

Adorno, Kant and Enlightenment

DEBORAH COOK
University of Windsor, Ontario
dcook@uwindsor.ca

Abstract

Theodor W. Adorno often made reference to Immanuel Kant's famous essay on enlightenment. Although he denied that immaturity is self-incurred, the first section of this article will show that he adopted many of Kant's ideas about maturity in his philosophically informed critique of monopoly conditions under late capitalism. The second section will explore Adorno's claim that the educational system could foster maturity by encouraging critical reflection on the social conditions that have made us what we are. Finally, this article will demonstrate that Adorno links enlightenment to Kant's idea of a realm of ends.

Keywords: Adorno, Kant, maturity, autonomy, enlightenment, realm of ends

When Kant assessed the *ethos* of his time in his essay on enlightenment, he declared that humanity is immature because it is unable to use its 'understanding without direction from another'. Rather than thinking for themselves, individuals often allow authorities and experts to do their thinking for them, to act as their guardians (WIE, 8: 35).¹ For Kant, of course, enlightenment presupposes maturity. It requires the courage to use reason autonomously, to think for oneself. Adopting many of Kant's ideas about maturity, Adorno gives them considerable political force when he states that maturity would be achieved if individuals were able 'to resist established opinions and, one and the same, ... to resist existing institutions, to resist everything that is merely posited, that justifies itself with its existence'. For Adorno, a critical theory of society presupposes maturity in the Kantian sense; it demands that critics exercise autonomy in the sense that they think for themselves and are 'not merely repeating someone else' (Adorno 1998a: 281–2 *passim*).²

Adorno also follows Kant when he seeks to acquire a philosophically informed understanding of his present. Just as Kant examined the social situation of his time with a view to gauging humanity's potential for enlightenment, Adorno plumbed historical conditions in the twentieth century with a similar end in view. The first section of this article will outline Adorno's assessment of the predicament of individuals under late, or monopoly, capitalism.³ After briefly describing Adorno's 'ontology of the wrong state of things' (Adorno 1973: 11), I shall discuss his ideas about maturity as an *Ausgang*. In this context, I shall examine Adorno's claims about the importance of self-reflection for maturity, along with his ideas about how the educational system might encourage individuals to reflect on the socio-economic conditions that have made them what they are. The article concludes with an account of Adorno's views about enlightenment under transformed conditions – conditions that Adorno links to Kant's idea of a realm of ends.

1. The Wrong State of Things

The question that Adorno asks throughout his work animates Kant's essay on enlightenment as well, namely 'What is our present?' Adorno answers this question by scrutinizing prevailing socio-economic conditions. His examination of these conditions helps to explain the immaturity of individuals because, among other things, it reveals that late capitalist society fosters adaptation and conformity. In a damning account of social integration under late capitalism, Adorno not only declares that late capitalist society is untrue or false, he makes the moral judgement that society is evil. Society is evil because it exercises forms of social conditioning that are so extensive that they can justifiably be compared to genocide, 'the absolute integration' (Adorno 1973: 362). Since individuals are obliged to adapt and conform to society if they want to survive, they simply perpetuate the status quo, obeying a 'principle of inertia'. And, on Adorno's view, this principle of inertia 'truly is ... radically evil' (Adorno 2001b: 115).⁴

The mass murder of Jews, homosexuals, communists and other 'deviants' in Nazi concentration camps was a more extreme example of the eradication of individuality under the constant pressure to conform and adapt. This is one reason why Adorno claims that a straight line continues to lead from thralldom to exchange relations under late capitalism to 'Gestapo torturers and the bureaucrats of the gaschambers' (Adorno 1974: 183). Fabian Freyenhagen explains that 'what happened to the victims of the concentration camps is what late capitalism is moving towards: the liquidation of anything individual, the degradation

of people to things' (Freyenhagen 2008: 100). To be sure, Adorno recognized that, even today, countertendencies exist that could prevent the liquidation of the individual. Nevertheless, the immaturity of the majority of individuals – their abject subjection to authority figures and their inability to think independently – means that the possibility of totalitarianism persists.

Adorno constantly denounced the reduction of people to things; he complained that adaptation to late capitalism demands that individuals mutilate themselves by identifying with fungible commodities, inanimate objects, dead things. In a graphic passage in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno took up Marx's thematic distinction between the living and the dead under capitalism when he quipped that even individuals 'who burst with proofs of exuberant vitality could easily be taken for prepared corpses'. They are corpses 'from whom the news of their not-quite successful demise has been withheld for reasons of population policy' (Adorno 1974: 57). Yet individuals who will not, or cannot, adjust to society and conform to its norms fare no better than those who adapt. They not only suffer from their maladjustment to society, they may be marginalized, excluded or exposed in other ways 'to the vengeance of society, even if they are not yet reduced to going hungry and sleeping under bridges' (Adorno 1967: 71).

Under late capitalism, individuals accommodate themselves to conditions that weaken them psychologically. This helps to explain why they often lack the strength to think for themselves and to resist the blandishments of demagogues and charismatic leaders. In fact, late capitalist society fosters narcissistic traits. Briefly, ego autonomy suffers when society assumes the task of self-preservation and individuals become completely dependent on the vicissitudes of the economy and the often fickle largesse of the welfare state for their survival. Following Freud, Adorno notes that narcissists have a diminished capacity for rational self-control and independent decision-making because their defences against the demands of the id and the superego are weak and infantile. Narcissism results in 'automatized reactions' and a weakening of 'the forces of individual resistance', even as it provides fertile grounds for blatant appeals to the emotions (Adorno 1991: 138). What occurs in narcissism 'is that merger between id and superego that psychoanalytic theory already focused on, and it is precisely where the masses act instinctively that they have been preformed by censorship and enjoy the blessing of the powers that be' (Adorno 1967: 80).

Given the weakness of their narcissistic egos, many individuals have become compliant and submissive. But Adorno also associates compliance and submissiveness with authoritarianism in an empirical study of personality traits that was conducted in the United States in the 1940s. Among the major traits of authoritarian personalities, Adorno and the coauthors of this study listed the following: conventionalism, a 'submissive uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup'; aggression towards those who 'violate conventional values'; superstition and stereotypy (a 'belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate', and 'the disposition to think in rigid categories'); a pre-occupation with 'dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower' and 'identification with power figures'; destructiveness and cynicism which take the form of 'generalized hostility'; and projectivity (the 'projection outward of unconscious emotional impulses') (Adorno et al. 1950: 157). Along with individuals' narcissistic tendencies, these traits also help to account for immaturity.

Authoritarian individuals are often prejudiced. They adopt as their own the credo that Adorno claims lies at the heart of anti-Semitism: 'Whoever is not with me is against me'. In so doing, they are all too ready to consign 'for mere difference to the enemy camp' those who fail, for whatever reason, to conform (Adorno 1974: 131). In his extensive critique of identity thinking, Adorno unearths the cognitive mechanisms involved in prejudice, but he also insists that these mechanisms are linked to broader socio-economic trends. Underlying prejudice is the pervasive and coercive subsumption of the different under the same which also characterizes the 'social model' of identity thinking: exchange. Just as identity thinking equalizes the unequal by treating things as mere instances of more general kinds, exchange relations equate heterogeneous things. As they expunge differences between individuals, exchange relations make 'nonidentical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical' (Adorno 1973: 146).

Adorno effectively shows that prejudice has been built into Western culture. Prejudice is an odious effect of the pathic form of reason in the West – pathic because it forces everyone and everything into the straitjacket of identity. Homogenizing and levelling individuals, exchange relations also encourage individuals to think in stereotypical and schematic ways that pigeonhole people and things. Individuals will often act in such a way that they reject – sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes violently – those who differ from them. Moreover, since they tend to follow authority figures and demagogic leaders blindly, individuals may also be persuaded to

direct their aggression towards enemies who are more apparent than real. In this way, they perpetuate the radical evil that culminated in Auschwitz (Adorno 1973: 218–19).

In short, Adorno makes exchange relations and identity thinking responsible for immaturity on the grounds that they foster adaptation to existing states of affairs. In our exchange-based society, he complains, ‘making-oneself-the-same, becoming civilized, fitting in, uses up all the energy that might be used to do things differently’ (Adorno 2003: 109). Social integration now triumphs over autonomy because individuals identify themselves ‘in their innermost behavior patterns with their fate in modern society’ (Adorno 1969–70: 152). The pressure to make oneself the same as everyone else also gives rise to prejudice of various kinds: whether prejudice takes the form of racism, sexism and homophobia, or consists in hostility towards immigrants and foreigners. Indeed, given that individuals lack autonomy, that they tend to comply with authority figures, it should come as no surprise that Adorno hoped to find a way out of our current predicament. As I shall argue in the following section of this article, his critique of late capitalism aimed to enable individuals to become more mature in Kant’s sense.

2. Maturity and Critique

In a conversation with Hellmut Becker, which was broadcast on radio in Germany only a few days after Adorno’s death in 1969, Adorno praised Kant’s ideas about maturity once again. Noting that Kant described enlightenment as the release of human beings from their self-incurred tutelage to authority, Adorno remarked that this idea remains ‘extraordinarily relevant today’. *Inter alia*, Kant’s ideas about enlightenment remain relevant because democracy presupposes that citizens have attained a level of maturity. Democracy ‘is founded on the education of each individual in political, social and moral awareness, as embodied in the institution of the representative vote’. Democracy depends on ‘the moral development of each individual’; it ‘presupposes each individual’s ability and courage to use his own reason’ (Adorno 1983: 103).⁵

Adorno had already linked maturity to democratic forms of government in his essay ‘Critique’. There he argued that the ‘separation of powers, upon which every democracy is based, from Locke and Montesquieu and the American constitution up to today, has its lifeblood in critique’. Since the separation of the executive, the legislature and the judiciary allows each power to criticize the other two, Adorno avers that critique

‘and the prerequisite of democracy, political maturity, belong together’. In this context, he also contends that Kant himself recognized the link between maturity and critique: it is no accident that Kant – ‘who taught autonomy, that is, judgment according to one’s own insight in contrast to heteronomy, obedience to what is urged by others’ named his three major works ‘critiques’ (Adorno 1998a: 282).

Adorno makes maturity a prerequisite of critique, including his own. As noted earlier, critical theory presupposes maturity in the Kantian sense; it assumes that critics can think for themselves and are not simply parroting others. But maturity also demands that critics examine their own entanglement in mechanisms of domination. Critics must reflect on their entanglement in these mechanisms because survival imperatives force even ‘conscious individuals, capable of criticizing the whole, to do things and to take attitudes that blindly help to maintain the universal even though their consciousness is opposed to it’ (Adorno 1973: 311). In fact, Adorno views critical self-reflection as one of the more positive hallmarks of the process of individuation under capitalism. Critics may, more or less successfully, counter late capitalism by mobilizing the forces that helped to produce the individual in the first place, forces that include our heightened capacity for critical self-reflection (Adorno 1972b: 92).

To the extent that critique requires self-reflection, Adorno suggests that it too may serve as a model of maturity. His critique of the West is performative because it attempts to model the critical self-reflection that it aims to foster in others. But the performative dimension of Adorno’s critique also helps to make sense of an ostensibly unrelated remark that Adorno makes in ‘Progress’ when he proclaims (citing the poet Peter Altenberg) that humanity can be conceived only through an ‘extreme form of differentiation’, namely ‘individuation’. Here Adorno implies that social critics may act – at least temporarily and with a profound sense of their own fallibility – as stand-ins for the species because their concerted attempts to think for themselves, as they criticize conditions that adversely affect their own thought and behaviour, make them more autonomous than those who adapt blindly to these conditions (Adorno 1998e: 151).

Adorno expresses similar ideas in other work as well. Responsibility for initiating change now falls on critical and self-critical individuals: ‘In contrast to the collective powers that usurp the world spirit in the contemporary world, the universal and rational can hibernate better in the isolated individual than in the stronger battalions that have obediently

abandoned the universality of reason.’ Praising the isolated individual who thinks for herself, Adorno roundly rejects Bertolt Brecht’s claim that a thousand eyes see better than two because this claim simply expresses ‘that fetishizing of the collectivity and organisation which knowledge of society has the supreme duty to break through’ (Adorno 1972a: 455). Repudiating the claim that ‘by abandoning one’s own reason and judgment one is blessed with a higher, that is, collective reason’, Adorno counters that ‘to know the truth one needs that irreducibly individual reason that is ... supposedly obsolete’ (Adorno 1998c: 276).

Kant did acknowledge that some individuals had succeeded in casting off the fetters of tutelage, but he thought that humanity generally was immature. He also believed that the immaturity of humanity was self-incurred. For Kant, immaturity is ‘self-incurred when its cause lies not in lack of understanding but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another’. Nevertheless, shortly after ascribing immaturity to cowardice and laziness, Kant seemed to imply that external factors might be to blame when he observed that immaturity had become second nature for individuals because their guardians had never *permitted* them to attempt to use their own understanding. More damningly still, Kant claimed that they have made ‘their domesticated animals dumb’. Here he also suggested that the so-called guardians of the people guide them with ‘precepts and formulas’, the ‘mechanical instruments of a rational use, or rather misuse, of natural endowments’, which act as ‘the ball and chain of an everlasting minority’ (WIE, 8: 35).

For Adorno, of course, it is not so much cowardice and laziness that frustrate independent thought.⁶ Again, based on his account of the wrong state of things under late capitalism, Adorno largely attributed immaturity to the socio-economic conditions under which we live. Today individuals have fallen under the spell cast by levelling and homogenizing exchange relations – a spell that also affects the way they think (Adorno 1973: 346). Spellbound, individuals tend to think of themselves and others as ‘the same’, while becoming less tolerant of differences. And, on Adorno’s view, this levelling tendency (which writers as diverse as Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, Alexis de Tocqueville and Martin Heidegger also described) is one of the more pernicious effects of identity thinking and exchange relations. Like identity thinking, which ignores the particularity of things by treating them as mere instances of more general kinds, exchange ‘imposes on the whole world an obligation to become identical, to become total’ (Adorno 1973: 146).

Along with his critique of identity thinking and exchange relations, Adorno blamed cultural and educational institutions for crippling independent thought.⁷ Indeed, he expressed concerns about the state of the educational system in much of his work, including many of his radio broadcasts.⁸ In schools, children are encouraged to behave and to think in socially approved ways. They may also be taught to view others in terms of categorical schema that promote prejudice. Rather than learning to think for themselves, and being given tools that would enable them to do so, children are frequently asked to reproduce, rather than to question, the status quo. Emphasizing the submissive character of individuals, Adorno shared Friedrich Nietzsche's views about the prevailing herd mentality (Adorno 2000: 172). With his phrase 'No shepherd and one herd', Nietzsche denounced 'a completely functionalized and anonymous form of domination' that rules over the herd of sheep-like individuals 'with much greater brutality than if there were a visible bell-wether for them to follow' (Adorno 2000: 174).

In 'Education After Auschwitz', Adorno again criticized the educational system for keeping people in a state of immaturity by promoting submissiveness and conformity. In this essay he also declared that 'the only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection' (Adorno 1998b: 193). In fact, Adorno associated self-reflection with morality in his lectures on moral philosophy when he said that 'the element of self-reflection has today become the true heir to what used to be called moral categories' (Adorno 2000: 176). The association between self-reflection and morality was made clearer in *Negative Dialectics* when Adorno argued that, even as critics expose the evils that afflict society, they must reflect critically on their own complicity with evil. The complicity of critics also explains why Adorno demanded humility from them. Those who 'will not be stopped from differing and criticizing' are not authorized to put themselves in the right because their criticisms are invariably sullied by the reality they hope to change (Adorno 1973: 352).

How, then, did Adorno think that the educational system might foster critical self-reflection? Adorno gives the rudiments of an answer to this question in his radio conversation with Becker when he refers briefly to David Riesman's distinction in *The Lonely Crowd* between inner-directed and outer-directed individuals. On his somewhat problematic reading of Riesman, inner-directed people have relatively strong egos; they have an internal moral compass and are more likely to be guided by the norms they have internalized even when others disagree with them,

bully them, or criticize them. Yet most people today are outer-directed, and Adorno links Riesman's ideas about outer-directedness to Kant's comments about immaturity. For both Riesman and Kant, many people 'fundamentally accept without resistance whatever almighty facticity places before them and inculcates into them, as if what now exists must continue as such' (Adorno 1987: 107).

If inner-directedness can enhance individual autonomy, Adorno suggested other ways in which autonomy might be fostered. Conceding that prospects for autonomy confront 'indescribable difficulties' today, Adorno told Becker that autonomy might be achieved if education were to become 'an education for contradiction and resistance' (Adorno 1983: 108–9 *passim*). In other words, the educational system could teach students to scrutinize the opinions of authority figures carefully, encouraging them to question these opinions and to think for themselves. At the same time, it could promote resistance to the forces that currently thwart autonomy. Indeed, Adorno defined resistance in Kantian terms when he said that resistance involves 'the ability to distinguish between what is known and what is accepted merely by the constraint of authority'. Resistance is 'one with critique' (Adorno 1998a: 282).

Adorno offered concrete examples of what an education for contradiction and resistance might look like in his 1969 radio broadcast. Among other things, secondary school teachers could take senior students to see a commercial film and encourage them to criticize it. Similarly, they could ask students to criticize radio programmes, advertisements and articles in magazines. Teachers could also help students to listen to music critically and to assess the factors that make some music popular. More generally, to educate people for contradiction and resistance, Adorno thinks that students should be apprised of 'the fact that they are constantly being deceived'. Employing Kantian terms again, he hazards the claim that 'the mechanism of tutelage has been raised to the status of a universal *mundus vult decipi*: the world wants to be deceived'. But Adorno also believes that teachers can bring this situation to the attention of students 'because there can be no normal democracy which could afford to be explicitly against an enlightenment of this kind' (Adorno and Becker 1999: 31).

More generally, thinking itself is a resistive force. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno wrote that thinking involves 'an act of negation, of resistance to what is imposed upon it'; it effectively amounts to 'a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing' (Adorno 1973: 19).

Education for autonomy is possible in principle because ‘thinking is actually the force of resistance, from which it has been alienated only with great effort’ (Adorno 1998f: 293). In thought that is worthy of the name, we distance ourselves from existing states of affairs by objectifying them. In so doing, we already implicitly resist them. Discussing the links between thought and action in ‘Marginalia to Theory and Praxis’, Adorno argues that Kant’s essay on enlightenment itself provides an example of resistance to existing states of affairs. Resistive thought may range ‘from the primitive who contemplates how he can protect his small fire from the rain or where he can find shelter from the storm to the Enlightenment philosopher who construes how humanity can move beyond its self-incurred tutelage by means of its interest in self-preservation’ (Adorno 1998c: 264–5).

3. An Enlightened Age

This article has revolved around a constellation of concepts: maturity, autonomy, individuation, self-reflection, critique, resistance and morality. But a further concept needs to be addressed here: the concept of enlightenment itself. How does Adorno understand enlightenment? Although he criticizes Kant’s transcendental account of autonomy, and sees the transcendental subject as a cipher for a society that is unaware of itself⁹ (Adorno 1998g: 248), he clearly accepts Kant’s view of enlightenment as involving maturity or autonomy. Moreover, Kant and Adorno have similar concerns about how difficult autonomy is to achieve. As I have already argued, however, Adorno squarely blames socio-economic conditions for the lack of autonomy. Again, to survive under inherently unstable and unpredictable economic conditions, individuals are obliged to adapt to these conditions to the point where they negate ‘precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals’. And it is this situation, which demands blind submission to authority, that threatens to culminate once more in totalitarianism (Adorno 1998d: 98 *passim*).

To be sure, critique alone cannot put an end to the modes of individuation that frustrate enlightenment. If we are ever to live in an enlightened age, society must be completely transformed. Critique is necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for this transformation. It can certainly reveal what is wrong about society by showing how and why human life has been damaged, but it cannot by itself make the wrong life right. Nevertheless, in his sweeping denunciation of late capitalism, Adorno also fashions perspectives on the wrong state of things that ‘displace and estrange’ it, making the familiar appear strange (Adorno 1974: 247). In so doing, his critical social theory gives us an oblique glimpse of a world that is other

than what now exists. Like Marx, who refused ‘dogmatically to prefigure the future’, Adorno sought ‘the new world ... through criticism of our own’ (Marx and Engels 1978: 13).

This new world becomes visible in its general outlines when Adorno insists on several occasions that critical theory’s central task is ‘to make transparent the dialectic of individual and species’ (Adorno 2006: 264). Calling the resolution of this dialectic an urgent problem, ‘a problem of the greatest possible gravity’ (Adorno 2006: 44), Adorno also offers the glimmer of a solution to it. To resolve the dialectic of individual and species, the individual must first free itself from ‘the contingency of individually posed ends’ – that is, it must free itself from ends that are directed solely to securing its own individual survival. Only when the individual – the ‘subject of *ratio*’ – is emancipated from these ends will it become ‘an actual universal, society – in its full logic, humanity’. For what is ‘inexorably inscribed within the meaning of rationality’ is the preservation of humanity in a more rationally organized society. Emphatically conceived, reason ‘should not be anything less than self-preservation, namely that of the species, upon which the survival of each individual literally depends’. Moreover, if self-preservation were finally directed towards the preservation of the species, Adorno believes that humanity would gain ‘the potential for that self-reflection that could finally transcend the self-preservation to which it was reduced by being restricted simply to a means’ (Adorno 1998c: 272–3 *passim*).

In other words, the isolated selves that individuals are so intent on preserving under late capitalism must embrace the survival of the species as a whole. However, Adorno immediately throws a wrench in the works when he issues a strong warning: the species must not be hypothesized. Although it is ‘part of the logic of the self-preservation of the individual that it should ... embrace ... the preservation of the species’ (Adorno 2006: 44), Adorno is concerned that the embrace of the species risks pitting the ‘general rationality’ against ‘particular individuals’ (Adorno 1973: 318). To be sure, by embracing the species, reason may succeed in freeing itself ‘from the particularity of obdurate particular interest’, or from the contingency of particular ends. At the same time, however, reason may fail ‘to free itself from the no less obdurate particular interest of the totality’ (Adorno 2006: 44). On this point, Adorno issues another warning: ‘a moral philosophy and a moral practice that ignore this antagonism between the highly justifiable interests of the whole and those of the individual, between the conflicting

interests of the universal and particular, must inevitably regress to barbarism and heteronomy' (Adorno 2000: 144).

Interestingly, Adorno believes that Kant flagged this problem when he pointed out that 'the idea of species reason' contains, 'by virtue of its universality, an element restricting the individual'. Since this element is restrictive, Kant acknowledged that it could 'turn into an injustice on the part of the universal towards the particular' (Adorno 2006: 44–5). Specifically, Adorno alleges that Kant saw law as 'a potential threat to freedom'. Kant claimed that law 'tends to assert itself more effectively than freedom', even as he warned that 'we have to stay on our guard and be constantly vigilant in the face of a fetishization of law'. Yet, with his postulate of a realm of ends, Kant effectively discovered 'a highly original framework with which to stabilize the *a priori* balance in the relationship between freedom and the law' (Adorno 2000: 122).

In the realm of ends, each individual may seek happiness in his or her way. But there is an important proviso to the pursuit of happiness: it may not infringe upon 'the freedom of others to strive for a like end'. Instead, the freedom of each must 'coexist with the freedom of everyone in accordance with a possible universal law' (TP, 8: 290). Among other places, Adorno rehearsed these ideas in his lectures on moral philosophy: 'the freedom of the individual should only be restricted to a certain extent, and should be restricted by law *only* to the extent to which it restricts the freedom of another individual'. Not only did Adorno endorse Kant's ideas about the realm of ends in these lectures, he went much further when he said that these ideas provide 'a canon which can serve as a guide' for reconciling the individual and the species (Adorno 2000: 122 *passim*).

Adorno also deployed determinate negation to envisage a condition in which the individual and the species are reconciled. Focusing again on human psychology, he remarked that the superego consists in internalized social norms. This means that our moral conscience is derived from the 'objectivity of society, ... the objectivity in and by which people live and which extends to the core of their individualization'. Commenting specifically on the norms of adaptation and conformity, Adorno observed that they contain 'antagonistic moments', or mutually incompatible ideas. On the one hand, they sanction 'heteronomous coercion'. On the other hand, these norms may evoke 'the idea of a solidarity transcending divergent individual interests' (Adorno 1973: 282). This reversal of heteronomous coercion illustrates what Adorno calls

‘the dialectic of progress’ (Adorno 1998e: 150) – an idea that he also borrows from Kant. For Kant taught (in ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim’) that ‘the entanglement of progress ... in the realm of unfreedom, tends by means of its own law toward the realm of freedom’. In fact, ‘Hegel’s “cunning of reason” later came out of this’ (Adorno 1998e: 149).

Given the dialectic of progress, ‘solidarity is only able to develop on the back of ... oppression, which ... solidarity then annuls’ (Adorno 2006: 264). Although Adorno denied that history had to take the course that it did, he also argued that ‘it takes the repressive form of conscience to develop the form of solidarity in which the repressive one will be voided’ (Adorno 1973: 282). In addition, Adorno praised Kant’s own attempt to carry out ‘the dialectics of individual and species’. In *Negative Dialectics* as well, he reiterated that Kant’s idea that ‘everyone’s freedom need be curtailed only insofar as it impairs someone else’s’ foreshadows ‘a reconciled condition’ (Adorno 1973: 283). To be sure, Kant’s realm of ends is merely a hypothesis. Furthermore, as Adorno remarked in his lectures on moral philosophy, this idea cannot serve directly as a norm because no action undertaken ‘here and now’ will be ‘immediately identical with what is good for the species as a whole’. Yet Adorno enthusiastically endorsed Kant’s speculative attempt to reconcile subjective and objective reason with his hypothesis of a realm of ends (Adorno 2000: 142).

The dialectic of subjective and objective reason has a dual task: it must supersede both ‘the bad universal, the coercive social mechanism’, and ‘the obdurate individual who is a microcosmic copy of that mechanism’. In short: it must ‘rise above both the individuals who exist and the society that exists’. In a more rational society, individuals will not ‘frantically be guarding the old particularity’ because the ‘old particularity’ is a sham owing to the homogenizing and levelling effects of exchange (Adorno 1973: 283). In a Hegelian vein, Adorno also objects that ‘the fixation on one’s own need and one’s own longing mars the idea of a happiness that will not arise until the category of the individual ceases to be self-seclusive’ (Adorno 1973: 352). Conversely, a rational society will not ‘agree with the present concept of collectivity’. That concept is equally shambolic because collectivities today often encourage the subjection of individuals to the will of demagogic and authoritarian leaders (Adorno 1973: 284). Groups and organizations (including more ‘progressive’ ones) are often hierarchically organized and undemocratic. Their leaders frequently silence dissent and demand submission.

Citing Kant when he envisages a future reconciliation of the individual and society, Adorno suggests that individuals will change when they recognize that their own survival is tied inextricably to the survival of humanity as a whole. At the same time, individuals who promote the preservation of the species will also play a far more active and independent role in a rational society than we currently do in our irrational one. According to Adorno, there is ‘no available model of freedom save one: that consciousness as it intervenes in the total social constitution (*Gesamtverfassung*) will through that constitution intervene in the complexions of the individual’ (Adorno 1973: 265). Simply put, in a freer and more rational society, individuals will finally shape the social institutions that in turn shape them. A more fluid dialectic between the universal – society – and the particular – the individual – will also enable individuals to communicate with each other even as they preserve their differences (Adorno 1998g: 237).

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno complained that individualism and collectivism now complement each other in the wrong direction (Adorno 1973: 284). Individualism and collectivism complement each other in the wrong direction because, even as individuals are confined to the atomistic and isolated pursuit of keeping themselves alive under monopoly conditions, conformist tendencies promote a follow-the-leader mentality and ‘group think’. However, I have argued here that Adorno tried to give his readers some sense of what an enlightened age might look like when he adopted many of Kant’s ideas about maturity and reconciliation and endorsed his hypothesis of a realm of ends. Heeding Kant’s directive in ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim’, Adorno agreed that we must find a way to reconcile ourselves with society by our own efforts so that we are finally able to develop all our capacities to the fullest. We must find a way successfully to anchor the individual in the species (Adorno 1998e: 144).¹⁰

Notes

1. Parenthetical references to Kant’s writings give the volume and page number(s) of the Royal Prussian Academy edition (*Kants gesammelte Schriften*), which are included in the margins of the translations. English translations are from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. I use the following abbreviations: IUH = ‘Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim’ (in Kant 2007: 108–20); TP = ‘On the Common Saying: That may be Correct in Theory, But it is of No Use in Practice’ (in Kant 1996a: 277–309); WIE = ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’ (in Kant 1996b: 15–22).

2. Translations of Theodor W. Adorno's work may be modified.
3. Karl Marx predicted that competition under capitalism would diminish as monopoly conditions developed. Adorno confirmed Marx's prediction: once monopoly conditions emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, competition decreased – and these monopoly conditions are what Adorno calls 'late capitalism'. Unlike Marx, however, Adorno thought that monopoly conditions could continue indefinitely: 'one would still have to concede that the capitalist system has been resilient enough to postpone the anticipated collapse indefinitely'. Capitalism continues to exist owing, in part, to 'an immense increase in technological development which enables the production of a plethora of consumer goods from which all members of the highly industrialized nations have benefited' (Adorno 1987: 232–3).
4. For an extended discussion of Adorno's use of this word, see Freyenhagen 2013: 158–61.
5. For a later translation of this conversation between Adorno and Becker, see Adorno and Becker 1999.
6. Yet Adorno does suggest that intellectuals and academics are cowardly. See Adorno 2006: 165.
7. See, for example, Adorno (1973: 41): 'Under social conditions – educational ones, in particular – which prune and often cripple the forces of mental productivity, ... it would be fictitious to assume that all people might understand, or even perceive, all things. To expect this would be to make cognition accord with the pathetic features of a humankind stripped of its capacity for experience by a law of perpetual sameness – if it ever had this capacity.'
8. In their introduction to Adorno's conversation with Becker, Robert French and Jem Thomas note: 'Between 1959 and 1969, he [Adorno] had made at least one broadcast each year in the series *Bildungsfragen der Gegenwart* (Educational Questions for Today). All these broadcasts were concerned ... with education and its significance in the modern world' (French and Thomas 1999: 2).
9. Interestingly, Adorno offers a far more positive reading of the transcendental subject when he argues that the 'universality' and 'all-encompassing totality' of this subject would be possessed only by the as yet non-existent 'global social subject'. Kant's transcendental subject 'points beyond the merely contingent nature of individual existence and, ultimately, even beyond the conditioned and ephemeral form that a society possesses at certain stages in its history'. It is the very *logos* of society because it represents 'the overall social rationality in which the utopia of a rationally organized society is already implicit' (Adorno 2001a: 172–3 *passim*).
10. See also IUH, 8: 15–31.

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