[257]

Thus humanity, in becoming what it is, not only abstracts from the

temporal immediacy of the moment, it necessarily imposes a discipline on that

imaginative leap as well. The compulsive need to affect one's self and one's

immediate environment, what Nietzsche calls the will to power and what

Bataille terms transgression, is modulated by humanity's "instinct that realized

that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics."[258]

Nietzsche argues that historically, humanity has imposed an ascetic

ideal upon itself. He explains that such an asceticism requires that

> a few ideas are to be rendered inextinguishable,
> ever-present, unforgettable, "fixed," with the aim of
> hypnotizing the entire nervous and intellectual
> system with these "fixed ideas" - and ascetic
> procedures and modes of life are means of freeing
> these ideas from the competition of all other ideas,
> so as to make them "unforgettable."[259]

At the level of society, for example, one can look to "the severity of penal codes'

as a "measure of the degree of effort needed ... to impose a few primitive

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[257] Ibid., 61.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.

demands of social existence as *present realities* upon these slaves of momentary affect and desire."[260] The very capacity for reason, the calculability and stability that undergirds its possibility is founded in this violent mastery of the individual's, and by extension society's, physiological and psychological organization. Through the repetitive imposition of these techniques,

> one finally remembers five or six "I will not's," in regard to which one had given one's promise so as to participate in the advantages of society - and it was indeed with the aid of this kind of memory that one came "to reason"! Ah, reason, seriousness, mastery over the affects, the whole somber thing called reflection, all these prerogatives and showpieces of man: How dearly they have been bought! how much blood and cruelty lie at the bottom of all "good things"![261]

Foucault has been careful to catalog various ways in which these disciplinary tactics have been incorporated into and transformed by an enlightened reason that promised to liberate man from their arbitrary imposition. The rise of bio-power in the eighteenth century and production of docile bodies on which it depends relies on a disciplinary society founded on a new "microphysics of power" that manifests itself concretely in "a political anatomy of detail."[262] This microphysics of power involves "a multiplicity of often minor processes, of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another" in ways that "converge and gradually produce the blueprint of a general method."[263] These processes were

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[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid., 62.
[262] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 139.
[263] Ibid., 138.

typically "adopted in response to particular needs," but their application was not constrained to "the inextricability of a particular functioning."[264] Rather, they move beyond their particular application, as if to "cover the entire social body," spreading as a general form that maintained "the coherence of a tactic."[265]

The human body increasingly came to be thought of as a programmable machine that could be modified for specific ends. In creating a soldier, for example, the "posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint" is fostered that "runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times, turning" its actions "silently into the automation of habit."[266] Furthermore, the requirements of an emerging capitalist economy demanded malleable bodies that could be made and remade through rigorous training. Techniques for military training, good handwriting, improved medical care, education, and the maintenance of prison systems could now be diffused and sustained in their interrelationships with the factory and the market. Thus disciplinary control was never arbitrary in its application, rather its object was always quite specific. Regardless of the specificity of its object, however, the aim of such control was always oriented toward "the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed."[267]

Nietzsche's "memory of will" has been absorbed and reconfigured in ways that would make possible the productive capacities of modern man. No longer merely a matter of negative controls, or sanctions, "the correct use of the

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[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid., 139
[266] Ibid., 135.
[267] Ibid., 152.

body" becomes more explicitly connected to a series of positive results. Time is speeded up, broken down, made discreet, and pointed toward a specific end: "nothing must remain idle or useless; everything must be called upon to form the support of the act required."[268] Mnemonics becomes refined in the service of a rational economy of means that has parted company with a traditional, violent, religiously oriented system of sanctions and controls.

Nietzsche's discussion of mnemonics and Foucault's analysis of modern forms of disciplinary control imply that the colonizing effects of a cognitive-instrumental rationality take hold of the individual body and the individual memory prior to discourse. Where Habermas contends that human autonomy and individuality can be recaptured and sustained by securing the space for a free, uncoerced discourse that gives play to the full breadth of rational potential, Nietzsche and Foucault point to why the form of rationality inherent to the cognitive-instrumental sphere remains stubbornly resistant to the discursive, moral-practical interventions that Habermas envisions.

Nietzsche, and by extension Foucault, resort to a different strategy in forging their positive response to the advance of disciplinary society. If, as their strategic positions lead them to ask, the learning processes that shape individual behavior and self-awareness precede and surpass discourse, how might one work at inculcating in oneself some degree of autonomy? Both thinkers have detected, in the tactics characteristic of the disciplinary society, a clue as to how new attitudes might be installed in the feelings. Nietzsche, in fact, has suggested that our best hope in this regard is to coopt and then turn mnemonic, or "mnemotechnic," techniques back upon the self.

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[268] Ibid.

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It is important to note, however, that this *self*-discipline seeks to avoid the strictly ends-oriented element of control over others and the self inherent in disciplinary tactics. Rather, it is through the "faithful repetition of the same labors, the same renunciations" that what had seemed the fixed bounds of one's subjectivity begin to loosen, opening up the possibility of cultivating new attitudes and new feelings about one's own self. For Nietzsche, these new attitudes suggest the possibility of the "*sovereign individual*, like only to himself, liberated again from morality of custom, autonomous and supramoral." Such an "emancipated individual, with the *right* to make promises, this master of a *free* will," might break away from those unexamined ways in which his or her subjectivity has been constructed.

What mankind has taken most seriously for the greater part of its history - the idealizations of god, of morality, of a responsible, overmastering and predetermined subjectivity - are, in Nietzsche's view, "*lies* prompted by the bad instincts of sick natures." Natures, that is, that are imbued through and through with a hatred of life and resentment of finitude. Thus Nietzsche, in his autobiographical essay *Ecce Homo*, discusses a whole series of "small things which are generally considered matters of complete indifference." These "small things," his daily regimen - his eating habits, his choice of drink, the way he listens to music, the details of his literary technique, how he reads, his proclivity for long, brisk walks, where he chooses to live - stand out in his mind as "the basic concerns of life itself." It is in the serious consideration of these basic concerns that one, in opposition to all those reassuring but life denying idealizations that Nietzsche continually attacks, that "one must begin to

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relearn."[269] As we shall see, Connolly will explore how this relationship between learning and a care for life are implicated in an affirmative ethic that informs his vision of an emerging democratic ethos.

The individual must come to see himself not as "the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets, his hidden truths," but as "the man who tries to invent himself." These are Foucault's words, but they clearly reflect Nietzsche's own formulation of the aim of the care of the self:

> One thing is needful. - To "give style" to one's character - a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until everyone appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye. Here a large mass of second nature has been added; there a piece of original nature has been removed - both times through long practice and daily work at it. Here the ugly that could not be removed is concealed: there it has been reinterpreted and made sublime. Much that is vague and resisted shaping has been saved and exploited for distant views ... In the end, when the work is finished, it becomes evident how the constraint of a single taste governed and formed everything large and small. Whether this taste was good or bad is less important than one might suppose, if only it was a single taste![270]

As Nehemas has pointed out, Nietzsche suggests here a model of human behavior that understands the world textually and which seeks to define the totality of one's character as the "sum of its effects." This idea of creating

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[269] *Ecce Homo*, 256.

[270] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 290, as quoted in Nehemas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, 185.

oneself, particularly in a world that has abandoned its faith in a God that would grant an individual life its ultimate purpose, suggests a way of living that could overcome the disenchantments of modernity, recapturing a sense of individual "meaning" at the same time it impels one to carry on the difficult work of freedom.

Our discussion of Habermas, however, should make it clear that any such appeal to aesthetic self-formation carries with it profound dangers. In particular, the idea of "giving style to one's character," of validating one's actions on the basis of their "literary" coherence, would seem to deny the relevance of normative judgments. A Hannibal Lecter or an Adolf Hitler, for example, could be said to have style, to have committed their most atrocious acts as if they were aesthetic productions. In response to Nietzsche, one could argue that the nature of one's acts matter very much. In any case, the subjective criterion for self-formation suggested by Nietzsche must, if nothing else, sacrifice some of its theoretical consistency if it is to defend any general ethical or moral position - the normative gestures undertaken in its name are what Habermas, referring directly to Foucault's allegiance to certain political positions, has called a "*cryptonormativity*."[271] That such a defense does circulate through Nietzsche's writings, in a somewhat undeveloped way, should not surprise us in a writer who would argue that Habermas's "will to a system is a lack of integrity." We will, in fact, see how a neo-Nietzschean tradition, furthered both by Foucault and Connolly, will seek to more carefully articulate the ethical implications of Nietzsche's thought.

Nonetheless, the notion that one could alter the habits and feelings

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[271] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity*, 282.

inculcated by a disciplinary society at large, moving against those dictates in the limit attitude suggested by the possibility of transgression, might seem to suggest nothing so much as a delusory form of self-programming. James Miller relates, for example, Deleuze and Guattari's systematic proposals for "a number of concrete ways to produce a body without organs," that is, a body that redefines itself as the locus of a new set of pleasures and pains that escapes the physiological/psychological dispositions associated with modern social imperatives. They offer a "masochist body" as one of those "concrete" alternatives, laying down, step by step, the particular details of an imagined sado-masochistic encounter. Their formula for such an encounter, they insist, "is not a fantasy, it is a program." Within the context of the politics of sexual difference, such a program might offer itself as an useful alternative to the hegemony of heterosexual identities, but one is left to wonder about the wisdom of such self-imposed programs. Foucault himself, in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, has warned of the ways in which any liberating gesture can itself turn into a new prison of the self, as a repressed essence that offers the promise of an illusory overcoming. The implications of any such program, however, might have more directly unsettling effects. Again, the logic that creates the "masochist body" could, some might argue, be used to construct a cyberneticized body that directs its violent tendencies outward, in say, the overtly threatening form of a "rapist's body."

The Nietzschean/Foucauldian notion of an asceticized, aesthetic self-formation, however, insists on a constant reexamination of its relationship to an unfolding moment. As an asceticism, it remains open-ended; as an

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aestheticism, it understands itself performatively, rather than as any final performance. The limit attitude suggested by transgression thus refuses the Hegelian promise of a dialectical synthesis. Such a performative orientation, of course, is no guarantee against the appearance of the most monstrous acts, but it does point toward the way in which aesthetic self-formation always demands an encounter with an ethical choice. Ethics cannot be abandoned at the moment of consensus; its "yes" is to be validated only by its recurring insistence of a "no," by its constant reexamination of that consensus that Habermas has rightly located as the rational basis for social action. Ultimately, it is the insistence of this encounter that fulfills the promise of a "positive," neo-Nietzschean contribution to Habermas's intersubjective ethics. Whereas the notion of consensus implies our participation in a majoritarian, democratic politics, our orientation towards our aesthetic self-formation recaptures the inescapable contestability of that consensus, radically challenging the applications of an intersubjectively wrought moral order.

The critical charge that animates a Nietzschean/Foucauldian approach to an aestheticized self-formation captures the radicalizing possibilities inherent in democratic governance. As Connolly reminds us, "a viable democratic ethos embodies a productive ambiguity at its very core," in which its "role as an instrument of rule and governance is balanced and countered by its logic as a medium for the periodic disturbance and denaturalization of settled identities and sedimented conventions."[272] Thus, a perspective that grants primacy to an aesthetic orientation could open up possibilities for thinking a more democratic

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[272] Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil: The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault", *Political Theory*, vol. 21, no. 3 (August, 1993), 379.

politics; the struggle against congealed conventions and the persistent demand for freedom at the heart of a Foucauldian/Nietzschean ethic, Connolly maintains, is a necessary prerequisite for the temporal maintenance of democratic governance.

This chapter has attempted to reinstate that necessity by tracing the ways in which the Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition might offer a productive challenge to what it sees as the most problematic assumptions of Habermas's theory of communicative action. It has sought to question Habermas's account of how competent speakers arise in specific lifeworld contexts. By extension, it has questioned the ability of those speakers to freely enter into the discursive space in which moral and political negotiation is supposed to occur. The critical perspective offered by Nietzsche and Foucault suggests that Habermas's redaction of Mead, Piaget, and Kohlberg tends to occlude those fundamental components that both precede and exceed their rational model. As a critical gesture, the Foucauldian/Nietzschean perspective alerts us to the binding impetus of these extra-rational constructions, for though such a perspective, as Richard Rorty has pointed out, "accepts Mead's view that the self is a creation of society," it does not so readily "admit that selves shaped by liberal societies are better than the selves earlier societies created." Nietzsche's analysis of "mnemotechnics" and Foucault's complementary exploration of the way human beings are made into subjects demonstrates "how the patterns of acculturation characteristic of liberal societies have imposed on their members kinds of constraints of which older, premodern societies had not dreamed."[273]

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[273] Rorty, 63.

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This chapter, however, has tried to move past this moment of critical recognition by looking at the ways in which a Foucauldian/Nietzschean "care of the self" suggests how one might begin to work back against these subjectivizing "patterns of acculturation." By turning mnemonic and disciplinary techniques back upon oneself, one gains a foothold for exploring the unknown and indeterminable possibilities of one's self-formation. This foothold, then, would seem particularly compatible with the ethics and politics of resistance. The question remains, however, as to whether an ethic sustained by a "care of the self" can be linked to an ethic that "cares for the other," or whether a politics that seems wedded to "the distant roar of battle" can at the same time function in its "role as an instrument of rule and governance." Though it now seems reasonable to argue that attention to our aesthetic self-formation is a necessary concern for democratic theory, we need to more carefully consider whether this orientation is sufficient for the fullness of democratic thought. The next chapter will explore William Connolly's attempt to square a Nietzschean/Foucauldian ethic with these concerns.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONNOLLY ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF CLOSURE AT THE ETHICAL MOMENT

A. Vivisecting the Politics of Resentment

When exploring Nietzschean/Foucauldian concepts of an aesthetic self-formation, the question arises whether privileging the care of the self merely refigures the politics of identity, merely regroups our notions of subjective coherence, possibly doing nothing more than retargeting the sting of our resentment. Habermas, as we have seen, worries about privileging an aestheticism that remains bound to a philosophy of consciousness and that is doomed, both politically and philosophically, to refigure the dead ends of its subjective perspective. Philosophically, it can be argued that an ethic that celebrates Nietzsche's "pathos of distance" and that recommends a "care of the self" as its motivating principle organizes anew the atomistic underpinnings that it seeks to resist. Its deconstruction of modern notions of subjectivity aside, such an ethic's volitional impulses seem, at times, to suggest a privatization of thought that is ultimately apolitical, nothing more than a private fantasy. Read in these terms, a turn to Nietzsche and his heirs would signal a withdrawal from politics. Particularly given the reifying pressures of late modern capitalism and its privatizing imperative, the agonal work on one's own thought and one's "subjectivization" recommended by a Nietzschean/Foucauldian aesthetic can come across as nothing more than bourgeois self-indulgence. Such a turning inward would seem only to exacerbate the individualism that sustains different versions of liberal-capitalist ideology. Ironically, the logic of exclusion interrogated (as specific practices) by a Foucauldian/Nietzschean ethic might be recapitulated when that ethic seeks to affirm its resistances.

These suspicions are not without warrant. Nietzsche's polemics against

the Christianized herd mentality of welfare state capitalism and Foucault's flirtation with the thought of conservative economists such as Frederick Hayek make it clear that neither Foucault or Nietzsche's thought can be neatly coopted in the service of a more egalitarian, post-capitalist economic ethic. Nietzsche and Bataille's depiction of the sovereign individual and Foucault's delight in "the refusal to be governed" seem to suggest a desiring self that maps quite well onto standard liberal notions of subjectivity, negative freedom, and individual rights. William Connolly, however, has tried to work back against these readings. By fusing Nietzsche's "struggle against existential resentment" and Foucault's contestation of "moral visions that suppress the constructed, contingent, relational character of identity" in a way that suggests "a positive alternative" to conservative liberalism and "that goes some distance in specifying the political ideal that might inspire it," Connolly hopes to channel their thought towards shaping a more radically democratic and economically egalitarian future.[274]

Furthermore, Connolly's effort to wed Nietzschean/Foucauldian thought with calls for a more democratic and egalitarian form of governance thematizes a possible ethos of response to one of conservative liberalism's most effective ideological cudgels: the idea that socialist visions of a more rationally organized future fails to account for a desiring (and thus covetous) "human nature." Connolly's work on Foucault and Nietzsche seeks to incorporate the ineradicability of this desire without reducing it to a "natural" and thus uncontestable phenomenon. Thus though the desire that energizes Nietzschean/Foucauldian thought makes it clear that Connolly's intimations of a

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[274] Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil", 372.

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post-capitalist ethos is neither dependent on or insistent upon a social world in which desire could somehow be kept magically under control, it is the *structural* ineradicability of such a desire that marks the social potential of his "ethos of pluralization."

Connolly begins his Nietzschean/Foucauldian challenge to the liberal-capitalist status quo by noting that the predominate and unproblematicized notion of identity that circulates in modern societies - which in its Liberal version depicts atomized, private, rational actors free to fulfill their individual destinies under the protection of the state - "remains bound up with historically received standards of self-responsibility, self-discipline, and freedom."[275] Connolly, however, challenges the unproblematic acceptance of these received standards. He reiterates and expands upon the Nietzschean/Foucauldian insight that to think of identity as an ontological given is more than naive. The very indispensability of fixing an identity, he reminds us, serves to hide the problem of evil inherent in its social construction. This hidden evil "flows from the attempt to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the other that exposes sore spots in one's identity as evil or irrational."[276] And though defining the other as the site of irrationality and evil seeks to maintain for the self a sense of stability and moral surety, it can do so with only limited success.

Connolly locates the problem of identity at the intersection of our religious skepticism and our socio-psychological reaction to the promises and limits of our increasing technological organization. Echoing and extending

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[275] Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 20.

[276] Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil", 372.

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Weber's insights into the pathological tilt of modern capitalist societies, he seeks to demonstrate how the loss of meaning associated with the death of God is related to a bureaucratic "loss of freedom." In a world where "meaning" is focused in the here and now, the limits imposed on our "freedom" stand out all the more starkly. Ironically, our individual and collective hopes for self-mastery have been undercut by the very denials and advances with which we have sought to secure those hopes.

Beginning with the industrial revolution, Connolly notes, humanity's drive to control and order his world has situated our notion of a stable identity in institutions that "have become more highly and pervasively organized," creating an ever "more detailed array of institutional standards of normality and entitlement." As always, those who fail to meet those standards run the risk of being defined away as the other; but even those who would negotiate "a path through a finely grained network of institutionally imposed disciplines and requirements" find their personal identity dependent on a "microconformity that comes with the territory." Even this microconformity, however, can only promise a highly contingent sense of security. As technologies advance, old standards of achievement become obsolete. Furthermore, any achievement itself creates new deviations for which one can be punished.[277]

Connolly argues that the "dependent uncertainty" fostered by the multiplication of disciplines in late modernity expresses itself in a "generalized resentment."[278] This notion of resentment, crucial to Nietzsche's indictment of Christian morality, is reciprocally linked to feelings of gratitude; if gratitude

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[277]Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 20-23.
[278] Ibid., 22.

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implies recent or ongoing vulnerability, then resentment flows from the embarrassment that one feels for the weakness that necessitates that gratitude. Thus, at a social level, those "who experience themselves as penetrated too thoroughly by disciplinary powers and standards resent even the benefits they receive."[279] In a world in which happiness is sought within and dependent upon the confines of an ongoing normalization, there is always a brooding anger that percolates below the surface of a society founded upon the possibility of a rational order. The very mechanisms of modernity constituted to maintain a sense of certainty, it seems, actually escalate in the individual a growing awareness of his or her own contingency, extending in him or her at its most radical level to a "resentment against finitude ... projecting a fundamental unfairness into being and then resenting 'it' for being unfair."[280] Far from achieving Condorcet's overreaching vision of a serenely deathless paradise, modern rationality has become increasingly allied to a bureaucratized, normalized economy that exacerbates problematic questions about the value of life in a world where that life has become firmly entrenched as the end-all of our existence.

The projection of this economically driven resentment, then, occurs within the milieu of our modern, post-traditional self-understandings, in which the "physiological fact" that "life is short encourages the self" to actively fashion his or her own individuality.[281] Drawing upon the Heideggerean insight that the performance of our own death must always ineradicably remain our own performance, Connolly reminds us that this irreducible encounter offers a

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[279] Ibid.
[280] Ibid., 164.
[281] Ibid., 17.

strong psychological motivation for establishing "priorities in life to consolidate the loose array of possibilities in life into the density of a particular personality with specific propensities, purposes, principles."[282] The force of this motivation, however, "creates an ambiguous context for the exercise of freedom."[283] Death, after all, marks the most stubborn barrier to modern notions of freedom; it marks out the possibility of freedom as the difficulty of choosing in a set of circumstances where all of our valued choices cannot be made manifest. For a free mortal, to choose is to be haunted by the road(s) not taken. To choose "to do or to become x" eliminates "alternative possibilities; thus "every act of freedom is therefore bound up with the possibilities it must forego."[284] The fragility of our projects in an always changing post-technological world are exacerbated by a finitude that closes down the flexibility of our responses to those changes: "If I lived forever, I could be a philosopher, a professional basketball coach, a concert pianist, a transvestite, and a corporate lawyer."[285] We will not live forever.

Connolly argues that the crux of Nietzsche's project, and its ultimate upshot for modern democratic politics, is thus an injunction to godless humanity to reassess the problem of individual subjectivity, or selfhood, and its relation to death. Nietzsche, and in his wake Foucault, Connolly reminds us, seeks to overcome modern humanity's resentment against finitude by inculcating in the self a care for life, a joyous embrace of the contingency that (s)he cannot escape. Nietzsche attempts to overcome the ways in which the new forms of

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[282] Ibid.

[283] Ibid.

[284] Ibid., 18.

[285] Ibid., 17.

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"salvation" suggested by modernity have stranded the individual in the flux of time. The predicament of modern humanity for Nietzsche, Connolly reminds us, reflects a now familiar double bind: humanity is bereft of a god that might transform death into eternal salvation ("God is dead"), but it is determined to maintain its mastery over the capriciousness of circumstance.

Though for Nietzsche Christianity's will to power, its greatest genius, was in using this resentment against life itself as a validation of its promise of eternal salvation, that promise, he thought, could no longer sustain itself in a godless world. The nihilism of our modern age, Nietzsche argues, is in fact the inevitable conclusion of Christianity's effort to protect humanity from the vicissitudes of life. In preaching a resignation to the limits of our finite condition, Christianity has paved the way for a type of "last men" no longer capable of positing their own overcoming as an orienting existential goal: "man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man."[286] Whereas in Christianity the struggle against life had been channeled towards a preparatory resignation, Nietzsche announces that the challenge to modern, post-traditional humanity will be to discover in its self-creative capacities a life-embracing ethic, a nobility of spirit that will not seek to demean an inescapable, ever unfolding now. Nietzsche, in effect, seeks to work past our nihilism, our loss of meaning, by working on its connection to the issues of the ongoing construction of our freedom. The "forgetting" of our capacity for self-creation fostered by Christianity has left post-Christian humanity ill equipped to forge the values,

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[286] Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 17, as quoted in Robert Pippen, "Nietzsche's Alleged Farewell," in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge, MA: The Cambridge University Press, 1996), 257.

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goals, and/or sense of truth that could secure the "meaning" of our lives.[287]

A sense of the possibility of an ongoing liberation, however, does not offer itself as an unproblematic post-traditional, historical inevitability. Quite to the contrary, for the mass of (post-materialist) humanity, such a possibility will remain an unconscious unobtainable, and easily exploited matrix of desire. As such, its suggestions of constant movement will be particularly susceptible to capitalist colonization, particularly in the form of a commodity fetishism that can always promise the consumerist equivalent of a new "freedom," of a new "becoming." It seems fair to argue, in fact, that the logic of an ever opening present is a key to the psychology of late modern consumer capitalism. Happiness and meaning can be had in the next clothing style, and then the next, imagining that they can be had, finally and contentedly, somewhere behind the wrapper of the future. Christianity's promise of an other-worldly salvation that is beyond our immediate comprehension is transferred to a sense of creature comfort and peace of mind whose final consolidation always lies just beyond our reach.

As the salvationism of capitalism is forced to recognize, however, that it cannot fulfill the illusion of this contentment, as its promise of "meaning" begins to ring hollow, it spawns a series of resentments that map onto the fear of death and the limits that it imposes. Given that the Hobbesian and, to a lesser extent, Lockean variants of the liberal tradition are founded as a protection against untimely death, the implications of this generalized resentment should not be underestimated. It may, in fact, have profound consequences for the very

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[287] It is important to point out at this juncture that the Nietzschean effort to wrestle with the nihilism of modernity does not offer a final overcoming; it instead suggests a teleology that insists that it can never arrive at a fixed endpoint.

stability of modern democratic structures themselves. Connolly, like Habermas, recognizes that this generalized resentment manifests itself in symptomatic pathologies ranging from drug abuse to "random" acts of "'mindless'" violence. Connolly, however, suggests that it "receives its most revealing and politically active expression in the hostility of those in positions of official independence to the complaints of those in officially recognized conditions of dependence."[288] Thus, in late modernity, the attempts to secure and maintain identity has often led to a politics that seeks to exclude or punish the other. At the level of the individual, these exclusionary tactics lead to a narrowing of life's choices, closing "off access to the subject's own pre-rational, embodied otherness."[289] On the collective level, such tactics too often pander to and reinforce various forms of racism, sexism, and nationalism. Denied the mastery of infinite choice, the masses are an easy target for strategies that seek to relocate that mastery at the borders that define who "we" are. If we had but world enough and time, other's objections, refusals and differences might not be a crime. But we do not, there seems to be no time, and we must locate and punish those responsible for unsettling our dreams of certainty. The limits of that mastery, and death is the ultimate such limit, build up a reservoir of resentment that drives the desire to seek out new targets - blacks, Jews, Hispanics, homosexuals, the intellectual, the liberal, the conservative, etc. – that can be

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[288] Ibid., 23.

[289] Stephen K. White, "Foucault's Challenge to Critical Theory", *American Political Science Review* (80: 2, June, 1986), 424.

marginalized, isolated and mastered.[290]

Convincingly, for example, Connolly pinpoints how the religious right's condemnations of "abortion, atheism, evolution, communism, liberalism, infanticide, euthanasia, ERA, homosexuality, lesbianism, and perversion"[291] has come to form an ideological center for Republican attempts to capture the left's long-time governing coalition in American politics. Connolly suggests, for example, that this series of fundamentalist exclusions has had a particular appeal for the large block of the American electorate represented by "northern, male, white, blue-collar workers and white-collar workers of modest means," and that the resonances between this traditionally Democratic constituency and fundamentalist right begins to grow as each of these constituencies becomes "convinced that the enemies of the other were also its own enemies."[292]

The white North remained a coherent voting block in post-World War II American politics to the degree that its individual members could construct their identity within an "ideology of sacrifice."[293] That ideology located "their dignity"

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[290]I have pointed out earlier that Habermas, too, has suggested that modernity is marked by a consciousness of time that continually posits a "now" that can only be "distinguished from the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future." Every new moment is an "epochal new beginning" that "is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new." Modernity's self-understanding as a break with the past, in other words, demands a *"continuous renewal."* The argument developed here follows out of Foucault's suggestion that his work seeks to continue the work inaugurated by the Enlightenment by thematizing a more radical understanding of critique - a critique that, following Habermas's definition of modernity, is itself always in the process of a constant renewal and reassessment. Connolly's reading of Foucault suggests that this constant renewal of critique reflects the limits (and thus essentially open) understanding that always pushes its final destination beyond its reach. The ways in which this refusal of a settled consensus resonates with Habermas's insistence on the ongoing contestability of any specific consensus points to one of the most fruitful intersections between these two discourses.

[291] This catalog comes from Jimmy Swaggart, as quoted from Harold Bloom, *The American Religion*, 178, in Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization,* 110.

[292] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 111.

[293] Ibid.

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in " their role as 'head of household,' their freedom" in " a willingness to sacrifice personal pleasures now to insulate their spouses form the rigors of the workplace and to improve future prospects for their children."[294] Such an ideological coherence, of course, was sustained by its own exclusions: wives within this lower-middle class constituency, no doubt, continued to be denied the self-surety and limited potential for power sustained by this "network of male authoritarianism." "Nonetheless," Connolly argues, this "identity of secular sacrifice" was "pivotal" in cultivating white working class "loyalty to welfare state liberalism" and for providing "channels" through which this constituency could link-up with the fundamentalisms that were already circulating through the Southern right.[295]

These channels began to open wide by the end of the 1970's, when "the civil rights movement, the American defeat in Vietnam, the growth of middle class feminism, the convergence of the welfare state into the programs of the Great Society, the rise of middle class environmentalism, and the conversion of many industrial jobs into service jobs" began to undo the certainties of white lower-middle class identity.[296] As essential parts of the ruling Democratic coalition's ideological rhetoric, these challenges to the sanctity of menial labor, the primacy of the nuclear family, and the ideology of sacrifice are "experienced as attacks on the very fundaments" of lower and lower middle class identity.[297] At a socio-psychological level, then, the politics of resentment would seem to play a crucial role in the Republican right's ongoing takeover of welfare state

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[294] Ibid.

[295] Ibid., 112.

[296] Ibid.

[297] Ibid.

politics. If this is the case, Connolly's turn to Nietzsche's critique of existential resentment offers a telling indictment of the upsurge in the politics of separation, segregation and dispersal - the 1992 Republican Presidential Convention, Proposition 187, the Contract With America, or Bob Dole's recent campaign ads complaining about Clinton's coddling of "illegals," for example, all attempt to reconvene a specific brand of political identity by targeting various others (blacks, Hispanics, homosexuals, single mothers) who threaten that identity.

B. THE ASYMMETRY OF THE "FUGITIVE EXPERIENCE OF BEING"

Working back against the drift of this resentment with the hope of unsettling the ways in which it is mobilized in electoral politics, Connolly argues that it is the structure of desire that marks both the empirical predicament of modern humanity and the ethical possibilities that flow from such a predicament. We have seen the formulation of desire in Nietzsche's work as the will to power, and in Bataille as a function of his general economy. Connolly, however, reminds us that Foucault works to demonstrate that that desire cannot be thought of as a cosmological formulation. His redaction of the transcendent doublet suggests that it remains "a strange, persistent, self-subverting configuration of modern discourse" not because it, to offer a paradox, reflects an impulsive volition, but because it captures *the structure* of *any* epistemic effort. Foucault conceptualizes this doublet in a way that demonstrates that the "subject of action and inquiry is perpetually chased by the compulsion to clarify opaque elements in its desire, perception and judgment."[298] As any enquiry, in

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[298] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 11.

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other words, moves towards the space in which it assumed it could conclude its search, the target of that search is pushed beyond the grasp of the consciousness that now occupies that original target of that enquiry. Thus, the complex of events and circumstances that Nietzsche claims we commonly and mistakenly call "the will," or in its more passive form, "the understanding," must itself remain opaque. As Iris Young notes, "consciousness, speech expressiveness, are possible only if the subject always surpasses itself, and is thus necessarily unable to comprehend itself."[299] In becoming conscious of desire, in other words, we can not account for the ways in which the desire for that clarity is organized. "Every dialogue," even the very possibility of coherence, Connolly reminds us, thus "invokes," by its very structure, "a set of prejudgments and preunderstandings not susceptible to exhaustive formulation within its frame."[300]

Connolly's effort to reimagine an "etiology of desire" in these terms challenges the clarity of the categorical distinctions that inform a Habermasian ethic. The experiential force of "an organization of energy" that seeks "to possess, caress, love, emulate, help, befriend, defeat, stymie, boss, fuck, kill, or injure other human beings, both as individuals and types" are, furthermore, "too protean, multiple, contingent, and promiscuous" to be strategically separated out from our moral-practical considerations.[301] Beyond insisting on the ineradicability of a subconscious desire, however, Connolly insists that the intersubjective formulation of moral-practical propositions cannot be separated

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[299] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,1990), 231-32.

[300] Ibid., 10.

[301] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 49.

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out from the confluence of subjective desires in which they are framed. Connolly, in other words, finds that the structure of desire frustrates the purely analytical effort to separate out one cognitive dimension from another; to use Habermasian terms, attempts to relegate affective/experiential issues to an aesthetic-expressive sphere ignores the ways in which those issues infiltrate the cognitive-instrumental and moral-practical spheres.

Any attempt to regulate the cognitive and the affective in the service of a moral/political economy, in fact, conceals the "logic of deceit built into the consolidation of desire."[302] Given the connection, in Habermas's thought between such a consolidation and the capacity of the modern subject to engage in responsible moral negotiations, Connolly thus questions the structural purity that undergirds the ideal speech situation. Connolly, however, disagrees with Habermas's contention that the inability to sustain these cognitive distinctions signals an ethical disaster. To the contrary, Connolly understands this structural impurity to be good news for our ethical possibilities. This "impurity" not only guards against any uncontestable, final ground, it in fact directly implicates us with the "other."

Connolly develops this claim about the connection between categorical impurity and social interconnectedness by returning to Foucault's analysis of the modern subject. It will be remembered that Foucault, at the conclusion of *The Order of Things*, proclaims that the "death of man" may be in sight. He argues that the Kantian notion of subjectivity, caught within the aporias of the empirico-transcendental doublet, is merely the latest in a series of historically contingent formations and that there is no reason to assume that it will endure

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[302] Ibid., 52.

into infinity. Earlier, in fact, we have pursued a certain reading of Nietzsche, Bataille and Foucault that undermines many of the operative assumptions of such a subjectivity by reminding us of the limits of its mastery. This critical gesture, these attempts to question the unproblematic reconfirmations of a modern subjectivity, at times threatens to burst the bounds of that subjectivity, implying the possibility of a new, post-subjective *episteme* that would deliver humanity from the pathologies associated with the "figure of man."

Such an escape, however, as Foucault recognizes, is highly problematic, for it seems unlikely that it could be effected without merely reconvening the paradox that sustains the tension of modern man's doubled subjectivity. There is no final destination, Foucault seems to think, that could free the individual, free his or her thought, from the ineluctable strictures of one's physical limitations or one's history. As soon as thought moves beyond the bounds that contain it, those bounds are refigured anew, often in unforeseeable ways. There seems, this line of argument allows, no transcendental ground, no final systematization of human agency, not even at the site of a "pure absence," that could somehow prevent thought from roaming past itself, or stop its attempts to link up with that which is beyond its range. The intuition of this "otherness," this "unthought," in other words, seems not only an inevitable consequence of any attempt to portray an atomized consciousness, imagined above all as a *difference* from the world. Rather, such a sense of otherness reveals itself as a structural inevitability of all efforts at a coherent thinking. Identity, by definition, is bound to difference. Connolly tries to think how this intuitive attraction (to an absence that, by the very structure of identity, must be there) could inform a

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political ethic sensitive to an "other," an ethic that promotes an active, engaged, and magnanimous humbleness in our human relationships. Thus, rather than seeking to escape the language of Foucault's critique of Kantian subjectivity, Connolly uses it to mark two possible poles of his positive, neo-Nietzschean ethic - this doubled subjectivity is the site from which the private individual is *necessarily* caught up in a movement beyond itself that implicates it with the other.

Connolly tries to turn the question of modern freedom into a resource for imagining the contours of a post-liberal society that more clearly gripped its existential predicament. If man empirically posits himself as a finite object, thrown into situations largely beyond his or her individual control, Connolly hopes that this recognition could help foster a sense of interconnectedness in human relations. Because one always finds oneself as an "otherness," distinct from his or her "is not," he or she immediately recognizes the affinity that he or she shares with all particular others that he or she might encounter. The incalculable difference that is a structural necessity of our own unique identity is inescapably what structures the possibilities of those that we encounter.

The "care of the self" that emerges in the space cleared by this genealogy of identity can alert us to us to our own radical contingency and the contingency that structures the identities of those that we encounter; it, in fact, finds in this space the possibility of an "hypothetical universal," what Connolly calls an "ontalogical universal," that recognizes a fundamental character of being that resists imputing a logic to it and affirms its alogical character." This ontalogical opposes the "contrived forgetfulness" of essentialist, "moralist-

political discourses; it, to the contrary, is insistent in its refusal to forget the contingent, finite nature of the human condition." This insistence, in turn, suggests a subjectivity that appears grounded not in any transcendental fundament, but rather against *"a background of emptiness."* The void that serves as the backdrop for human experience becomes, in a sense, the ground for a positive alternative to the "politics of 'good and evil.'"[303]

Rather than leading to the nihilistic embrace of a moral relativism, this backdrop creates the space in which a Foucauldian/Nietzschean ethic foregrounds the ways in which a caring for one's self fosters an appreciation of the contingent, finite predicament of the concrete other. Nietzsche, and in his wake Foucault, suggest that the limit of one's ineluctable finitude creates the dramaturgical space in which one defines oneself *and* in which one encounters others. Thus, for example, though Foucault realizes that it has become strange to imagine an ethics that would be organized around a genealogical orientation towards the care of the *self*, his genealogy of Greek attitudes about the proper relationship between older men and young boys suggests that an attention to one's "subjectivizations" implicates one in a complex game, a game that implicates one in the social circumstances in which one finds oneself. By problematizing the aesthetic form of one's self-presentation, one turns to consider the ethical stakes of one's social relationships and commitments. Far from eliminating the moral/ethical focus of Habermas's intersubjective ethics, our inability to reduce these stakes to an universalizable code is in fact what conditions the inescapability of our ethical encounters.

Foucault counsels that the individual who would become what he or she

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[303] Connolly, "Beyond Good and Evil", 374-77.

is must overcome the modern subconsciousness's "essential, permanent, obsessive relationship with death" with an injunction that one has "no right to despise the present"[304] The individual thus might be reconstituted in an attitude of "permanent reactivation" that compels one to turn one's attention to the "small things" that constitute a concrete selfhood and to pay particular attention to the careful work of self-production. By extension, our relationship with the concrete other comes to reflect a sensitivity to their involvement with *their* self-creation within the *context* of *their* finitude. Our attitude toward the concrete other becomes not so much a matter of tolerance as an active awareness of the other's struggle to posit his or herself as a force acting on and reacting to the myriad other forces that continually impose themselves upon them. Connolly's extension of this ontalogical perspective holds that "the very contingency of identity and the universality of struggle with mortality can sometimes solicit in the self a fugitive experience that stretches above and below any particular identity."[305] The "unpursued possibilities" of one's life reveal "how life overflows the boundaries of identity."[306] Identity ceases to be connected to any particular convention, and thus is defined more sharply in terms of its relation to the difference of the other. Thus, the ontalogical perspective leads us along paths in which one's identity is "implicated ethically with others."[307]

The ontalogical universal that undergirds Connolly's Nietzschean/Foucauldian ethic suggests a context in which these contestations might proceed from "a common point of departure through which agonistic

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[304] Foucault, "What is Enlightenment", 40.
[305] Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 166.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid.

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respect can be cultivated between contending identities."[308] It is here, in fact, where the connection between a post-Nietzschean ethic with Habermas's ideal speech situation can begin to take shape. For the competencies and attitudes that actors bring to that situation can now be accounted for in ways that are more sensitive to their intrasubjective struggles to become who they are and the importance of these struggles as themselves being an irreducibly political moment. Habermas's regulative ideal of intersubjective consensus might now be enlarged to include "the Nietzschean portrayal of the body as ambiguously the site of social inscriptions and a source of energies exceeding those scripts."[309] Politically, the discursive spaces (both in their real and imagined sense) that Habermas argues for can now be expanded to include the irreducible structural contingency of identity. Discourse remains an ideal, but that ideal must now come to be thought of in terms that never lose sight of the profoundly political nature of the experiential/aesthetic issues that discursive participants bring to the table. Such an ideal would demand a mutual respect between actors that would not *necessarily* entail presuppositions of consensus or even mere tolerance. Rather, it would be quite happy with the radicality of difference that its presupposing ethic seems to entail.[310]

Connolly's ethical/political orientation thus appreciates modern forms of subjectivity as an ambiguous achievement. He argues that our subjectivity, as a locus of a desire that it cannot control or contain, marks both a compulsion to consolidate our identity and the impossibility of ever fully finalizing that

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[308] Ibid.

[309] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 13.

[310] Obviously, the relationship of this discussion to specific political mechanics would be crucial to developing the ideas suggested here.

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consolidation. Rather than relegate our affective and experiential drives to their "proper" cognitive sphere, Connolly appropriates the Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition in an effort to refocus the place of desire in the liberal-capitalist tradition. That desire, Connolly argues, does not necessarily lead to an economic struggle between economic actors. The very structure of desire, he hopes, can point to a recognition of the concrete other that implies the other's right to economic justice. Beyond his fairly pedestrian suggestion for a steep progressive income tax that would reinvest the workings of a market economy in the distribution of public goods (such as public transportation, education, etc.), Connolly's contribution to the politics of economic justice centers on imagining an individualism drained of the resentments that prop up the rhetoric of inequality. By working on the sting of contingency, by focusing on the finite points of departure from which all individuals must necessarily proceed, Connolly's ethic seeks to uncover the ontalogical basis for political community and economic solidarity. That ethic recognizes that desire both binds us to other actors and provides an ineradicable source for political action. Desire drives, at a point both anterior to and within the framework of intersubjective communication, the volition without which a democratic politics cannot proceed. Desire thus cannot and should not be eliminated from a politics that seeks a fairer economic distribution. It, in fact, remains an indispensable point of departure for the contestations that would challenge the prevailing economic and political status quo.

Connolly, then, imagines a politics that is sustained by "*an ethics of engagement*."[311] Such an engagement remains indebted to the traditional

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[311] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 234.

pluralist paradigm to the degree that that engagement is enacted "between constituencies locked into relationships of interdependence and strife." No doubt, however, the form of this engagement will differ from the static, conservative tendencies of traditional pluralism depending on the particularities of the moment in which that engagement occurs. To the degree that *settled* constituencies seek to sustain their identities and promote their interests, Connolly argues for a relationship of "agonistic respect." Agonistic respect

> explores an alternative to which people strive to interrogate exclusions built into their own entrenched identities. It pursues an agonistic ethic of care that ambiguates assumptions it itself is often compelled to make about the truth of the identity it endorses. It probes the idea of a politicization of difference, in which conventional identities and standards sealed in transcendental mortar are tested and loosened through political contestation. More hesitantly yet, it explores the ethicality of a politics that refuses to resign itself unambiguously to limits imposed by the structural requirements of any particular order, a politics alert to a tragic gap between the imperatives of organization in the order it idealizes and admirable possibilities of life that exceed those imperatives.[312]

Connolly's minimal model of politics, his ethos of pluralization, thus complements both Habermas's communicative ethic and traditional forms of pluralism by radicalizing their notions of neutral tolerance. The synchronic structure of the pluralist paradigm and the consensual impetus of a Habermasian politics remain an attractive model for the space in which those groups and interests that have achieved a reason-able political and economic position might stand in a competitive relationship with rival identities and

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[312] Connolly, *Identity/Difference*, 14.

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interests. Habermasian and traditional pluralist's notions of tolerance, however, too easily ignore the hidden social and economic pressures that sustain the bounds in which political contestations and negotiations occur. A Habermasian ethic, of course, does move to loosen these bounds by opening the field of discourse to all participants that are affected by the outcome of that discourse. As we have seen, however, a Connonian/Foucauldian/Nietzschean inspired critique of this ethic seriously challenges the model of learning on which Habermas's notion of communicative competence is based and thus questions the symmetrical organization of his ideal speech situation. Habermas's paradigm of communicative action, it is argued, comes dangerously close to reconfiguring the worst aspects of the pluralist status quo that it seeks to displace.

Connolly names the response to this danger of sedimentation as a moment of "critical responsiveness."[313] The genealogical disturbances of one's sense of self, the modest work on the limits and dependencies created by one's physical habits, operate to foster an ethos of pluralization that complements the static structures of traditional pluralism. These disturbances confront those who negotiate from a (relatively) privileged position within these structures with a challenge to the unproblematicized criterion of normalcy that sustain the self-assurances of their identities and which typically exclude those who would challenge those structures. Furthermore, it offers a strategy, a set of tactics, that would enable those who are presently excluded from the space of negotiation and contestation to find a route into that space. By offering a strategy for contesting and modifying one's sense of self, Connolly's appropriation of the

[313] Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, 234-35.

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Nietzschean/Foucauldian tradition creates possibilities for political intervention that might otherwise be ignored, opportunities that might be missed.

Connolly, then, suggests a style of *living,* an ethos, that would be commensurate with a more radically democratic political structure. Given that Connolly's vision of "agono-pluralism" presupposes a more equitable redistribution of wealth, it may seem naive to imagine a reconstruction of contemporary political-economic space that would proceed by refiguring the ways in which we *imagine the ethos* that sustains that space. There can be no doubt that any attempt to work for a more democratic and economically just future must work on more than just the imaginative register. A politics of engagement must seek economic justice at both the structural and substructural levels; Connolly's pluralizing ethos thus cannot be effective if it is reduced to an anti-materialism. As Connolly points out, however, any attempt to bring about a more attractive political future is immediately caught in what he calls the Rousseauean paradox of political founding. Rousseau discusses this paradox in relation to the founding of the general will:

> In order for an emerging people to appreciate the
> healthy maxims of politics and follow the
> fundamental rules of statecraft, the effect would have
> to become the cause; the social spirit, which would
> have to preside over the founding of the institution
> itself; and men would have to be prior to the laws
> what they ought to become by means of laws.[314]

Any attempt to imagine a political future at odds with a current political arrangement is likely to understand the relationship between political institutions, economic structures and their sustaining ethos to all be of a set

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[314] Ibid., 137-38.

piece. "The problem" always arises as "how to establish either condition without the previous attainment of the other upon which it depends."[315]

Thus, though Connolly's attempts to reconfigure the pluralist imagination are less specific than other more overtly material or institutionally oriented prescriptions, his work on reimagining a more democratic ethos remains a necessary point for intervening in the perceived injustices of the political moment. Though it is naive to think that such an intervention can stand on its own, it does allow one to cultivate a coherent attitude about the impetus for pursuing political interventions that reflect the possibilities for a post-capitalist democratic individualism. It suggests the motivation for opposing the entrenched identities and reified structures of modern liberal-capitalist orders by considering the vibrant possibilities of living in a more democratic future. It suggests a way of living that would fold the lure of desire into the necessities of social and political justice.

Nonetheless, Connolly's Nietzschean/Foucauldian ethic cannot, it seems, do without some of the most salient insights offered by Habermas's communicative ethic. Connolly's approach does cultivate the "permanent reactivation of an attitude" that is a necessary part of an active, democratic politics. Furthermore, it does seem to be able to account for the general outline of a contestatory politics in which contending identities and interests coexist with one another on the basis of an "agonistic respect." It is less successful, however, in accounting for the basis of *democratic political action*. Habermas's paradigm of communicative action's efforts to imagine the philosophical basis for democratic decision making offers an outline for arriving at decisions that

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[315] Ibid., 138.

addresses the moments when contending parties are forced to suspend the agonal defense of their own identity structures. The turn towards the necessities of collective action must be rooted in terms of a reason-able process of negotiation that works as a check against the closure that always marks any particular act. If the specific applications of Habermas's model of communicative action remain too closely bound at times to the particular lifeworld contexts from which they emerge, that model nonetheless offers a viable framework in which more radical contestations of those contexts can work towards the moments of consensus that remain necessary for a stable political organization.

C.   CONCLUSION

This thesis has privileged a Nietzschean/Foucauldian/Connonian approach to the ethical and political in order to flesh out what it understands to be a crucially underdeveloped aspect of Habermas's theory of communicative action; it has sought to problematicize the understanding of how identities are formed and maintained that informs a Habermasian ethic. This thesis has not, however, sought to overturn the intersubjective core of that ethic. It seems plausible, in fact, that an intersubjective framework that is more sensitive to the asymmetries of power that typify our social world would be better equipped to intervene in the politics of the moment. Likewise, an aesthetically oriented politics seems to need, at those moments in which it is forced consolidate its performative poses in order to act, a mechanism for checking, for contesting, those actions. A process of intersubjective negotiation remains the most democratic of any such

mechanism.

In the context of this balancing act, it is Connolly's notion of the "fugitive experience of being" that suggests how we might hold the Nietzschean/Foucauldian and Habermasian approaches in relation to each other. That fugitive experience marks the irreducibility of the "other" in any direct encounter between contending identities. That irreducibility is no less operative in the encounter between competing political-philosophical predispositions. If we imagine these competing predispositions as alternative ways of intervening in the political present with an eye towards the political future, we are wise to recognize the productive tension that exists between them. As Jacques Derrida has suggested, any intervention, as a performative moment, can be iterated across innumerable contexts, but it can never be perfectly realized, never totally present to itself.[316] Likewise, neither approach that we have surveyed in this essay has a claim to a final truth, a final consolidation of our approach to the political future. Neither approach, in fact, denies the fallibility, the contestability of its prescriptions. To my mind, however, Connolly's articulation of a Foucauldian/Nietzschean approach more fully thematizes this fallibility by more directly problematizing the relationship between the utter contingency of particular social/political contexts and the pressures of consensus. The "fugitive experience of being," then, reminds us of a supplementarity that always escapes any attempt to find an irreducible ground for our moral or ethical predispositions; it reminds us of the constantly shifting incompleteness of any political predisposition, tenor, or argument.

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[316] Jacques Derrida, *Limited, Inc*, trans. by Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 71.

Such a "supplement," eluding immediate articulation or total presentation, is more than merely, as Habermas would have it, "at our backs." The "unthought of our thought" has a more active role, implying, on the one hand, both a limit to our debates and a privileged ordering of our judgments, and on the other, the necessity of a constant reopening.[317] Given the limited nature of any theoretical intervention into the political present, it should be apparent that neither Habermas theory of communicative action nor the Connonian/Foucauldian/Nietzschean ethic that I have opposed to it can speak to the totality of political and ethical experience. The more particular claim pursued by this thesis suggests that each of these opposing responses to the political, moral and ethical limits of rationality are particularly suited for addressing the aporetic tensions of its debating partner.   Though this rule of supplementarity works in both directions, this thesis has certainly privileged a Nietzschean/Foucauldian critique in order to work back against the grain of Habermas's communicative ethic. The central thrust of this thesis has been a tentative exploration of how subjectivity and identity reify the boundaries that marks "me" from "you" in dangerously inflexible ways. Habermas's theory of communicative action, it is true, moves to escape from a philosophy of consciousness, but in its effort to best ensure "equal treatment," it fails to pay sufficient attention to the political implications of how identity is constructed and how such constructions necessarily occlude the connections between us and those that we unproblematically censure for their difference, lack of responsibility and dangerousness.

Beyond fostering a renewed sense of those interconnections, the

[317] Christopher Norris, *Derrida* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 110-111.

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ontological-ethical asymmetricality of all identity that we have explored in this thesis might help us guard against the violence that is submerged in the Habermasian drive for consensus. Though Habermas would ideally allow that any such consensus must be open for an ongoing recontestation, it is possible that the structure of consensus that he locates in language inaugurates a teleological momentum that becomes increasingly insensitive to challenges to that telos. The neo-Nietzschean tradition that we have briefly surveyed in this thesis suggests that such a teleological fulfillment is never secured politically and ethically without its violences (however justified). As a matter of thought, such consensus, to the degree that its finality becomes less problematic, can only be illusory. Connolly's notion of the "fugitive experience of being," in fact, reminds us that the structure of language is not simply consensual; a linguistic utterance always presents itself as both the possibility of consensus and as that which can never be *totally* consensual.

These considerations, finally, point us back to a more realistic appraisal of Habermas's position in regards to the primacy of any such consensus. To turn his thought into a "giant consensus machine," in fact, is to construct a straw man. Habermas seems well aware that any claim offered for intersubjective appraisal retains, in some sense, an inherent fallibility. Furthermore, it is clear that he never partakes in the utopian dream of a grand, settled consensus. Rather, his thought is ultimately a pragmatic gesture, returning us to a world in which politics cannot avoid the necessity of action. Habermas's theory of communicative action thus remains an engaged attempt to come to grips with how that necessity might be negotiated on democratic terms. Furthermore, the

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consensus that Habermas posits as a teleological endpoint can never reach closure - its contestation and examination, much as the neo-Nietzschean perspective outlined in this thesis suggests, is ongoing.

Finally, one should note that Habermas is quite willing, at some points, to project a politics that sounds quite congenial to a neo-Nietzschean politics of aesthetic resistance and its concomitant demands for asymmetrically sustained notions of care. In arguing that the conflicts of late capitalism "arise along the seams between system and lifeworld," Habermas comes to suggest an alternative to party politics that moves towards "new forms of a 'politics in the first person,' a politics that is expressive and at the same time has a democratic base."[318] Such a politics can no longer respond only to "the supply of power, security, or value, but" must also consider "the supply of motivation and meaning."[319] In a world where the legitimacy of political participation seems to be increasingly replaced by apathy and the colonizing forgetfulness of a technologized and commodified lifestyle, the very possibility of resistance and the promise of social/economic justice cannot, it seems, be totally disentangled from this gesture toward the politics of identity.

If it is true, of both Habermas and the neo-Nietzscheans, that the very effort to address these questions cannot totally account for their own, internal will to power, that does not completely invalidate that effort. In fact it is probably inevitable that the mechanisms of governance, of how things get done, must address both the question of action and its identity-forming effects. This thesis merely suggests that a theory of action based in consensus must always

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[318] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2, 395-6.

[319] Habermas, "Reconstructing Historical Materialism," in *Jügen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader* (Beacon Press: Boston, 1989), 140.

proceed in a sometimes uneasy alliance with theories of power and identity that sound the call for reopening what our rationality has wrought.

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