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ABSTRACT

CRITERIA IN CRISIS: MODERNIST, POSTMODERNIST, AND FEMINIST CRITICAL PRACTICES

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I examine a problem or dilemma of legitimation faced by the critical theorist who takes as the object of his or her critique a totality of which she or he is a part. The dilemma is that the theorist must either illegitimately exempt her critical theory from the determining influences of the totality or lose normative authority. The critics I examine in detail are: Adorno and Horkheimer; Kant; Hegel; feminist standpoint epistemologists, in particular, Sandra Harding; Irigaray; Foucault; and Arendt.

I conclude that a purely theoretical or epistemic ground for the legitimacy of totalizing critique is impossible; philosophical critique must involve an extra-rational faith or a political commitment. However, I also argue that the project of theoretical grounding should not be abandoned. I continue this project by drawing out of the critical theorists I examined some preliminary concepts and strategies (such as mimesis, hysteria, free action, and psychoanalytic practice) that may, after further development, serve to provide a theory of the legitimacy of critical philosophy.
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CHAPTER I

THE CRISIS OF REASON AND THE DILEMMA OF CRITIQUE

According to Gilles Deleuze, "Philosophy is at its most positive as critique."¹ I agree. Certainly a critical attitude toward received views has been a moving force behind much of the philosophical thought of the entire western tradition in philosophy.² In this dissertation, I will focus more specifically on critique as it has been manifest in the modern period. This is not because I fail to recognize the critical attitude and method inherent in the philosophies of the Ancients (especially Socrates and Plato, whose reliance on the distinction between reality and appearance informed all of their philosophical thought), but because the modern period in philosophy, in its unique preoccupation with questions of methodology and epistemology, can be seen as offering self-conscious and sophisticated reflection upon the capacities and problems of critique itself. Furthermore, the modern period in philosophy can be seen to differ from a premodern philosophical weltanschauung in its extension of the powers of critical reason to all spheres of human functioning, including those areas of life which the premodern tradition had left to the authority of religious and political institutions.³

Modern philosophers threw off the yoke of authority and insisted upon autonomously exercising their own critical faculties in order to gain scientific (i.e., systematic, certain, reliable) knowledge and to determine practical questions about society, politics and law, and ethics.⁴ Motivating the critical philosophies of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Marx, to

²For a study which focuses on critique as fundamental to philosophical thought throughout the tradition, where it has been instantiated in various analyses of alienation, see Trent Schroyer, The Critique of Domination, (New York: George Braziller, 1973).
³The 18th century Enlightenment was known for this confident extension of reason in the rise of modern science and in bourgeois political revolutions.
⁴Kant's famous three questions—'What can I know?,' 'What ought I to do?,' 'What can I hope?' can be seen to incorporate this attitude of critical autonomy in all spheres.
name a few, has been the assumption that knowledge could be achieved only by means of a process of critical inquiry. The most prominent voices of philosophical modernity have taken up the task of revealing received views, traditional practices, and institutions to be illegitimate.

There is another reason that I am concerned with modernity's employment of critique. Many prominent philosophers have argued that the modern period is coming to an end.⁵ This state of affairs gives rise to an apparent paradox. For it is by making use of various forms of the concept of critique that the so called "post-modern" thinkers are claiming to have transcended, surpassed, outgrown, or deconstructed philosophical modernity. Critique therefore appears to be one modern concept which has transgressed the boundaries of its place of origin and to have survived the "paradigm shift" out of philosophical modernity and into post-modernity. Thus, the concept of critique itself entails paradox, for it is both immanently embedded in the tradition to which it applies itself, and at the same time, as critical of that tradition, it transcends its place of origin to become something else.⁶ What is this "something else" that critique has become? Are there vestiges of its modernist (and perhaps even earlier) origin?

⁵Many philosophers have recently either made this claim or attempted to explore its legitimacy. See, for example, Jean Francois Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition for the paradigm statement. According to Lyotard, the basic characteristic of postmodernity is a lack of faith in "metanarratives," or large-scale theories which purport to explain all of physical or social reality (e.g., Marxism, Christianity, Psychoanalysis). I am, for the moment, leaving the question as to whether there is a qualitative difference between modernity and postmodernity open. I do believe that a large number of current thinkers seem to have a more cynical view of the value and capabilities of reason to improve the general quality of human life than did most thinkers of even a century ago. Whether it would be reasonable to draw a sharp distinction, however, between modernism and postmodernism on this point, I tend to doubt. (Would we have to classify Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud as postmodernists, for they were hardly optimistic about the status quo?) I rather believe (somewhat like Habermas) that there is a more gradual trend of deepening skepticism going on which is an (dialectical) evolution out of the past deployment of critique and the strengthening of reason's autonomy. I intend to clarify this issue more in the dissertation.

⁶I borrow the terms "immanent" and "transcendent" from the existential phenomenologists, especially Merleau-Ponty, who use these terms to describe the structure of human consciousness which is both embedded in the world and able to gain the perspective of distance upon it.
involved in its current uses, and if so, why are these vestiges not repudiated along with the critique and repudiation of other aspects of modernist reasoning? This paradox suggests the need to subject the concept of philosophical critique itself to critical scrutiny. Toward this end, I would like to examine a basic dilemma or problem which is engendered by the attempt at critique, with a view toward determining whether the currently employed strategies or forms of critique are successful in escaping the problems which it, itself, has identified in the traditional modern uses of the concept.

In this first chapter, I will describe the larger problem of the crisis of reason, specifically as it pertains to the paradoxical structure of critique, and elaborate the consequent dilemma facing the critical theorist. I then intend to examine this dilemma as it is exemplified in Adorno and Horkheimer's critical analysis of Enlightenment rationality.

The Crisis of Reason

The basic problematic of critique can be seen as (in my view) an important—in fact, the most significant—aspect of what has commonly been referred to as the "crisis of reason."7 Ironically, it has been the work of modernist critique itself which has been responsible for the current crisis in which, I am arguing, it too is implicated. For it has been the modern uncovering of the various aspects of reason's lack of "purity" and autonomy which has also rendered dubious critical thought's capacity to pass judgement on the legitimacy of others. This modernist trend is easily recognized in the increasingly accepted idea that thought is always "situated" in and conditioned by extra-mental factors. This modern development can plausibly be seen as starting from the

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extreme isolation of reason, (supposedly) accomplished in the radical abstraction from 
the concrete, empirical, and bodily of Descartes' *ego cogito*, and ending with all of the 
ways in which "pure reason" has increasingly come to be seen as compromised by its 
dependence upon historical, social, economic, political, bodily, or unconscious 
phenomena. This development was particularly acute in nineteenth century thought, in 
the Hegelian stress on reason as historical, and in the culmination of this trend in the 
work of the "philosophers of suspicion," Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud. Twentieth century 
philosophers have thus found it less and less defensible to assume reason to be 
operating autonomously, and today’s critical theorists, from the Frankfurt School to 
feminist critics, continue to alert us to the ways in which our basic structuring concepts 
and categories have been shaped by human institutions and embodied experiences. On 
the Anglo-Analytic side of the theoretical field, the now classic work of such thinkers as 
Quine, in deconstructing the analytic/synthetic distinction, and Kuhn, in demonstrating 
the social influences shaping scientific theories, contributes to this development by 
questioning the very idea of beliefs whose truth is a product of necessary reasoning and 
therefore beyond the reaches of skeptical scrutiny. It is hardly necessary to run through 
a detailed litany of the modern and post-modern work which tends to show the situated 
nature of thought and reason.

The point which I have chosen as a clearly visible instance of the 
accomplishment of the limiting of the capacity of critical reason, in response to the 
application of critique to itself (a self-reflexive procedure), is the critique of Kant, whose 
valiant attempt to chisel "pure reason" out its mired predicament within the empiricist 
epistemology, by means of the use of the scalpel of critique, serves as a classic 
demonstration of the paradoxical position in which critical philosophers continue to find

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This phrase is commonly attributed to Paul Ricoeur.
themselves. I believe that the "transcendental ideality" of Kant's basic ontology set the stage for further considerations of the manner and extent of the human contribution to the construction of the very object of knowledge. With the "thing-in-itself" cast irrevocably out of cognitive bounds, it was only a short step to a renewed problematizing of the status of knowledge. If the object of knowledge is in all cases a product of mental activity enacted upon a sensible manifold, is it not possible that that mental activity could be otherwise? Thus, at least some thinkers have proposed that the possibility of "alternative conceptual frameworks" begins with Kant. Kant's sophisticated and subtle arguments succeeded in making a form of idealism an inevitable consequence of continuing to believe in the possibility of scientific objectivity itself. Furthermore, Kant's analysis of the workings of the mechanisms of perception, cognition, and reflection begins with our "first-order" encounter with sense-data, thus demonstrating that our mental functioning is conditioned (by both empirical and transcendental factors) from the ground up, so that cognitive experience can never be entirely "pure." Kant therefore "saved" natural scientific objectivity only by reinterpreting its nature. To ground cognition and knowledge in a "transcendental ego, which itself can never be an object of knowledge, casts aspersions on the instrument of critical knowledge itself and cannot be completely satisfying to the skeptic. The door is thereby further opened by Kant for a wide variety of attempted proposals regarding the actual ground and source of "knowledge," and the degree of "objectivity" which we are able to attain.

The idea of "pure thinking" has by now been questioned in all areas of human cognitive endeavor from natural science (e.g., Kuhn, Feyerabend, Harding, Keller, Haraway), to social science (e.g., sociology of knowledge and ideology critique), to logic and abstract reasoning (e.g., Nye, Lloyd, Godelier, Sohn-Rethel), to moral reasoning
(Gilligan), down to the primary level of perception (e.g., Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, phenomenological psychology). It seems that in our functioning as thinking beings we are variously anchored to and determined by the body (Nietzsche, Merleau-Ponty, Bordo), the unconscious (psychoanalytic theory), material economic activity (Marx), lived experience (Husserl), language (Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, ordinary language philosophy), and political power (Foucault), to name just a few of the proposed grounds of thought. This far-reaching and varied philosophical development paves the way for viewing all beliefs and intellectual activity—critique included—as ultimately grounded not in universal laws of purely autonomous reason, but elsewhere.

**The Structure of Critique and the Critic's Dilemma**

The crisis of reason, as it more specifically pertains to critique, takes the following form. Critique requires a perspective which transcends the object of critique, but which, in a significant class of cases, cannot account for itself, and must be considered illegitimate. Ironically, the transcendent-critical perspective is illegitimate only in cases where the critical theory is held to be universal in scope. Thus, theorists who argue that all perspectives—including that of critical reason—are determined by the object of their critique (e.g. socio-ideological institutions such as patriarchy, material-economic arrangements, libidinal economies, neural-chemical processes, linguistic practices, or whatever is seen as the determining totality) face the dilemma of either exempting their own theoretical pronouncements from critical scrutiny or admitting that the theories they offer are also relative to the structure of domination that they have found. For this type of theorist, any degree of transcendence or self-exemption from the determining constraints of that which s/he is criticizing constitutes an illegitimate move.
which threatens to contradict the critical claims that all consciousness (or subjectivity, or agency), is determined by the totality, a claim which is precisely the fundamental point of the critical theory. Those critical theorists who do not respect this prohibition are subject to charges of pragmatic self-contradiction and self-refutation.9 But unless the critical claims are more universal in scope, unless the critical philosopher can justify a more comprehensive vision than that which s/he is criticizing, the force and legitimacy, the epistemic or moral superiority, of the critique is unfounded. As Richard Bernstein explains, "Critique always presupposes some ideal in the name of which we engage in critique—however we conceive of this ideal and whatever status we claim for it."10 Thus, there can be no such thing as totally immanent critique.11 Self-critique is in every case the critique of one aspect of a whole by another which is transcendent to the object of critique because it claims a greater degree of participation in the value or values in the name of which the critique is being conducted. Similarly, what Seyla Benhabib calls “defetishizing critique,” critique which simply lays out alternative possibilities to a belief

9The basic form of this argument that charges self-refutation is quite clearly exposited in Hilary Putnam's *Reason, Truth and History,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), as a refutation of relativism. Putnam traces the argument to Plato, so it's clear that it has been around for quite some time. Some contemporary uses of this same argument can be found in Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* trans., Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) where he uses the argument against, most strikingly, Derrida, but others as well, including Adorno; Thomas McCarthy, (see "The Politics of the Ineffable," *Philosophical Forum,* v.XXI, Nos. 1-2, Fall-Winter, 1989-90, pp.146-168, for a discussion of self-refutation, again, with respect to Derrida; and Charles Taylor, ("Foucault on Freedom and Truth," *Foucault: A Critical Reader,* editor, David Couzens Hoy, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), which offers a critique of Foucault along these lines.


11The Frankfurt School example of "immanent critique" will be discussed in depth below in Chapter One of the dissertation. In short, my argument will be that although Adorno and Horkheimer recognize their necessary immanence to the Enlightenment rationality that they are attempting to critique, it is this very immanence which ultimately prevents their success. Although Adorno and Horkheimer recognize the dialectical reciprocity of the progressive and regressive aspects of Enlightenment, their critical practice is an attempt to make use of and extend the progressivity, in order to identify and eliminate the regressive and barbaric elements. However, insofar as immanence can be maintained, the repressive elements cannot be left behind. See Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* translated by John Cumming, (New York: Continuum, 1986).
or practice, without arguing for the moral or epistemic superiority of the alternative, entails an appeal to transcendent values, since to see a belief as limited in scope due to the fact that there is an alternative of equal value or plausibility presupposes an act of transcendence out of the particular belief structure which had previously appeared to be universal in scope, as well as a commitment to the superior value of a more comprehensive view, i.e., the view which encompasses both alternatives, as opposed to the view which sees only one possibility.\footnote{Seyla Benhabib, Critique, Norm, and Utopia, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).}

The necessary elements of critique consist both of a recognition of a problem or crisis in the object of critique, and the application of, or appeal, to an ideal standard or criterion according to which the critical object can be judged and found wanting. This analysis of critique is lent support by the word's etymological connection to both the terms `criterion' and `crisis'.\footnote{All three terms, 'critique', 'criterion', and 'crisis' come from the Greek, 'krisis' and 'krinein', which mean 'to choose, separate, divide, judge, discern'. Both Benhabib and Bernstein comment on the connection of 'critique' with 'crisis' but fail to mention the equally significant connection with 'criterion'. See Benhabib, Ibid., page 19, and Bernstein, Ibid., page 257.} One way of understanding the dilemma of critique is to see these two aspects as in conflict. In order to recognize the crisis, the critic must have an insight of the deficiency of the object which entails the employment of a criterion; however, if the criterion has been engendered out of the totality which is in crisis (as is the case of the critics of modernity, or of reason), the criterion should not be relied upon. However, if the critic turns her critical skepticism on the criterion itself, s/he ends up without any normative standard, and without any means for making critical distinctions.

The Epistemological Form of the Dilemma

This problem or dilemma of critique is the same problem as that which is
manifest in modern epistemology as the well-known "problem of the criterion" or "dilemma of epistemology." The epistemological form of the dilemma of critique is that what we possess at the start of any inquiry into the nature of knowledge cannot be assumed to be true, but merely apparent, knowledge. We have, as yet, no standards or criteria by means of which to distinguish knowledge from the false claims to knowledge. That some criterion is needed if certain knowledge is to be obtained has been a standard philosophical position since Plato, whose "paradox of learning" in the Meno is resolved by recourse to a "myth" (i.e., the "myth of recollection") which denies the possibility of a state of absolute ignorance. On this account, we necessarily presuppose criteria which distinguish true knowledge from a false claim to knowledge. In other words, we, in some sense, always already know what knowledge is, and, furthermore, we have no choice but to trust that our presuppositions are legitimate.

But with the "epistemological turn" of modern philosophy, an appeal to an irrational and unexplained ground of knowledge was considered inadequate. The question and status of the criterion was then taken up with renewed vigor. Descartes' solution to this problem was to attempt to obtain a truth of which he could be certain, and then to deduce from that instance of knowledge its distinguishing features, which he then inferred to be the sufficient conditions for its certainty. The epistemic marks by means of which Descartes concluded that he could be certain of the truth of his instance of knowledge were nothing other than the clarity and distinctness with which his insight impressed itself upon him. Thus, Descartes believed that he had wrested the criteria of knowledge from an indubitable instance of knowledge, and thereby solved the problem.  

14As I will argue in Chapter 2, Hegel's solution is similar to Plato's in that he too denied that total ignorance can ever be the starting place of coming to know. Rather, for Hegel true knowledge or science exists from the beginning in the simplest, most naive pose of consciousness. The criteria for knowledge are therefore necessarily present within the first acquaintance of consciousness with its object.
But it can be easily argued that this solution is illegitimate. Descartes must have presupposed his criteria from the outset in order to have recognized the cogito as true on the basis of its clarity and distinctness. For if not (echoing Meno), how could he know that he knew? And if so, how could he claim to be starting from scratch?

A clear model of the epistemological form of critique can be seen in the early modern period’s rival epistemologies. What is seldom noticed in discussions of rationalism and empiricism is that each of these foundationalist epistemologies is also a theory of critique, as a theory of how to distinguish real from merely apparent knowledge or false belief. Each theory of knowledge offers a critique of received opinion; each offers a method to avoid being duped by false claims to knowledge. Rationalism assumes that knowledge is a whole (Descartes’ “tree of knowledge”) based ultimately on self-evident intuitions immediately present before the “mind’s eye.” Critique is, on this view, a process of checking knowledge claims against the touchstone of intuitive self-evidence, rejecting those claims that don’t measure up. Empiricism, on the other hand, measured knowledge claims against the incorrigibility of sensory evidence. What characterizes foundationalist styles of critique, as such, is the employment of values or criteria which are held to be absolute or transcendent to the crisis in the object of critique. The criteria are held secure during the critique and exercise a normative role over that which they are used to legitimate. But the failures of rationalism and empiricism illustrate the impossibility of holding the normative criteria exempt from the operation of critique. Rationalism, in attributing legitimacy only to the transcendent component of the knowledge equation, resulted in a circular system which excluded an openness to new knowledge which could be derived from experience. Thus, Descartes was compelled to introduce the “deus ex machina” of God in order to allow for the possibility of warranted knowledge of the external world. Empiricism, on the other hand,
resulted in a skepticism about such pragmatically necessary and taken-for-granted fundamental concepts as the existence of the self. Furthermore, when taken to its logical extreme, as with Berkeley and Hume, belief in the existence of even the material world (empiricism’s alleged strong suit) was seen to be unjustified. Thus, the early epistemologies, in claiming to have found ways to exempt their criteria for knowledge from critical skepticism resulted in crippled and one-sided systems, which failed to be able to legitimate instances of knowledge that they needed. Thus, there was a logical movement from foundationalist critique, which employs universal and necessary or indubitable standards, to immanent critique, which recognizes the impossibility of exempting the standards themselves from the need for critical scrutiny.

Critique as Practical/Political

It should be evident that there is a purely epistemological aspect to the problem or dilemma of critique, for as I have stated above, the critic must have knowledge of, or insight into, a crisis or problem in the object of critique. In this way, the dilemma of critique parallels the epistemological problem of the criterion. But there is also a practical-ethical aspect to the problem of critique, for critique is an activity and behavior, and not merely an ideational state. This way of viewing critique is similar to seeing it on the model of what the Ancient Greeks called a “techné,” a purposive human activity, a craft, or a skill. According to the Greek analysis, every techné is characterized by three aspects: its aim or goal, the object upon which it operates, and the method or knowledge which accounts for its success.15 We have thus far been discussing the nature of the critical method. What, then, is the goal or aim of critique? The modern

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15See, for example, Plato’s Gorgias, translated by Donald J. Zeyl, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987).
period in philosophy can be seen as the quest for certainty. This desire, motivated historically in large part by the successes of natural science and the clash between scientific and religious beliefs, gave rise to an increased attention on the part of philosophers to questions of method.\(^{16}\) The profound distrust of received views engendered by the scientific refutation of much Church teaching in the early modern period, led to the requirement that method offer a way to adjudicate between conflicting knowledge claims. Hence, method was required to be critical. But it was not knowledge, merely for its own sake, that the critic desires. As we have already seen with Descartes, the epistemic certainty toward which the critic aims is in the service of her desire for autonomy and freedom from externally imposed domination by the authorities of religion, tradition, and power. Furthermore, critique aims to motivate change (in beliefs, policies, institutions, or actions) on the part of others. Thus critique always has an agenda to change consciousness, and frequently behavior, and in this respect critique has been an important motor of philosophical and political development, as well as a fundamental way in which thought relates to "real life," or theory to *praxis*. It is therefore these practical-ethical values—freedom, autonomy, and justice—which may be seen to be the deeper motivation for acts of philosophical critique.

There is also another sense in which critique is inherently action rather than merely thought. All critique participates in the ethical-political realm of life, for critique is fundamentally an act of resistance—a rejection of illegitimate authority and an exercise of the critic's autonomy—which at the same time establishes and enlarges the conditions for that autonomy and freedom.\(^{17}\) This feature of critique is evident in

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\(^{16}\) In fact, epistemology as a discipline can be seen to have begun as late as the Nineteenth Century as a reflection on modern scientific success; see George Canguilhem, *Ideology and Rationality in the History of the Life Sciences* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1988), page 1.

\(^{17}\) This same aspect of critique would allow us to characterize it as an “ontological event,” in...
Descartes' epistemological work, in its self-consciously revolutionary rejection of all previous authority, but it should be recognized as an essential feature of all forms of critique as well. Insofar as authentic critique is possible, it must contain a transcendent moment—a moment which is original and free from determination. This original critical moment installs the critic at a distance from the object of critique, and is, therefore, responsible for the normativity and authority of the critique. Critique is thus essentially free action, as well as an instance of theory. This aspect of critique—critique as free action—can therefore also be seen to be an instance of what Hannah Arendt calls “the political.” For Arendt, the basic existential category of the political is “natality,” which is the spontaneous act of beginning anew. Philosophical critics, in their rejection of received opinion and authority, inaugurate a new beginning, thereby establishing their own freedom and a space for its exercise.

It follows that the object upon which the activity of philosophical critique is performed will be beliefs, or apparent and untested knowledge claims. Furthermore, the most forceful instances of critique will apply not only to beliefs which we in fact hold, but to those which we are in principle capable of holding, and thus will be concerned with the conditions for the possibility of knowledge and belief (e.g., our minds, reason, language, principles of justice or knowledge, social and political institutions and practices). Thus, even apparently “purely philosophical” (and not just obviously “political”) critics—those who take the philosophical tradition, knowledge, metaphysics,
or the faculty of reason itself as the objects of their critiques—are engaged in political action, and function to engender change.

This aspect of critique—critique as praxis—must not be lost sight of, for it is frequently the ethical-political dimension of critique to which we turn when seeking justification and grounds for the critique. Thus at the end of Descartes' epistemological inquiry, the theoretical certainty which grounds his post-critical knowledge of the external world rests on faith rather than reason, for this certainty is underwritten, according to Descartes, by none other than the hand of God. Similarly, Plato's solution to the epistemological problem of the Meno turned to the plane of practice, wherein the possibility of knowledge was practically demonstrated, rather than rationally argued, by the tutorial with the slave.20

The Dilemma as a Dialectic of Theory and Practice

But as we have seen above, this transcendent and normative aspect of critique is precisely that which is seen to be in crisis according to the dilemma of critique. To ground the legitimacy of critique in its ethical-practical nature as free action falls sway to the dilemma, for the kind of fundamental critique with which we are concerned is necessarily critical of the very possibility of free action. Yet when we seek theoretical grounding and legitimation for our critical activities in theory rather than action, we are again brought to the same quagmire, for thought which cannot be considered above the

20We can also see the practical/political aspect of critique to be at play in other Platonic dialogues. Socrates, in the Gorgias, claims “I am the true politician,” for he saw his work, indeed he saw philosophy, to be a political, rather than a theoretical enterprise. Furthermore, this view of the Socratic/Platonic dialectic allows for an understanding of the functional significance of the frequent use of myth in the dialogues. Myths are used as an alternative to purely rational or theoretical means for causing the ideational and behavioral changes in interlocutors, listeners, and readers which were the frequent goal of the dialogue. Furthermore, as we have already seen above, with Meno, myth often functions as an alternative to theory as a ground for the possibility of the critique.
taint of illegitimate influence and determination cannot prove human freedom to be possible. The question of grounding then seems to falter on this choice between the practical and theoretical, with both aspects giving way to each other, and neither being sufficient.

The dilemma of critique is a dilemma of grounding or justification. It can be seen as one mode of the expression of a deep-lying philosophical dualism. Dick Howard identifies the dilemma in its most general form as the choice between two explanatory concepts—normativity and genesis. According to Howard, all of our explanatory attempts appeal to one or the other principle. Yet appeal to one without the other is not possible, for they require each other; normativity grounding genesis, and vice versa. The bipolar and ambiguous structure of critique, as I have been here developing it, can also be viewed in light of this opposition, for the critic's criteria and insight are engendered out of the totality which s/he is critiquing, yet these criteria must claim to have normative force over that very totality. This general opposition or dichotomy, according to Howard, has taken various forms in the history of theory: the split between theory and practice, critique and criticism, and philosophy and politics, among them. Howard argues that the dilemma is necessary and that each explanatory pole is irreducible to the other. Thus political action requires philosophical grounding, and vice versa. If Howard is correct, then there can be no solution to the dilemma of critique. Our attempts to critique the totalities that spawn our very ability to critique must be seen as theoretically without ground. But before giving up on the possibility of theoretically justified critique, there are instances of global critique which must be examined. I will begin with a classic instance of a critique which struggled self-consciously with the

problem of normativity and genesis, or transcendence and immanence, and which claimed to have found a way of achieving transcendent normativity by means of maintaining immanence—the critique of Adorno and Horkheimer.

The Critique of Enlightenment

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment is "totalitarian," in that it encompasses all thought and language which may be used to refer to and to criticize it. Their attempt to elude this trap of enlightened reason entails their belief in reason's own ability to purge itself of those barbarous elements which do not measure up to its own standards. Thus they engage in "immanent" critique, hoping to extend the non-dominating, non-oppressive elements of reason, while leaving behind the tendencies toward oppression. Although I will argue that it is not possible to eliminate completely the oppressive aspects of enlightened reason, I intend to follow Adorno and Horkheimer in an attempt to broaden and transform the concept of reason itself, in a way which may serve to liberate some of what reason has previously denied and suppressed. This possibility arises from the uncovering by Adorno and Horkheimer of reason's necessary involvement with myth, magic, and mimesis. They show that myth and reason are not completely separable from one another, nor are they essentially different, but are rather dialectically identical, the one giving way to the other, and the one, as they demonstrate through a reading of Homer, "expounding and elucidating" the other. Both mimesis and rationality embody an attitude of domination over nature, but perhaps it is possible that myth and mimesis contain something else, as well, that can serve as a glimpse of liberatory redemption.

22Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment.
23Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 46.
24My discussion of this point will foreshadow my attempts in later chapters to sketch some
Adorno and Horkheimer write in the introduction to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

We are wholly convinced—and therein lies our *petitio principii*—that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. Nevertheless, we believe that we have just as clearly recognized that the notion of this very way of thinking, no less than the actual historic forms—the social institutions—with which it is interwoven, already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today. If enlightenment does not accommodate reflection on this recidivist element, then it seals its own fate. If consideration of the destructive aspect of progress is left to its enemies, blindly pragmatized thought, loses its transcending quality and, its relation to Truth.  

But just how is this required reflection upon its own regressive elements possible? Adorno and Horkheimer are quite aware of the paradoxical nature of this task, yet they attempt it anyway. How is it that they see the regressive aspects of enlightened thought to be identifiable and eliminable by enlightenment thinking itself? "Social freedom," they argue, requires enlightened thought, yet enlightened thought "contains the seed of its reversal." What exactly do Adorno and Horkheimer understand by the concept of enlightenment?

For Adorno and Horkheimer, 'enlightenment' refers to a type of reasoning and not just to the Western historical period (Eighteenth Century European culture) which is considered to be the apotheosis of this type of thinking. Enlightenment is seen as constituting the basic cognitive orientation of the entire Western tradition of philosophical thought, beginning with the emergence of reason out of supposedly pre-rational myth. The project of enlightenment, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, is new critical concepts and theoretical tools and to explore their use by more recent (especially feminist) thinkers.

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27If this is the case, then postmodernity, if successful in transcending and rendering
the "disenchantment of the world" and the elimination of fear by means of the increase in knowledge. The attitude inculcated by this knowledge is patriarchal, one of domination and sovereignty over nature, while the essence of this thought is technology, or the ability to manipulate, control and change nature. According to Adorno and Horkheimer,

Bacon's view was appropriate to the scientific attitude that prevailed after him. The concordance between the mind of man and the nature of things that he had in mind is patriarchal: the human mind, which overcomes superstition, is to hold sway over a disenchanted nature. Knowledge, which is power, knows no obstacles: . . . Technology is the essence of this knowledge.²⁸

But don't Adorno and Horkheimer themselves bring a technological, instrumental and patriarchal posture to their inquiry? They attempt to learn the essence of enlightenment, so that they may develop a strategy for the fulfillment of its positive goals, and the elimination of its defects. "The accompanying critique of enlightenment is intended to prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination."²⁹ The critique of enlightenment is carried out for the intended purpose of furthering enlightenment. This purposiveness of the critique is thus already suspiciously entangled with the object of the critique. The outstanding characteristic of enlightenment thought is its Baconian instrumental power, its tendency and ability to manipulate, dominate, and put to use its object. Since critique is necessarily purposive and instrumental, it too must be considered an instance of, what is in this case, its object. Thus, instrumentality per se cannot be totally repudiated and transcended by Adorno and Horkheimer, unless they are likewise to repudiate their own illegitimate modernity's concepts of reason and rational values, must also be seen as a critical overcoming of the entire western tradition. Indeed, some so called "post-modern" critical philosophers do see themselves as having gone beyond the metaphysical totality—e.g., Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida.

²⁸Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 4.
²⁹Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page xvi.
activity. Is there a solution to this apparent paradox?

Habermas has also reflected upon this problem in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer. As he so clearly describes the problem,

As instrumental, reason assimilated itself to power and thereby relinquished its critical force—that is the final disclosure of ideology critique applied to itself. To be sure, this description of the self-destruction of the critical capacity is paradoxical, because in the moment of description it still has to make use of the critique that has been declared dead. It denounces the Enlightenment's becoming totalitarian with its own tools. Adorno was quite aware of this performative contradiction inherent in totalized critique.  

According to Habermas, it is the insistence of Adorno and Horkheimer to apply critical reason to itself, thereby engaging in a second order reflection, which causes the problem and which is, in his opinion, illegitimate. Furthermore, according to Habermas, this historical progression from legitimate and useful "ideology critique" (i.e., critique which demonstrates the illegitimate entanglement of a theory with irrational power) to "totalizing critique" (i.e., critique which takes as its object the procedure of ideology critique itself) is unnecessary and requires a "one-sided" and "oversimplified" reading of the culture of modernity in order to make it appear to work.

Yet the drama of enlightenment first arrives at its climax when ideology critique itself comes under suspicion of not producing (any more) truths—and the enlightenment attains second-order reflectiveness. Then doubt reaches out to include reason, whose standards ideology critique had found already given in bourgeois ideals and had simply taken at their word. Dialectic of Enlightenment takes this step—it renders critique independent even in relation to its own foundations.”  

Habermas' suggestion is similar to the proposed solutions to Russell's various

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paradoxes of reference, which simply proscribe self-referentiality in certain instances.32 But is this possibility really open to Adorno and Horkheimer? Why did Adorno and Horkheimer believe it necessary to engage in critique at such a totalistic, "meta" level? According to Habermas, it was the horror of recent history that led Adorno and Horkheimer to believe that enlightened reason was itself flawed. The rise of German fascism and western totalitarianism indicated that any source of hope for social liberation was to be abandoned; the Marxist historical dynamic had failed to bring about lasting revolution. How had the Marxist ideology critique resulted in Stalinism? How had European culture and rationality produced Auschwitz? For these reasons, Adorno and Horkheimer thought it necessary to attempt a critique of the totality and essence of reason. This insight into Adorno's and Horkheimer's motivation allows us to see perhaps more clearly the insufficiency of genetic explanation to provide theoretical grounding. Although we can certainly understand the desirability of a critique of the kind of thinking that could produce atrocity, and in this sense we could say that the attempt is justified, at the same time we must admit that the lack of theoretical understanding of the mechanism whereby such a critique is possible leads to skepticism with respect to the legitimacy of its results. The question remains whether Adorno and Horkheimer are able to provide an adequate theoretical explanation of that mechanism and so to ground the conclusions of their critical project.

Their attempt to uncover the irrational within the very structure of the rational traces this entanglement to the beginnings of Western Civilization in the work of Homer, which they consider to be "the basic text of western culture." The Odyssey is therefore read as a narrative of the coming into existence of the individual subject, with all his

32There is of course also the well known joke, according to which the patient tells the doctor that "it hurts when I do this," to which the doctor replies "well, don't do that."
bourgeois and atomistic attributes of self-identity, self-reliance, and autonomy. This process of individuation is at the same time a process of tearing oneself out of the world of animistic superstition governed by invisible and undifferentiated elemental forces. This struggle, as Adorno and Horkheimer show, is a dialectic, for pre-rational myth is always already rational science; it explains, confirms, presents reality, and in so doing it sets off the process of enlightenment. Myth and magic see more in nature than meets the eye, and according to Horkheimer and Adorno this more is the precondition for language, since it provides the objectifying distance necessary between a thing and its name. On the other hand, enlightened reason is shown to revert increasingly to myth and magic. In its fundamental principles of the interchangeability of objects and the repeatability of events (the "principle of immanence," enlightenment reasoning loses its grasp of the very nature which it sought to understand and dominate, and becomes once again estranged from a totality which it finds fearsome and oppressive. Both science and myth originate in fear, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, which they attempt to assuage by recourse to explanation.

The dialectic of myth and magic, on the one hand, and reason, on the other, is shown to be manifest in many forms throughout the Homeric narrative. Firstly, both antipodal elements exist formally, as the mythical content of the Odyssey is organized and mastered through the Apollonian form of the epic. In terms of content as well there is much in the text that contains a similar dualistic admixture of the magical and the rational. The notion of the gift, for example, is, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, "halfway between barter and offering," and thus makes use of the prerational concept of sacrifice as well as the modern notion of equivalent exchange.34 The mythic power of

33Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 12.
34Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 49.
the gods is itself divided between the older, cthonic deities, and the newer gods, whose relation to the elemental forces they evoke is more distanced and symbolic rather than identical. And of course it is the power of the gods over the minds of humans in the form of superstition and fear against which our hero, the representative of a demythologized rationalism, is pitted. Yet this use of reason by Odysseus is itself impure. The battle waged by Odysseus to free himself from enslavement by the power of myth draws upon that very power, in the fundamental use he makes of mimetic artifice and deceptive cunning. Odysseus fools the Cyclops and cheats the Sirens by exploiting a basic dualism inherent in the first glimmers of enlightened reasoning—the distance between meaning or intention, and its expression. Thus, Odysseus, in claiming to be "Nobody" speaks the literal truth of his name, yet gains advantage from the ambiguity of meaning. Similarly, he is able to win from the Sirens the prize of their song without paying the price of madness by following the letter of the law, but not its intent. Odysseus outwits his enemies, who represent the older, darker world, by using their level of enlightenment against them. Odysseus' use of both mystification and instrumental rationality exploits the weaknesses of both and pits their strengths against each other. Adorno and Horkheimer thus reveal him to be an immanent critic. But is Odysseus' example of turning mythic enlightenment against itself, thereby propelling itself out of the sheer darkness and terror of myth in the direction of further enlightenment, one that can be followed by contemporary critics, such as Adorno and Horkheimer? And if so what could this mean, since we live in a time when enlightened reason appears to have succeeded beyond all expectation and hope in demystifying reality? It is science, the very flower of disenchanted reason, rather than superstition and myth which now dominates human consciousness and behavior, at least within the cultural milieu that has produced the horrors to which the critique of Adorno and Horkheimer respond.
In pointing out this dualism of the prerational and rational at the heart of the "bourgeois" Odysseus' cleverness, Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate the already purposive-rational character of mythical thinking; enlightenment is present within myth from the beginning. This admixture of reason and superstition which characterizes Odysseus' adventure indicates another aspect of the paradox of the critical perspective utilized by Adorno and Horkheimer. In seeking to uncover the origins of the narrowing of reason to instrumentality, Adorno and Horkheimer analyze the development of enlightenment out of myth in such a way as to support their theoretical assumptions that the process of disenchantment from myth and superstition is one of continual and increasing employment of reason as instrumental. Odysseus is shown by Adorno and Horkheimer to be "always already" a bourgeois subject. This problem is seen by Seyla Benhabib as one of viciously circular reasoning on the part of Adorno and Horkheimer.

. . . The interpretation of Odysseus already presupposes a self in fear of losing itself in otherness, a self aware of the dangers to his continuing identity posed by the urges within. Yet this self is one whose identity formation already reveals a pathological resistance against the blurring of boundaries. Odysseus fears merger and seeks autonomy, and attains autonomy only at the expense of self-repression. Humanity's original fear from nature is already viewed by Horkheimer and Adorno as a fear of merger and a pathological resistance to otherness. They project back to the beginnings of human subjectivity pathologies which they themselves diagnose as belonging to its historical development, for the fear of otherness becomes pathological only in the case of the rigid authoritarian personality whose ego boundaries must be violently asserted. It is as if Odysseus prefigures the authoritarian personality. 35

Thus in their attempt to capture the emergence of instrumental rationality from out of its other, Adorno and Horkheimer return to a beginning wherein the dialectic of enlightenment is already in full swing. Adorno and Horkheimer fail to see beyond

35Seyla Benhabib, Critique, Norm, and Utopia, page168.
enlightenment reasoning which appears to be already present at its own origin. The moment of its actual birth eludes the dialectical analysis. Yet it is easy to see that this is an inevitable consequence of their methodology of immanent critique. Adorno and Horkheimer are motivated by a critical view of disenchanted reason and its correlative subjectivity—that of bourgeois autonomy. They seek its origin in what is commonly accepted to be one of the earliest manifestations of the same western reason they wish to critique. It is hardly surprising that in their analysis they would find exactly what they expect. Not only have Odysseus' adventures been presupposed to be a starting point for the dialectic of enlightenment, but the methodology of immanent critique employed by Adorno and Horkheimer could not possibly reveal anything else. This methodological circularity, although understandable, is troubling if what is sought is a solution or a way out of the dialectic of myth and enlightened reason. Immanent critique appears incapable of escape from this dialectic, for it cannot envision any alternative type of rationality. No concretely developed other to the dichotomous possibilities of either superstition or enlightenment is revealed in the analysis of Odysseus' "adventures with the dialectic." Both myth and enlightenment are present, and both are intertwined in many of Odysseus' actions, but Adorno's and Horkheimer's analysis is unable to demonstrate a radically different rationality that can be held out as a normative standard which could serve as an alternative to either the instrumentality or the barbarism (or the barbarism of instrumentality—e.g., the "efficiency" of the death camps, or the mind-numbing pleasures of the "culture industry") which it is their concern to critique. Insofar as it is the aim of Adorno and Horkheimer to demonstrate a dialectic of enlightenment and myth, their analysis of Odysseus succeeds. Insofar as this demonstration itself purports to be a critique, in its revelation of rationality's dark side as complicitous with myth and magic, questions remain. The legitimacy, as well as the utopian alternative
driving this critique is unclear. The normative force of the critique relies on two assumptions, for which no argument is given—that myth-driven enlightenment is bad; and, conversely, that narrowly instrumental reason in its opposition to myth and magic is likewise bad. On what grounds is either condemnation justified or justifiable?

We have seen in the analysis of Odysseus the demonstration of the first "thesis" of the text, that "myth is already enlightenment." The other side, so to speak, of the dialectic of enlightenment is the argument of Adorno and Horkheimer's second thesis that "enlightenment reverts to mythology."36 This second thesis can be seen as a demonstration of the revenge that subdued nature has taken upon humanity. Enlightened subjectivity, as we have seen, constitutes itself via a radical separation from nature, begun in terror as a response to the fear of the vast powers of "circumambient" nature. Yet, as Adorno and Horkheimer demonstrate, although this separation was originally a defensive response to terror, its inevitable consequence is a reversion to terror. This thesis is demonstrated in the second "excursus" of the text, which examines the way in which bourgeois Kantian reason and morality find their paradigm instantiation in the coldly calculative protagonists of Sade's writings.37 This "excursus" traces the rigidification of reason into instrumental reason, pinpointing the moment of this accomplishment in Kant. Kant's definition of 'enlightenment' as maturity amounts to the individual's rule by reason. Since reason's function is to systematize and organize the activities of the understanding, to provide for the connection and unity of principles and facts, the mature autonomy prescribed by Kant has the effect of levelling all differences in the particular objects of knowledge as well as in the "highest" manifestation of

36Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page xvi.
37Slavoj Zizek makes a similar point when he argues that the film character of Hannibal Lecter is the paradigm instantiation of Kantian morality. See Slavoj Zizek, The Sublime Object of Ideology, (New York: Verso, 1989).
consciousness attainable by the individual knowing subject. To bring the diversity of perceptual experience to order culminates in the purely formalistic knowledge of mathematical law. But this type of knowledge is empty of content and significance. Knowledge which is stripped of the meaning it has within the context of its socio-historical development reduces to tautology, and the knowing subject loses all critical capacity in the face of the immediacy of the given. Thus, not only the object, but the subject of knowledge becomes empty, as well.

What appears to be the triumph of subjective rationality, the subjection of all reality to logical formalism, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given. . . . The task of cognition does not consist in mere apprehension, classification, and calculation, but in the determinate negation of each im-mediacy. Mathematical formalism, however, whose medium is number, the most abstract form of the immediate, instead holds thinking firmly to mere immediacy.\textsuperscript{38}

Furthermore, since empirical facts belong to the realm of practice (for they derive from experience with physical reality and can only be tested by experimental means), Kant's characterization of legitimate knowledge as phenomenal or scientific further supports the Baconian equation of knowledge and power. Kant thus provides transcendental ground for reason's instrumental nature, according to Adorno and Horkheimer. Enlightened maturity becomes, on this view, success at survival, and the promise of autonomous freedom held out by reason is merely an abstract generalization from the hierarchical domination of social reality. Thus, the unifying purpose of reason can only endorse and derive from the social status quo.

Even if the secret utopia in the concept of reason pointed, despite fortuitous distinctions between individuals, to their common interest, reason—functioning, in compliance with ends, as a mere systematic science—serves to level down that same identical interest. It allows no determination other than the

\textsuperscript{38}Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, page 27.
classifications of the societal process to operate. No one is other than what he has come to be: a useful, successful, or frustrated member of vocational and national groups. He is one among many representatives of his geographical, psychological and sociological type.  

Kant’s transcendental proof provided a linkage between reason and purpose in such a way that Sade’s characters can be shown by Adorno and Horkheimer to portray the epitome of the Kantian enlightened individual.

What Kant grounded transcendentally, the affinity of knowledge and planning, which impressed the stamp of inescapable expediency on every aspect of a bourgeois existence that was wholly rationalized, even in every breathing-space, Sade realized empirically more than a century before sport was conceived.

Moreover, this instrumentality is carried over into morals, for Kantian rationality gives rise to a purely formal morality which has lost the capacity to ground concretely normative judgements. Sade’s Juliette engages in acts of cruelty, sexual excess, and criminality, all the while maintaining her enlightened maturity and never flinching before the possibility of her maxim becoming universal law. This moral poverty of enlightened reason points up its failure to provide the utopian freedom, the promise of which had motivated its development and offset the sacrifices—e.g. the self-denial, the distancing from the natural, the sensual, the base. Even Juliette, to whom all things are permitted, does not experience the sensual pleasure of her indulgences, but attains only the formal intellectual satisfaction of the bourgeois.

. . . Juliette embodies (in psychological terms) neither unsublimated nor regressive libido, but intellectual pleasure in regression—amor intellectualis diaboli, the pleasure of attacking civilization with its own weapons. She favors system and consequence. She is a proficient manipulator of the organ of rational thought. In regard to self-control, her directions are at times related to Kant’s as

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39 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, page 84.
the special application is to its basic proposition. \textsuperscript{41}

The increasing instrumentalization of reason becomes incapable of purging, harnessing, or even of negatively evaluating the barbaric impulses which remain embedded in a radically other nature from which reason is profoundly alienated. Furthermore, reason's very alienation from nature increases the tendencies of the bourgeois subject toward barbarism. This is due to the huge psychological cost of this self-distancing from nature. Reason must differentiate itself from the natural, the bodily, and the irrational. But nature, as the necessary substratum of reason's very existence cannot be annihilated, but only oppressed and denied. Its power is thus increased, in a classic instance of the Freudian phenomenon of the "return of the repressed," as reason fears it as its unknown source. The fear is that of backsliding into a dark and shameful past from which reason has managed to escape only barely, and with great struggle. Thus, any reminders of reason's proximity to nature evoke terror, anger, and hatred, which quite often can and will explode into atrocities.

Wholly to expunge the odious overpowering longing to return to a state of nature is the cruelty produced by an abortive civilization: barbarism, the other face of culture. ". . . Them all!" Annihilation allows of no exception. The will to destruction is totalitarian. "I go so far," says Juliette to the Pope, "as to wish Tiberius that all mankind had but a single head, that I might have the pleasure of severing it at one blow!" The signs of powerlessness, sudden uncoordinated movements, animal fear, confusion, awaken the thirst for blood. The justification of hatred for woman that represents her as intellectually and physically inferior, and bearing the brand of domination on her forehead, is equally that of hatred for Jews. Women and Jews can be seen not to have ruled for thousands of years. They live, although they could be exterminated; and their fear and weakness, the greater affinity to nature which perennial oppression produces in them, is the very element which gives them life. This enrages the strong, who must pay for their strength with an intense alienation from nature, and must always suppress

\textsuperscript{41}Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, page 95.
their fear. They identify themselves with nature when they hear their victims utter
over and over again the cry that they dare not themselves emit.\textsuperscript{42}

What is the cause of this dialectical reversal, whereby dominated nature once
again overpowers reason? Is it due to the modern narrowing of rationality to
instrumentality, or is this result an inevitable consequence of the development of reason
in general? According to Seyla Benhabib, there is a tension between the views
expressed in the two excursuses. On this view, the first excursus considers the dialectic
of enlightenment to be a result of western reason in general; while the second excursus
places the blame for the terrible consequences on the radical instrumentalizing of
reason accomplished in modernity.\textsuperscript{43} We have already seen that for Adorno and
Horkheimer the dialectic had its beginnings in the earliest emergence of reason out of
myth. This emergence was based on subjectivity's self-separation from nature as
witnessed in Odysseus' adventures. But if the separation from nature is already
sufficient to launch the dialectic, can there possibly exist a form of rationality and
subjectivity which can elude the regression into myth and barbarism? Odysseus'
rationality was already purposive and instrumental. Can there ever be a rationality which
is noninstrumental?

Adorno and Horkheimer use immanent critique as a way of letting the
contradictory nature of the object express itself. Immanent critique does not import
criteria from the outside with which to evaluate its object, but rather attempts to draw
from its object the standards it has set for itself and the distance that exists between
itself and those standards. Adorno's reflections upon this topic in \textit{Negative Dialectics}\textsuperscript{44}
clarify the nature of immanent critique. There Adorno points out the difference between

\textsuperscript{42}Adorno and Horkheimer, \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment}, page 112.
\textsuperscript{43}Seyla Benhabib, \textit{Critique, Norm, and Utopia}.
\textsuperscript{44}Theodor W. Adorno \textit{Negative Dialectics}, translated by E.B. Ashton (New York:
Continuum, 1987).
his own methodology and that of previous philosophic systems. Adorno rejects thinking which attempts to bring the concrete and particular into the order of a system which operates according to general principles. This type of thinking, which Adorno calls "identity thinking," smooths over the differences and tensions inherent in reality by subsuming all particular objects under universal laws. In this way, contradictions are apparently resolved (or, as in Hegel, synthesized at a higher level) and their critical force is thereby nullified. The result is an illusory vision of a unified whole; the reconciliation of contradictory particulars provided is a false consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer, in refusing to bring the particulars under the rule of a unifying theory that points unambiguously to its culmination in a single telos (as do, for example, the Marxist or Hegelian versions of history), allow the contradictions to speak for themselves. Their negative power is accented rather than suppressed. Thus, Benhabib is correct in her insight that there is a tension between the two excursuses, for there is a tension in the reality of a reason which is both instrumental and simultaneously non-dominating, both myth-driven and opposed to myth. Furthermore, the contradictory nature of reality pervades the particulars "all the way down," so to speak, to their smallest "atomic" level, for, as we have seen, early instances of myth and magic are already purposive (as is nature), so that the contradictory poles of myth and reason can never be entirely separated, even analytically. And as we have already discussed, critical reason, even as it attempts to be non-oppressive, contains elements of instrumentality, for it too is motivated and sustained by purpose.

The critique presented in Dialectic of Enlightenment is accomplished by means of

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45There is obviously plenty of instrumental rationality in nature, as any viewer of television nature shows knows. Turtles bury their eggs; animals hide their nests; brightly colored animals mimic their surroundings to avoid becoming prey; traps are laid, etc. It is therefore just as impossible to expunge nature of instrumentality as vice versa.
a pointing up and sharpening of contradictions. Adorno and Horkheimer pit the particulars against each other. This method can be seen to be critical praxis insofar as the acceleration of the enlightened awareness of contradiction propels the dialectic forward. Thus they write that "Enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the bounds of enlightenment." 

This assistance given to the dialectic presupposes that the dialectic contains within itself the possibility of its own self-overcoming. Thus the job of the critic is to reveal the contradictions without forcing a resolution. The text therefore rejects totalization, even formally, for it comprises a series of essays rather than an architectonic system with a single logical structure. No grand summation is given; the text ends with fragments. Adorno and Horkheimer are fully aware that the repressive aspects of reason are also necessarily contained within enlightened reason. For they believe that "The only kind of thinking sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive." But the self-destruction of enlightened reasoning contains the possibility of a future transcendence to non-oppressive, liberatory rationality. If instrumental reason "shatters myth," perhaps a "mimetic reconciliation" which extends and develops reason's non-oppressive aspects is possible, after all. Although this possibility cannot be theoretically justified or guaranteed within the terms of Adorno and Horkheimer's work, it is the only hope with which they are left.

46Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 208.

47This method of pitting the particulars against each other can be seen especially clearly in Adorno' analyses of "emphatic" art works. See Aesthetic Theory, translated by C. Lenhardt, edited by Gretel Adorno, and Rolf Tiedmann (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

48The first fragment is significantly titled, "Why it is better not to know all the answers" Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 209.

49Adorno and Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, page 4.

50Thus, Martin Jay points out that the Dialectic of Enlightenment represents a dialectic of hope and despair. See Martin Jay, Marxism and Totality, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), page 242.
We have thus seen how, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, a purely theoretical grounding for the possibility of critical reason is elusive, in that no transcendent normativity outside of the *status quo* can be justified. Any employment of reason is marred by the dark side of the dialectic, so that to isolate the nondominating, non-oppressive aspect of reason appears impossible. We have also seen that, for Adorno and Horkheimer, Kant's critiques can be seen as marking the triumph of reason's instrumentality. If this is so, perhaps the liberating aspect of critical reason (*Vernunft*) can be more readily apparent within the concept of reason upon which, and with which, Kant enacts his procedure. I would therefore propose that before following Adorno and Horkheimer all the way, and giving up on the possibility of a purely theoretical solution to the problem of critique, and correlative but more importantly, the actuality of a resistant critical reason that can fully transcend and oppose domination, we explore Kant's procedure of the critique of reason by reason and its resulting product in a theory of reason's limitations and capacities. This exploration will be taken up in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 2
THE DILEMMA OF THE KANTIAN CRITICAL SUBJECT AND THE HEGELIAN ALTERNATIVE OF IMMANENT CRITIQUE

We have seen that for Adorno and Horkheimer the strategy of immanent critique was their means of attempting to elude the bind of the philosophical totalizing critic, since the standards and criteria for the critique were considered to derive from the object of critique itself. This, however, as we have seen, resulted in an inability to purge completely the instrument of critique (critical reason), as well as the post-critical knowledge found by that critique, of the elements of barbarism which the critique was concerned to eliminate or transcend. Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer ultimately appeal to a reconciliation with the partly mythical and nonrational aspects of nature as a solution to the unenlightened aspects of reason. Their critique is ultimately grounded in a faith in the (possible) progress of the dialectic they identify as governing reason’s evolution through the opposing tendencies of enlightenment and myth, and their own attempt to nudge that dialectic along by pointing out and sharpening those tensions. But perhaps this strategy is too timid in its reluctance to step outside the dialectic it studies, even for a critical moment.

As we have seen in Chapter One, one way to understand the critical dilemma is to focus on the critical perspective, the subjective position from which a totalizing critique is conducted, as paradoxical and problematic. Viewed as such, the critic finds herself in a bind with respect to the status of her own critical pronouncements, for she can neither exempt these pronouncements from the rigors of critique, nor trust the legitimacy of these claims insofar as they, too, are under suspicion and should therefore be held in critical suspension. But perhaps a more detailed focus on the critical perspective and the subject’s capacity to conduct critique will yield a way out of the
dilemma. In this respect, Kant’s critique of the instrument of knowledge becomes relevant. Kant closely and critically examined the subject who knows, and in so doing was compelled to consider explicitly his own activity as subject of critical knowledge. In what way did he see himself as attaining the necessary transcendence out of the object of critique in order to be that object’s judge?

The ability of consciousness to grasp itself—consciousness’ reflexivity—is seen as essential to the production of knowledge for both Kant and Hegel. It is this reflexivity which, for both philosophers, allows consciousness to engage in critique. This reflexivity of consciousness can also be seen as underlying the problematic and paradoxical structure of philosophical critique as it necessarily assumes perspectives which are both immanent within and transcendent to its object. My aim in this chapter will be to show the way in which both Kant and Hegel make use of the ambiguous structure of critical consciousness which I've elaborated in Chapter One, and to identify the particular tangles and failures in which each critical epistemology becomes caught.

I will therefore argue that the "empirical realism" which Kant claims to justify depends upon a view and strategy of critical consciousness which constitutes a pragmatic contradiction of the very strictures on legitimate knowledge that his epistemological theory establishes and his empirical realism requires. What I mean by this is that Kant illegitimately, in his theoretical-critical practice, steps outside of the bounds of knowledge which his critical theory draws. Furthermore his theory itself makes this explicit, for the bounds of knowledge which Kant sets up will be, even in empirical consciousness, transgressed. Kant's realism holds only for a particular and proscribed perspective of cognitive consciousness, yet this proscribed perspective presupposes a transgression of its own boundaries—a transgression for which it is
ultimately unable to account, and which it explicitly repudiates. Thus, I will argue that Kant’s attempt to examine “the instrument” of cognition prior to putting it to use itself surreptitiously uses that very instrument in a way which his theory explicitly claims to be illegitimate. As we will see, Hegel’s criticism of Kant is also along these lines. But Hegel believes that he can avoid the mistakes he identifies in Kant by means of a phenomenological approach which relies on the immanent critique intrinsic to the process of coming to know. My interpretation of Hegel will argue, however, that his epistemological progress over Kant (i.e., his proclaimed success in grounding a greater amount and type of knowledge) is illusory, and that he too fails to ground either the point of view or the knowledge which his faith in immanent critique leads him to profess. I therefore intend to show that both Kant and Hegel fail to elude the critical dilemma which I have elaborated in Chapter One.

In this chapter my focus will be primarily on the manifestations of the paradoxical nature of critique in the epistemological writings of Kant and Hegel. This is because my prime concern in the dissertation is for a theoretical grounding of the possibility of critique; my concern is with what the critic can know with respect to her own activity. Although it may be that the best we can achieve will be a theoretical statement of the necessity and logical priority of a practical-ethical foundation for the critical capacity, it is to theoretical reason as the standard of truth and knowledge that I intend to look first. Thus my inquiry into the legitimacy of the critical capacity should begin with the similar attempts of others to uncover that which critical reason can know. However, as I have argued in Chapter One, it should not be forgotten that there is always a practical-ethical component to critique, which will necessarily assert itself in what follows. I will therefore identify a way in which Kant’s epistemology falters in what can be seen to be an ethical mis-step. Hegel, on the other hand, does not keep the
ethical and epistemological as separate as does Kant, so that Hegel sees cognitive perspectives to be simultaneously ethical-practical attitudes. Thus to discuss Hegel's epistemology is to be already within the circle of his totalistic system. Since according to Hegel, the "path to science" is already "science itself," his understanding of and methodological use of critical reason in one area of his system should be in accord with the whole.

Authorization and Limitation in the Critique of Pure Reason

Kant’s task in the Critique of Pure Reason was to navigate between the precritical positions of both rationalist dogmatism (in particular, the theories of Leibniz and Wolff), and empiricist skepticism (Hume). The problem with rationalism, as relevant to the critical dilemma, is its assumption of a too transcendent point of view which led it to claim the ability of reason to know things-in-themselves (including such things as God, the soul, and the totality of existence). Empiricism, on the other hand, denies the ability of reason to go beyond (or transcend) the phenomena at all, so that the first principles of even empirical knowledge, insofar as they attribute necessity and universality to phenomena (e.g., all events have a cause), are considered illegitimate. Empiricism is therefore completely mired in its immanence within the phenomenal realm of sensation. Kant’s critique is therefore double-edged: against the inflated claims of rationalism, he must limit reason to its own realm; at the same time, against empiricism, he must establish and authorize reason’s appropriate power as a “lawgiver to nature.” Critique must both proscribe and prescribe; remain within its bounds (maintain immanence) and establish propriety over its realm (attain transcendent as sovereign

Kant’s answer to Hume’s skeptical denial of the possibility of scientific knowledge took the form of a demonstration or “deduction” that pure concepts or “categories” must be applicable to our sensible intuitions in order for us to have conscious awareness at all. According to Kant, the faculty of knowledge is the understanding, whose function is to bring unity to the manifold of sense. What Hume had argued was that sensibility does not receive a unity or necessary connection of its intuitions (or “impressions”), but rather apprehends a manifold. Thus it is the mind’s job to connect together our sensible intuitions according to concepts. Hume concluded from this that the combinations of impressions supplied by the mind were merely subjectively valid—a result of mental habit or custom—and therefore couldn’t guarantee the necessity or universality which we attribute to them. But for Kant, our mental structuring concepts are rules which govern the mind’s activity of bringing the intuitions apprehended by sense together in such a way that these intuitions refer to an empirical object. This mental activity of unification, which Kant calls “synthesis,” is thus responsible for the objective validity of empirical knowledge, for we know an object, according to Kant, when we have synthesized its representations according to the rule which is its concept.

Understanding is, to use general terms, the faculty of knowledge. This knowledge consists in the determinate relation of given representations to an object; and an object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united. Now all unification of representations demands unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them. Consequently it is the unity of consciousness that alone constitutes the relation of representations to an object, and therefore their objective validity and the fact that they are modes of knowledge; and upon it rests the very possibility of the understanding.  

52Kant, Critique, page B137.
representations as representations of our own consciousness, then we must apply the categories of the understanding, by means of an act of synthesis, to the flux of intuitions which constitute the manifold of sense. The rock-bottom premise of this argument is the undeniable (even to Hume) fact that consciousness is a unity. But consciousness, as awareness of mental representations, is awareness of a manifold of intuitions from sense (e.g., hot, humid, heavy, soft buzzing, light blue, etc.). My awareness must therefore relate each representation to an “I think” if these representations are to be recognized as contents of my consciousness. Thus the unity of consciousness presupposes an act of synthesis which grants unity to the manifold. The analytic proposition that consciousness is a unity presupposes the synthetic act of bringing intuitions together in relation to the “I think.” This fundamental synthesis is analyzed by Kant in the first edition transcendental deduction (CPR A 95-130), which constitutes the subjective side of Kant’s deduction argument. The three mental syntheses identified therein along with the transcendental unity of apperception as their ground and source are the “subjective grounds” of the necessary connection of appearances. On the objective side, there must also be an “affinity” of the manifold of sense, to allow that it be capable of being combined by the threefold synthesis. Kant argues in the B edition deduction (also known as the “objective deduction,” CPR B 129-169) that the syntheses are performed in every case according to a rule which grants necessity to the manner of combination of the intuitions. This necessity of following a rule comes about by means of the intentional or referential function of the mental syntheses which refer my representations back to their object which is presupposed to be the source of their objective validity. The rules, which are the concepts or categories of the understanding

53Namely, the “synthesis of apprehension in intuition,” the “synthesis of reproduction in imagination” (which “runs through and holds together” the contents of the manifold), and the “synthesis of recognition in a concept.”
thus confer objective validity on the knowledge of objects of empirical intuition.

Thus Kant claims to be able to salvage objective validity for the empirical sciences, whose legitimacy had been destroyed within Hume’s skeptical analysis. Positively, Kant’s critique establishes the understanding’s jurisdiction over its proper realm. But Kant’s victory over Humean empiricism is not without its price. The negative function of critique as drawing limits requires that something be given up. Since the concepts or categories are rules for the synthesis performed by the understanding on a manifold which it receives from sensibility, their legitimate employment can only be to gain knowledge of empirical phenomena. Intuition brings a manifold of sensibility to the understanding, which proceeds to synthesize this manifold according to its concepts. Thus the concepts may refer only to sensible objects.

They [i.e., the categories] are merely rules for an understanding whose whole power consists in thought, consists, that is, in the act whereby it brings the synthesis of a manifold, given to it from elsewhere in intuition, to the unity of apperception—a faculty, therefore, which by itself knows nothing whatsoever, but merely combines and arranges the material of knowledge, that is, the intuition, which must be given to it by the object.\(^5\)

Furthermore, since objectivity is itself a product of an activity of mental synthesis, we cannot claim that empirical objects are in-themselves as they appear to us. What has been sacrificed by Kant’s critique is the possibility of gaining knowledge of things-in-themselves. Kant is thus committed to the position that the categories of the understanding cannot legitimately be applied beyond the realm of sense. Nor can “ideas” of reason, whose function is to synthesize and organize the result of understanding’s conceptualized knowledge according to its rules of combination, apply to objects not previously given in sensibility and synthesized according to the

\(^5\)Kant, Critique, page B145.
understanding's concepts. The idea of *noumena*, or non-sensible objects known by an intellectual intuition, thus functions as a limiting concept which sets the upper boundary on our possible knowledge.

**The Reflexivity of Consciousness in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason***

As we have seen, knowledge, for Kant, involves the mind's active relating of its representations to an apperception of its own unity. Consciousness must be able to recognize its mental contents as its own, hence it must be able to relate each of its representations to an 'I think'. All knowledge, according to Kant, involves the logical possibility of self-conscious awareness of that knowledge as a content of consciousness. Cognitive consciousness is, for Kant, inherently self-relational; the mind must be able to refer to its own mental contents in such a way as to be able to grasp those mental contents as states of its own consciousness. The deduction arguments have shown that knowledge is ultimately grounded in "transcendental apperception," which is the ability of the mind to think itself as a unitary consciousness, or to self-reflect. This reflexivity of consciousness is important for Kant in terms of both the content and method of his epistemology. As regards content, not only does the doctrine of "inner sense" require that consciousness has the ability to intuit itself, but, more importantly, the theory of threefold mental synthesis, which is crucial to Kant's transcendental deductions, consists entirely of an account of continual cognitive self-relating. This account narrates the act of cognition, describing the mind's work upon its disparate contents, as it brings them together, and at each turn through a "higher" procedure yields a new synthetic unity, culminating in recognition in a concept, and

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55See e.g., Kant, *Critique*, pages A 33-B49-50, B 153-7.
56Kant, *Critique*, pages A 97-104.
empirical knowledge. Cognitive consciousness is thus seen to operate at different levels for Kant; there are epistemic activities which Kant shows to take place necessarily "beneath" empirical consciousness, as the necessary conditions of cognitive experience. It is consciousness' reflexivity which links these different levels or perspectives of mental functioning together and which allows consciousness to move through the various levels of acquaintance with empirical objects from the most immediate intuition of sensory phenomena to the most sophisticated syllogistic reasoning about them. Methodologically, Kant's reliance on the reflexivity of consciousness is also crucial to his epistemological enterprise. Kant's theory comes to understand intuitions to be "appearances." In order for this to be possible, the epistemological mind must be able to reflect upon its own nature as contributing to its apprehension of intuitions. Kant therefore identifies and makes use of two different perspectives of cognitive consciousness; one, more immediate, the other, more reflexive; both of which contribute to his epistemological understanding of empirical cognition.  

57 These two perspectives can be seen at work in the account Kant gives in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" of the functioning of the forms of sensibility.

When I say that the intuition of outer objects and the self-intuition of the mind alike represent the objects and the mind, in space and in time, as they affect our senses, that is, as they appear, I do not mean to say that these objects are a mere illusion. For in an appearance the objects, nay even the properties that we ascribe to them, are always regarded as something actually given. Since, however, in the relation of the given object to the subject, such properties depend upon the mode of intuition of the subject, this object as appearance is to be distinguished from itself as object in itself.  

58 In this textual passage Kant identifies two levels or perspectives of cognitive

57As will be discussed later, these two perspectives can be seen to correspond to the two perspectives of cognitive consciousness which I will identify in Hegel's epistemological method, namely, the "phenomenological we" and the consciousness which is its object of study.

58Kant, Critique, page B69.
consciousness. From within the first level, consciousness distinguishes illusion and object, for it regards the empirical object and its properties as "actually given." It is this distinction between object as given and subjective representation, or between reality and appearance, which the mind draws as it apprehends intuitions, which defines the realm of experience for this ordinary level of consciousness. This ability to distinguish allows this ordinary empirical perspective to make use of a standard of objectivity, and so to attain what it regards as objective knowledge. However, there is another "higher" level or perspective of consciousness operative in this passage, and this is the epistemological or critical consciousness. To reflect upon the "givenness" of empirical objects is to be conscious of their mode of relating to the knowing subject. Thus, empirical consciousness, when it self-reflects, gives way to a more reflexive epistemological point of view from which it considers its mode of apprehension of intuitions. Epistemological consciousness is then forced to consider these intuitions to be appearances, rather than things in themselves, for they are now understood to be dependent upon the subject's mode of sensible intuition. This higher order, epistemological and critical consciousness is less limited than the first-order empirical consciousness with which Kant's reflections began, for this critical perspective sees the reality of empirical consciousness to be a reality only in relation to the perspective of empirical consciousness. This higher order perspective is attained only as consciousness transgresses the limits of its previous perspective and reflects upon this perspective which is then the object of the new perspective's conscious attention. Thus, the self-conscious reflection upon its passive mode of intuition brings consciousness to a different order of awareness, one which sees the reality of its prior state as limited. The new perspective therefore enlarges its bounds by drawing another distinction between appearance and reality, that between the empirical object and the object in-
itself. Thus for Kant, cognitive consciousness operates as a continuum, whose different levels or positions on the scale of reflexivity afford it different perspectives from which its intentional objects likewise differ. What is grasped as reality at one level of consciousness is seen to be appearance from the more transcendent perspective which is able to apprehend the lower order awareness along with what is objective reality for that lower order. To the perspective of empirical consciousness which is immanent to empirical reality, phenomena are real, independently existing objects. But as cognitive consciousness attains transcendence from that more immanent perspective by assuming a self-reflexive epistemological pose, empirical objects are now understood to be appearances. Kant's doctrine of the "Transcendental Aesthetic," that external objects in space and time are appearances dependent upon our mode of sensibility, is therefore an epistemological truth known only to a higher order of cognition than the everyday empirical consciousness which is immanent to empirical reality as it is circumscribed by space and time. Kant's critical epistemological method is therefore structured by the same logic of critique which I have elaborated in the previous chapter. Both the immanent pose of empirical consciousness and the transcendent perspective of the self-reflexive epistemological consciousness are necessary to Kant's enactment of critique. One of the ways in which Kant experiences, interprets, and attempts to avoid the critic's dilemma can be seen as he assumes in turn each of these two perspectives in the two versions of his "refutations of idealism."

Immanence and Transcendence in the Refutations of Idealism

Kant’s “transcendental idealism” (i.e., the theory that empirical objects, space and

59 It is important to differentiate the terms ‘transcendent’ and ‘transcendental’. Kant uses the term ‘transcendental’ to refer to the conditions for the possibility of experience; while ‘transcendent’ simply means ‘beyond’ or ‘outside of’.
time as their forms of intuition, and the categories of the understanding as their structuring concepts are not things in themselves, but rather appearances resulting from the spontaneous activity of the transcendental mind), as we have seen, was intended to preserve the objective validity of empirical knowledge. In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant attempts two different “refutations” of the charge that his theory constitutes an idealism of the sort that would render empirical knowledge merely subjectively valid. In the refutation of idealism given in the fourth “paralogism” of the first edition Critique, Kant explicitly distinguishes his “transcendental idealism” from what he calls “empirical idealism” on precisely this score. “Empirical idealism” is, according to Kant, the view that external objects cannot be known with certainty, since they are not perceived immediately, but must be inferred to exist as the causes of our immediately perceived mental representations. Empirical idealism’s error, as Kant explains it, lies in its presupposition of a “transcendental realism,” which regards space and time as existing in themselves, as conditions for the existence of external objects, which also exist in themselves and independently of our sensibility. Thus, in our terms, Kant’s criticism amounts to charging the empirical idealists with an illegitimately transcendent perspective which would allow them to know space and time “in themselves."

Kant sees his “transcendental idealism,” however, as allowing for an empirical realist position with respect to the existence of external objects. This is because Kant’s position, in regarding space and time to be merely the forms of our sensible intuition, does not regard sensible objects to be things-in-themselves. External objects are, on

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60Kant’s main target here is Berkeley, and to a lesser extent, Descartes. Although Descartes was not technically a metaphysical idealist, his epistemological rationalism entailed the position that ideas are known more directly than physical objects. Additional confusion on this issue is due to the fact that Kant’s position attempts to be idealist in epistemological terms (and indeed only transcendentally, but not empirically); while metaphysically, Kant is necessarily committed to an agnosticism.

61Kant, Critique, page A 369.
this view, merely appearances, and thus nothing more than our mental representations. Thus our minds are just as capable of having direct access to external objects as to any of our representations of our own inner mental states. The appearances of inner and outer sense are on an equal epistemic footing according to Kant, since both species of appearance are immediately perceived. There is, therefore, no need to infer the existence of external objects as the causes of our mental representations, as is done according to the empirical idealists. As appearances, empirical objects are known directly as their concepts are synthesized by the mind. In the act of mental synthesis, governed by the categories of the understanding, the mind directly apprehends its object, for this object is none other than that which corresponds to the concept, which is the form or rule for the act of mental synthesis. Thus, for Kant the empirical distinction between objectively valid judgment and merely subjective illusion is preserved.

From perceptions knowledge of objects can be generated, either by mere play of imagination or by way of experience; and in the process there may, no doubt, arise illusory representations to which the objects do not correspond, the deception being attributable sometimes to a delusion of imagination (in dreams) and sometimes to an error of judgment (in so-called sense-deception). To avoid such deceptive illusion, we have to proceed according to the rule: Whatever is connected with a perception according to empirical laws, is actual.

Empirical error and subjective illusion are thus distinguished from empirical knowledge on the basis of compliance with a rule of the understanding. Since experience is, as the “Analytic” has shown and as discussed above, the result of mental syntheses according to rules, empirical error is easily accounted for as a matter of not following, or incorrectly applying the rules (i.e., the concepts and principles of the understanding).

62 According to Kant, “... an object is that in the concept of which the manifold of a given intuition is united.” Critique, page B137.
63 Kant, Critique, page A376.
64 In the above case the rule cited is the second postulate of empirical thought, Critique, page B266.
This distinction between empirical knowledge and subjective illusion could not be maintained by empirical idealism, according to Kant, because the empirical idealist, as a transcendental realist, demands that knowledge be of things-in-themselves.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{65}Hilary Putnam gives a strikingly similar argument to show that what he calls “metaphysical realism” leads inevitably to skepticism. See Putnam, \textit{Reason, Truth and History} (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
Transcendental realism . . . inevitably falls into difficulties, and finds itself obliged to give way to empirical idealism, in that it regards the objects of outer sense as something distinct from the senses themselves, treating mere appearances as self-subsistent beings, existing outside us. On such a view as this, however clearly we may be conscious of our representation of these things, it is still far from certain that, if the representation exists, there exists also the object corresponding to it. In our system, on the other hand, these external things, namely matter, are in all their configurations and alterations nothing but mere appearances, that is, representations in us, of the reality of which we are immediately conscious.66

Empirical idealism cannot distinguish experience from illusion according to Kant for it can never be certain that the independent reality which it seeks is as it is represented in our mental perceptions. Kant’s position, on the other hand, preserves the empirical distinction between real externally existing object and merely subjective appearance precisely because it takes empirical objects to be appearances, in the transcendental sense, rather than things-in-themselves. Thus, according to Kant’s first edition “refutation of idealism,” the distinction between empirical reality and subjective illusion is grounded in the transcendental distinction between appearance and thing-in-itself. Realism, at the empirical level of consciousness, is therefore made possible by an idealist perspective at the transcendental level, one which takes the objects of its experience to be relative to its mode of perceiving them. Kant, in his first edition refutation, is speaking from this transcendental perspective.

The second edition refutation, however, takes a different level of consciousness as primary. It begins from the premise that “I am conscious of my own existence as determined in time” (Critique B275). Thus Kant’s premise is of an act of self-reflection, or an experience of an intuition of the self. Kant’s argument then draws from this premise the conclusion that external objects must exist. Kant argues as follows: If I have

66Kant, Critique, page A372.
an awareness of myself as an existence in time, then I must also be aware of something permanent which could serve as substratum against which change would be perceptible.\textsuperscript{67} Whatever this permanent is, it cannot be in me, \textit{i.e.}, it cannot be part of the self which I perceive as existing in time, for this self-perception can be made only on the condition of this something permanent. This permanent cannot then be a representation, for to understand it merely as a representation would be to see it as contingent upon the self which I have temporally determined, as a mental state of that same self, rather than as the condition for the ability to make a determination of that self.

This permanent cannot, however, be something in me, since it is only through this permanent that my existence in time can itself be determined. Thus perception of this permanent is possible only through a \textit{thing} outside me; and consequently the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things which I perceive outside me.\textsuperscript{68}

According to Kemp-Smith, this second edition refutation of idealism offers a more "realist" position than the first. Thus, he concludes that the two refutations are directly contradictory; the first position leading to a Berkelean idealism, and the second, as the more mature, critical position, resulting in an empirical realism.\textsuperscript{69} But, notice that this necessity of the \textit{existence}, rather than merely of the mental representation of external objects is demonstrated from the perspective of an empirical awareness. The

\textsuperscript{67}According to Paton, this follows from the proof for the "first analogy," which argues that all perception of determinations in time requires a representation of the permanent substratum which underlies change. Since time itself cannot be perceived (since time is not an object), the permanent in appearances must be the object itself. H.J. Paton, \textit{Kant's Metaphysic of Experience}, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), vol.2, pages 278-279.

\textsuperscript{68}Kant, \textit{Critique}, pages B275-276.

\textsuperscript{69}Kemp-Smith, \textit{A Commentary}, pages 312-313. Strawson similarly is unable to reconcile Kant's doctrine of the ideality of space and time with his claim that outer objects are immediately perceived to be the causes of our mental representations of them. This view will be discussed more fully below.
Conclusion of this refutation of idealism is that if I am to determine myself in time, then I must grant the existence of empirical objects outside myself. Both the determination of self and the awareness of empirical objects existing outside myself occur within the field of awareness of empirical consciousness. Kant begins this refutation by assuming in the first person ("I am conscious . . . ") the level of consciousness which places its existence in time, and is, therefore, immanent in the present experience. This perspective is no longer the higher order level of transcendental reflection which Kant adopted in the first edition refutation. Rather, it represents an attempt to grasp immediacy, to intuit the sensation of a present mental state. The existence of objects as a necessary presupposition of our ability to be aware of ourselves is an empirical, and not a transcendental existence. The "actual things" which are shown to exist are not things-in-themselves, but are empirical objects, which exist as such for empirical consciousness. Thus, rather than being in contradiction, the two refutations differ because they are written from two different points of view. In the first edition refutation, Kant concluded that empirical objects do not require any inferential mediation in order to be perceived, for their immediate relatedness to empirical consciousness has been established on the basis of their being understood by transcendental idealism to be appearances. The second edition argument, however, begins from the premise of Descartes, from within the perspective of ordinary, pre-critical, empirical consciousness as it grasps itself. It is Kant's assumption of the point of view of empirical consciousness which allows him to conclude that empirical objects necessarily exist (for it is certainly not the case that to

70 It would appear that I am claiming something paradoxical here—that there is an immediate awareness of self, or that the least reflexive conscious posture is already self-reflective. Indeed, this is exactly correct; the immanence and transcendence of consciousness coexist all the way down to the lowest level, or as Hegel would put it, consciousness is already self-consciousness. As we shall see, this realization is basic to Hegel's attempt to go beyond Kant's philosophy.
the transcendental-epistemological point of view, empirical objects are “permanent things outside me,” for this point of view grasps the ideality of space and time, and thus of all spatio-temporal appearances, including that of the phenomenal empirical self).

**Bad Faith as a Strategy of Avoidance**

Seen in the above way, we can now ask whether Kant’s “refutations of idealism” really refute the position that they profess to. Each refutation gives a different view of what is essentially the same bi-leveled position. Because empirical objects are appearances (an observation only accessible to the perspective of transcendental epistemology), we perceive them immediately, as already there, present in the world prior to our conscious attention (an observation from the perspective of an act of empirical consciousness). Thus Kant’s position is two-tiered; a “transcendental idealism” and an “empirical realism.” Kant becomes a realist only insofar as he is able to leave behind the perspective of the epistemologist, and adopt the more immanent pose of empirical consciousness. But the idealist position which he claims to refute is an *epistemological and metaphysical* position. Berkeley never attempted to deny the claim that empirical objects *appeared* to ordinary consciousness as real and independently existing. There is thus a sense in which Kant’s “refutation” is more of an avoidance or dissolving of the problem, for Kant does not confront idealism on its own terms, but

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71 I borrow the term ‘strategy of avoidance’ from Dick Howard, whose use of it will be discussed below. See Howard, *The Politics of Critique*.

72 Although I agree with Kemp-Smith that the second edition refutation demonstrates our acquaintance with empirical objects to be even more immediate than our intuitions of self, while the first only claims that outer intuitions are as well known as those of inner sense, I think that this difference is accounted for on the basis of the different perspectives of the two refutations. From within empirical consciousness, one experiences external reality as preexisting any conscious thought; however, from a transcendental point of view, it makes sense to say that all intuitions in space and time are appearances, without articulating the different ways in which empirical consciousness may experience an appearance. Thus the two views are combined coherently in my reading of Kant’s position as bi-leveled. See Kemp-Smith, *A Commentary*. 

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demonstrates a way to escape it by circumscribing a limited perspective of cognitive consciousness in relation to which empirical objects have the ontological status of independent reality. But the empirical realism of the second edition refutation, if it is to supply an answer to Berkeley, must be viewed in terms of its significance for the higher-order epistemological perspective. Since the realism itself describes the epistemic situation immanent to the empirical, not to the second-order epistemological consciousness, it fails to refute the empirical idealist charge. Kant’s position thus takes advantage of the ability of consciousness to take on points of view which can be increasingly reflexive and more self-aware, or, like empirical consciousness, more immersed in immediacy. The limited experience of empirical consciousness thus supplies, for a higher order epistemological perspective, the solution for a problem which crops up for that epistemological understanding. Empirical consciousness is not itself skeptical of the external existence of empirical objects. Idealism is rather a higher order position attained by reflection upon the operation of empirical consciousness. Kant’s epistemological consciousness, therefore, must cross into the empirical consciousness in order to gain experience, and then recross the limit which separates the empirical from the epistemological, in an act of self-reflection, in order to gain the epistemological significance of the experience. But this “double crossing” into the immanence of the empirical perspective and back out into the transcendence of the epistemological represents a strategy of avoiding the problem posed by idealism. Kant answers the charge that he is an idealist by displacing his idealism to a higher plane, then answering the accusation either solely in reference to (the A edition refutation) or from within (the B edition) the more immediate level. The perspective from which Kant’s idealism is visible is kept out of the discussion; while the realism which he professes to uphold only operates at a level other than the one at which the charge is made. Kant
thus “dodges” the issue of idealism.

This avoidance of the problem of idealism follows a similar logic as that traced by Sartre in his analysis of the existential-psychological phenomenon of “bad faith,” or self-deception. According to Sartre it is possible for self-consciousness to oscillate between its immanent and transcendent perspectives in order to avoid unpleasant truths about itself. Sartre analyses this phenomenon in *Being and Nothingness* in several concrete hypothetical cases. Thus, for example, a woman who is being romanced “becomes all intellect” when her suitor responds to her only in her bodily being as a sexual object. She then shifts her self-awareness to her physical self when she fears that her intellectual performance has been too successful and that her suitor has lost sight of her as a sexual being. The upshot of Sartre’s amusing analyses is that bad faith is motivated by consciousness’ fear of its own radical ungroundedness—there is no preexisting essence or blueprint for conscious being, which it is incumbent upon each of us to create for ourselves. Thus for Sartre we are without excuse or ground, and thus “condemned to freedom.”

Similarly, Kant escapes from the (perhaps uncomfortable) transcendental truth of his idealism—a position which would render knowledge merely subjective and thus ungrounded—into empirical awareness to claim a (familiar, comfortable, and solid) realist identity, thus denying idealism at the empirical level. But Kant simultaneously denies that the realism applies at the higher level, even though this is the level at which any idealism which he ostensibly refutes must be understood to operate. What remains to be shown here is that each perspective—the empirical and the transcendental—necessarily has access to the point of view of the other, so that the escape into the

immediacy of the empirical perspective is a purposive and feigned “forgetting.” Thus empirical realism is based on bad faith or self-delusion. Furthermore, it is for Kant the higher-level position (i.e., the transcendental story) which is supposed to guarantee or ground the lower-order realism. Since Kant denies the actual (metaphysical) truth of his transcendental idealism, for he denies the legitimacy of metaphysical knowledge, thus his idealism is not metaphysical, but transcendental, how are we to understand this grounding as secure? If Kant cannot establish the actual truth of the transcendental-idealist position, (i.e., the metaphysical claim that empirical objects really are mere appearances, rather than things-in-themselves) then the empirical realism which depends upon the transcendental idealism for its legitimation collapses. Thus, the transcendental truth is illegitimate in its function as grounding empirical realism, for its own status as knowledge must be considered problematic according to the requirements of Kant’s theoretical critique. Kant’s transcendental idealism credits itself with establishing the legitimacy of empirical realism, yet the empirical realist point of view is, from either its own or the idealist perspective, merely apparent; while the transcendental idealist position is itself insecure and fails to meet its own criteria for legitimate knowledge.

If Kant’s claim to have established the legitimacy of empirical realism is to hold even prima facie plausibility, then it cannot be more true to say that empirical objects are appearances than it is to say that they are real. Each claim must be “true” or legitimate relative to its appropriate perspective. In fact, for Kant, it is the empirical consciousness which is the basic level of consciousness from which objective knowledge may be attained (i.e., the understanding legislates in the faculty of knowledge; reason and the imagination do not alone provide knowledge without the rules of the understanding being applied appropriately). It is therefore paradoxical and
perhaps ironic that Kant’s theory demonstrates the way in which this empirical consciousness presupposes and is dependent upon operations of consciousness which transgress the limits of the empirical perspective, and which do not regard empirical objects to be independently existing realities, but know them to be only “in-themselves” for a particular level of consciousness. Furthermore, empirical consciousness itself is shown by Kant necessarily to have a degree of awareness of these presupposed transcendental operations if it is even to have experience of empirical reality. For Kant, empirical consciousness must be able to transcend its limited perspective, for its consciousness of objects necessarily presupposes some degree of awareness of the relation of those objects to itself. As we have seen in the “Transcendental Deduction,” a sensible intuition involves mental synthesis, whereby consciousness relates the intuition to the unity of apperception in order to bring the intuition into its own field of experience. The Critique analyzes this general process of synthesis into three moments which reflect different levels of mental awareness prior to full-blown knowledge. The mind must be aware of each level of synthesis which it performs, for it is that awareness which relates the level of unity of representations already attained to a higher form of unity as expressed ultimately in the ‘I think’ of apperception, thus resulting in conceptual cognition.

The word ‘concept’ [Begriff] might of itself suggest this remark. For this unitary consciousness [dieses eine Bewusstsein] is what combines the manifold, successively intuited, and thereupon also reproduced, into one representation. This consciousness may often be only faint, so that we do not connect it with the act itself, that is, not in any direct manner with the generation of the representation, but only with the outcome [that which is thereby represented]. But notwithstanding these variations, such consciousness, however indistinct, must always be present; without it, concepts, and therewith knowledge of objects, are
altogether impossible.\textsuperscript{74}

Thus we see that the mental operations which take place “beneath” the experience of empirical consciousness contain an awareness of the contribution made by the mind to its own experience. Underlying the experience of empirical consciousness is a transcendental process of cognitive development. In the second edition refutation, Kant argued from within the experience of empirical consciousness for the immediacy of the mind’s acquaintance with empirical objects. The original premise of this refutation is an act of self-intuition, an assumption of the perspective of empirical consciousness which takes itself as its intentional object. But this awareness, according to Kant, presupposes a mental act of temporal determination, whereby the mental representation is related to time as the form of inner sense in accordance with the rules for the temporal synthesis. Consciousness must be aware of its act of temporal synthesis as rule governed, if it is to recognize the representation as existing in an \textit{objective} time order. Consciousness must therefore have, at a pre-experiential level, an awareness of its contribution to its self-intuition. This pre-experiential cognitive development continues, according to Kant, as the mind regards the intuition of self to be dependent upon the act of mental synthesis which places it in objective time. Consciousness at this level searches for the unconditioned and objective reality which makes possible its own self-representation, which it now regards as conditioned appearance. The objective cause of consciousness’ self-representation is considered to exist prior to and hence independently of the mental synthesis which first brings an intuition of self to consciousness. The final stage of pre-empirical mental functioning which results in conscious experience thus occurs as this causal judgment is made, positing empirical objects, now considered to be the independently real, as temporally

\textsuperscript{74}Kant, \textit{Critique}, page A104.
and ontologically prior to the mind’s representations, which are now understood to be effects of those empirical objects.

But given this necessary pre-experiential awareness on the part of empirical consciousness, it is no longer clear how Kant can maintain that the empirical consciousness must itself be convinced that its own experience is of a preexisting and independent reality. The empirical consciousness, as it seeks self-knowledge, must come to the same conclusion about what has necessarily taken place at the transcendental level as does Kant. Thus, it will appear to an empirical consciousness seeking epistemological understanding that it must have transcendentally synthesized a given manifold, and thus its empirical objects are really appearances. It cannot then be true on Kant’s theory to say that the empirical consciousness appears, even to itself, to have immediate access to external reality. The transcendental account will be accessible to empirical consciousness, for empirical consciousness has been shown to have a necessary degree of awareness of its transcendental preconditions in order to be able to distinguish subjective representation from objective experience. Empirical consciousness must therefore be aware that it has, at the pre-empirical level, performed a synthesis of a manifold under the direction of the causal rule, for the distinction between illusion and objectively valid perception requires a recognition that the synthesis of representation has been rule-governed. The empirical consciousness cannot be a completely closed sphere, but is necessarily open to the “experiences,” so to speak, of the perspectives of consciousness which lie beneath or beyond it as its transcendental presuppositions. But then the legitimacy of cognitive consciousness’ claim to empirical knowledge is, for it, or from within its own perspective, grounded in its denial or in its having “forgotten” that it has itself contributed to the creation of the objective time-order and the phenomenal objects that exist within it. Empirical
consciousness has the ability to view its own self-certainty as based on this forgetting, and thus to contain an element of “bad faith,” for it is open to it to know that its own causal syntheses produced its experience, yet it pretends to believe that its experience is independently given. Empirical consciousness is a particular point along a continuous spectrum of consciousness; however, if it is to maintain (or pretend to) a realist self-understanding, it must choose to remain partially blind. Thus there can be no completely closed empirical consciousness to which external reality is indubitable, so that Kant’s attempt to circumscribe a perspective of consciousness for which realism is true must be considered illegitimate and based on empirical consciousness’ act of self-delusion.

Enter Hegel

As we shall see, Kant’s understanding of the transcendental activity of consciousness is formally similar to the dialectic of consciousness described by Hegel, whereby a lower order awareness gives way to a higher position of knowledge. But for Kant, as we have seen, in distinction from Hegel, the continuous spectrum of consciousness, from less to more self-aware, is not considered to ascend from less to more truth. Kant privileges the empirical perspective; other levels of conscious activity are open to truth only if they can claim the proper relation to empirical reality. For Hegel, it is not the empirical consciousness, but rather the highest point on the spectrum of reflexive consciousness, which grasps the fullest truth. Kant’s denial that the transcendental perspective is acquainted with a more truthful reality than the empirical puts Kant in a difficult situation, which Hegel was able to recognize.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, in an obvious criticism of Kant’s

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epistemological method, discusses the “natural assumption” that philosophy’s proper procedure is to begin its work with a study of its “instrument,” i.e., human cognition. Hegel argues that this natural assumption is self-refuting, for although this view professes to doubt its ability to reach truth, it fails to doubt the truth of its own assumptions. These assumptions include the beliefs that cognition is a medium or instrument, that it is possible to set ourselves, as skeptical examiners, apart from this instrument in order to examine it, and that cognition exists in complete independence of the true reality which is held to be unattainable, even though this cognition must take itself to be real or true (Phenomenology, page 47: #74-75). The point of this argument is that complete skepticism, or skepticism which presupposes nothing as true, is impossible, for the skeptical position must always posit its own assumptions to be true. Thus, according to Hegel, it is not possible to critique one’s cognitive “instrument” without at the same time using it, for, as we have seen in Chapter One, critique always requires the positing of a criterion or standard if it is ever to be able to discern the truth. Cognition, and its faculties, cannot be set aside to await rational justification, for how could it ever receive such justification if the criteria for knowledge, the epistemic marks of self-evidence, or the fundamental principles of reasoned argument are not to be employed? Hegel therefore turns the tables on Kant, asking whether a totally critical skepticism is not itself a mistake in the search for knowledge.

Meanwhile, if the fear of falling into error sets up a mistrust of Science, which in the absence of such scruples gets on with the work itself, and actually cognizes something, it is hard to see why we should not turn round and mistrust this very mistrust. Should we not be concerned as to whether this fear of error is not just the error itself? Indeed this fear takes something—a great deal in fact—for granted as truth, supporting its scruples and inferences on what is itself in need of prior scrutiny to see if it is true. To be specific, it takes for granted certain ideas about cognition as an instrument and as a medium, and assumes that there is a
difference between ourselves and this cognition. Above all, it presupposes that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other, independent and separated from it, and yet is something real; or in other words, it presupposes that cognition which, since it is excluded from the Absolute, is surely outside of the truth as well, is nevertheless true, an assumption whereby what calls itself fear of error reveals itself rather as fear of the truth.\textsuperscript{76}

Hegel thinks that the impossibility of a presuppositionless beginning is not a problem for his own epistemology, for he sees a link between natural consciousness, insofar as this attitude makes any knowledge claims at all, and true knowledge. Since consciousness is self-reflective, since it knows itself, it carries its criteria for knowledge with it. True knowledge or science according to Hegel exists from the beginning, in the simplest most naive pose of consciousness. The criteria for knowledge are, therefore, necessarily present within the first claims of consciousness to possess knowledge, since implicit in a knowledge claim is a presupposed characterization of what knowledge is. If I claim to know, I am simultaneously claiming to know that I know, which in turn requires that I know, in some sense, what it is to have knowledge. Thus consciousness is able to use its presupposed standard of knowledge as a \textit{telos} to guide its search. The fact that cognition begins within a perspective which already contains a determination of truth, and is possessed of an “instrument” which cannot be set aside, is to Hegel that which grants the possibility of arriving at unconditioned knowledge. Due to consciousness’ self-reflexive structure, its reach will always exceed its grasp until it has fully actualized itself by attaining what Hegel calls “the Absolute,” which is a knowledge of the whole. Hegel therefore places positive value on the perspectival nature of cognitive consciousness, for it is consciousness’ original orientation, and the presuppositions about truth contained therein, which ultimately lead it to true and

\textsuperscript{76}Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology}, page 47, #74.
complete knowledge. But is Hegel’s criticism of Kant warranted? Does Kant attempt to critique the object of knowledge without at the same time using it? If not, what restrictions does the “instrument” impose on Kant’s methodological perspective? Is his perspective itself legitimate according to the standards for knowledge at which his epistemological inquiry finally arrives, or does his epistemological perspective transgress the limits of cognition which his theory determines?

Kant’s Transgression

That Kant believed it both necessary and possible to examine and critique the faculty of knowledge is uncontroversial. A critique was necessary, according to Kant, in order to guarantee freedom from the error which could result from the “dogmatic” employment of reason to produce metaphysical knowledge \textit{a priori}.\textsuperscript{77}

It is upon this enquiry, which should be entitled not a doctrine, but only a transcendental critique, that we are now engaged. Its purpose is not to extend knowledge, but only to correct it, and to supply a touchstone of the value, or lack of value, of all \textit{a priori} knowledge. Such a critique is therefore a preparation, so far as may be possible, for an organon; . . . what here constitutes our subject-matter is not the nature of things, which is inexhaustible, but the understanding which passes judgment upon the nature of things; and this understanding, again, only in respect of its \textit{a priori} knowledge. These \textit{a priori} possessions of the understanding, since they have not to be sought for without, cannot remain hidden from us . . . we are concerned only with the critique of the faculty of pure reason itself. Only insofar as we build upon this foundation do we have a reliable touchstone for estimating the philosophical value of old and new works in this field.\textsuperscript{78}

Until, therefore, the faculty of knowledge could be legitimated by means of a critique which would determine its proper domain, it would be necessary to tread carefully, to

\textsuperscript{77}See, for example, Kant, \textit{Critique}, page A12 = B26.

\textsuperscript{78}Kant, \textit{Critique}, pages B26-27 = A13-14.
avoid using the faculty of knowledge dogmatically in a way productive of any new knowledge. It was thus Kant's intention to avoid the production of new knowledge until after the faculty of knowledge could be determined to have passed inspection; however, this intention is problematic for Kant. Kant's transcendental epistemology, in studying the operations of mental synthesis performed by the understanding, is a reflection upon the understanding's use of concepts as applied to an immediately given sensible manifold. How is this reflection possible? For, if this epistemological reflection is to yield knowledge, it appears that it must employ the very faculty which it studies, for the understanding is the faculty of knowledge. But Kant's alleged intention is to refrain from the actual use of the faculty of knowledge until its abilities have been determined by the critique. There is thus from the outset an ambiguity with respect to the ability of the mind to gain knowledge of itself and the status of this "knowledge" once it is achieved. Even if we consider Kant's critique to be using primarily the higher level faculty of reason rather than the understanding, as various textual passages suggest, the reflexivity problem remains, for reason in this case is still being applied to itself.

There is, however, one advantage which may be made comprehensible and of interest even to the most refractory and reluctant learner, the advantage, that while the understanding, occupied merely with its empirical employment, and not reflecting upon the sources of its own knowledge, may indeed get along quite satisfactorily, there is yet one task to which it is not equal, that namely, of determining the limits of its employment, and of knowing what it is that may lie within and what it is that lies without its own proper sphere. This demands just

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79 See, for example, Kant, *Critique*, pages A xii, and B 22-23.
80 See for example "The Doctrine of Pure Reason" Critique, pages A721, B749 for passages which suggest that Kant's critique is a self-reflective use of reason rather than merely the understanding.

Also see Gilles Deleuze for a lucid and masterful interpretation of the confusing issue of the various faculties of reason and their relationships to each other in Kant's writings. Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy: The Doctrine of the Faculties*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
Kant, in the very next paragraph, denies the legitimacy of the “transcendental” employment of the understanding, which he equates with the application of the concepts and principles of the understanding to things-in-themselves.\textsuperscript{82} Thus it would seem that, although it is perfectly appropriate to regard empirical objects as the causes of our representations of them at the empirical level, it is illegitimate to make an analogous inference from the perspective of a transcendental inquiry and to regard things-in-themselves as causes of appearances. But this restriction is problematic when we consider that Kant’s critique offers a transcendental account of faculties, syntheses, judgments, principles, rules and concepts whose function is to bring about, to synthesize, the realm of appearances and our objective knowledge thereof. Kant’s transcendental account of the functioning of empirical consciousness appears to be the same account given by the empirical idealists, except that, for Kant, the mind’s use of a causal inference (from mental representation to object) appears to itself to take place at the transcendental level. Thus empirical consciousness, when it self-reflects, must come to the realization that its experience is the result of a synthetic activity which, in accordance with a causal rule, is forced to take its own perceptions as secondary in the objective temporal order, and as therefore causally dependent upon the externally existing objects. A pre-experiential employment of the concept of causality has been shown to be necessary as the ground of the original and immediate experience of objects as already there, temporally prior to empirical awareness. This transcendental employment of the understanding’s category of causality allows empirical consciousness to view empirical objects as real and as the causes of mental

\textsuperscript{81}Kant, \textit{Critique}, page A238=B298.
\textsuperscript{82}Kant, \textit{Critique}, page A239 = B298.
representations. External objects are known, at the level of empirical experience, immediately because the transcendental understanding determines that something given from without must have caused its mental representations. Thus, for Kant, as the empirical idealists held, an acquaintance with the mind’s inner contents logically precedes empirical knowledge of objects (although this logical order is then reversed by the pre-experiential mind when the mental representations are themselves placed in the objective temporal order of experience and considered to be effects of the empirical objects as their cause). Kant’s transcendental account thus appears to require an illegitimate extension of the category of causality beyond the possibility of experience. As we have seen, this use of causality is embedded in the theory itself as part of the explanation of the workings of the transcendental mind.

But this illegitimate transcendental employment of causality is also methodologically employed as part of the explanation for the grounding of empirical realism by the transcendental account; for the transcendental theory is Kant’s story of the pre-empirical mental operations of synthesis which causally contribute to our empirical experience. Not only then does Kant’s theory violate its own strictures on legitimate knowledge, but it appears that his progress over the empirical idealists is merely illusory. We have to ask, as did the empirical idealists at the empirical level, whether the mind operating transcendentally could not have entirely created the totality of its representations. It again appears that Kant has merely displaced the idealism and skepticism which he has claimed to refute. The transcendental story, as we have seen, if it is to explain and ground the possibility of objective empirical knowledge, must be taken as a description of the behind the scenes mental activities which function to cause the appearances to empirical consciousness. Thus the theory must apply the understanding’s concepts (for example, of causality) to these transcendental operations.
How then can Kant claim the right to engage in transcendental critique?

**Analytic Entailment as Another Strategy of Avoidance**

Kant’s critique gives us a cognitively significant discourse about the transcendental functioning of reason and its various faculties. If this discourse should not be understood to be knowledge, lest a transgression of the theory of knowledge be entailed, just what is its significance and how then can it provide a foundation for empirical knowledge? Kant’s apparent answer is that the transcendental story is not itself synthetic knowledge, but is merely an analysis. Thus, although the empirical understanding is capable, at its extreme limit, of achieving synthetic knowledge *a priori* about the forms of possible experience in general, the faculty which examines the understanding itself may yield only analytic propositions.

Accordingly the Transcendental Analytic leads to this important conclusion, that the most the understanding can achieve *a priori* is to anticipate the form of a possible experience in general... and the proud name of an Ontology that presumptuously claims to supply, in systematic doctrinal form, synthetic *a priori* knowledge of things in general (for instance, the principle of causality) must, therefore, give place to the modest title of a mere Analytic of pure understanding.  

Thus, the “Transcendental Aesthetic,” in its analysis of sensibility, entails the theory of space and time as the pure forms of all possible intuition. Likewise, the “Transcendental Analytic,” in its deduction of the functional necessity of the categories of the understanding for empirical awareness, analytically arrives at the theory of transcendental syntheses. If Kant is correct that “transcendental analysis” may be used to produce a critique of the faculty of knowledge in such a way that the understanding need not be self-referentially employed in the very manner which is to be the object of

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83Kant, *Critique*, page A247=B303.
investigation, he has successfully eluded one horn of the critic's dilemma, and perhaps Hegel's criticism is ill-founded. An analysis of experience is not a transgression of the limits of experience, but merely a drawing out of the implications of that knowledge which we already appear to possess. Kant has then found a way to critique the instrument of knowledge without illegitimately using that instrument. But is this answer really open to Kant?

As we have seen, Kant was forced to posit operations of the understanding at a level beneath empirical consciousness, as the necessary preconditions of our experience of objective reality. If, as Kant wants to claim, our understanding of these pre-experiential operations is no more than an analysis of the experience of empirical consciousness, he cannot draw by analysis any account which is less open to doubt than the experience which he seeks to justify. Since prior to Kant's epistemological inquiry the legitimacy of empirical knowledge is precisely that which is held in question, he cannot then rely upon empirical experience as an established premise to support the truth of its analytic entailments. Even if we allow Kant the use of the most incorrigible premise possible for his deduction arguments, the premise that consciousness is experienced as a unity, the transcendental account which he demonstrates as following cannot make more certain the truth of that premise than it already is. Furthermore, as Kant makes clear in his discussion of the "paralogism of rational psychology" (Critique, B407-414), the "I think" of self-apperception which serves as the basis for the deduction arguments must be understood not as an intuition, but as an analytic proposition. Thus the premise of the deductions is not, strictly speaking, an

84This reading is of course controversial in Kant scholarship; some commentators think that Kant’s premise is the proposition that we do possess legitimate synthetic knowledge a priori in the form of math. See the Prolegomena for the clearest textual support. I follow Robert Paul Wolff and others in reading Kant as arguing from the more foundational premise of the unity of consciousness. See Wolff, Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity.
instance of knowledge, but a mere thought. Further entailments of this thought can therefore never attain the status of knowledge. If the thought of the 'I think' does not securely ground an inference to the existence of an 'I' which thinks, then how can it ground additional inferences to knowledge? If the mere appearance, thought, or mental representation of empirical knowledge is not good enough for the epistemological skeptic (such as Hume), then neither should be the logical entailment of that appearance. Since, as Kant famously shows in the “Transcendental Dialectic,” “existence is not a predicate” which can add synthetic content to our concept of an object, no argument can take us from a concept, or mental representation, to an actuality. Mere logic cannot ground synthetic knowledge in the way in which the skeptic who is unsatisfied with an idealism can accept. Kant's argument therefore amounts to the following: the transcendental meaning of the apparent experience of empirical consciousness of itself as a unity appears to be that, at some (apparently) deeper, more transcendental level, (apparent) syntheses of the (apparently given) manifold (apparently) take place. Kant's empirical realism therefore collapses back into an idealism which holds the entire realm of experience of empirical consciousness to be an appearance.

Furthermore, the transcendental story is a meaning at which the empirical perspective arrives in its self reflections. Once again, we must wonder why the empirical consciousness does not itself accept the deeper belief that objects are appearances as the “real truth,” but holds, as Kant claims, to an empirical realism. The empirical idealists were wrong, according to Kant, because they believed that legitimate knowledge must be of things-in-themselves. Kant denies the possibility of knowledge of things-in-themselves, and so relies upon the concepts of necessity and universality in order to justify empirical knowledge by distinguishing it from empirical illusion. However, at a
higher level of reflection, ‘objectivity’ and ‘necessity’ must be taken to mean ‘synthesized by the mind according to rules’. But the knowledge that actual syntheses according to actual rules have actually taken place cannot itself be certain, for the epistemological theory follows, as an analytic entailment, from the apparent experience of empirical reality. Empirical knowledge is therefore grounded in its apparent objectivity and necessity. But how is this grounding any more secure than a grounding in its apparent independent reality (which the empirical idealists already had)? Thus, Kant’s attempt at avoiding the charge of self-refutation with respect to his own theoretical position requires that he deny his own epistemic access to an independent reality, but this denial then undermines his ability to offer a theory which has sufficient certainty and substantiability to ground our (merely) apparent empirical knowledge.85

Other Commentators

My analysis of the ways in which Kant fails to justify his own critical method, as well as to ground his result (in the confinement of knowledge to its appropriate sphere), offers one way of looking at the matter. As I’ve already pointed out, my interpretation has been necessarily limited to a portion of Kant’s philosophy. Indeed, other commentators have identified additional areas of contradiction and inconsistency in Kant’s critical enterprise which can be attributed to the fundamental tension between the

85It has been suggested that perhaps we should see the transcendental story not as an analytic entailment of empirical consciousness, but as a hypothetical induction from the possibility of empirical knowledge. But this doesn’t change the basic criticism. In fact, this interpretation is one that was commonly attributed to the Critique, although other defenders of Kant (such as R.P. Wolff, see Kant’s Theory of Mental Activity) see it as only operative in the Prolegomena, where Kant employs it for the purpose of giving a popularly accessible exposition. If the transcendental deductions are merely attempts to explain how knowledge is possible, given the already presupposed premise that empirical knowledge is firmly and factually in our possession, then Kant’s project is not to legitimate or ground that knowledge, but only to speculate on why we do indeed have it. The critical force of Kant’s epistemology as an answer to Humean skepticism is thus forfeit.
dual requirements (of immanence and transcendence) of a critique of reason by itself. In this section, I will examine several of these interpretations with a view toward the significance these commentators attribute to the various ways in which Kant fails at his critical project.

**Strawsonian Discipline**

P.F. Strawson, in his extremely influential study, *The Bounds of Sense,* attempts a reading of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* that separates out the unpalatable “metaphysics of transcendental idealism,” and keeps only the arguments and doctrines that Strawson considers acceptable—those which identify the structural necessities and preconditions for empirical knowledge in the presupposed concepts of the understanding, as well as Kant’s specification of the requirements for meaningful discourse, or what Strawson calls Kant’s “principle of signification.” According to Strawson’s reading, this principle draws the boundary between the realms of meaningful discourse and nonsense by demonstrating the lack of ability to verify metaphysical claims about things-in-themselves. On this reading, metaphysics is meaningless and Kant becomes a logical positivist. Strawson realizes of course that this is not Kant’s intention; nevertheless he holds that Kant’s contribution can best be understood in this manner. Strawson therefore rejects in its entirety Kant’s transcendental idealism, which he reads as a disguised phenomenalism. Strawson sees Kant’s idealism as entailing a metaphysical position such that Kant holds not merely that we cannot know

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87 Phenomenalism is the theory that physical objects are nothing more than constructions of sense data; thus our mental representations are accorded more reality and logical priority over those objects. Major proponents of phenomenalism have included Berkeley (on some interpretations), and Russell (at some times).
supersensible reality, but rather that “reality is supersensible and we can have no knowledge of it.” Given this reading, it is obvious that Kant has violated the terms of his own theory of knowledge (for, of course, Kant should not claim to have any knowledge of the nature of ultimate reality), but Strawson’s analysis is more interesting than this general criticism in his particular accounts of the variety of inconsistencies and failures which Kant’s insistence on maintaining the transcendental idealist posture entail.

Strawson’s reading of particular inconsistencies in Kant’s theory takes as basic the “principle of significance,” which he attributes to Kant as one of Kant’s major insights. The way in which Strawson sees transcendental idealism as itself a violation of this principle can be seen to embody Strawson’s understanding of the nature of critique. According to Strawson, a basic mistake Kant makes is to misunderstand the realm of application of a reality/appearance distinction. Transcendental idealism, according to Strawson, parallels a legitimate and natural epistemological line of reasoning, but it simply goes too far. In order to draw a meaningful distinction between reality and appearance, two criteria must be met according to Strawson. The critic who draws such a distinction must have access to two standpoints—one will be the view to which the object merely appears (in our model of the structural requirements of critique, this is the immanent standpoint); while the other will be what Strawson calls “the corrected view” (for us, this is the transcendent and normative perspective). Furthermore, these two standpoints must connect in such a way that identity of reference can be established, so that the object as appearance and the object seen by the corrected view are guaranteed to be the same object. (In our discussion of the immanent and transcendent perspectives used by Kant, it was important to establish that the empirical consciousness was connected to the transcendental consciousness in order to claim, as

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I did, that the transcendental consciousness should have been taken by the empirical consciousness as its own “corrected view.”) As Strawson points out, these two requirements for the meaningful use of a reality/appearance distinction are met in the account of sense-perception given by such empiricists as Locke, who apply the distinction within experience to objects of the senses versus objects of epistemological theory and of natural science. The former have “secondary” qualities such as color, which are the result of the interaction of the object with our perceptual apparatus. But science and epistemology can discern the objects in their “real” constitution with only their “primary” qualities which cause our perceptions. 89 These requirements are not however met, according to Strawson, when we attempt to apply the distinction beyond the realm of possible experience as, he claims, does Kant, to argue that all spatio-temporal objects, even those of scientific theory, are appearances, while the real reality is beyond the possibility of our acquaintance. This type of talk, according to Strawson, is nonsense and gets Kant into all sorts of trouble. 90 Stemming from this initial crossing of the boundary into the transcendental, other incoherences arise.

That Kant fails to satisfy the conditions for a significant application of the contrast between things as they really are and things as they appear—that, indeed, he violates his own principle of significance both in his application of this contrast and in the associated use of the concept of cause—is, perhaps, a point evident enough. We are left with the task of trying to explain, if we can, the striking parallel which we have noted and the even more striking failure of that parallel,

89 See Strawson, Bounds, pages 250-253.
90 Further inconsistencies in Kant’s theory are seen by Strawson as resulting from the basic absurdity of transcendental idealism. For example, Strawson points out the problem we’ve already discussed in the above section on the “Refutations of Idealism” of reconciling the claim that external objects are only representations and the claim that we are immediately conscious of external objects as independently existing. Although Strawson sees the solution I have offered that each claim comes from a different perspective, he does not feel that this is sufficient to diminish the inconsistency. Given my interpretation of the connection between the two perspectives of consciousness, and my consequent charge of bad faith on the part of the empirical consciousness, and Kant himself, I end up, although by a different route, in agreement with Strawson that the inconsistency remains.
the extraordinary transposition of the whole terminology of things affecting
faculties which takes that terminology entirely outside the range of its intelligible
employment, viz. The spatio-temporal range. . . . The extraordinary generality of
Kant’s thinking is constantly straining against what he himself recognized as the
limits of intelligibility.91

In an attempt to rehabilitate Kant and render his work useful and meaningful for
contemporary philosophy, Strawson’s interpretation isolates what he considers to be the
positive and insightful aspects of Kant’s critique. The relevance of this attempt for our
purposes is that Strawson can be seen as offering a way to make Kant’s critical
enterprise successful at eluding the critical paradox of self-refutation. According to
Strawson, we must simply ignore the transcendental idealist metaphysics. But then are
we left with anything resembling a secure foundation for knowledge? Or have we not
given up on the authoritative and normative functions of critique and resigned ourselves
to the anxious uncertainty of skepticism and self-doubt? The answer, I believe, is the
latter; for, as I have already argued above, if the force of Kant’s critical epistemology is
merely that of a logical analysis of our present (i.e., before the critique) state of cognitive
consciousness then our epistemic certainty after the analysis cannot be any greater, for
the entailment is logically dependent on the premise. Although it may seem tempting to
follow Strawson in excising from Kant everything that violates the requirements on
legitimate knowledge, to do so would be to lose the normative force of the theory.
Without the transcendental account of the synthetic activity of the transcendental mind,
and the epistemological-transcendental perspective according to which space and time
are forms of intuition, Kant may no longer be guilty of self-refutation; but neither could
he claim the victory over Humean skepticism of his “Copernican revolution.” Thus
Strawson’s way of solving the problem of inconsistencies in Kant’s critical theory

91 Strawson, Bounds, page 255.
sacrifices the achievement which motivated the theory in the first place. The authorizing and normative aspect of critique, the transcendent ability of critique to establish legitimacy by setting standards, is forfeit on Strawson’s reading, as it insists too rigorously upon the maintenance of an immanent posture which restricts even the epistemological critical perspective to the empirical as the sole arena of meaningfulness.

The Transcendence of Theory: Deleuze

Deleuze, in Kant’s Critical Philosophy, offers a way of reading Kant’s critical project which can be seen in our terms as embracing the directly opposing horn of the critical dilemma as that taken by Strawson. Rather than insisting upon the necessity of immanence of the critic in the object of critique, and thereby losing the capacity to achieve the transcendence which the positing of critical standards requires, Deleuze emphasizes the transcendent capacity in such a way that theoretical reason is seen to be itself subordinate to reason in its ethical and aesthetic, or practical modes. Deleuze engages in a reading of the entire critical corpus, seeing the variety of rational faculties that Kant investigates as operating in a hierarchical harmony. Theoretical reason on this reading will necessarily be limited and must yield to the higher authority of reason as judge. Thus, according to Deleuze, Kant’s first two “Critiques” (The Critique of Pure Reason and The Critique of Practical Reason) find their completion and ground only in

92Gilles Deleuze, Kant’s Critical Philosophy, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

93Among contemporary readers of Kant, this view is becoming increasingly popular. The most rigorous and committed attempt that I know to work this view out, not only as an interpretation of Kant, but also as an independently argued ontology of human being, can be found in Hannah Arendt’s The Life of the Mind. To our great misfortune, she died leaving the third and according to her own admission, most fundamental, functional capacity of reason—that of judging—incompletely analyzed. Other readers of Kant who see theoretical reason as grounded in the aesthetic and/or the political (for Arendt, aesthetic judgment is the political faculty) include Howard Caygill, Susan Meld Shell, and Kimberly Hutchings.
Deleuze’s understanding of the faculties in Kant sees them as being ordered according to the principle of reason’s natural and proper interests. Deleuze, quite rightly, points out that Kant’s critiques stand against empiricism’s position that reason is purely instrumental and that it is only nature in the form of human desire and instinct that can have interests and range over ends. For Kant, reason’s interests are served by its various faculties; for example the speculative interest is given to be met by the faculty of knowledge.\footnote{There are also the faculties of desire and that of the feeling of pleasure and pain, obviously corresponding to the other two of Kant’s “Critiques.”} Furthermore, within this functional division of faculties according to their ends, there are additional faculties depending upon the source of the mental representation each provides. Thus, for example, the faculty of knowledge comprises the faculty of sensibility (which provides intuitions), and the active faculties of imagination, understanding, and reason. The various faculties have an optimal manner of relating to each other, one which will meet in the highest, or most autonomous way, the larger interest or end of reason which is to be served. On this point, we can see (as Deleuze points out) that Kant’s epistemological theory (as embodied in this faculty psychology) differs from rationalism (as well as empiricism) by holding that reason’s true ends are given not from without, as rationalism (in agreement with empiricism) holds (\textit{e.g.} God, Truth, the Good), but autonomously. Thus Kant’s theory of faculties, according to Deleuze, enables him to establish for reason its autonomous power over its objects and itself and hence its ability to engage in critique. It is, according to Deleuze, the theory of faculties that constitutes the essence of Kant’s critical transcendental method. We can therefore see that Deleuze’s reading provides an additional explanation for the failure of a reading like Strawson’s to account for or to
allow the possibility of Kantian critique. The critical capacity as Deleuze understands it is a function of the transcendental account of the nature of the mind.

There is however, a problem that Deleuze identifies in Kant’s faculty theory which bears on our project to find in Kant a theoretical ground for his capacity of critique. The problem is that the theoretical transcendental account of faculties still falls short of grounding the certainty of knowledge. The faculties of knowledge (e.g., sensibility and understanding) differ in nature such that one is legislative and active, the other passive. But then Kant needs to explain the way in which these two radically different faculties accord with one another. To do so, he invokes the action (called the “schematism”) of the imagination which will prepare the sensible intuition for the application of the understanding’s concepts. But this solution doesn’t really solve the preexisting problem of epistemology (in both rationalism and empiricism) of relating the unformed data of sensation with the general forms of concepts and principles.

. . . in order to explain how passive sensibility accords with active understanding, Kant invokes the synthesis and the schematism of the imagination which is applicable a priori to the forms of sensibility in conformity with concepts. But in this way the problem is merely shifted: for the imagination and the understanding themselves differ in nature, and the accord between these two active faculties is no less ‘mysterious’ (likewise the accord between understanding and reason).

It would seem that Kant runs up against a formidable difficulty. We have seen that he rejected the idea of a preestablished harmony between subject and object, substituting the principle of a necessary submission of the object to the subject itself. But does he not once again come up with the idea of harmony, simply transposed to the level of faculties of the subject which differ in nature?\footnote{Deleuze, \textit{Kant’s Critical Philosophy}, page 22.}

Deleuze thus in essence agrees with my conclusion that Kant’s empirical realism isn’t sufficiently established by his transcendental idealism; that there remains a contradiction or gulf between these two realms, perspectives, discourses, or aspects of
knowledge. For Deleuze, this gulf is not adequately bridged in theory, but is left to be accounted for in the nature of reason’s “higher” non-speculative faculties.

**Oscillation: Howard and Hutchings**

In addition to the above two examples of interpretations of Kantian critique that embrace the two extremes of immanence (Strawson) and transcendence (Deleuze), there is another logical theoretical possibility for those who accept the paradoxical nature and dual necessities of critique as both immanent and transcendent. This is to embrace the paradox and to require that critique remain in an ambiguous tension, never grounded or stabilized in either pole. Two recent commentators have held such a view. Dick Howard, whose characterization of critique as comprising both a genetic and a normative moment we have already discussed in Chapter One, explores this characterization through a reading of Kant.\(^6\) Thus according to Howard, Kant’s first Critique offers both a genetic explanation or ground for the possibility of critical reason which is given in the A edition deduction; and an attempted legitimation via grounding in normative objectivity for our purely rational knowledge in the B edition deduction. Kant found it necessary to give both versions, according to Howard, because neither alone is capable of grounding the double nature of critique. Howard therefore sees the theoretical solution to the grounding problem as consisting in an admission that there are structures of meaning which elude characterization in simple terms, but which are ontologically “originary” or symbolic. Thus critique as an activity which combines a need for both normativity and genesis, theory and practice, philosophy and politics can be reduced to neither, and will constantly alternate between the two poles. Thus Howard

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insists that philosophy must be supplemented with politics and critique with criticism (which is self-consciously biased in a way which it doesn’t attempt to defend) if these two poles are to be adequately addressed. But the problem with this so called solution lies in the nature of the relation between these two poles. Since the relation is “symbolic” and neither conceptually necessary nor actual or real, there is no way of answering the skeptic who denies that the theory is adequate to the practice or that the beliefs or knowledge we profess to have are justified on the basis of anything either empirical or theoretical. The legitimation or grounding is insecure, based upon a structural entity that eludes rationality. Once again we might as well appeal to mysticism, a god, or faith in human freedom.

Similarly, Kimberly Hutchings\textsuperscript{97} sees critique as structured by the needs of immanence and transcendence, and finds this paradoxical construct in Kant’s critical theory. She argues that it is not possible either to escape or to instantiate the duality, but that the critic's task is to “oscillate” between the two poles.

Kantian critique is premised on both the limitation of reason and the assumption of the capacity of reason to transcend that limitation in the process of critique. From the beginning, therefore, critique is an impossible task. The philosophical richness of critique lies in the ways in which it is an exploration of its own impossibility. In an effort to deduce the legitimate scope of theoretical reason, practical reason and judgement, the Kantian critic takes on the roles of legislator, warmonger and judge, but each time the authority of critique appears to be grounded it is always undermined. The alternatives of dogmatism and speculation which critique was intended to transcend continually threaten the work of the critic.\textsuperscript{98}

Again, I would have to say that this solution to see critique as impossible, tempting as it may be, is unsatisfactory to the theoretical skeptical critic. Before giving up and

\textsuperscript{97}Kimberly Hutchings, \textit{Kant, Critique and Politics} (New York: Routledge, 1996).
\textsuperscript{98}Hutchings, \textit{Kant, Critique, and Politics}, page 1.
embracing such a “cop out” I suggest that we continue to explore the theoretical
attempts to ground the possibility of critique and to perform a critique of reason itself.
One such attempt lies in Hegel’s critical extension of the Kantian project.

Hegel: Phenomenology as Immanent Critique

Hegel’s Phenomenology\(^99\) can be seen as a deduction of the possibility of
authentic or “absolute” knowledge from the premise of a basic and ordinary “stage”
(Gestalt) or act of consciousness. In this respect, Hegel’s critical epistemology is
comparable to Kant’s “transcendental deductions,” which likewise attempt to deduce the
possibility of knowledge that was held by skepticism to be questionable (synthetic a
\textit{priori} propositions) from the fundamental premise of an aspect or feature of
consciousness which he held to be irrefutable.\(^{100}\) As we have seen above, Hegel took
issue with Kant’s methodological presupposition that epistemology needs to examine its
“instrument” prior to its actual use. This original assumption of skepticism, this
“mistrust,” according to Hegel, is a mistake which resulted in Kant’s inability to realize
the full potential of human reason. We need not, and indeed cannot “examine” the
instrument, but simply should put it to use (if we must look at cognition as an instrument

\(^{99}\)Although many of Hegel’s writings contain criticisms of Kant, in what follows I will be
focusing on the Phenomenology as my main source. This is because, as several commentators
have pointed out, the Phenomenology can be seen as Hegel’s attempt to deduce the possibility
of “absolute knowledge” from a preliminary and basic stage of consciousness. Thus a close
comparison with Kant’s “transcendental deductions” of the possibility of knowledge is warranted.

\(^{100}\)There is certainly (at least one) basic and important difference between Kant’s and
Hegel’s starting points even though both have to do with a fundamental feature or pose of
consciousness. For Hegel, the premise with which he begins is actually performed or taken up
—it is an experience of consciousness; for Kant, however, the “I think” of consciousness is of
necessity a proposition. For Kant, the \textit{transcendental} unity of consciousness is never
\textit{experienced}, for experience can only be of the phenomenal self. See The “Paralogisms” where
Kant explicitly argues that we have no experience of the transcendental or noumenal self; and
that Descartes and others have simply confused the “unity of experience” with the “experience
of unity.” This point is obviously crucial for my analysis of Kant’s failure discussed above, for the
inability of Kant’s \textit{analysis} to ground the actuality of knowledge depends on his analysis
remaining outside of experience.
at all). For Hegel, then, the “proof” of the possibility of genuine knowledge comes via its demonstration in the process of knowing.

Thus, the Phenomenology offers a narrative account of the development of philosophical consciousness or knowledge from out of its pre-reflective origin. The foundation or starting point of “Absolute Knowledge” is, for Hegel, the pre-theoretical orientation of the subject to the object of cognition, out of which self-reflective, philosophical cognition develops as a matter of course. Hence, Hegel’s method is one of immanent critique, for the motor for the development of consciousness comes about from within the consciousness itself. The development cannot be a consequence of the imposition of external standards of correctness, under whose dictates consciousness purges itself of whatever does not measure up. The standards used are prescribed by the consciousness to itself. Every form of consciousness is therefore for Hegel already critical, and he has no need, prior to the enactment of his study, to identify and to separate out critical reason from its non-critical or instrumental use in order to use the former to study the latter (as we have seen to be Kant’s procedure). The normative-transcendent aspect of critical reason belongs immanently to every form of consciousness (or instance of attempted cognition), according to Hegel, so that the epistemic development (from less to greater knowledge) proceeds from within the object of Hegel’s critique.

The self-movement of consciousness that Hegel studies thus proceeds “dialectically,” as the consciousness under study becomes aware of its internal contradictions and attempts their resolution. The nature of consciousness, for Hegel, is, therefore, a dialectical tension between what we have been calling the immanent and transcendent poles of critical reason.¹⁰¹ Since this dialectical development takes place

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¹⁰¹Thus Hegel can be seen as an important forerunner of Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s view
within the object under study, i.e., the form of consciousness which is undergoing the critique, the task of the philosopher who narrates this account will be that of an observer who merely describes. Hegel therefore apparently eludes one horn of the critical dilemma by avoiding an illegitimate transcendence out of the object of critique. His position, as the philosophic observer of the form of consciousness under study, is not one of normative outsider, but merely of passive observer. The critique is enacted solely on the “inside,” so to speak, of the form of consciousness which is the object of the critique. The story of the developing consciousness will be a “phenomenology,” while its subject matter, the object of study of the phenomenologist, will be the self-development of consciousness through its various forms of cognition. But is this distinction (between the phenomenologist as observer and the active critical consciousness that exists on the inside of the object of critique), which enables Hegel to escape the critical dilemma by engaging in critique without transcendent activity on his part, really tenable?

The Dialectical Experience of Consciousness and Immanent Critique

For Hegel, as well as for Kant, the reflexivity of consciousness is its most essential feature. It is this feature that allows Hegel to see consciousness as a connected continuum, ranging from less to more self-reflective. Thus the foundation or starting point of Hegel's "deduction" of the possibility of authentic knowledge can, like Kant's, begin in a basic act of consciousness, which Hegel follows as it then takes itself as object, in self-reflection. We find in the Phenomenology that consciousness is self-relational, reflexive, always aware of both its object and itself. It is this feature of consciousness which grounds the possibility of the critique within each form of consciousness, as each given act, stage, or form of consciousness in turn transcends of the dialectical nature of reason.
itself toward greater knowledge. Consciousness, according to Hegel, moves itself by means of acts of progressive self-reflection, and thereby gains “experience” (Erfahrung).

Hegel therefore relies upon a link between natural consciousness, insofar as this attitude makes any knowledge claims at all, and true knowledge or science. Thus it will not be necessary for Hegel (the phenomenologist) to apply standards from the outside in order to judge of a knowledge claim or instance of knowing whether it measures up to some independently determined essence of knowledge. It is, therefore, according to Hegel, by means of its own immanent essence that “Science” is able to distinguish itself from its mere appearance or the pretension to knowledge of an instance of cognition. Science, according to Hegel, “liberates itself” from its mere appearance or semblance by “turning against” its false manifestation (Phenomenology, #76). This process of “turning against” its appearance in which science engages is a progressive realization or actualizing of the “Notion” or concept (“Begriff”) of science, which any consciousness claiming to have knowledge must presuppose. Cognitive consciousness is self-relational, for its activity is to think or make a concept or “notion” of itself—i.e., to presuppose true knowledge as its essence or standard.

Consciousness, however, is explicitly the Notion of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself. 102

Consciousness’ continual movement of self-transcendence is propelled by the discrepancy between its self-posed essence or “notion,” and its actual state of knowledge. Due to this self-reflective structure, Hegel appears to be capable of maintaining immanence in the totality which he critiques. He does not need, as did Kant, to try to transcend the capabilities of the pre-critical object of knowledge. Hegel,

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102 Hegel, Phenomenology, #80.
therefore, believes that he has a solution to the “problem of the criterion,” for it is not necessary to know, explicitly and in advance, what knowledge is in order to attempt to learn about the nature of knowledge. All that is necessary is to let consciousness’ self-posed standards guide the epistemological inquiry.

“Experience” is gained, according to Hegel, as consciousness “reverses itself” (Phenomenology, #87) by reflecting upon the discrepancy or gap between the object in-itself and the object for-consciousness. By means of this self-reflection, consciousness is made aware of its own active involvement in determining the nature of its object. Consciousness realizes that the object which it has posited as in-itself is really only “in itself” for consciousness. This realization denies the “in-itself” existence of consciousness’ first object, and in so doing, implicitly posits as a presupposition another object “in-itself,” which becomes the truth or standard in comparison to which the previous object (which is now understood to be only “for-consciousness”) is judged inadequate. This self-movement proceeds via the following steps: first, consciousness splits its awareness into an awareness of its object as it exists apart from consciousness, or as it is “in-itself,” and an awareness of its awareness of the object, or an awareness of the object “for consciousness.”

For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, and on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what for it is the True, and consciousness of its knowledge of the truth. Since both are for the same consciousness, this consciousness is itself their comparison; it is for this same consciousness to know whether its knowledge of the object corresponds to the object or not. The object, it is true, seems only to be for consciousness in the way that consciousness knows it; it seems that consciousness cannot, as it were, get behind the object as it exists for consciousness so as to examine what the object is in itself, and hence, too, cannot test its own knowledge by that standard. But the distinction between the in-itself and knowledge is already present in the very fact that consciousness knows an object at all. Something is for it the in itself;
and knowledge, or the being of the object for consciousness, is, for it, another moment. Upon this distinction, which is present as a fact, the examination rests.  

The Phenomenological Consciousness as Transcendent to its Object

But this same pattern of movement must also constitute the experience of the consciousness which is doing the study, or the epistemological-phenomenological consciousness. If Hegel is right about the structure of conscious experience in general, then the same structure must likewise characterize his conscious experience insofar as he is involved in a cognitive endeavor as the phenomenological observer. Thus, Hegel’s phenomenological consciousness must likewise immanently contain a standard of knowledge which it will use to judge of its object whether it is satisfactory. This standard is, of course, none other than the actual development of the stage of consciousness under study—that development as it takes place “in-itself,” for Hegel’s methodological directive is to let the object of study perform its own critique.

Consequently, we do not need to import criteria, or to make use of our own bright ideas and thoughts during the course of the inquiry; it is precisely when we leave these aside that we succeed in contemplating the matter in hand as it is in and for itself.

But this standard is determined and presupposed nonetheless by the level of consciousness of the phenomenologist, from which the inquiry is being conducted.

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103 Hegel, Phenomenology, #85.
104 Kenley Royce Dove sees the importance of this methodological point, and accepts Hegel’s characterization of the passive (i.e., non-transcendent) role of the phenomenologist. According to Dove, “Hegel’s method is radically undialectical. It is the experience of consciousness itself which is dialectical and Hegel’s Phenomenology is a viable philosophical enterprise precisely to the extent that it merely describes this dialectical process. The “new object” therefore must not be introduced by the philosopher; it must arise out of the course of the experience described—and not merely qua described, but through itself.” See Kenley Royce Dove, “Hegel’s Phenomenological Method,” in Review of Metaphysics, volume xxiii, 1970, pages 615-641.
105 Hegel, Phenomenology, #84.
Since Hegel is concerned to avoid the illegitimacy of transcendent critique, he attempts to “apprehend” rather than to “comprehend” (Begreifen), for to comprehend is to posit a concept or “notion” which serves as standard. But is this really possible? Hegel believes that it is, so he refrains from allowing his consciousness to interfere with the process of cognition being studied. He, therefore, attempts to preserve the standard of truth posited by the object of study. It is the essential truth of the object in-itself—indeed of its being studied—that Hegel, the phenomenologist, is after. Thus Hegel’s method must begin by “bracketing” the natural activity of his own consciousness—that of positing the criterion or normative standard for the truth of his investigation—so that this criterion may come from the consciousness under study. What Hegel’s method assumes is that the essential reality or truth of the consciousness under study is accessible to the unmediated and passive apprehension of the phenomenologist.

But isn’t this initial assumption of the phenomenological method already the positing of a standard or criterion—an “in-itself” against which the object of knowledge can be measured? That Hegel collapses the “in-itself” assumed by his own consciousness into the “in-itself” of the object of study, does not absolve him of responsibility for originally engaging in the transcendent-normative moment of critique. The phenomenologist takes the “in-itself” of the object of study as the standard for what is really going on in the process of consciousness’ coming into knowledge. Thus Hegel cannot claim, as the phenomenologist, not to have drawn a distinction between appearance and reality, for the intention of the phenomenologist, to let reality appear for it as it is “in-itself,” holds out as its own criterion the criterion or reality of its object of study. The phenomenologist’s truth is its object of study as it is “in-itself.” The phenomenological method presupposes the object “in-itself” to be the source of true knowledge. Thus the phenomenological consciousness is indeed critical, in the full
sense which includes the deployment of a standard or criterion for truth.

There is further evidence at Hegel’s starting point that the phenomenological consciousness begins its study by presupposing a normative standard for knowledge. Hegel begins his exposition of the progression of the forms of consciousness with “sense-certainty.” The rationality of this choice becomes clear once we realize that sense-certainty is the simplest, least complex structure of cognitive consciousness. Consciousness of sense-data comprises the least amount of subject-object relations; sense-certainty is the least mediated, most direct relation of consciousness to its object, for it is simple awareness of a sensation. Thus sense-certainty must also be consciousness’ most general and universal form of experience. Every consciousness has necessarily experienced sensory awareness. Hegel’s choice of beginning is therefore justified given that he seeks the essential nature of consciousness and knowledge, in general, or the most basic features that underlie all forms of consciousness. If Hegel can demonstrate the possibility of a continual progression from sense-certainty to “Absolute Knowledge,” he will have shown that this experiential path exists for all consciousness, and is therefore the truth of the totality of knowledge. Thus, it is Hegel’s intention at the start of the phenomenological enterprise to seek the essential and total truth of knowledge, to grasp knowledge, his object of study, in-itself. To “apprehend” the truth of knowledge, must therefore be seen as simultaneously comprehending that truth. Hegel’s choice of starting point must then be seen as the assumption of a normative standard for truth. Thus the phenomenological consciousness, according to Hegel’s own theory of the dialectic, and in spite of Hegel’s denial, must begin its inquiry with implicit presuppositions about what counts as true knowledge, and, therefore, with a normative criterion which will guide his search.

Furthermore, the phenomenological consciousness becomes aware of its own
activity as necessary to its dialectical progression toward “Absolute Knowledge.” There comes a point at which the phenomenological consciousness realizes that its own contribution to knowledge is essential, and so gains its own experience and goes beyond its own limits. That this point must occur is suggested by Hegel in the Introduction to the Phenomenology, where he makes explicit the contribution of the phenomenological (or observing) consciousness to the dialectical progression being studied. According to Hegel, the necessity of the progression of consciousness from one form to another is seen and understood only by the phenomenological consciousness; this necessity is actually the “result” only of the perspective of “we phenomenologists.”

This way of looking at the matter is something contributed by us, by means of which the succussion of experiences through which consciousness passes is raised into a scientific progression—but it is not known to the consciousness that we are observing. But, as a matter of fact, . . . in every case the result of an untrue mode of knowledge must not be allowed to run away into an empty nothing, but must necessarily be grasped as the nothing of that from which it results—a result which contains what was true in the preceding knowledge. . . But it is just this necessity itself, or the origination of the new object, that presents itself to consciousness without its understanding how this happens, which proceeds for us, as it were, behind the back of consciousness.106

It is, according to Hegel, due to this necessity of the emergence of the new object within the experience of the phenomenal consciousness being studied, that “the way to Science is already Science” (Phenomenology, #88). But since this necessity (of a “determinate” rather than of a merely “abstract” negation) is the contribution of the phenomenological consciousness, that consciousness must be understood as actively involved in the dialectical progression toward Absolute Truth. Thus, the phenomenological consciousness must gain cognitive experience by means of a

106Hegel, Phenomenology, #87.
dialectical development which presupposes a normative transcendence of its object.

Furthermore, there will come a point where the phenomenal consciousness catches up, so to speak, and coincides with the phenomenological consciousness. The phenomenal consciousness must learn at some point that it has undergone a necessary dialectic, for the “Absolute Knowledge” which it ultimately attains is knowledge of the entire “Science of Consciousness.” Thus the contribution of the phenomenological consciousness must at some point be recognized by the phenomenal consciousness to be essential to its own development. At this point, the experience of the “phenomenological we” will become bound up with the dialectical progression of the consciousness under study. The phenomenal and phenomenological consciousnesses must arrive at “Absolute Knowledge” together, for in the “Absolute,” nothing can be left out. But this means that Hegel’s attempt to elude the critical problem by avoiding the transcendent activity of his own phenomenological consciousness is an illusion. Hegel is simply “playing both sides” of the critical dilemma, by oscillating between the perspectives of the phenomenal (immanent) and phenomenological (transcendent) perspectives, requiring both for the progression of the dialectic.

The Ground of Hegelian Transcendence

The transcendence enacted by Hegel is legitimated, according to Hegel, because he posits it as immanent to the object of study, which is the nature of consciousness in general. But, this view of the nature of consciousness is only fully justified at the end of the study when “Absolute Knowledge,” which knows the total truth, has been attained. This feature of the Hegelian dialectical critique has been remarked by Michael Rosen, who calls it the “post festum paradox.”

107Michael Rosen, Hegel’s Dialectic and its Criticism, New York: Cambridge University
as I have developed it. According to Rosen,

\[ \ldots \] to criticize Hegel is to claim that the system does not attain validly its point of completion. But to criticize from any point other than the point of completion violates a crucial presupposition of the system itself, namely, that only someone who has really attained its final point can perceive the rationality of its attainment. I shall call this the post festum paradox.\(^{108}\)

Thus, the proper critical stance requires both immanence and transcendence, since the system must be gone through, but can only be evaluated at its endpoint. This form of the dilemma is specific to immanent critique, for it requires that the system be entered into and followed out. But this immanent strategy encounters the horn of the dilemma facing the immanent critic, for it also requires that the endpoint be reached, since it is the totality which must be grasped, which requires a degree of transcendence out of any particular point within the system. According to Rosen’s view, another way of looking at this is to see the endpoint of Hegel’s system, the “Absolute Knowledge” that the system seeks, as always present in the stages of consciousness that precede its attainment. Rosen thus points up the criticism I have been here developing that the transcendence necessary to critique is simply displaced by Hegel to within the nature of consciousness, thus allowing Hegel to maintain an apparent posture of immanence.

But can Hegel justify this assumption that the endpoint is always already immanent within every pre-critical stage of phenomenal consciousness? Although Hegel has made the self-transcendence of consciousness toward the Absolute immanent to the structure of consciousness itself, he cannot show the necessary attainment of Absolute Knowledge to be imminence or even possible, without presupposing a faith in its necessary existence as the telos of his cognitive-critical journey. As Rosen points out, Hegel believes that he is writing from the point in historical time when the dialectic has

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achieved completion in the Absolute. Thus, for Hegel, the possibility of the attainment of the Absolute has already been actualized, so that it is merely a matter of drawing out of natural consciousness the explicit awareness of what it already possesses. But if we reject the assumption that we are at the historical endpoint of the development of Spirit, the implicit knowledge of the Absolute which Hegel assumes to exist in every instance of ordinary cognition must be seen to be rationally without ground. His avoidance of the critical dilemma, is, therefore, based on an always presupposed faith, which cannot be rationally grounded until the end of the journey, in a manner again similar to Descartes, who needed God to justify his cognitive capability, and to Plato for whom the practical demonstration of knowledge was required (e.g., in the *Meno*, as discussed in Chapter One, above) as the justification for his theoretical position that knowledge was possible. Thus Hegel, like Adorno and Horkheimer, falls back upon a faith in the dialectic's ability to transcend the limitations of the form of consciousness which he is concerned to critique. Furthermore, he presupposes this faith from the outset. Thus his critical epistemology, in maintaining its posture of radical immanence in its object, cannot independently justify or ground its own activity.

**The Oscillation of Immanence and Transcendence in Kant and Hegel**

The choice between Kant and Hegel therefore seems to be a choice between the two horns of the critical dilemma. Kant’s epistemology has been shown to enact an illegitimate transcendence; while Hegel, in remaining immanent, is unable to offer a legitimation of itself which does not presuppose its own critical capacity to transcend from the start. Neither Kant nor Hegel, then, have been successful in escaping the critical dilemma, but rather oscillate between the two poles of uncritical immanence and unjustified transcendence. But perhaps the attempt to elude the dilemma by focusing on
reason’s capacity, in its purely theoretical and abstract form, has been too stringent in what it will allow of reason and of rational critique. As we have seen in our discussion of Adorno and Horkheimer, reason is always necessarily intermixed with the nonrational. To attempt to purify reason as Kant has done, and to focus on reason in its most abstract and universal features, as Hegel does, fails to allow for the possibility that the critical perspective may be justifiable insofar as its rationale may be broadened to encompass its concrete instantiation in its bodily and historical situatedness. If Adorno and Horkheimer are right, reason is never pure. In fact, as was hinted at in Chapter One, the rational is always already practical and political. Thus, the practical-political motivation for the enactment of critique, if it is recognized and accepted, may offer a contribution to its theoretical groundedness. The problem, of course, is to justify this practical-political component. We will examine this possibility, and its attempted justifications, in the next two chapters, where the subject of critique is brought down to earth as embodied, situated, and politically motivated in the person of the feminist.
CHAPTER 3

IS THERE A GROUND FOR A FEMINIST STANDPOINT?

The basic critical dilemma that I have thus far explored is a fundamental problem for feminist theory, especially feminist epistemology. For feminist theorists, the attempt to critique the values and beliefs of patriarchy requires both the critical distancing of the outsider, and the simultaneous acknowledgment of patriarchy’s deep influence on the very tools and ideas needed to engage in feminist critical thought. This deep ambivalence and dual position of feminists with respect to the patriarchal tradition has been recognized and commented upon by a great many feminist theorists. Myra Jehlen gives us one of the most pithy and easily understood expressions of the problem in her use of the image of Archimedes and his fulcrum. According to Jehlen,

Somewhat like Archimedes, who to lift the earth with his lever required someplace else on which to locate himself and his fulcrum, feminists questioning the presumptive order of both nature and history—and thus proposing to remove the ground from under their own feet—would appear to need an alternative base. For as Archimedes had to stand somewhere, one has to assume something in order to reason at all. So if the very axioms of Western thought already incorporate the sexual teleology in question, it seems that, like the Greek philosopher, we have to find a standpoint off this world altogether.

But, of course, this is impossible, so Jehlen continues:

Archimedes never did. However persuasively he established that the earth could be moved from its appointed place, he and the lever remained earthbound and the globe stayed where it was. His story may point another moral, however, just as it points to another science able to harness forces internally and apply energy from within. We could then conclude that what he really needed was a terrestrial fulcrum. My point here, similarly, will be that a terrestrial fulcrum, a standpoint from which we can see our conceptual universe

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whole but which nonetheless rests firmly on male ground, is what feminists really need.\textsuperscript{110}

The feminist standpoint epistemologists (Harding, Hartsock, Smith, Rose, Flax, Jagger) can be understood, like Jehlen, to be looking for a “terrestrial fulcrum,” which will enable them to critique the tradition while simultaneously remaining embedded in it and true to those traditional values which must be preserved in order to engage in a struggle for greater truth and political freedom. Standpoint theorists are deeply aware of the difficulties which the critic’s dilemma poses for their own attempts to develop an epistemology that will avoid the pitfalls of male bias, while simultaneously preserving that with which they cannot do without, namely the commitment to objectivity and truth that the standard epistemologies also claim to respect. It is, in fact, the recognition on the part of the feminist epistemologists of the depth of contamination of the values of standard science and epistemology, and the necessary implication of their own ideals in those very values, that led to the development of standpoint theory as a means to elude the difficulty by devising a “successor science” which constitutes a more radical break with the tradition than does a more stringently adhered to empiricism. But does this approach, which does not completely relinquish, but merely revamps values such as objectivity, work? Many other feminists\textsuperscript{111} claim that it doesn’t; thus we have grounds for embracing a postmodernist feminism which breaks even more radically with tradition, by relinquishing even the dream of objectivity and truth. In this chapter, I will examine the standpoint approach in order to determine its success or failure in solving or escaping from the critic’s dilemma.

\textsuperscript{110}Jehlen,"Archimedes," page 190.

\textsuperscript{111}These feminist theorists who embrace a more radical postmodernist position can be seen to include Jane Flax, in her later articles, Donna Haraway (who has also argued for a standpoint approach, see “Situated Knowledges”), Judith Butler, and Luce Irigaray. Irigaray’s position will be discussed below in Chapter 4.
The Ground of Standpoint Theory

The basic question I will ask of standpoint theory is for its ground and justification. Standpoint epistemology, as a critical alternative to the already existing mainstream-malestream epistemologies of empiricism, functionalism/relativism (e.g., sociology of knowledge), and Marxism, must be able to provide adequate legitimation for both its necessity and its possibility. The arguments for grounding standpoint theory’s legitimacy that have been put forward by its main proponents seem to rely on five basic appeals: (1) an appeal to the Marxian-Hegelian theory of the development of the enlarged consciousness of the oppressed; (2) an appeal to women’s common experience in reproductive and nurturing labor; (3) an appeal to the dual or bifurcated consciousness developed by women as an oppressed class; (4) an appeal to object relations psychoanalytic theory, in its understanding of the construction of gendered identity; (5) a revised notion of “objectivity,” such that a feminist standpoint yields greater objectivity (of this new and improved sort) than the standard masculinist view. These appeals are not completely separated or mutually exclusive, but are overlapping and interrelated in the various expressions of standpoint theory. However, as I will argue below, standpoint epistemology’s use of these appeals is insufficient to solve or to evade completely the critic’s dilemma in a satisfactory theoretical way. The upshot of my critique of standpoint epistemology will be that it must be supplemented by a political commitment, for which there can be no purely theoretical ground.

The Standpoint of the Proletariat

In answer to the question of ground, the most pervasively given argument for the superior objectivity of a feminist standpoint appeals to Marx’s theory of the epistemic
superiority of the proletarian viewpoint. Marx, in turn, bases his position on the work of Hegel, whose master/slave dialectic offers a hypothetical model for the development of an enlarged consciousness by the oppressed as s/he struggles with her/his oppressor. Standpoint epistemology takes off from Hegel's master/slave parable, and Marx' use of it, to try to ground its own feminist epistemology, which privileges the achievement of a feminist standpoint born of struggle. As Hegel argues in the Phenomenology, the relationship between master and slave is one whereby the slave gains in knowledge and power, while the master, who doesn’t perform labor for himself, but commands the slave to do it, atrophies. The slave, in developing the skills necessary to meet the master’s demands, grows in understanding both the master’s consciousness and her own. Thus the slave develops a double consciousness, which is more comprehensive and less one-sided and distorted than the master’s. Similarly, Marx’s epistemology argues that the proletariat, as the class which labors under capitalism, develops its own more comprehensive and unclouded view of the social reality.

Marx’s theory of the superior standpoint of the proletariat attempts to provide for Marxism a way out of the critical paradox. According to Marx, all thought is

112The basic elements of Marxist epistemology are scattered throughout his entire corpus. In particular he makes use of the standpoint of the proletariat as he analyzes the real relations of production under capitalism in Capital, as he develops his theory of alienation, historical materialism, and base-superstructure in the early writings (including The German Ideology). The idea of the proletariat as a revolutionary class with the ability to penetrate the appearances generated by capitalism is introduced in the “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” The theory is much further developed and explicitly stated by Georg Lukacs in History and Class Consciousness, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968), pages149-209.

113For Sandra Harding’s discussion of the Hegelian-Marxian history of feminist standpoint theory, see Is Science Multi-Cultural (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pages149-150.

114The success or failure of Marxist theory at eluding the critic’s dilemma cannot be adequately addressed within the scope of the dissertation. Obviously the literature on this topic is huge and would require a major study. However, given the focus on praxis in Marxist theory, I believe that it is safe to say preliminarily that Marxist theory, like the theoretical orientations that form the basis of this dissertation, requires a political/practical commitment to freedom and democracy that cannot be grounded in a solely theoretical proof.
superstructural, that is to say that it is conditioned by the materialist economic base of a society. But, of course, this charge equally implicates Marx’s historical materialism along with the bourgeois thought which he was concerned to refute. Marx’s answer to this charge is to argue that although all thought is materially conditioned, the stratification of society into two distinct classes—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—positions those classes in ways that offer an advantageous perspective on the really existing social relations to the oppressed class. The dominant class in a stratified society will be unable to problematize those social beliefs and theories which support and uphold their domination. But for the worker class, the exploitation underlying social economic production is clearly visible. As Alison Jagger expresses this,

The standpoint of the oppressed is not just different from that of the ruling class; it is also epistemologically advantageous. It provides the basis for a view of reality that is more impartial than that of the ruling class and also more comprehensive. It is more impartial because it comes closer to representing the interests of society as a whole; whereas the standpoint of the ruling class reflects the interests only of one section of the population, the standpoint of the oppressed includes and is able to explain the standpoint of the ruling class.115

Marxist economic theory, unlike bourgeois economic theory, bases itself on the standpoint of the proletariat, for whom the labor-capital relation is one of exploitation rather than free and equal exchange. Due to the basic fact of historical materialism that the material conditions of life influence consciousness, the consciousness of the oppressed worker will necessarily be different from that of a member of the ruling class.116 The worker will be capable of seeing and comprehending the real relations

116According to the early Marx, “In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite
which underlie the superficial appearance of equal exchange, because the worker will have an intimate acquaintance with the process of production. The point of view of the capitalist is tied to his interest in obtaining profit. As such, he will see the labor provided by the worker to be an exchange value, like any other, for which he will believe he has paid equal compensation—its total value. What the capitalist misses is that the value paid in the labor exchange is less than its use value in producing a surplus, and that the reason he is able to get away with this underpayment is due to his privileged position as owner of the means of production, which puts him in a position of power over those who lack such ownership. Thus, under capitalism, the relation between worker and capitalist is based as much on material force as was the case under feudalism, although this force is hidden from view, disguised by the appearance of equal exchange which presents itself to the capitalist consciousness. For the worker, however, the force and necessity which compels him to sell his labor power on the market is real and visible, as is the difference between the value he creates in the production of the good and the exchange value for which it is sold as a commodity on the market—a difference which becomes the profit of the capitalist. Exploitation can be seen by the worker in a way which is impossible for the capitalist to see. Thus the standpoint of the proletariat as a class will be more comprehensive and penetrating than the standpoint of the capitalist class.

Similarly, feminist standpoint epistemology will base itself on the standpoint of women, as the oppressed class under patriarchy. Furthermore, women as a class are like the proletariat in Marx’s analysis in that their relationship to the dominant class is forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.” Karl Marx, Preface to “A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy,” in Early Writings, translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage Books, 1975), page 425.
dual—their labor is both essential but unrecognized by the dominant perspective.\textsuperscript{117} This dual positioning gives to women a more comprehensive understanding of social relations, for women are required, due to their subservient position, to understand and to operate according to the beliefs and knowledge of the dominant class, while the dominant class need know nothing of the knowledge specific to the experiences of women as a subservient class. Likewise, according to Marx’s theory, the proletarian standpoint encompasses the viewpoint of the capitalist class, as well as its own specific experience of alienation and exploitation. It was not simply the marginality of the proletariat, their outsider status, but also their essentiality to capitalist production, that granted them the unique status as the revolutionary class. This same dual positionality and consciousness characterize Hegel’s slave, who is both radically other to and essential to the master. Since women under patriarchy do most of the subservient necessary labor employed with caring for bodily needs, while maintaining outsider status when it comes to sharing power, they too can claim the duality which Marxist and Hegelian standpoint theory argue allows for epistemic privilege. Furthermore, the marginality of women to the patriarchal order, their outsider status when it comes to sharing positions of power, is directly due to the fact that their responsibilities for what Ann Ferguson calls “sex/affective labor”\textsuperscript{118} leave them with no time, energy or


\textsuperscript{118}See Ferguson, Blood at the Root, chapter 4, pages 77-100. Sex/affective labor, according to Ferguson, produces four goods: domestic maintenance, nurturance, children, and sexuality.
opportunity to occupy the positions of domination. Thus women’s marginality is a function of their essentiality, which allows both insider and outsider, both immanent and transcendent, points of view to overlap. Moreover, the feminist standpoint epistemologists trace this dual positioning through to the meta-level of the production of knowledge, where feminist scientists’ positions, as both inside and outside the patriarchal symbolic order, grant them a more comprehensive viewpoint. Thus women, and feminists as their spokespersons, are a privileged knowledge class under patriarchy, for their simultaneous immanence and transcendence in the patriarchal order offers the possibility of their embarking on the dialectic of critique.

Another important appeal standpoint theory makes is to the different experiences of women as laborers, mothers, and nurturers. The standpoint theorists who make this appeal include Dorothy Smith, Nancy Hartsock, Ann Ferguson and Nancy Folbre, and Hilary Rose. These theorists can be seen as drawing, in turn, upon the work of such thinkers as Sara Ruddick, Nel Noddings, and Carol Gilligan, who have elaborated an “ethics of care,” and of “maternal thinking,” based on the work women do in the home. The basic point that connects all these theorists is that women’s domestic labor gives

119Bar On claims that although standpoint theory is successful at showing that women are marginalized, and simultaneously central to patriarchy, it is not the case that women’s marginality is a function of their centrality, and so the parallel with Marx’s epistemological theory fails at this point. See Bar On, “Marginality.” I disagree, as I state above, as does Hartsock. See Money, Sex and Power.


rise to their unique and alternative (to men’s) skills and ways of thinking, which in turn will yield epistemic and ethical norms and values that are different from those developed solely on the basis of men’s experiences as individuated, competitive, Cartesian subjects of knowledge, and Hobbesian subjects of practice. The bearing of and caring for children, for example, cannot be adequately understood on the model of the production of objects, nor can the relationship between mother and child be seen as one of two completely individuated consciousnesses confronting one another in a competitive struggle over scarce resources. Furthermore, the repetitive, concrete labor performed by women in the home involves the inextricable collaboration of intellect, emotions, and the body, in a way which privileges neither the mental nor the material, and which therefore cannot be understood in the analytic terms used to account for labor in the public sphere of patriarchal capitalist work. Thus, maternal and domestic work merge “hand, brain, and heart,” in a way that renders the mainstream categories inadequate.

Nancy Hartsock’s analysis is perhaps the most clear expression of this appeal. She argues from the sexual division of labor to the possibility of a specifically feminist epistemological standpoint. According to Hartsock, a major claim made by standpoint theory is the following: “If material life is structured in fundamentally opposing ways for two different groups, one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse.”122 This claim is crucial, for without it, the superiority, rather than merely the equal legitimacy, of the feminist standpoint is groundless. But how is this claim justified? Hartsock first appeals to Marxist theory to argue that Marx was successful in showing that the ruling class had indeed inverted the order of significance

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of the spheres of use and exchange in understanding capitalist social relations. The real point and purpose of production (even under capitalism) is (and should be) for human subsistence and need. However, the bourgeoisie, whose viewpoint is necessarily limited to the realm of exchange, fail to see the logical priority of the proper endpoint and purpose, and rather privilege exchange as the goal of production. This focus on exchange can arguably be seen as a “perversion” of the proper order (and in fact the excesses of capitalism, and the misery capitalism thereby causes, as it produces not for need but for the market, have been remarked repeatedly by many and various critics of capitalism). Furthermore, the inequities that exist in the productive realm are likewise hidden from the point of view of the equality of exchange. Viewed from the perspective of exchange, it appears that the worker and capitalist engage in fair and equal trade of labor for wages. But once the perspective of the worker is adopted, the illusion of equal exchange disappears and the reality of exploitation becomes evident. To adopt the proper and revolutionary perspective was, of course, Marx’s fundamental and essential contribution, and enabled him to develop his entire critique (e.g., the theories of alienation, exploitation, and ideology). Can the same be said for a feminist standpoint? Can its adoption enable a less “perverse” or less distorted theory of society and nature?

**Object Relations Theory**

In order to understand more clearly the argument Hartsock gives for the greater perversity of the traditional, patriarchal standpoint, it is necessary to examine more closely the explanation given for women’s differently structured conceptual and value systems. This explanation is given by the feminist development of object relations psychoanalytic theory.\(^\text{123}\) According to object relations theory, boys and girls construct

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\(^{123}\)See, for example, Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis*
their genders differently due to their different relations with their mothers. Object relations theory accepts the account given by Freud of the little boy coming to distinguish himself as an individual by negotiating the oedipal conflict. But Freud, as many feminists have held, was unable to give a satisfactory account of the gender construction of the little girl. Feminist object relations theorists thus supply an account that stresses the girl's more relational identity. The reason for this is that for both boy and girl, their primary object of identification is the mother—a female person. Both girl and boy must learn to separate themselves from this primary object in order to develop an identity as an individual, separate human being. For the boy, this separation is easier and cleaner, since he sees himself as fundamentally unlike his mother. Furthermore, the boy is helped in his individuation by all the societal cues regarding what is appropriate behavior for masculinity. He establishes his identity based on an intellectual appropriation of the rules and principles of male behavior he is given by society and by a father who is, in most cases, largely absent and removed. The girl, on the other hand, has a concrete daily example of what she is to become. Her mother is like her, and is present to maintain and nurture this likeness. Consequently, the girl never fully individuates herself, but sees herself as continuous with and related to others. Thus all women,¹²⁴ according to the theory, whether they, in turn, become mothers themselves,

¹²⁴This universalizing move has been much criticized. Obviously, it is problematic to extend the conditions of the modern, bourgeois, oedipal family to all humans, so that women always and everywhere can be understood to exhibit the same qualities as they have developed under a particular historical situation. For this reason, I believe the appeal to object-relations theory cannot strongly support a standpoint epistemology applied universally. I do, however, believe that the previously discussed appeal to women's specific mode of domestic labor is both more legitimately universalizable (as empirical studies have shown), and more analogous to the Marxist model, which bases the legitimacy of the proletarian standpoint on their specific praxis. The problems of universalization and essentialism will be discussed further in the last section of this chapter, and in Chapter 4 below.
are socialized in a way that preserves continuity with their own mother, and prepares them for the profound relationality with another that constitutes the activity of mothering. This greater relationality on the part of women, according to standpoint theorists, leads women to embrace the values of cooperation, rather than domination; unities of body and mind, subject and object, nature and culture; connectedness, rather than separation; life rather than death.

Thus, the fundamental perversion of the patriarchal viewpoint is, according to Hartsock, its substitution of death for life.\textsuperscript{125} As Hartsock expresses this,

\textit{The substitution of death for life results at least in part from the sexual division of labor in childrearing. The self-surrounded by rigid ego-boundaries, certain of what is inner and what is outer, the self experienced as walled city is discontinuous with others.} Georges Bataille has made brilliantly clear the ways in which death emerges as the only possible solution to this discontinuity and has followed the logic through to argue that reproduction itself must be understood not as the creation of life, but as death. The core experience to be understood is that of discontinuity and its consequences. As a consequence of this experience of discontinuity and aloneness, penetration of ego-boundaries, or fusion with another is experienced as violent. Thus, the desire for fusion with another can take the form of domination of the other. In this form, it leads to the only possible fusion with a threatening other: when the other ceases to exist as a separate, and for that reason, threatening being. Insisting that another submit to one’s will is simply a milder form of the destruction of discontinuity in the death of the other since in this case one is no longer confronting a discontinuous and opposed will, despite its discontinuous embodiment. This is perhaps one source of the links between sexual activity, domination, and death.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{125}Also see Mary Daly, \textit{Gyn-Ecology} for an elaboration of the claim that patriarchy is “necrophilic.” \textit{Gyn-Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978. Also, see Hilary Rose, “Hand, Brain, and Heart,” (in \textit{Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society}, 1983, vol. 9, no. 1), where she argues that the continued following of male scientific norms will lead to nuclear annihilation. In addition, many feminist theorists have pointed out the emphasis on the death of the other as the desire that motivates the master/slave dialectic in Hegel. It seems that Hegel could not conceive of another possibility for relation, but is arguing that the most basic attitude toward the other is to eliminate its threat to one’s own independence and autonomy.

\textsuperscript{126}Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint,” pages 299-300.
Certainly, it is a reasonable position to argue that substituting death for life is a “perversion” of what should be. Even so, I do not think this view can be upheld solely on theoretical grounds, but entails an ethical commitment. Notwithstanding whether this would indeed be a perversion, I do not think that Hartsock has shown adequately that patriarchy does value death over life. There seems to be a gap in Hartsock’s argument. To move from women’s greater tendency to uphold the more life-affirming values of nurturing, connection, and relation, to the claim that the entire patriarchal symbolic order is based on a prioritizing of death over life appears to me to be an overstatement. Is it not the case that such traditional values as rational self-interestedness, autonomy, and the control of nature have had some life-affirming consequences, at some times and for some people, in addition to their well-documented (by feminists) neglect of other, more traditionally women experienced values? Furthermore, as we have seen above, such male critics as Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno, Heidegger, and Gadamer have argued for a shift in traditional values away from the stress on domination of nature and others, separation of subject from object, self-interested individualism and autonomy. If these newer, more feminist style values can be extracted from the (malestream) tradition, then it is not the case that it is only with a feminist standpoint that perversity can be overcome, or even that the entire patriarchal viewpoint is guilty of perversity. Based solely on the logic of Hartsock’s claim, the material conditioning of the vision of the ruling class results in its having only a partial viewpoint, but not necessarily a

127 It could be argued that to value death over life is self-contradictory and therefore a purely logical error, in that death would negate the ground of the possibility of the enunciation of the position in a manner similar to the way in which, in Kantian ethical theory, contradiction arises when an attempt is made to universalize a maxim which underlies an action which is forbidden by the “categorical imperative.” But this seems a little sophistical, since it could be perfectly consistent to hold that the best life is one which is short and sweet, so that death at the proper time becomes of greater value than life. And, of course, contemporary public ethical discussion on such topics as the right to die holds just such a view, and can be seen as quite reasonable.
“perverted” one.

But what about the complementary claim that a feminist standpoint will necessarily be more comprehensive than the traditional androcentric one? Although here I believe there is some reason to support this claim, there are also some problems. In support of the claim, we should consider the fact that the members of an oppressed group in a social hierarchy must, in order to survive, learn to read their masters. Thus, the oppressed will be forced to follow the dictates and act on the knowledge of the dominant class, and so must understand their point of view. However, isn’t it also possible that there will be knowledge in the possession of the dominant class that will be unavailable to the oppressed? Part of the problem for any oppressed group is to gain access to the education and skills that the elite take for granted. Furthermore, the experience of oppression is oftentimes damaging. Not only does an impoverished social existence prevent access to education and knowledge, but it can also lead to misunderstandings, distortions, delusions, and mental incapacity. Thus, it seems that the feminist vision is necessary as a complement to render more complete the knowledge gathered on the basis of male experience, but not in all cases will it be less perverse or more correct.\textsuperscript{128}

Moreover, the analogy with Marxist epistemology breaks down on this point. Part of the reason for the objective superiority of the proletariat’s standpoint is that the proletariat, according to Marxist theory, is the universal class. As such, the proletariat represents the interests of society as a whole, and not just those of a particular segment of society. This fact is based upon Marx’s historical materialist analysis of capitalism, and its inevitable contradictions and crises. Capitalism is, according to the “science” of

\textsuperscript{128}Certaintly, the Lysenko affair has taught us this in the example of a misguided proletarian science. See Hilary Rose, “Hand, Brain, and Heart,” for a discussion of this episode in proletarian history.
historical materialism, doomed. The proletariat is the continuously expanding class, for as capitalism develops, the bourgeoisie, who are in competition with each other for profit, will continue to shrink in numbers as more and more former capitalists are forced to join the ranks of the working class. The proletariat thus represents the fate of the vast majority. Furthermore, the historical destiny of the proletariat is to abolish the antagonistic class structure altogether. The proletariat both represents and brings about the classless society, according to Marxist theory. But is there a corresponding “scientific” or theoretical analysis which renders the abolition of patriarchy inevitable? Without such, how can feminist standpoint theory claim that women’s interests are identical with the interests of society as a whole, in order to argue that the feminist standpoint is more comprehensive, and not merely equally legitimate?130

Thus, to believe in the superiority of the feminist standpoint requires the additional political commitment to increasing democracy by granting to the previously oppressed the power to speak and to be heard. The necessity of this political commitment will also be evident in Sandra Harding’s arguments for the necessity and legitimacy of feminist standpoint epistemology. Furthermore, Harding’s theoretical-critical method, as itself an instance of a standpoint approach, will demonstrate the necessary appeal on her part to a political rather than a purely theoretical ground. My discussion of Harding will therefore focus on the question of her critical method and its instantiation of the principles and failings of critique that I have discussed in the

129 It is not my aim in the dissertation to evaluate this claim. I merely want to point out that Marxist theory does have a theoretical basis for claiming the inevitability of an end to oppression, such that the class responsible for its end can be seen to be a universal class. My question is whether feminist theory can make an analogous claim.

130 As Ann Ferguson argues, women do meet the Marxist criteria for a class. These criteria include relations of exploitation, political cohesiveness, historical cohesiveness, domination relations, and lack of autonomy. See Blood at the Root, chapter 6. However, it is not clear from this analysis whether, as a class, women possess a privileged and superior epistemic standpoint, such that the real social relations are visible only to their viewpoint.
The Conflictual Nature of Feminist Empiricism

Sandra Harding’s argument for the necessity of a feminist standpoint epistemology begins with a critical examination of the alternative feminist epistemology—feminist empiricism. Feminist empiricism, like traditional empiricism, is a metatheory of scientific practice that espouses the empirical method and scientific objectivity, but that also claims that feminist inspired research more closely approximates the traditional empiricist ideals. This epistemological position arose in response to the increasing instances of feminist research in the natural and social sciences of the last few decades.\(^{131}\) With the increasing numbers of women in the sciences, hitherto unexamined research topics were and are now being investigated, yielding conclusions not previously known. One example of such a research topic is the existence of a sex/gender system. The sex/gender system is the system of male domination and control of women’s productive and reproductive labor that permeates society and oppresses women.\(^{132}\) In an early essay, Harding analyzes the reasons for the visibility of the sex/gender system only at this particular historical time.\(^{133}\) Why was this pervasive

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societal phenomenon not noticed by earlier social scientists? According to Harding, this is an important question for epistemology, but it cannot be asked within the traditional epistemologies. The existence of such a system had been invisible to scientists operating within the traditional epistemologies, according to Harding, because the basic tools and assumptions of these theories, as products of the social situatedness and biases of their agents, are inadequate to the task. Traditional empiricist, functionalist-relativist, and Marxist epistemologies were thus unable to identify the system of sex-gender oppression.

Again, in a later essay, Harding makes a similar point.\(^{134}\) Claims made by feminist scientists, guided by their political agenda, according to Harding, appear more objective than those made by traditional (male) scientists. Her epistemological question is how to explain this increased objectivity.

\[\ldots\] Some social scientists and biologists have made claims that clearly have been produced through research guided by feminist concerns. Many of these claims appear more plausible (better supported, more reliable, less false, more likely to be confirmed by evidence, etc.) than the beliefs they would replace. These claims appear to increase the objectivity of our understandings of nature and social life.\[\ldots\] These claims raise epistemological questions. How can politicized inquiry be increasing the objectivity of our explanations and understandings?\(^{135}\)

This same question guides Harding’s epistemological research in “Is There a Feminist Method?,”\(^{136}\) where she begins her inquiry with the “paradox” that politically engaged research yields greater objectivity in its results than does traditional research, which is

\[\begin{align*}
135\text{Harding “Feminist Justificatory Strategies,” page 190.}
136\text{Sandra Harding, “Is There a Feminist Method?” in Feminism & Methodology, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987). Harding uses this same strategy to argue the need for a specifically feminist epistemology throughout all of her writings.}
\end{align*}\]
supposedly free of political interest and bias. However, a basic problem in Harding’s critique arises here. Harding uses empiricism’s inability to explain the superiority of the feminist view as evidence for its inferiority to a more radical successor science—feminist standpoint theory. But Harding appears to be begging the question. She has not yet independently established the superiority of feminist research in general, but seems to take this superiority as a self-evident given. This method of proving legitimacy by assuming it, and then asking for an explanation, has been criticized already in the history of philosophy, when it was perceived by many to be Kant’s epistemological strategy.  

Although Harding’s attempt at justification may be satisfying to the already converted, it cannot prove that feminist generated research is more objective to the skeptic who doesn’t already believe it to be so. In fact, Harding readily admits this point. (While one need not find any particular claim more plausible than the beliefs it would replace, one must find some such feminist-inspired claim or other more plausible, less false, more likely to be confirmed by evidence, etc. in order to enter the discourse of this essay. It is the justification of this kind of claim that is at issue. If you cannot find any scientific claim generated by feminist-inspired research to be reasonable, then do not waste your time reading further!).

But in order to ground, explain, or justify the superior objectivity of feminist guided research, isn’t it rather necessary to “bracket” its apparent superiority and to try to inquire whether there are independently established grounds for believing that a feminist vision really is more comprehensive, more clear, more adequate to its task, than the supposedly “neutral” viewpoint of the tradition? After all, the old beliefs appeared to be the truth at the time they were proposed. (For example, it appears to many to be the natural order of things that women care for babies at home; that it is

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137I disagree with those who find Kant guilty of this in the Critique, (see chapter 2, above), however, it is certainly his method (at least of exposition) in the Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics, which was his more popular statement of his epistemology.

predominantly men, rather than women, who engage in business and politics; that the abstract principles of justice upon which modern, western jurisprudence relies must be applied equally regardless of context or relationship; that “man, the hunter,” was responsible for the advance of human civilization; that human subjectivity is most fully achieved in opposition to, rather than in connection with, others, etc.) Harding’s strategy thus appears circular, for it seems that she presupposes the superiority of the view which she ostensibly seeks to establish. However, Harding has not yet claimed that feminist conducted research is per se more objective than non-feminist guided research. In fact, feminist empiricism cannot establish this claim, which is one of the reasons that Harding believes that a standpoint epistemology makes better sense. All empiricism can claim so far is that some feminist inspired research is superior.

From the point of view of the superiority of some feminist-inspired research, Harding then goes on to critique the less radical attempt at justification for feminist scientific research given by feminist empiricism. The feminist empiricist legitimation strategy argues that “it is social biases—sexism and androcentrism—that are responsible for the false claims that have been made in biology and the social sciences.”139 These biases operate as “blinders,” making it impossible to perceive the full story of social reality, including the oppression of women and marginalized others. Liberatory social movements, like feminism, remove those blinders, thus allowing a clear view of social reality. Again, Harding is careful to point out the logic of this empiricist mode of legitimation. It is not the case, according to feminist empiricism, that the feminist bias itself guarantees greater correspondence with truth. According to Harding, “It is not that all feminist claims are automatically preferable because they are feminist; rather, when the results of such research show good empirical support, the fact

that they were produced through politically guided research should not count against them.”

Harding is rightly aware of the problems with this justificatory strategy. The superiority of feminist inspired research is here grounded in the fact that it produces results that are more in accord with the same norms of objectivity and truth of traditional empiricism. However, this cannot adequately explain the paradox of feminist research’s greater objectivity, for in other ways, this very success of feminist research flies in the face of traditional empiricist commitments. There are three basic problems which Harding identifies that prevent a feminist empiricism from being an adequate justificatory strategy. Firstly, feminist empiricism cannot accommodate the value of disinterested neutrality on the part of the scientific researcher. According to standard empiricism, the social identity of the scientist, and the context of discovery, are irrelevant to the matter of justification and truthfulness. But if, as feminist empiricism shows, a feminist viewpoint can yield greater objectivity in the results of its studies, this commitment to value neutrality cannot be held. Secondly, according to Harding, rigorous enforcement of empiricist methods doesn’t eliminate all social biases, especially those that enter research via the questions that form the research project. “. . . Feminist empiricism argues that an androcentric picture of nature and social life emerges from sciences that do not take feminist concerns seriously. . . Traditional empiricism does not direct researchers to locate their scientific projects in the same critical plane as their subject matters.”

Since researches do not adequately reflect upon the questions that they ask, biases can be present from the beginning of a research project which cannot

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be overcome via the answering of the biased question. Thirdly, feminist empiricists, according to Harding, have recognized that it is oftentimes the very following of the traditional empiricist norms and methods that lead to androcentric results. “... The particular methods and norms of the special sciences are themselves sexist and androcentric.”

It appears, from Harding’s analysis, that feminist empiricism wants to have it both ways—to hold onto the traditional empiricist standard of objectivity, holding that it is this standard alone that proves or grounds the superiority of its research, while insisting that it is only research guided by feminist concerns that meets that very standard of objectivity more readily than other “value-neutral” research. Both claims cannot be consistently held, for if it is merely the fact of increased objectivity that recommends feminist science as superior, the fact of its feminism should be irrelevant. As feminist empiricism argues, social biases are exactly the stumbling blocks in the way of a disillusioned vision of reality that resulted in the falsities of traditional empiricist male-conducted science. But if biases are a problem, why isn’t a feminist bias equally problematic? Feminist empiricism wants to hold that feminist research is more objective, but this claim cannot be upheld according to the theory of what makes empirical science lead to objectivity (in particular, researcher disinterestness). The problem with the feminist empiricist approach is that if, as feminist empiricism holds, traditional scientific norms are already adequate to truth, why is it only with a feminist perspective that greater truth has been achieved? These considerations lead Harding to reject feminist

empiricism as a successful justificatory strategy for feminist scientific research, and to seek a more radical epistemology that both abandons some, and modifies other, traditional empiricist norms and standards.

**Harding’s Strategy of Immanent Critique**

Harding clearly sees that feminist empiricism relies on its successful compliance with the already accepted norms and standards of good science. What is wrong with feminist empiricism is that its paradigm examples of good science also violate at least some of those norms, particularly the normative standard of value neutrality on the part of the researcher. And here we can see the way in which Harding’s rejection of feminist empiricism relies on a strategy of immanent critique. In her defense of the standpoint approach, Harding begins again with the alleged fact that feminist research projects yield more objective results than mainstream research does. However, from a traditional epistemological perspective, there appear to be solid reasons that Harding should not be permitted access to this traditional concept of objectivity. Since there are, as I’ve already pointed out, scientists who disagree that feminism’s claims are objectively superior to mainstream claims, Harding’s original premise is hardly uncontroversial, and is therefore inadequate as a firm premise for her further argument. Harding thus goes on to modify the traditional concept of objectivity to include the notion of researcher social situatedness. But if this is the case, then the success of feminist science at instantiating traditional objectivity (which Harding cites for her evidence of feminist science’s superiority) seems to be disingenuous. It was not the old concept of objectivity that feminist research instantiated, but the new one. Harding’s new concept of objectivity was present in the first instances of successful feminist inspired knowledge (like a Trojan Horse, those original feminist studies snuck the feminist values inside).
Although this may appear circular to the traditional empiricist epistemology, this circle may also, perhaps by other epistemological standards, be seen as non-vicious, and a legitimate mode of immanent critique, in its teasing out the presuppositions of what has been already accepted as true. Thus, Harding’s epistemological practice is itself in accord, not with traditional empiricist epistemology, but with the standpoint theory she articulates. She doesn’t shun her political commitment to feminism, but places it front and center in her research project. Thus Harding openly admits that she is attempting to find the reasons for, and not to prove the fact of, the success of feminist research.

Another way to look at this strategy is to see it as an instance of standard empirical practice. Harding observed an anomaly to the existing epistemological theory (i.e., the fact of some feminist-directed research’s greater objectivity), and then adjusted the theory accordingly. What she has thereby shown is that the old epistemology was inadequate to describe even standard scientific practice. Harding makes use of this interpretation in *Whose Science?, Whose Knowledge?.* Although traditional epistemologies have argued for the principle of researcher disinterestedness, in actual practice the giants of modern epistemology (Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant) have developed their theories in response to, and as explanations for, the historical changes in scientific knowledge gathering. According to Harding,

> When we look at the history of epistemology and philosophy of science, it is perfectly clear that the “Greats” in these fields are attempting to theorize adequately the historical changes in the kinds of beliefs that their age finds reasonable and the difficulty of appealing to conventional grounds to justify them. Thus, virtually all the leading epistemologists of the modern era attempt to make sense out of the difference in the ways scientific beliefs are generated and legitimated and the consequences of these differences for other kinds of belief, such as religious or political and social belief. Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant, and other philosophers are quite explicit about what they see as the social
causes of their problematics and the new kinds of standards of adequate belief they must keep in mind.\textsuperscript{144}

Thus, Harding sees herself as continuing the tradition. For Harding, epistemologies are explanations of the success of our knowledge-seeking activities. The modernist dream and conception of epistemology as providing firm foundation and certainty in response to skeptical questions, is not one she subscribes to. She rather sees her task as developing a meta-level explanation of what she already takes to be well established—namely the success of feminist inspired research in the natural and social sciences. She will do so insofar as she can with the already existing tools of science, and she will modify those tools and invent new ones as needed. Thus, as an immanent critic, she does not altogether give up the commitment to objectivity. To do so, she believes, could lead to relativism, and the forfeiting of the right to claim the superiority of feminist science. Thus, Harding is forced to play the critic’s game, which requires a balancing act between the traditional standards immanent to the tradition which she is critiquing, and the simultaneous development and modification of those standards to accommodate her theoretical needs.

Harding’s strategy of immanent critique is very Hegelian. As we have seen in Chapter Two of the dissertation, the development of a greater or more enlarged consciousness comes about via a realization of problems, tensions, or contradictions in the attitude of consciousness being studied. In an attempt to resolve those contradictions, a move is made to a higher-level theoretical orientation that explains the previous attitude as an appearance arising out of a limited perspective. This dialectical, critical pattern is first instantiated in feminist epistemology at the level of women scientists’ practice. The move from traditional science to feminist science was made

\textsuperscript{144}Harding, \textit{Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?}, pages 170-171.
necessary as women scientists reflected upon the conflicts between their own experiences, on the one hand, and the descriptions of social reality and the questions being asked by traditional scientific research, on the other. And as we have seen, Harding’s analysis follows a similar pattern. She first investigates feminist empiricism as a justificatory strategy, and is led to seek an alternative epistemological theory, on the grounds that feminist empiricism comes into conflict with some of traditional empiricism’s values. These conflicts require the move to a more radical justificatory strategy, one which will question more deeply into the fundamental values and central tenets of the traditional theory—feminist standpoint theory.

Harding thus criticizes feminist empiricism on the grounds that it is “too immanent,” i.e., too mired in the norms and values of male oriented science. In this way, Harding gains a degree of transcendence out of that which she is criticizing, as did Hegel as he critiqued each prior perspective or attitude of consciousness in the Phenomenology. But in so doing, does Harding, also like Hegel, gain too much “altitude” out of the totality of which she is a part? Does Harding’s “strong objectivity” assume an illegitimately too transcendent normativity? Or, on the other hand, and as some postmodern feminists will argue, isn’t an appeal to the value of objectivity merely an echoing of the universalist claim and desire of mainstream/malestream science? In which case, Harding’s position is not too transcendent, but rather still too immanent in the tradition? Just what does Harding mean by “strong objectivity,” and how does it differ from the dominant conception of scientific objectivity?

The “Terrestrial Fulcrum” of “Strong Objectivity”

According to Harding, the standard notion of objectivity is internally inconsistent,
as it is both too narrowly and too broadly conceived.\textsuperscript{145} Traditional scientific objectivity, in its application only to the context of justification, and not the context of discovery, cannot eliminate from research those social biases that are held by the entire research community. Obviously, in cases where that research community exists in a stratified society, and consists of the dominant racial, socio-economic, gender group, their biases concerning marginalized groups will not be recognized or eliminated by their peers. Thus, objectivity, as traditionally conceived, is too narrow. Traditional scientific objectivity is, however, simultaneously too broad, according to Harding, as it claims that all social biases and interests should be eliminated from objective scientific research. This was, as we have seen, the violation that disqualified feminist empiricism as an adequate feminist epistemology. Harding’s proposal is to alter the traditional conception of objectivity to include the context of discovery—to place the researcher’s social biases and questions in the same “critical plane” as the object of study, thus “strengthening” the concept of objectivity to accommodate the fact, as she sees it, of politically motivated research yielding better, more empirically supported results.

We can see that Harding’s critical methodological strategy manifests both the immanent and transcendent aspects we have come to expect in all modes of critique. In fact, her attempt at modifying and extending the traditional notion of objectivity to accommodate the needs of feminist science is similar to the attempt by Horkheimer and Adorno, discussed in Chapter One above, of preserving the desirable aspects of the concept of rationality, while modifying those which were seen as detrimental to the project of continued Enlightenment. Harding’s “strong objectivity” similarly shores up what she sees as progressive in the standard concept, by extending the concept to include norms governing the context of discovery and the researcher’s state of mind.

\textsuperscript{145}See Harding, \textit{Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?}, pages 143-144.
Methodologically, Harding’s critique itself is guided by her modification of standard empiricist norms. She adheres to traditional empiricist methodology as she accepts the “givenness” of feminist inspired research’s superiority, and then she modifies the epistemological theory to accommodate the observation of her “given.” This is standard empiricist practice.

What is not so standard, and what she believes to constitute a transcendence out of the tradition, however, is her extension and modification of the concept of objectivity. According to Harding, it is necessary for her ideal of increased objectivity to place the researcher’s values and interests “in the same critical plane” as the object of study. She, herself, accomplishes this. Thus, Harding, unlike traditional empiricists, admits that her “given” is already theory-laden, and that this theory-ladenness is politically motivated. She takes as premise the superiority of feminist research. Although she claims that this research is more objective than traditionally inspired allegedly “value-neutral” research, she then uses this fact to argue that the concept of objectivity is inadequate. But we can quite clearly see here that Harding’s critique is not purely epistemic. For, if traditional objectivity as it stands is inadequate because it cannot accommodate the fact of feminist research’s greater objectivity, then she must be relying on something other than objectivity at the beginning of her inquiry to tell her that feminist research is superior. This something else can only be the political value of allowing greater participation of previously marginalized people in the power discourse of science. Harding’s epistemological grounding of feminist standpoint theory, in a way similar to the critical theorists we have previously examined, is not entirely epistemic-theoretical, but must be seen as equally political.

Furthermore, this extension of the concept of objectivity is hardly original, nor is it distinctly feminist. For example, this epistemological development constitutes one of the
main contributions of the phenomenologists, Husserl and Heidegger, as well as the hermeneuticists, Gadamer, and Dilthey whose “Verstehen” philosophy elaborated just such a theory of researcher interestedness and its necessary consequences for and involvement with the results of research. Thus, Harding’s attempt at developing an epistemology that is distinctively and uniquely feminist fails. (Although it may still be true that there are scientific truths that are distinctly feminist, the methodology of their attainment is in accord with the newer modifications of the tradition, such as hermeneutics and phenomenology.) It is not only feminists who are capable of reflecting upon their own values and presuppositions. In addition, as I have argued above, unless the feminist standpoint is taken to be not just complementary to research conducted from other standpoints, but necessarily superior, the most we can conclude from the work of Harding and others is that the epistemology required by feminism is merely one type of alternative epistemology, but not, perhaps, the only epistemically legitimate one. Although I agree with the feminist epistemologists that the sum of human knowledge will benefit from additional research based on the lives of women and other marginalized groups, and that it is important to extend the jurisdiction of the concept of objectivity to cover not just the context of justification but also the researcher’s motives and biases, I do not think that Harding has made the case that the desirability of these moves is purely epistemic. Nor has she made the case that a feminist standpoint will necessarily yield superior epistemic results. Thus, the choice to adopt a specifically feminist epistemology must be made on ethical and political, rather than purely

146In her latest work, Harding admits that the standpoints of other oppressed groups offer equally legitimate knowledges. Thus Harding fails to justify the superiority of the feminist standpoint over that of any other oppressed group, but, more importantly, my point above is that she cannot even justify the standpoint of the oppressed over that of the dominant group, if all she can prove is that researcher interestedness must be part of the object of study. See Sandra Harding, Is Science Multi-Cultural, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
Subject and Object in Feminist Critique

As we have seen, Harding’s attempt at constructing a theory of knowledge adequate to feminist experience centered on reformulating the concept of objectivity. Her relative neglect of developing a critique of the subjective side of the knowledge-formula led her to accept, without sufficient epistemic ground, the superiority of feminist conducted research. This lack in Harding’s view of the subject of knowledge also opened her to the charge of essentialism for her uncritical view of women as possessing skills, attitudes, and values which enable them to have superior insight into social and natural reality. Thus Harding can be seen to remain too immanent in the patriarchal order, too accepting of the universalizing tendency of patriarchal reason to abstract from important differences among subjects of knowledge (and agents of action as well). Although she attempted to adjust the view of the subject’s role in knowledge-creation by arguing for the feminist perspective as an important guarantor of objectivity, she did not question the possibility of the traditional conception of a subject of knowledge who is ultimately, once social biases are accounted for, capable of perceiving an independently existing reality in an undistorted manner. Harding merely replaced the traditional male subject of knowledge with a female or a feminist subject, and “corrected” the traditional concept of objectivity to allow for this. Thus, Harding operates with an old-fashioned epistemological dualism of subject and object, and her theoretical revolution consists of adding value-interestedness to the formula which connects these disparate epistemic terms. In this respect, Harding is less radical and revolutionary than her classic standpoint theorist predecessors, Marx and Lukacs, whose fundamental epistemological position denies dualism by theorizing objectivity as itself a product of
the constructive laboring activities of theory and action. According to Lukacs, it is a basic mistake of bourgeois thought to equate the objective with the immediate; rather the object of knowledge and action is always necessarily mediated by theoretical and practical activity. The objective reality is constructed by such activity and does not pre-exist it, as Harding’s static analysis seems to imply. For Lukacs and Marx it is this mediated construction of reality itself that allows the proletariat standpoint its privileged grasp of the reality. The proletariat can grasp the objectively existing social relations because the proletariat has constructed them and has the power to terminate them.

Marxist epistemology theorized the relation between subject and object as dialectically mediate in a way that Harding does not. Thus Harding loses another aspect of the possible relation between knower and known which could account for the superiority of the feminist standpoint which she seeks to establish.147

But even Harding’s new concept of objectivity is too uncritical, still too dependent upon the standards and values of the tradition, to be sufficient to the revolutionary project of constructing a theory of knowledge which escapes the problems of the traditional biases, but remains theoretically justified or grounded in its legitimacy. For, if “strong objectivity” is simply traditional objectivity plus value interestedness, as turns out to be the case for Harding’s reformulation, what could this mean? Either a naive realism is still presupposed, except that now women (or, more precisely, feminists) can more adequately access the objective, universal, unchanging reality;148 or the perspectivism of

147This criticism of Harding can perhaps be corrected by appealing to the work of other feminist standpoint theorists. Thus, for example, Hartsock and Smith can perhaps accommodate a more dialectical relation between feminist subject and the really existing social relations. Part of the problem for Harding, I believe, is that she wants her standpoint epistemology to apply equally well to natural, and not only social, scientific knowledge. This gives her a more difficult case, since it is more readily acceptable to view human social relations as the products of human activity and interpretation. A more thorough inquiry is here in order which would examine the grounds for proletarian natural science and their applicability to the feminist situation.

148Jane Flax also sees this implication of Harding’s position and argues that standpoint
women’s position points to a changing, fluid structure for reality. In the former case, the
traditional concept of objectivity remains untouched and the strength of Harding’s
argument is concentrated solely in the greater comprehensiveness and perspicacity of
the feminist viewpoint. Thus, Harding’s new objectivity would simply fall back upon her
reassignment of the appropriate subject of knowledge (i.e., feminists) and she will now
be open to the postmodernist critique of traditional concepts of subjectivity and the
charge of essentialism. In the latter case, an epistemological and ontological relativism
results, for if women’s reality is merely different from men’s, on what basis can we argue
that one is superior? Thus we have an inability to ground theoretically the feminist
superiority—the superiority can, at best, be assumed for ethical/political reasons.¹⁴⁹

Harding’s position thus succumbs to the critical dilemma, as her position oscillates
between a too transcendent modernist objectivism, or a self-refuting relativism.

¹⁴⁹It may appear that if we assume a “coherence” rather than a correspondence theory of
truth, Harding’s claim for the superiority of the feminist perspective can be upheld, and
relativism avoided. Indeed it seems plausible that this is what Harding herself envisions.
Nonetheless, assuming a coherence theory of truth does not completely avoid an appeal to
such nontheoretical standards of justification as greater inclusiveness in discourses of power for
those who have been oppressed. Also, although a coherence theory can account for the
normative preference of greater comprehensiveness, if we assume an incommensurability
between the perspectives of feminists and those of the tradition, coherence theories cannot
supply a decision method. What is needed, if a coherence theory is to be made to work, is an
explanation of the objective and necessary overlap between the feminist perspective and that of
the tradition; and as we shall see, this is what I argue Irigaray supplies. But in the case of
Harding, the superiority of the feminist perspective relies upon the claim that it can see
everything that the traditional perspective can see, and more; thus it reduces back to the first
pole of the dilemma that grounds Harding’s work in the belief in women as a special subject
class, resulting in an uncritical notion of objectivity. I believe that this general line of reasoning
can be made to work, once the theoretical account is given that demonstrates the objective
necessity of the greater comprehensiveness of the feminist perspective. Thus some type of
coherence theory is the best we can have. On a traditional desire for a theoretical and formal
ground for the possibility of critical knowledge, standpoint theory, like the other critical theories
we have examined thus far, comes up short. In fact, my conclusion will be that it is time that we
give up the dream for a narrowly rational ground for human thinking, knowing and acting, and
that we accept the necessary implication of our standards for thinking in political and ethical
values. It is my further contention that feminist theory can help us do just that.
On a positive note, what we have learned from Harding’s attempt is the necessity of the proper perspective for the activity of critique. As we have seen, feminists are (although, I would argue, not uniquely) capable of formulating critical questions and proposing alternate visions, since they are directly acquainted with contradictions, tensions, and gaps in the accepted theories of reality. The feminist experience is quite often at odds with the stories being told about reality, so that feminists must develop a bifurcated and alienated consciousness. This is hardly a new position, and for centuries it has been a commonplace of dialectical philosophy (from Plato through Hegel to Marx) that the starting point of critical thought is in the identification of contradictions and the attempt to overcome and resolve them through theoretical (and, practical, in the case of Marx) development. Furthermore, as we have seen in Chapter One above, an essential aspect of critique is the identification of a crisis in the object of critique which leads to the development and employment of a criterion of adequacy for the new theory (action or institution). What makes feminism so promising as a critical orientation is just this change of perspective which allows the possibility of an alternative vision. When this vision is truly other and is fully sustained as such, it can result in radically new instances of knowledge, which in turn can lead to radically new criteria for what counts as knowledge. Thus, not only has feminism’s critique of the traditional (male) subject of knowledge produced new instances of knowledge (e.g., those mentioned previously in this chapter, such as the existence of the sex/gender system or sex/affective labor), but feminism’s epistemological contributions to the concept of the subject of knowledge should also yield a new concept of what there is to know (a new ontology) and of what

150This seems to be an echoing of the traditional Cartesian methodology. Descartes identified an instance of certain knowledge, and then extracted from that instance the criteria for its certainty. Similarly, as Harding argues, feminists can produce new instances of knowledge; the task is then to analyze those instances (as Harding attempted to do) and to make explicit what it is about them that accounts for their being knowledge.
counts as knowing it. (Harding’s “strong objectivity” failed to meet this expectation, and thus failed at overcoming the terms of the critical dilemma.)

Perhaps, however, another deeper look at the subjective side of the knowledge equation can yield some suggestions for the desiderata of a theory of the epistemological object that can help us overcome the problem of grounding critique. I believe that Irigaray can be seen as providing some of what we need to accomplish this task. Irigaray’s interpretation of the subject theorizes women as radically “other” than the traditional subject of patriarchal knowledge and power. In so doing, she too invokes the charge of essentialism. Perhaps, however, feminists have been too hasty in dismissing essentialism as (an essential?) crime or sin against the radicalism of feminist critique. In fact, it has been argued that anti-essentialism is itself essentialist, for in order to dismiss essentialism, it is first necessary to define it.¹⁵¹ Isn’t it then possible that the use of essence—the notion of what a thing is—is required in order to theorize at all?¹⁵² Perhaps there can be an essentialism which is “strategic” rather than metaphysical. If so, might this type of essentialism further the feminist project in the face of the critical dilemma of finding a justified theory which is sufficiently radical? I now turn to Irigaray in hopes of answering these questions.


¹⁵²Interestingly, this idea is explicitly expressed in Plato’s Gorgias, where it is argued that without definitions, distinctions and universals, the known world would collapse into indistinguishable matter, according to the principle of Anaxagoras. See Plato’s Gorgias, 465d.
CHAPTER 4

IS POSTMODERN FEMINISM THE ANSWER?

What poses problems in reality turns out to be justified by a logic that has already ordered reality as such. Nothing escapes the circularity of this law. . . . Female sexualization is thus the effect of a logical requirement, of the existence of a language that is transcendent with respect to bodies, which would necessitate, in order—nevertheless—to become incarnate, "so to speak," taking women one by one. Take that to mean that woman does not exist, but that language exists. That woman does not exist owing to the fact that language—a language—rules as master, and that she threatens—as a sort of "prediscursive reality"?—to disrupt its order (Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One).

In the last chapter, we began to examine the way in which the critical dilemma arises for feminist theory. Sandra Harding, as we have seen, distinguishes three different epistemological approaches to the critical dilemma and the problem of justifying feminist theory: feminist empiricism; feminist standpoint theory; and postmodern feminism. This tripartite division is in keeping with the work of much other feminist theory which seems to maintain a similar schematic division, depending upon the emphasis or aspect of feminist theory being categorized. 153 What all these

153For instance, earlier generation feminist theorists held to a categorization scheme that consisted of radical feminism, socialist feminism, and beyond; or there was the scheme of equity (or liberal) feminism, difference feminism, and postmodernist feminism; or according to Kathy Ferguson, we now have rationalist feminism, cosmic feminism, and linguistic feminism; or as C. DiStefano sees it, rationalist feminism; anti-rationalist feminism; and postmodern feminism. See Alison Jagger, Feminist Politics and Human Nature, (New Jersey: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983); Kathy E. Ferguson, The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Christine DiStefano, “Dilemmas of Difference: Feminism, Modernity, and Postmodernism,” in Linda Nicholson, ed.
classification schemes seem to hold in common is the third category of postmodern feminism. This third category seems in every case to be a catch-all category for theory which doesn’t fit the previous two, much better understood and more fully analyzed, categories. Obviously, it is this third category that is in most desperate need of clarification. In fact, it seems that most work thus far has characterized this third category not in terms of its positive theoretical attributes, but rather in opposition to or negation of that which it is not—namely modernist or enlightenment values concerning the nature of the subject, the object of knowledge and action (e.g., nature and society) and the tools with which we know (e.g., language, reason). Even the name, postmodern, designates a relational, rather than a positive or absolute, identity in terms of a transcendence or succession.

Thus, for example, Jane Flax has summarized postmodernism as announcing or holding the death of Man, History, and Metaphysics, as these terms have been understood according to their importance for the Enlightenment view of a unified, autonomous subject endowed with reason, capable of knowing the true story of history and the hidden, universal truths of natural and social reality. But what can be the result of these “deaths,” especially for feminism, which seems to rely fundamentally on its ability to argue in the name of progress, reason, and justice for the emancipation of an identifiable social group, whose subjectivity and hence correlative rights have been denied? Can there be postmodernist feminist critique, or is feminist critique necessarily embedded in the modernist tradition?

Immanence and Transcendence in Irigaray’s Postmodern/Difference Feminism


According to Rosemarie Tong, postmodern feminism takes off from Simone de Beauvoir’s claim that woman is the “other” of the masculinist order. Certainly this claim has been instantiated in the work of Luce Irigaray, who sees woman’s otherness as the necessary mirror that reflects the male image back to him and thus assures him of his legitimacy and superiority. Thus, most commentators see Irigaray as an essentialist, since she theorizes the differences between men and women, the necessity of those differences for the upholding of the patriarchal order, and the apparent grounding of those differences, oftentimes, in women’s biology. It would therefore seem that it is mistaken to identify Irigaray as a postmodernist; however, I believe that her critical methodology demonstrates postmodernist principles, in spite of her (alleged) essentialism and affinity with the position of the “difference” or radical feminists. Since it is her critical methodology that I am interested in, I am classifying her as a postmodernist critic for the purposes of this study. As we shall see, the greatest influences on Irigaray’s work, as reflected in her methodology, come from post-structuralist and post-modernist sources; Irigaray employs Lacanian psychoanalytic principles and strategies; Heideggerian and Nietzschean anti-metaphysical critiques; Derridian-style deconstruction; and linguistic and aesthetic rhetorical tactics and tropes, all in her provocative feminist reading of the history of western philosophical and psychoanalytic theory.

Furthermore, Irigaray’s critical target is not simply the content of theoretical


156Such feminists are usually opposed to the “equity” feminists who see feminism’s main task as the elimination of privileges based on (alleged) gender differences. The so-called “difference’ feminists stress the ways in which women are different from men, and include such figures as Mary Daly, Carol Gilligan, and Luce Irigaray. These two divisions represent the basic and constant dichotomy in feminist theory, as mentioned previously in the discussion of the tripartite classification schemes; the third category typically being reserved for the less understood “catch-all” category of postmodernist feminism.
descriptions and characterizations of women and gender; her focus is more precisely understood as a critique of modernist representationalism itself. For Irigaray, the very conceptual structure, values, and methods of theory-construction embody a masculinist perspective. In this respect, she is both a deeply radical feminist and an anti-modernist or post-modernist thinker. In addition, her “essentialism” must be understood to operate at the “meta” or theoretical level. In critiquing male-centered theory about women, Irigaray is attempting, for strategic purposes, to re-define women for and within the traditional theory. Her elucidation of woman’s essence begins immanently within the traditional theory which already essentializes women, and critiques that essence by revealing the ways in which it contradicts what is said about it. For Irigaray, the notion of an “essence” or “concept” of woman is itself intrinsic to the male representational order, and, as such, is not in any absolute or objective way valid. I believe that Irigaray knows quite well that in the concrete (or “ontic,” to borrow a term from Heidegger) way, it is women who exist; not essences. But to do battle at the theoretical level, essence may well prove to be an “essential” tool.

As we shall see more clearly below, Irigaray’s understanding of the patriarchal situation in which women find themselves poses the critical dilemma for her in a profoundly challenging way. For Irigaray, following Lacan, language, the entire representational-symbolic order, is itself male-centered; thus any use of language by feminists would seem to be always already co-opted. Given Irigaray’s identification of

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Irigaray makes this point clear in the following passage from an interview:

“Can anyone, can I, elaborate another, a different, concept of femininity? There is no question of another concept of femininity.

To claim that the feminine can be expressed in the form of a concept is to allow oneself to be caught up again in a system of “masculine” representations, in which women are trapped in a system of meaning which serves the auto-affection of the (masculine) subject. If it is really a matter of calling “femininity into question, there is still not need to elaborate another “concept”—unless a woman is renouncing her sex and wants to speak like me” This Sex Which Is Not One (p.122-123).
the linguistic order as phallocentric, how does she avoid the critic’s dilemma with respect to the totality of language? Since, according to the precepts of this order, as Irigaray uncovers them, women’s speech is necessarily either imitative or “hysterical,” how can she herself assume the subject position as the author of critique which expresses the truth about women? As Dianne Chisholm puts it, 

. . . why does she mime so perfectly those projects, projections, productions, contraphobias of phallogocentric discourse, why does she mirror so readily the ‘woman’ of philosophy and of psychoanalysis, why does she lend her writing to the re-production of theory in seeming complicity with masculine desire? Is she suggestible? Hysterical? Does she herself not entertain a vicious circle when as a woman she enters the circles of philosophy and psychoanalysis where “woman” (if Irigaray is correct) functions as a trope of female absence and negation to constitute the figurative illusion of male presence and autonomy? In entering these circles, does Irigaray not, like the philosopher/analyst, take this “woman” too literally to be the universal—symbolic, ontological, historical—(non)representative of women, and, consequently, like the hysteric, resign herself to being spoken for, to a mutism of miming an imposed femininity? In other words, does Irigaray not mime the philosopher/analyst as a woman who has been displaced by the discourse that she speaks, forgetting that this “woman” is also a mime? 

In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray offers us a reading of the history of western theory (especially of the feminine) from an alternative perspective—that which has been defined as object and “other,” rather than from the point of view of the traditional (male) subject of representation. Thus Irigaray’s central methodological metaphor in this text is the image of the speculum, the curved mirror which reflects but distorts, and which is necessary to the examination (by male medical science) of the curved contours of women’s genitalia. This image of the speculum indicates Irigaray’s

understanding of the importance of the perspective of the other for performing critique, thus Irigaray subsumes Harding’s point about the necessity of an appropriate (feminist) perspective. But already in the image of the speculum Irigaray encodes more than Harding theorized. For the speculum is not a flat mirror capable of representing the same reality that the masculine order theorized (only incompletely, according to Harding’s theory). The reality itself will be of another kind. Given this dependence on perspective, I would like to interpret Irigaray’s postmodernism as an elaboration of, rather than in opposition to, standpoint theory. For Irigaray, the feminine perspective, if it can be developed (and this is a big “if,” given her take on the patriarchal nature of the symbolic), can provide an alternative to the traditional order.

Irigaray’s speculum turns the tables on the tradition, inserting into the text of the western canon the instrument of reflection wielded by the feminine, rather than the masculine, as subject. She thus simultaneously reminds us that the traditional male story is also a representation or reflection, and, as such, an interpretation rather than a direct perception of reality. Furthermore, Irigaray shows us that the male-authored story is not the only possible one. *Speculum* can thus be seen as an example of what Seyla Benhabib calls “defetishizing critique,”¹⁶⁰ for the legitimacy of the traditional story is cast in doubt by the demonstration of another possible interpretation. This use of the metaphor of the mirror also alludes to the style of Derridian deconstruction, as Irigaray, like Derrida, attempts to read the “tain” or other side of the standard mirror of representation.¹⁶¹ Like Derrida, Irigaray will examine the standard operations of

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¹⁶⁰ See Chapter One for the characterization of this type of critique, which merely lays out the possibility of an alternative, thus refuting the assumption of necessary universality of the position being critiqued.

reflection to find their necessary ground in that which they deny, repress, and oppose. Thus the male culture’s reading of female sexuality will be exposed as necessarily dependant upon female desire and functions. Irigaray thus begins *Speculum* with a reading of Freudian theory, the most contemporary and accomplished of the theories of the feminine that she critiques in the text, and ends *Speculum* with a reading of Plato’s parable of the cave, which she interprets as a story of the original denial of the feminine on the part of reason. Irigaray's reversal of the traditional chronological order, in “deconstructing” Freud first and Plato last, can be seen as her attempt to “unravel” the metaphysical theoretical tradition beginning with the already woven tapestry of the present and pulling on a single thread until she comes to the original “stitch” in the complex image of the Platonic cave.

**The Platonic Womb of Theory**

Irigaray reinterprets Plato’s cave parable as a flight from the maternal, thus demonstrating the radical reversal of meaning which can be achieved via a switch of perspective. Furthermore, in taking on Plato, Irigaray also critiques the entire philosophical tradition, for Platonic philosophy is considered the beginning, the origin, the womb of philosophy. And this point of origin for philosophical thinking, for reason’s evolutionary dialectic out of the darkness of illusion, can be seen as encapsulated in Plato’s parable of the cave. Thus Plato’s cave parable functions for Irigaray in a manner similar to the Odysseus narrative’s function for Adorno and Horkheimer. The cave is the story of the beginning of western reason. Irigaray thus reads Plato's cave as a metaphor for the womb (“hystera”), but according to Irigaray, Plato inverts this womb. The neck of the womb is at the back, the back wall is in the front, and the opening out of the womb slopes upward. The significance of this inversion is clear. The dependence on the
maternal, as the true origin of life (and of reason), is denied. Furthermore, the cave is revealed by Plato to be a place of copies, representations, and simulacra which, like a conjurer’s trick, mirrors and mimics reality, but is not itself the real. The concept of reversal is again at play, as it is inherent in the operation of a mirror to reverse the image. Thus, Irigaray critiques not just Platonic idealism, but also the operation of representationalism upon which the traditional philosophical quest for truth relies.

This entrance to the cave takes the form of a long passage, corridor, neck, conduit, leading upward, toward the light or the sight of day, and the whole of the cave is oriented in relation to this opening. Upward—this notation indicates from the very start that the Platonic cave functions as an attempt to give an orientation to the reproduction and representation of something that is always already there in the den. The orientation functions by turning everything over, by reversing, and by pivoting around axes of symmetry. From high to low, from low to high, from back to front, from anterior to opposite, but in all cases from a point of view in front of or behind something in this cave, situated in the back. Symmetry plays a decisive part here—as projection, reflection, inversion, retroversion—and you will always already have lost your bearings as soon as you set foot in the cave; it will turn your head, set you walking on your hands, though Socrates never breathes a word about the whole mystification, of course. This theatrical trick is unavoidable if you are to enter into the functioning of representation (Speculum, page 244).

Irigaray shows in this essay that the Platonic representational economy is based on a mimetic doubling and a reversal of reality. Furthermore, as Irigaray points out, the cave functions as a “theatrical arena” for the action. Irigaray therefore reveals that the work of western representationalism, far from being natural, has been “staged.” In addition, this staging involves the control of what the prisoners are able to see and discuss. Thus, vision and speech are shown to be the primary means of circumscribing the real in the economy of Platonic metaphysics. But even here, Irigaray shows us that the repressed feminine asserts itself, as she points out the necessity of a background of
silence which allows for the voices of the prisoners to echo. This background points
metaphorically to the necessity of the feminine principle which, insofar as it is denied
voice, serves as silent medium and setting for the male symbolic economy. Irigaray’s
deconstructive technique here reveals what is casually passed off as unimportant in
Plato’s account (i.e., the offhand remark that some of the prisoners talk, while other
remain silent) to be of utmost importance in the critical task of mining that which has
been buried beneath the surface of representation.

Thus Irigaray’s deconstructive technique is simultaneously a psychoanalysis of
the metaphysical tradition. Like psychoanalysis, this critical method cannot be
understood solely as a theoretical intervention, but is also essentially a therapeutic
practice. Irigaray conducts therapy on the tradition, and like any good therapist, one of
her basic techniques is to listen to the symptoms described by her patient. These
symptoms—the contradictions, gaps, and desperate attempts to cover over that which
has been repressed—thus will themselves supply the new standards, values and
concepts which can then be used to structure the new economy toward which Irigaray is
working. These values will therefore include a return to the concrete, the dark and the
earth, to find what has been buried there, and to listen to the significance of silence.

Freud’s Libidinal Economy

Irigaray’s development of the female (feminist) perspective elaborates a
characterization of women as a by-product of her reading of the male tradition’s theory
of women. The “essence” which Irigaray attributes to women is one which already
belongs to women according to the masculinist tradition. Thus her “strategic
essentialism” functions as immanent critique, for it works from within the already
existing theory. Irigaray uncovers and remarks upon the places in the traditional theory
of women where women, even as defined by that theory, don’t fit. Irigaray thus reads the gaps and contradictions as symptoms of the repression, and allows these places to become opportunities for understanding a different economy of desire—of motivation, experience and pleasure. But it is important to note that the possibility and structuring concepts of this alternative economy are already presupposed in the tradition’s unconscious. Thus, where the traditional Freudian theory explicitly categorizes in terms of unity and duality, woman must be denied and repressed, for she is neither one nor two. Her sexuality is always in contact with itself, for her genitals comprise two lips which touch each other.

... woman’s autoeroticism is very different from man’s. In order to touch himself, man needs an instrument: his hand, a woman’s body, language. ... And this self-caressing requires at least a minimum of activity. As for woman, she touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity. Woman “touches herself” all the time, and moreover no one can forbid her to do so, for her genitals are formed of two lips in continuous contact. Thus, within herself, she is already two—but not divisible into one(s)—that caress each other.\footnote{162}{Luce Irigaray, \textit{This Sex Which Is Not One}, translated by Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), page 24.}

To the male, her genitals yield the horror of a “nothing to be seen,” yet this horror attests to the existence of an act of repression, for if the feminine genitals were indeed simply nothing, there would be no horror. Thus, Irigaray reads “the blind spot” of Freud’s theory, which is his understanding of the nature of the feminine. For Freud (and the entire psychoanalytic tradition which he founded), women can only be understood on the male model. This misunderstanding leads Freudian theory into various contradictions and gaps, which Irigaray identifies. These “gaps” include the following.\footnote{163}{See Irigaray, \textit{Speculum}, “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry,” pages 11 -133.} Because the male libidinal economy is the only one recognized by Freud, feminine
anatomy can be seen only as “lack” or deficiency; feminine desire can only be envy for the “superior” male organ; feminine sexual function can only be maternal. True feminine desire and pleasure cannot be recognized or understood on this model, for they differ radically from the male “norm” which supplies the categories, values and structuring concepts for the understanding of sexuality in general.

Another basic contradiction in Freudian theory that Irigaray identifies centers on the thesis of penis envy. Most obviously, and as many feminist theorists have pointed out, it seems absurd and unfounded to assume that the little girl will consider her genitals “inferior,” rather than merely different. After all, they give her great pleasure and should therefore be a valued part of her body. It is only according to an already presupposed valorization of both the penis and the specular\textsuperscript{164} that feminine genitals could be considered less valuable than the male’s. Freud, in fact, betrays this presupposition and desire by attributing the little girl’s alleged penis envy to the phallic phase of sexual development. But in this phase, according to Freud’s theory, “the little girl is a little boy,” that is to say that the girl’s libidinal development is at this point exactly the same as the boy’s, centered on the clitoris, which for Freud is simply the penis substitute. Why then should the girl envy what she believes she already has? Irigaray sees the answer to this question to lie, not in the girl’s desire, but in Freud’s.

Is the primitive, or most primitive, character of “penis-envy” not an essential factor in establishing the primacy of the male organ? In making the phallus necessarily the archetype for sex? The primal sex? And making the penis the best representational equivalent of the Idea of sex? There can only be one desire: the desire to ensure domination by greed, by appetite for appropriation. If anything were to contradict this desire—the little girl’s pleasures, for example—the whole economy of sexual affects, and affectations, would have to be

\textsuperscript{164}That the visible is over-valued in the masculine representational system is a basic theme of Irigaray’s, which is lent support by the etymological connection between “theory” from the Greek, ‘\textit{theoria}’, and “vision”.

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reinterpreted. And it is difficult to predict where a shift in the attribution of sexual
powers might lead. But the misprisions needed to maintain the established order
lead one to suspect that such an operation might take us far (Speculum, p. 58).

There are a number of additional contradictions that Irigaray identifies in Freud’s
theory. For one thing, traditional Freudian theory can understand the activity of breast
feeding only by assimilating it to the category of production. Quite obviously, this
assimilation in no way captures a woman’s experience, which, according to Irigaray,
involves a great deal of pleasure. Once again, women’s pleasure is not recognized. This
lack of recognition of female pleasure/experience is again reflected in Freud’s notion of
“passive aims.” Although Freud claims to reject the stereotypical active/passive
distinction for sexual difference, he reintroduces it with his notion of passive aims. Since
feminine sexuality cannot fit the male model, it is seen as orientating itself toward
passive sexual goals, rather than as challenging the active/passive dichotomy.
Furthermore, the teleological nature of male sexuality is assumed to apply to female
sexuality as well. Freud never considers the possibility that the very notion of aims or
goals may neither structure nor adequately capture the feminine sexual experience in
the way it does the masculine. Another theoretical glitch in the Freudian story comes
with his claim that the evolution to femininity is a “struggle,” but at the same time, Freud
holds that the female “constitution,” if followed naturally, leads to femininity. Why then
the inevitable struggle? 165

All of the above contradictions can be seen as presupposing the masculine need
for “sameness” and the inability to recognize difference. Irigaray makes excellent critical
use of this presupposition to identify a characteristic of the male order that can only be
received by that tradition with horror. The masculine desire for sameness indicates a
presupposed homosexuality.

Thus Freud discovers—in a sort of blind reversal of repressions—certain variously disguised cards that are kept preserved or stored away and that lie beneath the hierarchy of values of the game, of all the games: the desire for the same, for the self-identical, the self (as) same, and again of the similar, the alter ego and, to put it in a nutshell, the desire for the auto... the homo... the male, dominates the representational economy. “Sexual difference” is a derivation of the problematics of sameness, it is, now and forever, determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation, of the same (Speculum, pp. 26-27).

Irigaray’s Strategy of Mimesis

Thus Irigaray’s critical strategy involves the traditional critical style that we have already seen in previous critical theorists (most explicitly, in Adorno and Horkheimer) of letting the contradictions speak for themselves. But there is also another way in which Irigaray’s critical strategy operates. Irigaray mimes her object. She imitates and reproduces at a higher theoretical level the very contradictions that she finds. For example, Irigaray’s critique of Freud can be seen as a mimetic repetition of one aspect of the psychoanalytic theory that she critiques. According to the “castration complex” the little boy is overcome with feelings of fear once he catches sight of the “nothing to be seen” of the female genitals. The boy experiences this visual revelation as a threat to the cathexis he has attached to his own genitals. This feeling of threat experienced at the recognition of an alternative possibility for what had previously been thought to be the universal condition can be seen as similar to the condition evoked by what I have been, following Seyla Benhabib, calling “defetishizing critique.” In analyzing this aspect of traditional Freudian theory, Irigaray simultaneously points out the deep-rooted reasons for resistance on the part of the male-centered symbolic order. She repeats at the theoretical level an unveiling of an alternative libidinal economy. Just as the boy’s
glimpse of the female genitals was traumatic for him, as it indicated the possibility of castration, so the glimpse of another possible libidinal economy, provided by Irigaray, threatens the male-centered representational economy in its self-conceit as universal truth. This miming is a form of immanent critique, for Irigaray takes so seriously Freud’s theoretical story that she raises its truth to the level of its effect on her very capacity to speak, shaping what she is able to say. The only way she can speak her feminine alterity within the existing theoretical traditions, and according to the very theory of that tradition, is to mime Freud. The psychoanalytic tradition has set the terms for the discussion of female sexuality. But since psychoanalytic theory is self-contradictory, for it simultaneously depends upon and denies the feminine, to mime that theory is already to critique it.

Irigaray is forced to use a mimetic critical strategy due to the hegemony that masculine theory has in the realm of legitimate discourses. The language which could adequately express feminine sexuality does not yet exist. Thus, the only alternative to speaking female sexuality within the terms laid down by male psychoanalytic law is hysteria. Irigaray therefore “mimes” the theory in the exaggerated manner of the hysteric in order to make her point that the theory is limited. Hystera operates by miming discourse. Its gestures, silences, paralyses, and nonsensical utterances, imitate meaningful speech. Furthermore, hysterical miming, according to the authoritative terms of the psychoanalytic discourse, conveys an “excess” which, although not explicitly

As Irigaray puts it: “Why make the little girl, the woman, fear, envy, hope, hate, reject, etc. in more or less the same terms as the little boy, the man? And why does she comply so readily? Because she is suggestible? Hysterical? But now we begin to be aware of the vicious circle. How could she be otherwise, even in those perversities which she stoops to in order to “please” and to live up to the “femininity” expected of her? How could she be anything but suggestible and hysterical when her sexual instincts have been castrated, her sexual feelings, representatives, and representations forbidden? When the father forces her to accept that, while he alone can satisfy her and give her access to pleasure, he prefers the added sexual enjoyment to be derived from laying down the law, and therefore penalizes her for her (or his own?) “seduction fantasies”? (Speculum, pages 59-60).
expressed, constitutes a latent potential meaning. According to Irigaray,

... [the “neurotic pathology” of hysteria] is ambiguous, because it signifies at the same time that something else is being held back, kept in reserve. In other words, there is always, in hysteria, both a reserve power and a paralyzed power. A power that is always already repressed, by virtue of the subordination of feminine desire to phallocratism; a power constrained to silence and mimicry, owing to the submission of the “perceptible,” of “matter,” to the intelligible and its discourse. Which occasions “pathological” effects. And in hysteria there is at the same time the possibility of another mode of “production,” notably gestural and lingual; but this is maintained in latency. Perhaps as a cultural reserve yet to come . . . ? (This Sex, page 138).

Thus Dianne Chisholm reads Irigaray’s miming of Freudian theory as a strategy of “mimetic hysteria” which is intended ultimately to lead to the possibility of resistance.\footnote{Dianne Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria.”} She backs up this reading by appealing to two different forms of mimesis which she sees as operative in Irigaray, and which Irigaray borrows from Plato. There is both a reproductive and a productive type of mimesis described in Plato. According to Chisholm, Irigaray can be seen to be using the first sort of mimesis, in its exaggerated repetition of traditional theory, in order to pave the way for the second kind of mimesis. Thus, according to Chisholm, we can read Speculum as an instance of reproductive mimesis; while This Sex, with its lyrical poetic expressions of feminine desire, can be seen as an instance of the second type. The former type of (reproductive) mimesis leads to a possible resistance which is then expressed in the latter (“utopian” according to Chisholm) type. Thus to repeat Freud’s words about feminine sexuality emphatically and exaggeratedly, to adopt them as true of oneself, and to take them seriously is already subversive, for it presupposes that excess of meaning which makes possible the attitude of ironic and strategic acceptance of the discourse being mimed. Irigaray’s strategy of mimesis simultaneously expresses and creates space for the feminine

\footnote{Dianne Chisholm, “Irigaray’s Hysteria.”}
subject position that the psychoanalytic discourse, at the level of meaningful theoretical content, denies. Feminine hysterical mimesis offers a sort of pragmatic refutation of the masculine theory which denies to women the subject position.

**Miming Metaphor for Metonymy**

The above described mimetic feature of Irigaray’s critical method touches upon several interrelated themes: the relationship of the sexed body to language; metonymy and metaphor (displacement and condensation, or contiguity and similarity); and parler femme or speaking as a woman. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of Irigaray’s critical strategy, it is necessary to understand the traditional theory’s explanation of the relation between the sexed subject and language. Why is it, according to traditional psychoanalytic theory, that women’s relationship to language is different from men’s? According to Freudian theory, it is the resolution of the Oedipus complex that allows for the development of the superego, and hence the entry of the human subject into the world of symbolic order and language. Since the Oedipus complex is resolved differently for boys and girls, the boy, in renouncing the mother as the original object of desire, sublimates this desire by using language and creating culture and its products. The girl, however, never completely resolves the complex, and never completely renounces the mother, for she realizes that the mother is, like her, castrated. Furthermore, the girl has no incentive to give up her original preoedipal desire, for she can never hope to obtain the desired object (the phallus) by ultimately possessing a woman of her own in the way in which the father possesses the mother. Thus, the girl’s superego is not as strong as the boy’s, nor is her ability to sublimate as great.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ According to Freud, “. . . the Oedipus complex escapes the fate which it meets with in boys: it may be slowly abandoned or dealt with by repression, or its effects may persist far into women’s normal mental life. I cannot evade the notion (though I hesitate to give it expression
Lacan’s reinterpretation of Freud, according to his linguistic understanding of the unconscious, it is the symbolic “name of the father” (rather than the concrete individual father) that enters into the boy’s preoedipal imaginary relationship with the mother, and impels the development of the superego injunction against incest. But for both Freud and Lacan, the boy has the greater ability to use language, for the representational order arises out of his renunciation of the mother.\textsuperscript{169}

Irigaray, as immanent critic, begins from the psychoanalytic story of women’s relation to language or the symbolic economy. However, within that story, Irigaray finds and expands a space for the representation of a feminine economy. Irigaray both identifies the possibility of feminine speech within the theory, and elaborates that speech from a position outside the male order. She works from both the positions of immanence and transcendence. We can see an example of the way in which she accomplishes this in her figure of the “two lips” which constitute the female genitalia. According to Diana Fuss,\textsuperscript{170} this often-used figure of Irigaray’s is a basic reason for the charge of essentialism so frequently levelled against her. Irigaray cites the two lips as a basis for the alternative feminine economy; for the unity-in-duality of woman’s anatomy and pleasure challenges the male assumption of unity over plurality, activity over passivity, similarity over contiguity, and metaphor over metonymy.\textsuperscript{171} Most readers of that for women the level of what is ethically normal is different from what it is in men. Their superego is never so inexorable, so impersonal, so independent of its emotional origins as we require it to be in men. Character traits which critics of every epoch have brought up against women—that they show less sense of justice than men, that they are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgements by feelings of affection or hostility—all these would be amply accounted for by the modification in the formation of their superego which we have inferred above” Sigmund Freud, “Female Sexuality,” The Pelican Freud Library, Vol.7, \textit{On Sexuality} (Penguin, 1977), page 342.


\textsuperscript{171} The prioritization of metaphor over metonymy is so uncontroversial that a standard
Irigaray see her as challenging the male system by attempting to valorize the neglected poles of the above dichotomies. However, I would argue, following and expanding on Fuss, that Irigaray deconstructs the dichotomies themselves, showing the ways in which the male-valued poles presuppose and carry with them their complements in the feminine. Thus according to Fuss, the figure of the two lips functions as a “metaphor for metonymy.”

One wonders to what extent it is truly possible to think of the “two lips” as something other than a metaphor. I would argue that, despite Irigaray’s protestations to the contrary, the figure of the “two lips” never stops functioning metaphorically. Her insistence that the two lips escape metaphoricity provides us with a particularly clear example of what Paul de Man identifies as the inevitability of “reentering a system of tropes at the very moment we claim to escape from it” . . . But, what is important about Irigaray’s conception of this particular figure is that the “two lips” operate as a metaphor for metonymy; through this collapse of boundaries, Irigaray gestures toward the deconstruction of the classic metaphor/metonymy binarism. In fact, her work persistently attempts to effect a historical displacement of metaphor’s dominance over metonymy; she “impugns the privilege granted to metaphor (a quasi solid) over metonymy (which is much more closely allied to fluids)” (This Sex, 110).172

Furthermore, this use of metaphor to open space for metonymy supports my contention that Irigaray’s essentialism is strategic rather than ontological or biological, for her project to construct a feminine speech is based not on a literal reading of women’s anatomy, but on a figurative (although not entirely symbolic, for it is metonymical as well as metaphorical) relation of the body to language.

Irigaray thus makes use of metaphor in order to make clear within and to the male representational economy the alternative possibility of a female economy based

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172Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking, page 66.
on contiguity and fluidity, and figured in the trope of metonymy rather than metaphor. That this alternative economy indeed exists is shown (metaphorically) by Irigaray in the central section of *Speculum*. In the essay “Any Theory of the “Subject” Has Always Been Appropriated by the “Masculine”,” Irigaray makes use of metaphorical imagery in order to describe the relationship of the feminine essence to the male economy. The title makes clear that Irigaray is dealing with theory as the object of her critique, rather than a reality about women in themselves. Traditional male theory sees women as lacking self-consciousness; as “inert” matter which serves as the support for the male subject. This subject, in order to achieve and preserve dominance, continually distances itself from the material substratum. In a classic metaphor that Irigaray here echoes, men are the sun and women are the earth. But the earth, according to Irigaray, and unsuspected by the male solar subject, is not inert, but also self-relates.

As things go now, man moves away in order to preserve his stake in the value of his representation, while woman counterbalances with the permanence of a (self)recollection which is unaware of itself as such. And which, in the recurrence of this re-turn upon the self—and its special economy will need to be located—can continue to support the illusion that the object is inert. “Matter” upon which he will ever and again return to plant his foot in order to spring farther, leap higher, although he is dealing here with a nature that is already self-referential. Already fissured and open. And which, in her circumvolutions upon herself, will also carry off the things confided to her for re-presentation. Whence, no doubt, the fact that she is said to be restless and unstable. In fact it is quite rigorously true that she is never exactly the same. Always whirling closer or farther from the sun whose rays she captures and sends curving to and fro in turn with her cycles.\(^{173}\)

The fact that Irigaray is infiltrating the male economy from within is indicated in this essay. For here she describes the lengths to which the male economy will go to insure itself against contamination by the encroaching feminine. As Irigaray points out, 

\(^{173}\)Irigaray, *Speculum*, page 234.
with the advent of psychoanalytic theory, woman has been discovered to lie in men’s unconscious. But of course this discovery will be denied, repressed and fought against. Irigaray’s task is to block this repression and to bring to consciousness that which the male economy wishes to remain repressed. She continues to do so through her readings of various philosophical positions in the middle section of *Speculum*.

For instance, her essay on Kant continues this attempt. She reads Kant as conducting a very sophisticated salvaging of the male subject’s primacy and sovereignty over a nature which has begun to assert its independence in the realm of theory. As Kant elevates understanding over sensibility, according to Irigaray, the relation to the mother is sacrificed. However, this relation continues to assert itself in the mind’s desire for such ideals as the sublime and the moral law. These aspects of nature indicate male reason’s recognition of that which it lacks, and its attempt to come to grips with, to deny and to control this lack, by positing limiting concepts (such as a *telos* in nature and morals) that function to bring the unfathomable under the control of reason. Still, the repressed other cannot be completely tamed, and continues to make its appearance at various places within the theoretical tradition. Furthermore, there is one area of the traditional theoretical story that completely gives up the attempt to swallow up and hide the feminine. Thus mysticism exists within western metaphysics as the one movement that belongs essentially to the feminine, as the one place where women have had a voice.

This is the place where consciousness is no longer master, where, to its extreme confusion, it sinks into a dark night that is also fire and flames. This is the place where “she”—and in some cases he, if he follows “her” lead—speaks about the dazzling glare which comes from the source of light that has been logically repressed, about “subject” and “Other” flowing out into an embrace of fire that

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mingles one term into another, about contempt for form as such, about mistrust for understanding as an obstacle along the path of jouissance and mistrust for the dry desolation of reason. Also about a “burning glass.” This is the only place in the history of the West in which woman speaks and acts so publicly (*Speculum*, page 191).

Irigaray thus sees mystical discourse as bearing witness to the alternative nature of feminine desire. She finds in mysticism the feminine values of fire, burning, jouissance, and ex-stacy (in the literal sense of being outside oneself). This feminine realm of discourse demonstrates for Irigaray the possibility of the feminine economy and ontology that she seeks to develop. And although the mystical has always been the place of unreason, for Irigaray, the challenge will be to find and develop its own inner logic.

**An Alternative Economy**

As we have seen, Irigaray makes use of the standard technique of critical philosophizing in both remaining within, or immanent to, the theory which is the object of her critique, while at the same time attempting to develop values, standards, and concepts that are not acknowledged by the existing tradition. She works both from within and from without. One aspect of Irigaray’s critique which allows her simultaneously to “mine” these buried or repressed feminine principles, and to “mime” the male discourse about the feminine, is her use of psychoanalysis. In her interpretation of women as the “unconscious” blind spot of the western metaphysical tradition, Irigaray has found a way to present that tradition with its “other,” without denying her own embeddedness within the tradition. Since that other is latent within the tradition, it can supply standards and values which are both simultaneously immanent within and transcendent to that tradition. Moreover, Irigaray’s application of the insights
of psychoanalysis to the feminist critical practice can be seen as making progress over Harding’s inability to get beyond a modern scientific notion of objectivity to which she merely tacked on the requirement of value interestedness. For Irigaray, the feminist subject is, like the subject of standpoint epistemology, a split or bifurcated consciousness that sees both the traditional representation of reality and a beyond that is denied a voice. But for Irigaray, the psychoanalytic approach locates this bifurcation not only in the individual feminist subject’s psyche, but in the symbolic structure of language which determines the “objective” reality itself. Thus, Irigaray is able to avoid the dualism we have identified in Harding. Furthermore, Irigaray’s psychoanalytic strategy grants her some means of access to the repressed unconscious of this bi-leveled reality (e.g., such “therapies” as mimetic repetition, hysteria, and reading the “symptoms " and gaps), and therefore the possibility of developing this repressed element into a new representational order. Irigaray’s “strategic essentialism,” in developing the subjective side of the knowledge equation, simultaneously elaborates a reality which no longer accords to the structuring concepts of traditional objectivity.

There is another way in which Irigaray’s achievement can be seen to be an advance over that of Harding. Since Irigaray’s strategy of psychoanalytic deconstruction enables her to uncover what is already there, only hidden and buried, she has, to a certain extent, surmounted the obstacle of the critic’s dilemma, by avoiding each “horn.” Her new standards already exist within the tradition; yet they are beyond anything that has been explicitly recognized and instantiated. However, Irigaray’s achievement is not complete, for she fails to provide a fully-developed, rational, theoretical argument for the applicability of these repressed feminine values to the metaphysical tradition. It is not yet clear that what has been repressed can ever be expressed in anything more than a lyrical, poetic, figurative, nonrational sense. Furthermore, since psychoanalysis is itself
not only a theory, but, perhaps more importantly, a practice, we cannot fully credit
Irigaray with finding a theoretical solution to the critical dilemma. Like the other theorists
we have studied, Irigaray seems to “do” critique, without being able fully to explain or to
justify her own activity. Thus the ground for the possibility of her critique remains
elusive, appealing instead to the possible results of her critical work in its founding a
specifically feminine discourse (“parler femme”). However, since this feminine discourse
will itself operate according to alternative (feminine) standards and values, perhaps it is
to these standards that we should look to find the ground for Irigaray’s critical activity.
Thus, with Irigaray, as with other immanent critics, we encounter a certain circularity, for
the standards by which her work can be judged and justified will only come into being at
the conclusion of the work. The “proof” apparently can only be found in the “pudding.”

What then has Irigaray accomplished by bringing to the fore that which has been
forgotten, silenced, and denied within the male metaphysical economy of
representation? What are these new (feminine) standards which can serve to ground an
alternative economy? We have already seen that Irigaray uncovers hidden feminine
principles underneath the male metaphysical tradition. Furthermore, these principles, as
earth and ground for the male representational order, have nurtured that order as the
object of its repressed desire and motivation, and as the origin from which it flees. In
uncovering these feminine standards, values, and structuring concepts, Irigaray not only
offers a challenge to the male tradition, but also points the way to further development.

Irigaray’s critique of representationalism focuses on the concepts of identity and
sameness as basic to the patriarchal symbolic order. This economy has therefore been
incapable of encoding the feminine—allowing the feminine entry into the system only as
an object that conforms to its own principles. Since this order operates according to
laws of exchange (which provide the telos for the values of identity and equivalence),
women too are given value only insofar as they function for the exchange relation. Thus, in the current symbolic system, women serve primarily as commodities in a system of exchange between men.\(^{175}\) An alternative symbolic economy must therefore be structured by principles other than identity and sameness. These will include the (more feminine, according to Irigaray) concepts of difference and plurality; fluidity (rather than solidity); contiguity; touch (rather than sight); metonymy (rather than metaphor).

Furthermore, as I have been arguing, these alternative values are grounded not essentially in feminine anatomy, but in a critical and careful reading, a psychoanalytic deconstruction, of the repressed presuppositions of the male symbolic order. Irigaray’s suggestions—underdeveloped, though they may be—for an alternative symbolic economy are derived from and grounded in the already existing symbolic order in the sense that this order carries with it an unconscious underside—the feminine—which contains the repressed alternative.

Since, therefore, we must reject a simple essentialism of women’s bodies as grounding the activity of Irigarayan critique and the new representational economy toward which it points, we need to ask what we are left with? Can the negative—that which the tradition has denied as nonbeing—serve as adequate ground of a new epistemological economy, or are we left with the theoretical impasse that has haunted our attempts thus far throughout the dissertation? The hints that Irigaray has given us have been considerable, but still insufficiently developed. But as we have seen, the mimetic strategy of immanent critique has once again, in Irigaray, formed the basis of her method, as it has in several other theorists we have previously examined. Perhaps it

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is time to look more closely at the concept of mimesis which has shadowed the
metaphysical tradition as the constantly repressed complement, and dark underside to
the light of reason. Furthermore, as we have seen, the activity and attitude of mimesis,
as well as the political commitment to extending power to the oppressed, has structured
the performance of critique in both its immanent and transcendent aspects, thus
suggesting that our search for a theoretical, rational ground for critique and the radically
critical knowledge provided by feminist theory, can no longer ignore the necessary
nonrational elements of political power and mimesis. I therefore intend to explore these
elements and their applicability to the problem of grounding the critical perspective in
the last two chapters.
CHAPTER 5

THE CRITIC’S GROUND IN THE POLITICAL: FOUCALUT AND ARENDT

We have seen that the critical dilemma appears to elude a completely theoretical solution in the theorists we have examined so far. For this reason, many theorists in the post-modern movement have begun to explore the possibility of alternatives to pure theory in attempts at offering legitimation of their critical work. In this chapter, I will examine two such theorists, who, although apparently and at first glance appear to be worlds apart in their theoretical orientations, can be seen as sharing an important methodological tactic and a common turn to the practical/political realm of human existence as the ground of their critiques. More specifically, both Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt conduct critique by bringing to light the excluded possibilities of interpretation which they find at the origin of their objects of study. Thus Foucault offers an alternative understanding of the workings of political power, while Arendt gives a theory of freedom which she claims previously existed, but which has been abandoned and covered over. Both theorists, therefore, practice a form of “defetishizing critique” which delegitimates the status quo by showing its pretensions to universality and necessity to be without ground. Furthermore, both Foucault and Arendt manifest significant theoretical gaps in their accounts which are of great relevance for the question of grounding critique. These gaps, I believe, represent place-holders for future theoretical work, and it will be to an elaboration of the possible filling of these gaps that I intend to turn in my final chapter.

The Ground of Critique in Political Power: Foucault

Michel Foucault’s notoriously relativist (some would say “nihilist”) position has
elicited attacks from many critics. His professedly “post-modernist” stance has produced negative reactions ranging from puzzlement to exasperation. Because post-modernism rejects humanist values, it would appear that Foucault must abandon the quests for either truth or freedom. Furthermore, Foucault refused to be characterized as a structuralist, thus rejecting the theoretical alternative frequently embraced by the intellectual French Left of the last several decades. Foucault instead opts for a more humble theoretical stance then either structuralism or a humanism grounded in absolute subjectivity. His position claims to be localized and perspectival, without recourse to a theory of historical totality or universal truth.

But the critical intent of Foucault’s work seems to belie this denial of access to trans-historical values. His painstaking “genealogical” and “archeological” inquiries into the domains of human power, knowledge, and subjectivity can succeed as critique only to the extent that they uncover failings and injustices. But to identify injustice is to be acquainted with justice; to criticize untruth is to value truth. Hence, the unmasking of domination and deception, with which much of Foucault’s work is concerned, must see itself as contributing to a more truthful understanding and a more realized freedom than exist currently. To maintain, as Foucault does, that he is a “specific” rather than a “global” or totalizing intellectual, whose work appeals to nothing absolute, leads to the apparent paradox that one who denies the existence of truth is offering it, and one who denies the reality of the individual is seeking freedom.

When Foucault argues that knowledge, in its modern manifestation, “follows the


177See Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, Michael Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), chapter 3.

advance of power,” or that the modern subject is an effect of the strategies of “discipline” and bio-power,” he risks the charges of self-refutation and incoherence, for how are we to take his own theoretical pronouncements? If Foucault is correct, then his own position is merely another effect or strategy of power. But if his position is an unmasking of the hidden operations of power, and is for that reason an instance of a truth not subject to the control of power’s schemes, it must be that his analysis of the power/knowledge relation is mistaken. For according to Foucault:

. . . truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power: contrary to a myth whose history and functions would repay further study, truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its own regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

It appears that Foucault must either give up the relativist claim that power sets up “regimes of truth,” which then determine the field of possible discourse, or he must settle for a theoretical position which admits complicity with the power/knowledge system in which it functions, thus compromising his critical position. Thus, the critical dilemma is applicable to Foucault’s work in a clear and profound way. The demand seems straightforward enough. Foucault must give us a general theory of the operations of power/knowledge, and account for his own ground as the subject of a truthful discourse or a revolutionary practice. If he fails these tasks, his critical project is denied.

legitimacy. Thus, according to Michael Walzer, “We are to withdraw our belief in, say, the truth of penology and then support . . . what? . . . At this point, it seems to me, Foucault's position is simply incoherent.”

Or, as Nancy Fraser asks:

Whence, then, does Foucault’s work, his description of ‘the carceral society’, for example, derive its critical force? . . . Does he presuppose some alternative metaphysic, say, one of bodies? Or is his critique radically anti-foundationalist and if so, to what sort of justification can it lay claim?

But perhaps Foucault has developed the possibility of an alternative form of grounding his activity of critique which does not succumb to the critical dilemma. How does Foucault believe himself to avoid the extremes of either a nihilistic relativism or a foundationalist absolutism?

Foucault’s understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge can help us to achieve a deeper view of the way in which the critical dilemma may be overcome. The essential point here is that Foucault sees the ground and possibility of his own critique as arising from the very object of that critique. In this respect, Foucault is an immanent critic, whose "genealogical " strategy is to reveal the origins of the object of his critique, without evaluating those origins in terms of any absolute or transcendent criteria. Furthermore, what Foucault uncovers by means of his genealogies is a fundamental operation of power, rather than reason. It is then power, rather than reason, that grounds our modern institutions and beliefs; and it is power, rather than reason, that should be seen as grounding Foucault’s critical capabilities. This reliance on the nature of power, rather than of reason, for Foucault’s critical ground perhaps can

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give to his strategy of immanent critique an alternative way of eluding the critical dilemma. As we shall see, power in its modern form, for Foucault, cannot be analyzed on an either/or model that would accord with the terms of the critical dilemma. Thus power, in its implications with knowledge, also makes possible the resistance to power—a resistance of which Foucault's critique makes use. In order to make clear the rationale behind Foucault's attempt to elude the dilemma, I will now turn to a discussion of his historical methodology. How is it that genealogy can be used as a critical tactic that escapes the either/or extremes of nihilistic relativism or a transcendent absolutism?

**Genealogy as Immanent Critique**

Foucault's historical method is self-consciously modeled after that used by Nietzsche—genealogy.183 Traditional historiography sees the origin of an historical phenomenon as embodying a pure and pristine essence which then unfolds in a continuous manner. This concept of original unity and purity encodes the historian's belief in transcendental essences behind historical development. Historical knowledge, in uncovering these essences, makes clear the meaning of the present as the inevitable result of the operations of necessary laws. The effect of traditional historiography is, therefore, a comforting legitimation of the present, for the present appears as the culmination of a development in accordance with the dictates of a universal and trans-historical reason.

In contrast to the above “Platonic” view, genealogy sees in historical development only “the iron hand of necessity shaking the dice-box of chance.”184 Thus, genealogy, in refusing to accept metaphysics as the truth of history, searches for the


184Nietzsche, Dawn, quoted by Foucault in “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” page 89.
errors and accidents, the lowly details and ironic reversals, the disparities and differences at the beginnings of historical phenomena. According to Foucault, “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.”

We can, therefore, laugh at the origins of human values and practices, as we find that truth is often born of error, that we owe the concept of freedom to the ruling classes, and that humanity evolved from the ape. The critical function performed by this attitude of irreverence toward human history is obvious. The accidental nature of the present, and its irrational and contingent development out of absurd beginnings makes a mockery of the self-congratulatory view which sees the present as the fulfillment of past promises.

History is looked upon by the genealogist as the “body of a development.” The concepts “Entstehung” and “Herkunft” are therefore more appropriate to genealogy than is “Ursprung,” or “origin.” “Herkunft” means “stock,” or “descent,” and thus refers to the unique and various factors and events out of which arise the “traits,” or marks, the bodily peculiarities of a phenomenon. Thus, for example, our curious modern desire to probe into and to speak about our sexuality descends, according to Foucault, from the Catholic confessional practices of eliciting sexual secrets. “Entstehung,” which is also commonly translated as “origin,” is better understood, according to Foucault, as “emergence,” the moment of “arising.” Genealogy, in analyzing the emergence, must avoid the pitfall of the metaphysical historical method which sees the present as the telos of the past. What emerges for the traditional historian is a purposefulness seeking realization in its present function. But the relationship between a historical development

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185 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” page 79.
186 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” page 79.
187 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” page 79.
188 Foucault, History of Sexuality, volume 1.
189 Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” page 83.
and the need which it answers is not teleological. According to Foucault, this relationship is rather the result of a “series of subjugations.”\textsuperscript{190} Thus, genealogy de-legitimates and de-necessitates the present. The revelation of conflict and power at the origin of fundamental human practices and beliefs cannot but help to make the status quo appear to be radically unjustified by rational standards. Thus Foucault’s critical strategy functions as a mode of what we have been calling “defetishizing critique,” for it offers an alternative possibility to our current understanding, thereby delegitimizing the belief that the current view is necessarily true. The explanations offered by Foucault for the emergence of a development which we regard as valuable and necessary (for example, the prison system, or the worrisome nature of our sexual identities) in terms of accidental factors and disparate aims poses a critical challenge to our self-understanding. Genealogy thus speaks with a critical voice without appealing to trans-historical or absolute values. It is quite enough that our current humanist conceptions of justice, human dignity, and truth be confronted with their origins in absurdity and the violence of warring powers.

**Power as the Real Ground**

The emphasis which genealogy places on conflict and power is not, however, unproblematic. In fact, it raises anew the question of Foucault’s theoretical inconsistency. Foucault, in keeping with his denial of access to trans-historical absolutes, professes to be a nominalist with respect to power.\textsuperscript{191} Also, as we have seen, genealogy refuses to accept teleological explanations for the emergence of historical developments. However, Foucault appears to give a functionalist account of the rise of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190} Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, and History,” page 83.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Foucault, *History of Sexuality, volume 1*, page 93.
\end{itemize}
disciplinary power to dominance at the end of the classical period. ¹⁹² This account takes as basic certain historical needs, among them the need of power to expand. Discipline appears to have won out over the old economies of power because it offered the greatest opportunity for the expanse of power. This was due to its infiltration of political and economic institutions, its “embodiment” in the material historical processes of the time. Thus power grew by answering to needs created by other historical developments: the increase in population, and the growth in society’s productive capabilities. ¹⁹³ This historical “conjuncture” required a means to regulate the increasingly large and mobile population to the change in the productive apparatus. These needs were met by the newly emerging scientific “disciplines,” which Foucault, the genealogist, describes as the “physics or anatomy,” or the “body” of power. ¹⁹⁴ Far from being a straightforward Marxist explanation for the emergence of disciplinary power (that is, that discipline succeeded to the extent that it was functional for the growth of the forces of production), Foucault’s functionalism attributes as much explanatory weight to the needs of power as to those of the economy.

In fact, the two processes—the accumulation of men and the accumulation of capital—cannot be separated; it would not have been possible to solve the problem of the accumulation of men without the growth of an apparatus of production capable of both sustaining them and using them; conversely, the techniques that made the cumulative multiplicity of men useful accelerated the accumulation of capital. . . Each makes the other possible and necessary; each provides a model for the other. ¹⁹⁵

Thus power is, according to Foucault, irreducible to either the scientific disciplinary institutions, or the political/economic apparatuses within which it functions and through

¹⁹²Foucault, Discipline and Punish, part two.
¹⁹³Foucault, Discipline and Punish, page 218.
¹⁹⁴Foucault, Discipline and Punish, page 220.
¹⁹⁵Foucault, Discipline and Punish, page 221.
which it is exercised. Power is credited as a force in its own right, able to make use of material history, and thus attributed with a significant explanatory role in Foucault’s work.

But is this an anthropomorphization of power? How are we to understand power’s apparent intentionality, its ability to enact schemes and “strategies,” without taking power as either a subject endowed with agency, or as a transcendent absolute guiding history? This aspect of Foucault’s genealogy is particularly troubling to Charles Taylor, who sees it as a point of incoherence.\(^\text{196}\) According to Taylor, the notion of strategies of power without a subjective intention is incoherent insofar as no account is offered which relates this broad pattern of non-intentional purposefulness to the wills and intentions of historical actors. Taylor believes that some such account is necessary since it is historical actors who appear to compose the drama of history. If it is to be proposed that the conscious intentions of human beings do not, contrary to their understandings, succeed in steering the course of historical development, an explanation must be given for the way in which human intention and action is subsumed or overridden by a greater force.\(^\text{197}\) As Taylor argues:

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\ldots\text{purposefulness without purpose requires a certain kind of explanation to be intelligible. The undesigned systematicity has to be related to the purposeful action of agents in a way that we can understand.} \ldots\]

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\text{The reason for this requirement is that the text of history, which we are trying to explain, is made up of purposeful human action. Where there are patterns in this action which are not on purpose, we have to explain why action done under one description on purpose also bears this other, undesigned description. We have to show how the two descriptions relate. A strategic pattern cannot be just left hanging, unrelated}\]


\(^{197}\)Taylor gives examples of the type of account he is looking for: accounts which hold that the motivations of some human behavior cannot be acknowledged, or “invisible hand” accounts such as Marxism and those variants which see unintended consequences as a result of collective action. See Taylor,”Foucault on Freedom and Truth,” pages 86-87.
to our conscious ends and projects. But Foucault appears not to accept this requirement, for, as Taylor points out, Foucault not only fails to offer such an account, but he “doesn’t even feel the need to start looking.” Furthermore, according to Taylor, it seems as though it would be impossible for Foucault to give an explanation in terms of current models, without giving up some fundamental aspect of his theory. An explanation is required according to Taylor, but cannot be given without inconsistency on Foucault’s part.

The Foucaultian Gap

What I would like to suggest is that, rather than entailing an inconsistency in Foucault’s genealogies of power, this unwillingness and inability to offer the type of explanation which Taylor seeks stems from the necessarily incomplete nature of Foucault’s critical project. Foucault’s genealogy of power is a response to a deep inadequacy which Foucault saw in contemporary critical theory. According to Foucault, an implicational network binds together the workings of power, knowledge, and human subjectivity at the deepest levels of human reality. One manifestation of this implicational system can be seen in Foucault’s account of the relationship among disciplinary power, the “disciplines” of the human sciences, and the type of subjectivity—the docile bodies and normalized individuals—which this power/knowledge regime produces. Another such embodiment is unearthed in the symbiotic connections among the power techniques of the Catholic confessional, the disciplines of medicine,
psychology, and law, and the sexual identity of the modern individual. Indeed, much of Foucault’s work is an analytic study of the historical juncture at the end of the eighteenth century when changes occurred in these three fundamental aspects—power, knowledge, and subjectivity—of human reality. A major contribution of Foucault’s genealogy of the modern age is its bringing to light the role played by power in shaping human history. The self-understanding of modernism, particularly as manifested in the human sciences, has systematically failed to recognize the irreducible nature of power, according to Foucault. Thus, modern political theory conceives of power in terms of either of two models: Marxist theory, which reduces power to the economy (and its various state and ideological apparatuses) or liberal political theory, which reduces power to rights held by individual human subjects, who exchange these rights within a legal/political system of their own creation. We have, therefore, both an institutional and a Hobbesian sovereign/rights model for understanding power. One reduces power to the socio-economic structure, the other grounds power in human subjectivity.

These options can be seen as (inversely) echoing the terms of the critical dilemma. Power, as the object of critique is seen as either transcendent to or immanent within the subject. But power is also, in a sense, the subject of critique, (Foucault’s critique of power thus echoes the ambiguity of Kant’s critique of reason) for Foucault as immanent critic cannot and does not exempt himself from power’s reaches. Thus power, as subject or agent of critique, is also on these models either immanent to the subject (as a possession or right), or existing outside or transcendent to the critical subjectivity which it determines. But Foucault rejects both models, for neither can account for the possibilities uncovered by genealogy that power is exercised rather than possessed or exchanged, or that power is itself a relation of forces and not merely an arm of the

203See Foucault, The History of Sexuality volume 1.
economic apparatus.\textsuperscript{204} This rejection is a requirement of Foucault’s larger critical project to critique modernity from within. To understand power either as structural-institutional or as a possession of, or on the model of, human subjectivity is to participate in the theoretical discourse which belongs to the modern regime of power/knowledge, which is precisely the target of Foucault’s critical activity. The modern “regime” has excluded or ignored the possibility that power functions in a non-subjective but “strategic” manner. Thus to see power along the lines of a Nietzschean war or “agonistic” model, as Foucault does, is one way to propose the possibility that the accepted models are inadequate to theorize power.

Foucault’s genealogy of power can therefore be seen as his attempt to retrieve an exclusion that occurred at the origin of the modern period. Genealogy, in tracing the power to punish to the beginning of its modern form, finds there a dramatic reversal with respect to power’s visibility. Power previously was exercised in the social arena as a “spectacle” of ritual torture.\textsuperscript{205} But the exercise of the power to punish in the modern period is obscured, as it takes place in prisons and under the guise of the need to reform the criminal or to protect society. Power hides itself, according to Foucault, for it “is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself.”\textsuperscript{206} But this description of power should not be taken as a metaphysical absolute to which Foucault illegitimately appeals. Rather, it is a description of the appearance of socio-political reality to the modern perspective. From within the regime structured by disciplinary power, we tend not to see it. Foucault’s genealogies therefore seek to open the closed regime of disciplinary power/knowledge to a possible interpretation, a possible truth about the working of power which had not yet been considered. In this way, Foucault

\textsuperscript{204}Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power,” in Rabinow Reader, page 220.
\textsuperscript{205}See Foucault, Discipline and Punish, part one.
\textsuperscript{206}Foucault, History of Sexuality, volume 1, page 86.
can be seen as engaged in the type of “defetishizing” critique we have seen in previous theorists. But unlike the previous theorists we have examined, Foucault is quite explicit about the truth status of his critical descriptions. He is not claiming absolute truth or certainty, the status of law or general principle, but merely offering an alternative description.

T. Carlos Jacques offers a similar reading and justification of Foucault’s critical practice.²⁰⁷ Jacques sees Foucault as working only immanently within a particular historical situation, so that his genealogies are localized rather than universal or absolute. And within the local situation in which Foucault works, his critiques function to delegitimize the smug belief in the universal validity of the received view by reference to the equally plausible views that have been excluded.

This gives us a clearer idea of what the genealogist challenges, and what he or she refers to, in doing so. Not only is the aim to upset the self-certainty of contemporary practices, but more specifically, the self-certainty of universalistic theory which reflects the mechanisms of disciplinary power. And this is accomplished in the name of, by appeal to, local subjugated oppositional knowledges.²⁰⁸

Jacques argues that the mistake of critics of Foucault (such as Taylor, Fraser, Walzer, Habermas, and others) who charge him with self-refutation is to believe falsely that critique requires theoretical ground in order to be rational. But according to Jacques, this requirement is “empirically false,” for we frequently engage in critique on the basis of the “differing practices existing within the domain of dominant practices.”²⁰⁹ And this kind of practical critique in the name of that which has been oppressed is sufficient and legitimate.

Thus to demand, as does Taylor, that Foucault give us a theoretical account of the operations of power which would be consistent with the discourse that reduces power to the intentions of individual subjects is to miss the point that Foucault’s provocative thesis about the strategic nature of power in the modern period is a self-conscious rejection and critique of the entire sovereign/rights model. Taylor’s advocacy of the humanist values of truth and freedom, as necessary presuppositions of Foucault’s theses on power, does not appreciate the extent to which the discourse of humanism is implicated in the regime which Foucault wants to critique. Thus from Foucault’s perspective, a discursive practice basing itself on the rights and freedom of the individual is not sufficient to challenge the operations of disciplinary power.\textsuperscript{210}

Since Foucault is rejecting the philosophical presupposition that a theoretical ground is necessary for legitimate critique, Jacques believes that Foucault is not engaged in \textit{philosophical} critique.\textsuperscript{211} Foucault’s critique is localized genealogical history, so he does not confront his philosophical critics on their terms, but avoids or dissolves the requirement of transcendence by refusing to make universal and absolute claims. But I believe that this interpretation misses the point that Foucault’s historically situated and localized genealogies do contribute to a philosophical and theoretical position, namely the denial of the universality of the particular theoretical models that they critique (e.g., that power is a possession either of the subject’s sovereignty or of socio-political institutions). Although Foucault makes no positive theoretical pronouncements, nor does he claim universality or necessity for his descriptions, the upshot of his work is to cast doubt on the established philosophical wisdom. Furthermore, Foucault’s refusal to make positive theoretical pronouncements is itself philosophically strategic, for it

\textsuperscript{210}In fact, \textit{Discipline and Punish} describes how the discourse of the humanist reformers contributed to the emergence of disciplinary power. See part two.

\textsuperscript{211}Jacques, “Whence Does the Critic Speak?,” page 337.
enables him to make use of theoretical tools that he does not, in any ultimate or absolute sense, endorse. Thus, as a strategic practice, Foucault can appeal to the modernist concept of human rights when it suits his purpose in a specific case. For example, in an interview given shortly before his death, Foucault invokes the notions of truth and rights as a means of criticizing the polemicist. According to Foucault “. . . a whole morality is at stake, the morality that concerns the search for the truth and the relation to the other.”

It is therefore evident that Foucault is not a nihilist. But neither are his appeals to humanist values invocations of trans-historical absolutes. Foucault believes all currently held values to be contaminated with power. This is why Foucault has attempted to adopt a more modest stance than that of the “totalizing critic.” Power is seen as strategic in order to do battle with it on new ground. However, at times we may wish to use old weapons. Truth and freedom belong to this arsenal, but their use poses the risk of co-optation. As I see it, Foucault’s genealogical/critical tactic is to create space within dominant discourse for what he calls “subjected knowledges.” But Foucault is not advocating that the perspectives of the criminal or the insane become the paradigmatic knowledges for a new regime. Rather his strategy attempts to make a space, a difference, or “interstice,” within the standard order which will allow the entry and perhaps the infiltration of what has been previously excluded. This manner of critique does not profess to know all, or to know for sure, and therefore repudiates absolutes. But it maintains a critical distance, a degree of transcendence, by appealing to differences and exclusions, by opening “interstices” within which powers may battle and domination may be exposed.

212Michel Foucault, “Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations,” Rabinow Reader, pages 381-390.
In this way Foucault’s method of critique is similar to that which we have seen in Irigaray, for both attempt to bring to the fore the excluded other which exists underneath and within the current tradition. In order to do so, Irigaray draws upon psychoanalytic and literary methods, while the ground upon which Foucault draws lies in the workings of power and the political exclusion of groups and knowledges. Neither philosopher has supplied a rock-solid theoretical ground which can exempt their positions from the contaminations, biases, and determinations that they critique. However, the critical efficacy of their work does not seem to require this. Like Meno’s paradox which poses the dilemma that learning is impossible on either of two apparently mutually exclusive and exhaustive alternatives (that we either know or are completely ignorant), the critical dilemma is beginning to look more and more to presuppose an impossible and unnecessary demand. Perhaps the theoretical ground of critique can be found in the actual practice of immanent critique—the actuality of which should be sufficient to establish its possibility. If this is so, perhaps the question to be asked is not whether, but how critique is possible. For the beginnings of an answer, we now turn to Hannah Arendt, who can be seen as making more explicit one way of filling in the gap left open by previous theorists’ attempt to justify critique.

The Ground of Critique in Political Freedom: Arendt

Hannah Arendt proclaimed her thinking to be a "thinking without bannisters," by which she marked her rejection of such foundations as tradition, religion, or other authority. As such, she necessarily grappled with the problem of justification. In the following I intend to explore some of the ways in which Arendt's thought, without the safety net of foundationalist grounding, has come to terms with the problem of theorizing the human situation, in its relevance for what I see to be the critic’s problem
of legitimation. Although Arendt does not philosophize out of the intimately personal, she does begin her theorizing immanently in the concrete. For her, the most urgent theoretical and practical-political challenge of her time was to understand the possibility and mechanisms of totalitarianism. All of Arendt’s work can be seen as a response to this challenge and as such, shares many concerns with other theoretical and political movements which seek an understanding of oppression and a path to freedom. Arendt’s thought focuses explicitly on the problem of freedom, which she believes has been mistakenly placed by the philosophical-political tradition in the metaphysical realm, when its actual locus is in the political. Thus for Arendt, the true ground of human freedom and, therefore, also of the possibility of critical transcendence, lies in the political dimension of human existence. According to Arendt, there is a fundamental political dimension of life, of which the modern tradition of political philosophy has lost sight. Arendt’s entire corpus is motivated by a desire to retrieve this covered over sense and experience of the political and to bring to light an interpretation of human freedom which requires the political as the space for its development. What I will try to show is that Arendt’s conception of political freedom can be seen as beginning to fill in the gap left by previous theorists, by beginning to formulate an explanation and justification of the possibility of the critic’s freedom. Thus, the ground of the critic’s necessary freedom will be located in the political, rather than the purely theoretical realm. Both philosophical critique and political action are grounded in, presuppose, and attempt to instantiate human freedom. Furthermore, an ontological relation between theoretical critique and the practical-political can be elaborated in terms of the paradoxical structure of human freedom as Arendt theorizes it. I intend to show that her idiosyncratic and original interpretation of freedom offers provocative possibilities for the understanding of both theoretical and practical human reality, and, in particular, for the critic’s capacity to
transcend the reality in which she is embedded, in order to propose alternatives.

The Critic's Immanence in “The Human Condition”

Arendt begins *The Human Condition* with a prologue stressing the essential connectedness of humanity to the earth. This lesson, in spite of its apparent obviousness, has been, for the most part, little recognized in philosophical writing. Arendt's reminder alerts us to what must be taken as a fundamental axiom of theory—that theory is a product of earthly beings who are necessarily tied to nature and to each other as a condition for survival and for meaningfulness. By "human conditions," Arendt does not mean "human nature," the possibility of which she rejects, but rather necessities which are conditional upon our earthly existence. Thus, Arendt's existential structures of human existence are not transcendent absolutes or "essences." Rather, she seeks, as did Kant, for the necessary pre-conditions for what she takes as "given." However, her given is not the self as a disembodied knower or thinker, but as a concretely situated, embodied being. Thus, her human conditions are contingent upon her phenomenology of a concrete life world. Arendt's *The Human Condition* is an existential analysis, in the Heideggerian sense of fundamental ontology, of the concrete presuppositions of human "being-there."

What Arendt finds by means of her existential analysis of the human condition is that our fundamental connectedness with others constitutes us as political beings, beings who interact in a context of shared values and meaningful articulations of these values. Arendt's conception of the political presupposes a relation to others in the fundamental ontological condition of *plurality*. Furthermore, this fundamental existential structure of relationship does not determine a necessarily hostile or antagonistic master-

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slave model of human relation, nor even one which begins from an isolated self which
then reaches out to communicate with others. For Arendt, relationship lies at the heart
of "the human condition." Selves are never atomized on Arendt's view, but are
fundamentally in relation.\(^\text{214}\) In contrast to the traditional tendency of modern liberal
political theory toward atomization, Arendt's political is first and foremost a sphere of
human relatedness. Furthermore, this relatedness is consolidated and developed by
means of what is for Arendt a basic political phenomenon—speech. As Arendt puts it,
"Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political by definition,
for speech is what makes man a political being."\(^\text{215}\) Thus for Arendt, the critic's power of
speech already places theoretical critique in the political, and not merely epistemic,
realm of life.

However, according to Arendt, we've lost sight of the political realm in the modern
age. The rise of society and the social human being has overshadowed the political as
the proper sphere for public interaction. Arendt argues that this usurpation of the
political by the social is due to the ascendancy of instrumentality as the basic scheme of
our rational comportment with the world. This ascendancy, in turn, can be traced to the
historical appearance and the philosophical acceptance of a deep distinction between
the life of action, the \textit{vita activa}, and the life of thought, the \textit{vita contemplativa}, and the
corresponding hierarchizing of contemplation over action by philosophical and religious
thought. Arendt's argument is that, within the historical transformation from action as
important in Ancient Greece to contemplation as the most highly valued mode of being,
and even throughout the reversal of this hierarchy accomplished by Hegel and Marx,

\(^{214}\)In fact, for Arendt, one of the hallmarks of totalitarianism is that it isolates humans and
thereby cripples their capacity for political action and distorts their fundamental need and right
1958).

\(^{215}\)Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, page 3.
the distinctions within the realm of action were lost in the shuffle. This loss entailed a diminution in the meaning of the concept of action, so that all action was, by the modern period, seen as action in accordance with necessity. In short, the concept and recognition of the possibility of free human action was overshadowed, as instrumental rationality in the service of survival and world-making was taken as the guiding intelligence by means of which human action could be understood, interpreted, and evaluated. And with this loss, the place for this possibility, the political realm, had become lost too.

Thus, Arendt’s critical method shares common characteristics with many of the theorists we have already discussed, who attempt a retrieval of that which has been forgotten, repressed, excluded, or covered-over by the currently existing tradition. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Arendt returns to the Ancients for the original possibilities of the theory she attempts to critique. Like Foucault, she appeals to excluded knowledge, and like Irigaray, she attempts to reveal that which has been repressed by the tradition. We can therefore place Arendt in the camp of the “defetishizing critics,” for her basic move is to provide an alternative and plausible interpretation for that which has been already accepted as understood. Furthermore, as a defetishizing critic, it is not necessary to claim for her alternative theorization the status of absolutely certain or necessary truth. She only needs to offer an account which is reasonable and provides an alternative. Thus, Arendt tells a story of the political as possible in another way than the tradition currently admits, but that is latently contained in the tradition as an alternative origin.

The Immanence and Transcendence of Political Freedom

What then is the political? According to Arendt, in the ancient Greek pre-Socratic
conception, the *polis* was set up as the space of power, defined as the potential for humans to distinguish and reveal themselves as who they uniquely were. The political, as Arendt puts it, "corresponds to"\(^{216}\) the human condition which Arendt labels *plurality*, which is the irreducible fact that we are equal yet distinct, and that each of us is capable of expressing our distinctness. Each of us is unique at the same time that we share basic characteristics as members of a species. The condition of plurality thus entails a twofold structure of the political; it is the realm of both performative expression and of collaborative solidarity.\(^{217}\) As expressive, the political actor appears in public space and aims at the manifestation of *arete* or excellence. As collaborative, the political actor must call upon others for assistance in carrying through her deed, as well as in determining the meaning, and judging the significance and degree of glory pertaining to the action. The political is for Arendt the place or dimension of life where freedom can be enacted. Thus the political cannot be fully understood in Arendt's sense without an understanding of what she means by freedom. As she herself has summarized the connection, "The *raison d'etre* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action."\(^{218}\)

**The Defetishization of Freedom**

The philosophical tradition, according to Arendt, has lost or covered over the concept of our authentic experiences of freedom, which were recognized by the

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\(^{216}\)Arendt uses this phrase to signify the peculiar relationship between a structure, condition, or principle and its manifestation or effect. I will further discuss this relationship which I attempt to understand as a type of "mimetic causality" in the following.

\(^{217}\)Maurizio Passerin D'Entreves identifies this dual aspect of Arendt's political and believes that previous commentators have failed adequately to recognize either one or the other aspect, thus yielding a distorted view of Arendt's political theory. See Maurizio Passerin D'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

ancients. The current understanding of freedom, both philosophical and pre-theoretical is problematic and paradoxical. Freedom appears to be both necessary and impossible. As agents, we must assume freedom; yet upon reflection, our actions appear to be consequences of either internal motives or external circumstances. "Thought itself, in its theoretical as well as its pre-theoretical form, makes freedom disappear. . .."219 For Arendt, freedom is primarily an attribute of action rather than of thought. Freedom is only alive and real in human affairs, in the political.

The field where freedom has always been known, not as a problem, to be sure, but as a fact of everyday life, is the political realm. And even today, whether we know it or not, the question of politics and the fact that man is a being endowed with the gift of action must always be present to our mind when we speak of the problem of freedom; for action and politics, among all the capabilities and potentialities of human life, are the only things of which we could not even conceive without at least assuming that freedom exists, and we can hardly touch a single political issue without, implicitly or explicitly, touching upon an issue of man's liberty. 220

In fact, the philosophical focus on freedom as a metaphysical topic and problem came historically late. There is no such concern in ancient philosophy until the time of Augustine and St. Paul. Arendt thus sees inner freedom, the focus of the later metaphysical tradition, to be a derived phenomenon, originally the result of alienation from the worldly political realm where freedom may be experienced as a fact. Freedom of the will, the kind recognized by philosophy, is therefore something like a wish fulfillment, a fantasy compensation for those denied real freedom.221 Furthermore, it is this identification of freedom with free will on the part of the philosophical tradition that

221Arendt sees this type of freedom, theoretically developed by the Stoics, to be analogous to the kind of happiness claimed by the Christian martyrs. For a slave to claim "inner freedom" is like a christian martyr to claim happiness while being roasted alive in the Phaleric Bull. See The Human Condition page 235.
led to the further identification of freedom with sovereignty, for the attainment of inner freedom was seen to be the way to escape from the control and influence of others to become self-sufficient, and to attain the ideal of complete mastery. The identification of freedom with sovereignty, according to Arendt entails a dilemma: either no one is free (for no one is completely sovereign; our sovereignty is limited by plurality), or freedom requires domination over others. The structure of this dilemma echoes that of the philosophical critic—either we are completely determined or we are capable of a transcendence of a kind that Arendt believes to be mistaken and illegitimate. The problem, as Arendt sees it, is in the kind of transcendence or freedom presupposed and desired by the tradition. What Arendt offers is therefore an alternative interpretation of transcendent freedom and an explanation of its possibility. The traditional valorization of control, domination, mastery, sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and separation are seen by Arendt to be especially pernicious, and to prevent both the theoretical recognition and the political-practical instantiation of the possibility of authentic human freedom. Arendt would like to bring into philosophical focus (and indeed into common public practice) a kind of freedom which is neither domination over others, nor over even the self by the sovereign will. According to Arendt,

Within the conceptual framework of traditional philosophy, it is indeed very difficult to understand how freedom and non-sovereignty can exist together or, to put it another way, how freedom could have been given to men under the condition of non-sovereignty. Actually it is as unrealistic to deny freedom because of the fact of human non-sovereignty as it is dangerous to believe that one can be free—as an individual or as a group—only if he is sovereign. . . Under human conditions, which are determined by the fact that not man but men live on the earth, freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot even exist simultaneously. Where men wish to be sovereign, as individuals or as organized groups, they must submit to the oppression of the will, be this the individual will with which I force myself, or the "general will" of an organized group. If men wish
to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce.\(^\text{222}\)

**The Dual Nature of Free Action**

That Arendt's theory of freedom stresses its non-sovereign character can perhaps be seen more clearly in her analysis of the dual nature of free action. Again in correspondence with the twofold structure of plurality which determines both human connectedness and distinction, free action on Arendt's view encompasses two parts. In keeping with her methodological commitment to concrete everydayness and the actual world of *praxis*, Arendt returns to ordinary linguistic usage in antiquity, where she finds that both the Greeks and Romans had two different words for *action*. In both ancient tongues, action is conceived in two parts, the first of which is the introduction of something entirely new, and the second of which is the carrying through, with the help of others, of what had been begun. Free action is both spontaneous and cooperative, for Arendt, both autonomous and relational. Thus an elaboration of the fundamental human condition of plurality, through its manifestation in the political, points to two other basic human conditions which, for Arendt are equally as important as plurality, and these are *natality*, the fact that we are born, and, what Sela Benhabib calls *narrativity*, or the "web" of preexisting meaningful human relationships into which we must act.\(^\text{223}\)

Natality, according to Arendt, encodes both the facts that we are born into our historical situatedness as earthly and embodied beings, yet we are capable of free action as well. This freedom, according to Arendt, is expressed in the human capacity to begin something new. Arendt finds this capacity to be essential to both the Greek and Roman political experiences of freedom. Turning to Augustine, Arendt is able to find an

\(^{222}\text{Arendt, The Human Condition, page 164.}\)
\(^{223}\text{Seyla Benhabib, Situating the Self (New York: Routledge, 1992) pages 90-95.}\)
account of this Roman concept of freedom as beginning. For Augustine, freedom was not an attribute of will or the inner self, but was first and foremost a fundamental capacity of human life. According to Arendt,

In the City of God, Augustine, as is only natural, speaks more from the background of specifically Roman experiences than in any of his other writings, and freedom is conceived there not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence. . . . In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each individual's death. Because he is a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom.

**Freedom as Mimesis**

What are we to make of this strange argument and Arendt's reliance on it? "Because he is a beginning, man can begin. . . ." The assumption is that since we are ourselves an instance of free action (a product of God's freedom according to Augustine), we ourselves have the capacity to act freely, to initiate something new, and to instantiate freedom. Augustine's use of this argument is perhaps not so strange, since he is able to provide a causal link to connect our existence with our capacity for free action as one of our attributes. Since for Augustine we are manifestations of God's freedom, made in His image, He gave us the gift of freedom. But Arendt, as a secular political philosopher, is not entitled to appeal to this kind of supernatural causality, nor does she ever attempt to invoke it. Yet again, in The Human Condition, Arendt appeals to an apparent, but unexplained causal connection.
The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world.\textsuperscript{224}

How does our being unique, something new, account for our possession of the capacity for free action? What causal mechanism is at work here? There seems to be a gap in this account,\textsuperscript{225} for it seems perfectly reasonable to hold that, although each of us in unique, our life scripts have been pre-written either by God or by the laws of natural scientific causal determinism stemming for our original characteristics. What causal "glue" could ground Arendt's contention that because each of us is a beginning, we have the capacity to begin? What I would like to suggest is that this gap represents theoretical space which is yet to be adequately elaborated, but which Arendt's work has begun to explore and which offers a possible explanatory concept which, as an alternative to traditional forms of explanation, may be of use to critics in our attempts to legitimate our own critical voices with respect to the tradition, as well as to uncover and nurture instances of free action which have gone unrecognized by traditional theory.

Free action, according to Arendt, is action on "principle." It is not reducible to its goal (although action may seek a goal); nor is it reducible to its motive (although motives may be implicated in action). To act on principle, then, is not to be determined or motivated, but to be "inspired from without." And to act on inspiration is to bring into being that principle which inspires you. Thus, according to Arendt, freedom comes into being only with free action. It is neither an immanent possession of the subject, nor a transcendent absolute that preexists the subject, but is something that is created by our

\textsuperscript{224}Arendt, The Human Condition, page 178.
\textsuperscript{225}Two other commentators have made mention of the need for an explanation here. See Gabriel Tlaba, Politics and Freedom: Human Will and Action in the Thought of Hannah Arendt; and B. Parekh, Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy, (London: Macmillan, 1981).
attempts to imitate the beginning that we see ourselves to be. Thus freedom, like such other principles as love, honor, glory, duty, comes into being only insofar as we attempt to act according to our assumption of its principle. This principle does not have an absolute existence, independent of our actions, nor is it completely determined by or reducible to any of our particular acts. It is both transcendentally normative, as it inspires us to act in imitation of our conception of it; and it is also subject for its existence to our concrete attempts to instantiate it. Freedom exists as what we could call an “intentional object,” brought into being only as we actively presuppose it; yet it exerts a causal-normative force over our ability to act. Yet this causality is not reducible to a mechanistic, linear causality, and so it eludes articulation in current theoretical terms.226

**Storytelling, Rather than Theory**

This peculiar relationship of structural similarity between the human actor’s natality and the capacity for free action is again expressed in Arendt’s elaboration of the complementary existential structure of narrativity, which, as we have seen, is the ontological condition for action’s necessary human interrelatedness. This human interrelatedness becomes the stuff of stories for Arendt, and it is within stories that we find expressed and preserved human freedom. Arendt’s notion of the relation between an actor and his/her life story revolves around her concept of the "who" which is disclosed in action. According to Arendt, when a person acts, inserts herself into the

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226Perhaps the only sustained theoretical attempt to analyze this type of causal connection can be found in structuralism, specifically Althusser’s reading of Marx’s concept of “Darstellung,” or structural causality. This concept refers to the way in which a larger social structure (e.g., the relations of production) that is brought into being by human activity has causal force over the individuals whose actions created it. See Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, translated by Ben Brewster, (New York: Pantheon, a division of Random House, 1970). Also see Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (New York: Cornell University Press), 1981, for a discussion of Althusser’s analysis.
world by means of action and speech, what is disclosed exceeds any concrete qualities or attributes. Action is the way in which every human attains an identity, which is based on the uniqueness of each individual. When we want to describe in speech who someone is, according to Arendt, we inevitably recount a list of qualities which that individual may share with others. The specificity of the individual eludes us, and yet it is this unique specificity that guides our choice of words as that which we are attempting to capture in our description.

The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression. The moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is; we get entangled in a description of qualities he necessarily shares with others like him; we begin to describe a type or a "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us.227

This who is irreducible to the what which we may describe, yet it is this who which makes itself manifest in human action and speech. Because this who eludes the type of description appropriate to natural and inanimate things, the way in which it may be made present or brought to life in the absence of the actor is through the telling of the actor's life story. According to Arendt, we know who Socrates is better than we do Aristotle, in spite of the fact that we have Aristotle's writings expressing his philosophical positions. This is because we have Socrates' life story, which reveals to us his unique person as manifest in the representation of his actions and words.

The specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker, is so indissolubly tied to the living flux of action and speaking that it can be represented and "reified" only through a kind of repetition, the imitation or mimesis, which according to Aristotle prevails in all arts but is actually appropriate only to drama, whose very name (from the Greek

verb *dran* "to act") indicates that play-acting actually is an imitation of acting.\(^{228}\)

Furthermore, this *who* someone is, as revealed in speech and action, is not completely under the control of the subject of the action. The actor reveals this *who* to others, and to herself, only by means of the action. Yet the action’s meaning, significance, and consequences are never entirely predictable. Action inserts itself into a world of human relations, and as such calls up other actions in response and is subject to the meaning determinations of others. The actor is not the sole author of his or her life story, in the same way in which a theorist believes she may control her theoretical output.

The disclosure of the "who" through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt. Together they start a new process which eventually emerges as the unique life story of the newcomer, affecting uniquely the life stories of all those with whom he comes into contact. It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose; but it is also because of this medium, in which action alone is real, that it "produces" stories with or without intention as naturally as fabrication produces tangible things. . . . Nobody is the author or producer of his own life story.\(^{229}\)

The relation between an actor and his or her life story is neither totally one of authorship, nor one of passive experiencing. Rather, I am the subject of my story in the twofold meaning of the term *subject*, both its active source or cause and its passive sufferer. This twofold structure mimics the structure of action as well, for human action cannot be understood solely in terms of calculated, instrumental implementation of a means toward an end or goal, nor as the necessary and inevitable effect of some motivation, whether the motive force be unconscious and instinctual or the direct result

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\(^{228}\)Arendt, *The Human Condition* p. 187.
of conscious and deliberate thought or will. This is not to say that there is no element of will, thought, aim, instinct, or drive in action; only that action is not completely reducible to any of these factors as sole determinations. Human action cannot be fully understood in terms of instrumental-efficient causality. To so reduce the significance of action is, for Arendt, to capture not action, but behavior, and with such a behavioral analysis, the possibility of a glimpse of human freedom is lost. To reduce action to motive or goal is to lose the uniqueness of the individual, the contextualized significance of the action for others, and the principle which is created by and kept within existence by the action which it inspires.

Motives and aims, no matter how pure or how grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different types of persons.\(^{230}\)

What is the connection between unique individuality and free action? According to Arendt, freedom is not reducible to a possession or attribute of the subject in the manner of the substance/accidents relation. Any accident or property of an individual subject could just as well be a property of another. The unique identity of an individual goes beyond the sum of all her properties for Arendt. This includes the property of free will. Theoretical attempts to ground freedom in the subject as a capacity of subjectivity have usually located it in the will, but according to Arendt, this attempt has faltered, since it is misguided. The problem with the doctrine of free will is that once free will enters the empirical world and is actualized, freedom is lost, for the action, according to Arendt, comes under the sway of material causal determinants. And if we further attempt to insist upon the reality of freedom, while simultaneously accepting the causal determination of our empirical actions, freedom becomes grounded in some kind of

transcendental mystery of which we must remain necessarily ignorant, as in Kant's theory of the *noumenal self*. According to this type of salvaging of freedom, since we can never get "behind ourselves," so to speak, to know completely the wellsprings of our actions, we must assume that we are free. This lack of knowledge gives us the appearance of freedom as spontaneity. However, viewed in this way, that is, knowing that we don't know, must entail a loss of freedom, for freedom has traditionally been thought of as incompatible with ignorance, and as involving control and mastery over the external causes of our actions, in short, of autonomy. But the mastery of external forces requires knowledge. The theory which equates freedom with ignorance of the ultimate ground of our actions is therefore unsatisfactory; for freedom strikes us as incompatible with ignorance.

If Arendt is correct, this irreducibility of the *who* revealed in action eludes theoretical articulation, for it requires the assumption of human freedom. The free human subject is, however, represented and representable in the life story of an individual actor. A story, unlike a theoretical account, narrates the sequence of a life's events as they unfold and insert themselves into the larger text, the context, of other lives. A narrative, unlike a determinist theoretical explanation, preserves the moment of freedom in action, by resisting the reduction of this freedom either to an inevitable determinant or function of the subject's sovereign will or to the mere play of events on which the subject's action has no effect. Since action is made manifest and its freedom preserved only in a story, action must be recognized as essentially narrative. Action is

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231 Although I find the recent work by Bonnie Honig to be a move in the right direction in its appropriation of Arendt for feminist theory, I disagree with her view that for Arendt, there is no subject, self, or "doer behind the deed." Arendt's subject is elastic, in flux and formation, and open to change and definition through its actions, but this concept is, I believe, more in keeping with existentialism's self-transcending subject than post-modernism's schizophrenic non-subject. See Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).
fundamentally symbolic, meaningful, textual, in a way which is obscured by any rigid
distinction between theory and practice.

We have seen that the relationship between an individual and his/her life story is
neither solely one of authorship, nor of passive suffering, but is both active and passive
subjectivity and subjection. A narrative bears the same bipolar and ambiguous
relationship to its hero as does free action to the agent of action. For this reason,
Arendt's conception of freedom is not grounded in a traditional purely theoretical
manner. She never articulates a theory which justifies her contention that we are
capable of freedom but leaves open a gap in her theoretical account. The burden of
legitimation is thereby placed (in part) upon her descriptive narrative of instances of
freedom.\footnote{232} Freedom, on Arendt's view can only be represented or imitated narratively.
In fact, Arendt's style and method have themselves been characterized as narrative.
According to Seyla Benhabib, with whom I wholeheartedly agree in this respect,
Arendt's historiography is an exercise in the political act of "storytelling," rather than the
"nostalgic history of decline" for which it is frequently taken.\footnote{233} Thus Arendt depicts
instances of freedom in the stories she tells of ancient politics. Benhabib sees Arendt's
work as "re-membering," that is, a putting together the "members" of a whole, "a
rethinking which sets free the lost potentials of the past."\footnote{234} Thus Arendt's work functions
as critique by demonstrating the possibility of an alternative mode of both practical and
theoretical political engagement. Arendt's style of critique is one which thereby
succeeds to a degree in escaping the critic's problem of legitimation.

\footnote{232}See Arendt, \textit{Men in Dark Times}, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanoviceh, 1968), for
examples of Arendt's narrative descriptions of the lives of free actors.
\footnote{233}Seyla Benhabib, \textit{Situating the Self}, page 92.
\footnote{234}Seyla Benhabib, \textit{Situating the Self}, page 92.
Forgiving and Promising as Aspects of Critique

The intertextuality of human action, like the unique distinctness of the agent of action, and the newness, unexpectedness, and unpredictability of the action's occurrence, constitute action's basic human conditions on Arendt's view. Plurality, natality, and "narrativity" are presupposed in every human action. These ontological preconditions of action imply two other inherent characteristics of action: unpredictability and irreversibility. Action is unpredictable and irreversible—it is in fact for Arendt "miraculous," in the precise sense which she gives to this word, as interrupting automatic processes.\textsuperscript{235} Action breaks into causal deterministic chain of events, and begins new processes. Because these new processes are subject to causal laws, their continuing movement of implication and effect cannot be recalled. Because these new processes insert themselves into a human network, where action on the part of others is called up in response, they are unpredictable. Unpredictability and irreversibility constitute the major risks of action.

Action is risky as everyone knows, but this risk, both for the agent of action, and for its recipients, is somewhat mitigated by two human capacities which Arendt analyzes as components of the political life: forgiveness and promising. Forgiveness stops the automatic chain created by an action and inserts itself into actuality in order to create a new beginning. It frees the actor from the consequences of her action, as well as the forgiver from the automatic behavior of simple reaction. Forgiveness is itself an action, according to Arendt, and is grounded in the human condition of natality.\textsuperscript{236} Promising is another political capacity which serves to avert the risk which free action poses. Promising attempts to stabilize the uncertain and uncontrollable consequences set off

\textsuperscript{235}Arendt, "What Is Freedom?,” page 169.
\textsuperscript{236}Arendt, \textit{The Human Condition}, page 237.
by action. It also helps to tame the "unreliability" of human beings "who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow." Promising and forgiving are aspects of the miracle of human freedom, and, as such, are political acts according to Arendt.

If we see these two features of political action as applicable to our understanding of the practice of critique, the critic's dilemma loses some of its sting. Thus, the critic's practice embraces the risks inherent in free action by engaging in an activity which she knows may be without theoretical justification. As such, the critique's transcendent moment is likely to be missed by its recipients, who may attempt to deny its legitimacy, either by interpreting the critique as nothing new or by characterizing it as an unrealistic and utopian pipe dream. Thus the two horns of the critical dilemma constitute a risk that the critic must take. But to charge the critic with either horn is to fail to allow for the possibility that critique is free political action of the sort that Arendt describes. If we accept the possibility of Arendt's type of freedom, perhaps we can both forgive the critic her immanence and seek the transcendent promise implied by the critique.

Furthermore, the critic herself must make use of forgiveness and promising in her relation to the object of critique. The critic's immanent embeddedness in that which she critiques requires of her an attitude of forgiveness, if she is to allow herself, as she must, to use some of the very terms, values, and standards which she critiques. But the critic is also implicitly promising the possibility of something better. As we have already seen in Chapter One, every critique includes a utopian moment, such that the understanding of a problem, untruth, or injustice is already a positive act and a promise for the future.

Arendt's vision of political freedom is one which can help us to understand and

237Arendt, The Human Condition, page 244.
allow for the possibility of the immanent critic’s transcendence. This type of freedom allows the embodied, historically situated, causally determined human actor to begin something radically new and to bring into existence the principle of freedom. This freedom, if Arendt is correct, cannot be grounded theoretically, for it necessarily eludes the reductionist terms of theory. But to accept this type of freedom as a political principle of action allows for the mimetic calling up of its being, as we engage in action and tell stories about it. As we have seen in the theorists we have previously discussed, the critical force of their work is apparent insofar as it renders the *status quo* questionable. But these same critics seem to falter when the question of theoretical justification is raised. Perhaps it is time to give up the quest for theoretical certainty and to recognize, as does Arendt, that the human actor is capable of freedoms that the purely theoretical mind cannot adequately grasp or account for. Furthermore, the concept of mimetic causality, which links the actor to her freedom of action, can be seen to offer a possibility of expanding the notion of rational ground beyond the too narrow confines of the purely theoretical. I intend to conclude the dissertation with a summary of this possibility.
Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the activity of critique eludes a theoretical grounding or justification. In cases where the object of critique is a totality of which the critique is itself a part, the necessary transcendence cannot be accounted for. The various critics I have examined oscillate between the two terms of the critical dilemma. Adorno and Horkheimer, for example, cannot adequately envision an alternative type of rationality to the instrumental one they find in force at the origins of Western thought (as exemplified in their analysis of Odysseus). Instead they point out the dialectical intermixture of reason and myth that governs Western thinking. Their hope for a reconciliation between estranged nature and instrumental reason relies on a faith in the dialectic. This faith cannot be theoretically justified, since theory cannot, on their account, transcend its immanence in this dialectical relation that necessarily contains both the barbaric and the rational elements.

Kant similarly, in focusing on the subjective-critical perspective as the author of the critical capacity, cannot theoretically justify the transcendence required to engage in a critique of reason. Kant, like Adorno and Horkheimer, sees reason as bifurcated—comprising both a transcendent and immanent pole. For Adorno and Horkheimer, reason is both mythical and instrumental; for Kant, it contains both the transcendental-critical perspective, and that of the empirical consciousness. Kant’s strategy is to adopt, in turn, each of these perspectives and to attempt to use them to legitimate each other. I have argued that this attempt fails. For the transcendence required to establish the legitimacy of the empirical perspective cannot be upheld within the restrictions that structure the empirical perspective’s capacity for knowledge; nor can the restrictions
placed upon the empirical perspective (which Kant argues are responsible for the
legitimacy of the empirical perspective’s epistemic capacity) be maintained from within
the transcendental perspective. If transcendence is possible, the empirical perspective
becomes illegitimate when taken as the sole perspective capable of achieving
knowledge. If the empirical perspective is indeed the only appropriate epistemic
perspective, the transcendence required is itself illegitimate. Kant’s strategy oscillates
between the two perspectives, both of which are necessary, but neither of which can be
maintained. A concrete example of this oscillation is Kant’s attempt at refuting the
charge of subjective idealism; he “dodged” the issue by taking the charge of idealism to
apply only to the empirical perspective.

Hegel, too, places the possibility of the transcendence required for critique in the
structure of cognitive consciousness. His attempt at conducting a critique of the stages
of knowledge that fall short of his goal of the Absolute proceeds by following out the
self-development of each of these forms. However this procedure cannot constitute a
theoretical justification of the ability of consciousness to achieve total or absolute
knowledge without already presupposing an acquaintance with the Absolute as implicitly
existing in each stage of consciousness. Hegel’s critique is circular and relies for its
success on a faith in the ability of the dialectic to self-overcome until it has reached
absolute truth. Furthermore, this attainment cannot be evaluated or justified until the
end of the dialectical journey has been reached. If we do not accept Hegel’s contention
that spirit is currently in its final stage, we have no access to the transcendent point of
view required to evaluate his achievement.

For Harding and the standpoint epistemologists, the transcendence out of the
patriarchal order which constitutes the object of their critique is grounded in the dual
consciousness of the feminist subject. The standpoint epistemologists offer a theory that
casts this consciousness as bifurcated and capable of developing norms, standards,
and values not already operative in the male-centered tradition. However, the theoretical
basis for this bifurcated consciousness is not sufficient to justify the claim that the
feminist standpoint is superior to the traditional standpoint. Thus Harding’s arguments
are structured in a circular manner; she presupposes the superiority she is trying to
establish. This presupposition of superiority stems from her political-ethical commitment
to the liberation of women as an oppressed class. Theoretically, the epistemology she
develops succumbs to the critical dilemma. Her belief in the superiority of the feminist
standpoint is based on an unfounded exemption of the feminist bias from the critical
considerations which render a masculinist bias inferior, and her strengthened concept of
objectivity is merely the traditional concept with the feminist bias tacked on. “Strong
objectivity” is not sufficient to the task of grounding a feminist (as opposed to any other)
standpoint—her presuppositions regarding the proper subject of knowledge can only
support a perspectivist relativism, not the superiority of the feminist point of view.

I argued in Chapter 4 that Irigaray’s “post-modern” feminism represents an
advance over the standpoint theorists in that she offers the beginnings of a theoretical
explanation for the possibility of transcendence arising out of the immanence of the
male-centered tradition. Irigaray’s psychoanalytic deconstruction of the tradition’s theory
of the feminine points out the way in which the tradition harbors as its latent other the
repressed feminine principle. Furthermore, Irigaray’s use of a psychoanalytic method of
reading the “symptoms” of the tradition’s repression of the feminine—the gaps and
contradictions in the traditional theory—gives her a technique whereby she gains
access to the latent and unconscious feminine principles and values. Thus Irigaray, like
the previously discussed theorists, makes use of both a transcendent and an immanent point of view. She mimics the feminine as it is currently understood—via her use of “reproductive mimesis” and its “hysterical” expression in an exaggeration of essential feminine difference; and she productively attempts to develop the alternative feminine principles which she has uncovered in the tradition’s unconscious. Irigaray thus represents a more positive, constructive form of the activity of critique than the theorists I previously discussed. However, this positive aspect of her work is still insufficiently theoretically developed, and, as with the feminist standpoint theorists, the feminine values she upholds cannot be established to be superior or more true to reality—only to complement those already espoused by the tradition. Irigaray therein also relies on a political commitment to feminism for the legitimacy and force of her critique.

Political commitment is more explicit in the work of Foucault, whose critical goal is professedly the creation of room in traditional discourse for the positions of the oppressed, excluded, and marginalized. Foucault’s genealogical strategy functions in a manner similar to Irigaray’s use of psychoanalysis; it uncovers the excluded principles and values which are immanent to, but covered over by the tradition of political philosophy. The effect of Foucault’s critical enterprise is to delegitimize the tradition’s pretensions to universality and necessity by presenting, in the manner of a “defetishizing critic,” a plausible alternative. Since Foucault denies any status of absolute truth for his critical elaborations, he is able, in part, to elude the demands of the critical dilemma for a point of view which is epistemically superior to the object of his critique. Nonetheless, the theoretical requirement for a justification of the implicit hope that the tradition will acknowledge the legitimacy of the viewpoints of the oppressed and excluded—as well as Foucault’s radically alternative theory of power—remains in force.
Without this theoretical justification, there is no reason for preferring Foucault’s alternative over the tradition which it is meant to displace from its position of hegemony. Thus Foucault engages in critical practice, but is unable theoretically to justify this practice without an appeal to his political commitment.

Arendt explicitly proclaims the political dimension of human life to be the ground and source of human freedom. For Arendt, the immanence of the critic and human actor in the concrete life world of human relations and historical situatedness is not an obstacle to be overcome if freedom is to be possible. It is the very precondition of free action. The transcendent freedom required by the critic requires an acceptance of our earthly being according to the principles of natality, plurality, and narrativity. Arendtian theory points to the possibility of elaborating a theory of human freedom which can account for the critic's immanent transcendence. Thus, I have analyzed Arendt as beginning to offer an account of the type of situated or immanent freedom necessary to the activity of critique. Although this account remains underdeveloped in Arendt, her positive contribution was to identify the place where such an account may come into being in the gap between natality and free action. Since this gap exists, Arendt's view of freedom must also be found to be theoretically without ground, and to point to the necessity of a political commitment to the possibility of freedom. It therefore remains to further theoretical work more completely to elaborate this freedom. Freedom must always be seen to be an attribute of the political and practical, rather than the purely epistemic, dimension of life. Thus a rational grounding of critique, in Arendtian terms, must broaden the concept of reason to include the political.

As I framed the problem in Chapter One, the dilemma of critique can be seen as
an instance of the larger crisis of reason. Reason has lost its foundation and autonomy, since it has increasingly been shown to be historically situated, implicated in, and determined by the nonrational. Thus rational critique appears itself always to be nonrationally motivated and determined. Paradoxically, the very ability of critique to see this nonrational determination presupposes its own transcendence out of the factors which determine it. Critique appears to the purely theoretical mind to be impossible; yet this impossibility is obviously achievable.
The solution is to give up an attempt at purely theoretical justification in the already existing terms of the philosophical tradition and to recognize the possibility of transcendence as immanent to our embeddedness in the human situation. The theorists I have examined in the dissertation have all understood their inability to escape completely the confines of the tradition they were critiquing; yet at the same time they were able to engage in critique by self-consciously remaining immanent. Although we have seen these attempts falter on the question of theoretical ground, we cannot deny that these critics practically attained a critical force, rendering the objects of their critiques less firmly established than before the critiques were conducted. All the critics we have discussed—whether their targets were purely epistemological, ideological, or political—engaged in a form of “defetishizing critique,” in which the self-certainty of the status quo was shaken by their work. Since this practical actuality of critique is sufficient to establish its possibility, the theoretical problem becomes how to account for it.

I have begun to answer this question by drawing out of some of the theorists I have discussed the potential and promise of new concepts which could be further elaborated in order to provide a rational ground for critical transcendence. Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer point to and suggest the possibility of an enlargement of the concept of reason to include what the tradition deems to be its opposite—myth and mimesis. This enlarged reason will constitute a reconciliation with nature—its estranged other—in such a way that such traditional attributes of instrumental reason as domination and oppression will be eliminated. Although this vision is never fully or theoretically developed in Adorno or Horkheimer, it is there as a potentiality, and as such, it should be seen as calling for development.

Kant’s promise of the possibility of critical transcendence leaves the theoretical, epistemological realm altogether, and places this possibility in the transcendental
preconditions of knowledge and in the necessary positing of the existence of a noumenal agent. Kant's critical philosophy as a whole (comprising the three “critiques”) locates the freedom crucial to the noumenal agent in the ethical, rather than the epistemological realm. But the autonomy of the three spheres Kant proposes (the epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic) cannot be maintained, for the epistemological must make use of the capacity for freedom which it alone cannot ground. Practical reason therefore, for Kant, is “higher” than theoretical reason, and so the epistemological critique of pure reason must be seen to be an ethical and practical, as much as a theoretical, activity. To this extent Kant’s critical philosophy supports my contention that critique itself necessarily has a practical component. The challenge is to articulate this necessary connection between the practical and theoretical aspects of reason, and to determine why Kant thought it necessary to keep them separate.

Similarly, feminist theory engages in the positive, constructive task of elaborating the norms, values, methods, and principles which offer new ways of theorizing the alternative reality that will ultimately justify the feminist critical vision. Harding, for example, points to the need to develop a new epistemology sufficient to the task of normatively determining the political biases that lead to increased knowledge. Objectivity itself, however, will need to be recast more radically than Harding has done; the subject/object dualism she presupposes will need to be abandoned in order to account for the way in which the object of knowledge is constructed in accord with political biases. Irigaray is more productive than Harding. Irigaray’s alternative feminine economy bases itself on values that the patriarchal theoretical tradition has neglected.

Richard Rorty believes that epistemology must be abandoned altogether, since it is inherently foundationalist in a no longer supportable way. He sees the new philosophical paradigm which will replace epistemology to be hermeneutics and to be concerned primarily with edification rather than contributing to knowledge. See Rorty, Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979).
These values—fluidity, contiguity, touch, metonymy—may serve to structure a new metaphysics brought into being on the basis of feminine experience. The theoretical task to develop more fully this alternative metaphysics remains for future work.

It is the concept of mimesis, as I have uncovered it in Adorno and Horkheimer, Irigaray, and Arendt, that I find to be the most promising of the new conceptual directions that we may take in theorizing a transcendent freedom accessible to immanently situated rational beings. Mimesis functions, in Irigaray, as a critical strategy for expressing the failure of patriarchal theory to capture the feminine principle it pretends to know. Mimesis serves as refutation in Irigaray. Her mimicking of patriarchal discourse about the feminine functions to refute the position of that discourse on the subjectivity of women. According to the male dominated tradition of both metaphysics and psychoanalytic theory, women are insufficiently ethically developed to speak meaningfully or to author the products of culture. Furthermore, according to these traditional theories, women’s experiences can never be other than the way they are described by male-authored norms. Irigaray’s mimesis repeats the male tradition’s pronouncements on women, and thereby demonstrates their absurdity and bias; the act of exaggerated repetition performatively reveals the author of such repetition to be a subject with her own point of view. Mimesis and hysteria convey an “excess” of meaning beyond what the words signify; this excess points to a trapped subjectivity whose hysteria conveys her entrapment in a discourse which is revealed as insufficient to express her full meaning.

Arendt’s use of mimesis is, of course, quite different from Irigaray’s. Arendt advocates the use of mimesis as a methodological strategy capable of capturing the freedom of the political actor in a way which is impossible for political and philosophical
(metaphysical) theory. Storytelling is endorsed and used by Arendt as a replacement for traditional theoretical explanation. But I argued that the possibility of a new kind of theoretical explanation is present in Arendt’s work. Arendt appeals to mimesis as an explanatory concept crucial to her theoretical position on the nature of freedom. Thus, I have analyzed Arendt as outlining a theory of “mimetic causality” that can account for the relations among the existential structure of natality, the principle of freedom, and the actions of the human agent. This mimetic causality will explain the way in which freedom comes into being as a reflection of the uniqueness of each individual. Freedom is what I have called an “intentional object,” for it exists only insofar as it is presupposed and enacted. Political freedom, according to Arendt, comes into being only with the actions of human agents. It is not a faculty of the will or a possession of the subject. Rather it is an expression of the subject’s natality—the fact that each of us is born into the world as a new beginning. Thus our ability to begin anew is a mimetic repetition of the beginning we each represent. When we engage in action, we express this aspect of ourselves in such a way as to escape the confines of mechanistic determinism. Action for Arendt is “miraculous,” and, as such, cannot be predicted, controlled, or fully expressed in the terms of current political theory. This type of causality suggested by Arendt remains to be developed, but to see it as a form of mimetic repetition is a start.

My contribution in this dissertation has been primarily negative and critical, rather than constructive. I have analyzed ways in which the theorists studied have failed to provide a purely theoretical grounding for their critical philosophies. As such, this

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239This type of existence may capture what Foucault means by power being subject to its expression. Power is not an object possessed by individuals or institutions, for Foucault. Rather it can only be expressed, in which case it becomes a force in its own right. Thus power has eluded adequate theoretical analysis, according to Foucault. This type of existence may also be applicable to the problem in the Platonic theory of the Forms. According to Plato, the particulars imitate the Forms (which is why they are ontologically inferior); however the mode of this imitation has remained problematic and controversial in Plato scholarship.
dissertation has itself been an exercise in critique, which has pointed out the contradictions and failures evident in these critical theories’ attempts to establish their own legitimacy. But I have also attempted to offer some preliminary directions toward a positive elaboration that will fill in the space opened by what I see to be the crisis of critique. I believe wholeheartedly in the possibility of doing critical philosophy beyond the dilemma of legitimation. The activity of critique is never entirely theoretical, but always also a political enterprise. Pure theory, as it stands, can no longer play a foundational role. Our activities—even our activities as thinkers and knowers—are inextricably implicated in our political biases. The political aspect of critique, and indeed of all knowledge production, must be kept continually in view; our attempts to understand our cognitive activities must draw upon our political selves for the development of the new concepts and standards adequate to this challenge.

Contemporary philosophy, if it is to outflank the dilemma of critique and of reason, is in need of new modes of justification and normativity. But this is as it should be. As Jean-Francois Lyotard reminds us, “. . . philosophical discourse obeys a fundamental rule, namely that it must be in search of its rule. Or, if you prefer: its rule is that what is at stake is its rule.”240 It is precisely this difficult task of the construction of new standards which lies before us now.

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