UNIVERSAL HISTORY AS GLOBAL CRITIQUE:

FROM GERMAN CRITICAL THEORY

TO THE ANTI-COLONIAL TRADITION

by

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Department of Philosophy
and the Division of Graduate Studies of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

June 2021

DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

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Title: Universal History as Global Critique: From German Critical Theory to the Anti-Colonial Tradition

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Degree awarded June 2021

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation argues for a critical reconstruction of the concept of universal history. In doing so, it draws on theoretical resources offered by a materialist philosophy of history, as it is expressed in both German critical theory (of the 19th and 20th centuries) and Afro-Caribbean, anti-colonial thought (of the 20th century). Proceeding through an examination of classical conceptual oppositions in the history of philosophy such as historical specificity versus transhistoricity, nature versus history, and universality versus particularly, the project also surveys tensions and limitations of the historical assumptions of the existing literature in social and political thought. The dissertation explores the possibility of global critique for the present which emphasizes a multi-traditional and multi-regional approach to historically situated, critical social theory. It is argued that between the resources of the Western Marxist tradition (including Hegel, Marx, as well as the Frankfurt and Budapest Schools of critical theory) and anti-colonial thought (esp. systemic, materialist critiques of colonialism and imperialism from the Afro-Caribbean), the concept of universal history can be critically reconstructed to ground critiques of an antagonistic and unequal global society.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The commitments I hold here and otherwise are not held in isolation, they emerge from a collective struggle to grasp our historical situation and, more importantly, our collective attempts to radically transform it. My gratitude goes first and foremost to my advisor, Rocío Zambrana whose steadfast support and encouragement made this work possible and to my dissertation committee, Colin Koopman, Anita Chari, Barbara Muraca, and John Bellamy Foster, who were so supportive and helpful throughout. I owe an inestimable debt to Larry Alan Busk, my most cherished interlocutor and steadfast ally in all things. I also owe much to my dearest colleagues, and comrades, Óscar Ralda, Kenneth Knowlton, Iaan Reynolds, Mary McLevey, Valérie Simon, Billy Dean Goehring, and Reese Haller for their willingness to listen, to inquire, and to sharpen my thinking with patience, care, and encouragement and for their friendship.

To my mother and father, Aileen Pereira and Reinaldo Portella, who worked so very hard that I might have the chance to succeed in whatever I chose, without the condition that it be what they had chosen, I am infinitely grateful.

It is not only to those I know by name that I am grateful; each day in writing this, I sat in a chair at a desk, made by my fellow workers, I ate food harvested, shipped, and prepared by my fellow workers.

I have had the privilege of having my needs met by so many of my fellow workers, while so many of them do not. It is to these workers that we all owe our gratitude and our solidarity. Without them, my life and thus my work would not be possible, and, with them, the world has the possibility to, at last, become the right one.

For Larry,
my most trusted confidante, comrade, and passionate co-conspirator

and

For the workers of the world,
without whom nothing is possible and to whom the future belongs

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I: INTRODUCTION

The final years of the 20th century and the arrival of the 21st brought with them not only momentous historical changes but a new attitude toward not only these but all historical changes. With the ideological and economic reorganization of geopolitics after the end of the Cold War, critical social theory began to refashion itself in light of these changes and, overwhelmingly, this reformulation reflected the changes. Many of the world-historical events that precipitated such shifts were, in fact, rather decisive in shaping the future of our planet and peoples: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the rise of neocolonialism, the deconstruction of the capitalist welfare state (i.e., neoliberalism), and the transnational consolidation we now call 'globalization'. What much critical social theory fails to ask is whether such changes *should* have occurred, what the precisely *normative* significance of these changes is, and, most importantly, whether the commitment to historically situated social and political thought is an injunction to *capitulate to rather than transform* the historical conditions that confront us. It is these questions that I have attempted to raise and respond to in what follows.

However, the aim of this project is not merely to demonstrate what is lacking or what errs in the contemporary theoretical landscape. Rather, this project is one which is committed to the reconstruction and examination of categories in service of a critique which is adequate to the contemporary historical conditions in which it is developed and at which it is aimed. In order to do this, it is necessary to ensure that we can grasp those conditions fully and in reality, so as not to be arrested by appearances. This requires that we critically evaluate dominant historical narratives of how change—in critique and in the world—have unfolded. Thus, critical evaluation of prominent approaches in contemporary theory by necessity accompany the more constructive aspects of the project.

Analytically, this inquiry responds to two philosophical problems. The first pertains to the modes of historical critique employed in the critique of society (i.e., critical social theory). When critical theorists (broadly construed) undertake social critique as a historically situated task, the meaning of historical contextualization is often presumed rather than specified. This project, thus, both concerns

a clarification of implicit foundations of contemporary thought and a more positive reconstruction of what is required by a materially grounded critique of society. The second is

how best to make critique adequate to historical changes without losing its moorings, as it is awash with ever-new historical 'innovations'.

The argument I forward here is that, while we can admit that historical changes have taken place, their impact does not always register at the level of requiring a qualitative change in terms of social critique. Moreover, many of the changes that contemporary thinkers cite to corroborate the claims that we live in 'New Times' are not, in reality, very novel. The allegedly 'radical novelty' of many of these historical changes are largely superficial and, more importantly, ideological, in the sense that they obscure a more profound and more pernicious historical continuity, a continuity which is characterized by oppression, exploitation, and expropriation which has accompanies the increasingly total and integrative reach of capitalist imperialism. Our historical conditions are thus: a globalized capitalism continues to add to a long chain of historical violence and irrationality on a mass scale and the revelation of its newest threat demonstrates that capitalism imperialism threatens the very habitability of our planet and the survival of our species.

It is to these conditions that I index theoretical exigency. Not unlike other contemporary critical theorists, I share the commitment that critique must be calibrated to the historical conditions which exist, to avoid utopianism and to find its most advantageous strategic footing. In contrast to the prevailing tendency, my own position is that the supposedly 'old' categories have more to offer us than those which claim to have replaced them. One such 'old' category is that of *universal history*. Though its intellectual history is fraught, my claim is that its import is more pressing now than ever. To the contemporary reader it may not be entirely which I would elect to rehabilitate *this* category and those which a critical conception of it entails. To that reader I would direct attention at the totalizing threat of anthropogenic climate change, the continued, systematic violence and inequality wrought by global capitalism, and fact that our time is characterized by capitalism's attempt to universalize itself: globalization. This informs not only the choice to renew the category of universal history but to reorganize critical social theory to be amenable to a *global* society.

The fact of capitalist global integration (i.e., globalization) and the uneven world it has continually wrought guides this inquiry toward certain concrete questions and themes as well. In this project, the primary litmus for whether critique performs adequately for our historical situation is *whether it has or can develop the tools to grasp a global social whole*, in its shared as well as differential conditions. In my view, this means a critique that can grasp the heterogenous

expressions of colonial history, as well as contemporary neocolonial and imperial practice, as an extension of the logic of capital accumulation. This means that theoretical and practical traditions are drawn together in a heterodox fashion, in order to offer a more complete and more dynamic account of the global system.

In the more reconstructive moments of the project, this means making use of the tools offered to us by Western Marxism, especially the Frankfurt and Budapest schools, while also critically examining the way its apprehension of 'social totality' has been primarily focused on 'consumer societies' and not, for example, their neo/colonial conditions of possibility. To ameliorate problems of theoretical focus such as this, the project draws from resources both within the Frankfurt and Budapest schools as well as external to that strain of Marxist critique. As the project focuses heavily on the historical conditions of capitalist imperialism, it draws on theoretical resources from dependency and world-systems theory, as well as third world Marxism and what is referred to here as anti-colonial thought more broadly. This includes Latin American, Caribbean, and African Marxists. Thus, the project is by nature an interdisciplinary one, though its aims and methods are formally philosophical in that they constitute a search for normative foundations.

In the more critical phases of the project, I take the approach of considering prevailing claims about specific critical categories (whose opposition structures each chapter) from the decolonial and postcolonial vantage. I take the goal of this phase to be highlighting the ways that decolonial and postcolonial thought do not account for or misconstrue the conditions of the world-system they seek to critique but, more importantly, the ways their thought cannot account for crucial aspects of that system. In other words, I focus on structural deficiencies in these approaches to highlight the need for a more radical shift in contemporary thinking about colonialism, capitalism, and the climate crisis. The last of these is the focus of the later chapters, as the precipitation of anthropogenic climate change is equally, if only more recently, a hallmark of our own historical moment.

The task of critique and reconstruction is generally coextensive in each chapter. The chapters, generally, begin by taking stock of what is most commonly said or assumed about a given aspect of the historical critique, especially as it relates to the viability of universal history and, then, offer alternatives to the commonly held positions, with the aim of offering a more dialectical account and to ameliorate what I argue are ideological mediations which distort

both the diagnoses and prescriptions of much contemporary historically-situated critique. The chapters are organized as follows.

Chapter 1, "Philosophy of History and Historical Critique: Marx and Hegel Revisited," briefly introduces the problem of interpreting the term 'historical' in historically situated social critique and lays out the basic commitments of a materialist conception of history. It has three principal tasks: explicating and clarifying Marx's philosophy of history as it is presented in *The German Ideology*, clarifying and establishing the necessity of Hegel's 'rational intelligibility' for the project of social critique (and establishing this as a way to make the Hegel-Marx connection), and, finally, to bring the theoretical terms of Hegel and Marx's philosophies on the problem of underdevelopment (as understood by Walter Rodney) especially germane to anti-colonial critique. This last task also involves a critique of analytical Marxism as a distortion of the historical claims of Hegelian Marxism, a distortion which demonstrates decisively negative ramifications for its ability to address the colonial context. The chapter focuses specifically on the status of reason/rationality, social totality, and social relations and their role in a historically situated critique of capitalist imperialism.

Chapter 2, "Two Modes of Critique: Transhistoricity and Historical Specificity," continues to clarify and elaborate on the status of critical categories within a materialist framework and the Marxist tradition. The chapter, as the title suggests, focuses on two ways to interpret the term 'historical' as it pertains to critique. It highlights the reciprocal determination and dialectical relation between these two 'moments' of critique. It does this by constructing a hypothetical debate between Moishe Postone and István Mészáros, two theorists who explicitly address the question of the 'transhistorical' (as opposed to the ahistorical), albeit to different ends. The chapter examines the necessity of the transhistorical for grounding critical theory and for the logical intelligibility of historical specificity. It does this by examining the status of specific categories like labor, ideology, and social totality. Chapter 2 also lays out the conception of ideology which is operative in the critical phases of the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3, "Natural History and the Classical Opposition of History and Nature," is the first chapter which contributes substantively to the construction of universal history by elaborating one of its components. The category of natural history may, at first, appear as a kind of detour from the mainline of the project's inquiry, but, in fact, it further clarifies the material basis of the concept of universal history re-envisioned. Chapter 3 also begins to

perform the commitment to a global critique which takes both European and non-European critiques of capitalist imperialism as a differentially situated aspects of a larger, holistic critique. It traces the status of natural history in the work of Adorno and draws out the implications of the concept for interpreting his approach as a historical materialist. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates the absence of the category (or of any 'natural' categories) in decolonial (esp. the modernity/coloniality group) and postcolonial (esp. subaltern studies) thought, in spite of the central role that natural resources have played in colonial conquest. It demonstrates the resources that the Frankfurt school might—if counterintuitively—be better suited to offer, even if its focus has traditionally focused on Western 'consumer societies'. The chapter insists on the reciprocal determination of natural and history, if critique is to be adequate to its object; it thus foreshadows some of the ecological themes of Chapter 5. The chapter also begins to track a fundamental continuity between the Frankfurt school and anti-colonial thinkers such as Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, and C.L.R. James.

Chapter 4, "Universal History Against the Antithesis of Universality and Particularity," takes this task a step further to consider the status of universality in, on the one hand, decolonial and postcolonial critique and, on the other, the Marxist tradition in the forms of both the Frankfurt School (i.e., Western Marxism) and anti-colonial Marxism. Chapter 4 is the crux of the reconstruction of universal history, as the chapter is preoccupied primarily the opposition of universality and particularity in methodological debates in the critique of colonialism. The chapter undertakes a brief assessment of the role of false 'universalism' in colonial discourse and in the response of postcolonial (e.g., Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee) and decolonial thinkers. (e.g., Walter Mignolo, Ramón Grosfoguel). The chapter considers the decolonial and postcolonial objections—especially those grounded in epistemic location—and responds to these through a composite account of universalism as an anti-colonial strategy through the work Frantz Fanon in dialogue with Jean Paul Sartre, Aimé Césaire, and C.L.R. James, in conjunction with the more contemporary work of Theodor Adorno, Antonio-Vázquez-Arroyo, Karen Ng, and Vivek Chibber.

Chapter 5, "Universal History at the Brink of Climate Catastrophe," crystallizes the arguments of the previous chapters to demonstrate that universal history as a critical concept has a unique ability to address not only the totalization represented by globalization, but by the threat of anthropogenic climate change. Beginning from a historical materialist perspective as clarified in Chapters 1 and 2, it argues that the natural history of Chapter 3, and the

dialectical perspective on universality and particularity argued in Chapter 4, form the basis of a conception of universal history which is adequate to the historical objection of critique, to the world in which we find ourselves, without capitulating to the terms set by capitalist imperialism nor by remaining unduly rigid in the face of historical flux. Without losing its bearings and becoming mired in the dominant ideology, the concept of universal history developed in this context foregrounds the dimensions of the climate crisis which have recently revived debates about universality, given its presentation as a species-threat to a world which is deeply and violently stratified. The chapter demonstrates that a historical materialist conception of universal history is neither indifferent nor strictly determined by its historical conditions of possibility.

Like all finite philosophical inquiries, the project takes certain concepts and questions for granted. For example, it does not contain a comprehensive justification for its commitment to historical materialism, anti-capitalism, or anti-colonialism. It takes as self-evident (because of the work of so many diligent others) that colonialism, capitalism, and their synthesis in capitalist imperialism are worthy of critique, opposition, and, ultimately, abolition. It takes for granted that the problems exhibited by such social formations are not incidental or contingent but necessary for these forms to exist and perpetuate themselves. I do not attempt to give a 'balanced' account of the 'other side' on such matters, as I find it beyond the scope of the project and of little value to the critical theorist, of whom it can safely be assumed that such pretense to the non-partisan is itself ideological.

In the way of a justification for the materialist framework, I say only this: I have found no other framework which so dynamically and so adaptively accounts for the phenomena which concerns me and, I hope, critical theorists more broadly. I have, furthermore, found no framework outside the Marxist tradition which has the explanatory power and the methodological robustness to give an account of how the world came to and continues to be shaped by capitalist imperialism. Put more simply, I do not feel I choose historical materialism any more than one chooses to be corporeal, to be in a dependent, metabolic relation with nature, or to be a creature capable of the self-conscious and rational design of one's activity. The problem, it is presupposed here, is fundamentally a historical and material one and so, thus, is the method.

II: PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY AND HISTORICAL CRITIQUE: MARX AND HEGEL REVISITED

Introduction

As the primary aim of this project is to begin clarification and development of a philosophy of history as critique, i.e., to think historical inquiry with the aim of a critique of society, it is necessary to revisit that moment in the history of European critical philosophy since Kant that philosophy as critique crystallizes into a critique not of the possibility of historical knowledge (or knowledge altogether) but into the means by which philosophy, no longer understood to be autonomous from social and political life, takes social and political life as constitutive of critical thought. This moment, exemplified in the work of Marx and Hegel, has shaped critical theory in the German tradition and beyond into theory which is centrally concerned with historically situated critique. From feminist theory to postcolonial/de-colonial thought to the Frankfurt school, Marx and Hegel have been formative for historical critique. In spite of their founding influence, however, much has been written to refute, revise, or 'rethink' their thought in light of historical changes and aspects of their thought which—in light of the linguistic, cultural, and, most recently, epistemic turns in critical social theory—have been deemed deterministic, economistic, or 'metaphysical.' Without asserting that no modification or scrutiny is warranted, this chapter clarifies some important aspects of Marx and Hegel's historical thinking that is, I argue, necessary for transformative social critique. In service of clarifying these elements further, the chapter also offers a critique of the most widely read understanding of Marx's philosophy of history, G.A. Cohen's *Marx's Theory of History*, which has served as the sole monograph-length, English language reference on the topic since its publication. This critique specifically focuses on the anti-colonial protentional (or, rather, lack thereof) of analytical Marxism to distinguish it from 'Western Marxism,' whose method offers us tools toward that end.

Although the chapter is partly a response to the deteriorated philosophical status of the philosophy of history in the discipline and in the humanities, it is not primarily defensive. Still, I consider some common objections to Marx and Hegel's historical approaches, but I neither do so exhaustively nor as a focal point of the chapter. Instead, I have chosen to interpret and clarify those tools which are indispensable to a concretely grounded historical critique since much of the explication I give below is hardly 'common sense' about either Marx

or Hegel. The two loci of this chapter are in the clarification of the basis of a materialist (rather than idealist) philosophy of history and the 'rationality' of history (i.e., 'rational intelligibility') as a necessary component of social critique, engaging the relevant literature where necessary. Thus, the chapter follows Marx's own practice of articulation: *explicating philosophy of history, not for its own sake, but for the sake of a systematic critique of global society*. This means not capitulating to dominant narratives about history and not uncritically adopting dominant modes of historicization. This also means adapting historical materialism, as an analytical method to the flux of historical circumstances, changes, and transformations, but not by becoming unmoored and drifting aimless amidst the immediate appearance of historical change, rather than its underlying logic and dynamics.

Marx and the Philosophy of History

Marx is neither the first nor the only thinker of 19th century Germany to take up the question of history; he is most certainly not the last. Still, Marx's philosophy of history is unique on two accounts: its material basis and its critical mode. Unlike much historical and scientific inquiry in the German tradition, Marx's materialism manages to avoid the pitfalls of physicalism, empiricism, and what we might now call 'biological determinism' and predates the present-day varieties of 'vulgar' materialism, such as 'neuro-behaviorism'. Moreover, Marx's philosophy of history is one which is fundamentally oriented toward critique. Its longest and fullest articulation appears in *The German Ideology* and this text is somewhat unique in Marx's corpus for its immanently critical position in relation to German philosophy of the period. Thus, in terms of its intellectual history, Marx's philosophy of history is developed in relation to, in his own time, the dominant modes of philosophy of history and philosophical inquiry more broadly. However, this is not the only way in which the materialist philosophy of history is critical. Marx's materialist philosophy of history, more than a critique of his idealist contemporaries, is formulated *with the aim of substantiating and grounding claims about the need for a radical transformation of society*, as well as a critical analysis of ideas and institutions that might inhibit that transformation.

In spite of this singularity, Marx's materialist philosophy of history has long been misunderstood, misconstrued, and rejected, often on the grounds that it is 'deterministic,' 'teleological,' or Eurocentric. Moreover, Marx's philosophy of history is a frequent topic in debates about the viability of the philosophy of history *in general*, as in Popper's famous polemic *The Poverty of Historicism*. Still other critics maintain that Marx's thought is parochial,

suited only to the conditions of the 19th century and therefore moribund, if not already obsolete. The matter is not helped by a surprising lack—surprising if only because of the volume of criticism, both passing and sustained, that his philosophy has been subjected to—of academic literature, especially in the discipline of philosophy, dedicated to the exegesis not to mention interpretation of Marx's philosophy of history *as a philosophy of history*. Indeed, there is but a small handful of scholarly texts that are dedicated to this purpose. The most well-known attempt by a philosopher (and, in general) remains G.A. Cohen's *Marx's Theory of History*. Although analytical Marxism's heyday in the Anglophone Euro-Atlantic has long passed, many of Cohen's assumptions and conclusions about Marx's 'theory of history' live on as a kind of 'inherited wisdom.'[1] Indeed, Marx's philosophy of history has often been gleaned from only a few specific texts in his corpus, texts which contain more brief and ambivalent remarks about history, such as the 1859 Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, select passages of *Capital Vol. I*, and the *Communist Manifesto*. These texts, however, do not offer the clearest nor the most substantial expositions of the materialist conception of history. Although this fact has been acknowledged by scholars since at least the 1990s,[2] the tendency to focus on these texts nonetheless persists.[3]

In this chapter, I offer an alternate reading of Marx's philosophy of history which diverges from analytical Marxism in both form and content. Relying primarily on *The German Ideology*, I argue that not only does Marx's philosophy of history not amount to a 'productive force' or 'technological determinism' but, moreover, that such apparent determinism is the

[1]The reader may object to generalization about the views of analytical Marxists since their approaches are not homogeneous and there is considerable disagreement between them about the status and significance of some of its major claims. However, one feature is unanimously shared by all of its major figures, e.g., Cohen, Rigby, Shaw: the basic premise of analytical Marxism is an anti-methodological, non-dialectical reading of Marx's 'theory of history.' Though not all accept Cohen's specific version of exposition, they do concur with his most basic methodological disposition which is of greatest concern in what follows. See, for example, S.H. Rigby. *Marxism and History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). p. 7, 13. See also, William H. Shaw. "The Handmill Gives You the Feudal Lord": Marx's Technological Determinism." *History and Theory* 18(2) (1979): 155-176.

[2] See, Etienne Balibar. *The Philosophy of Marx*. New York: Verso Books, 2014. p. 93: The text of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy* of 1859 has long been seen as the canonical exposition of the 'materialist conception of history,' even though it is, quite explicitly only a programme. For better or for worse, Marxists have devoted thousands of pages to it." Unfortunately, in spite of this acknowledgement, Balibar continues to contribute to this tendency throughout the relatively short chapter devoted to Marx's philosophy of history. Indeed, as I discuss in the section on analytical Marxism, Balibar shares several assumptions with that interpretation in part because of this tendency.

[3] See, for example, Tom Rockmore. "Marx," pp. 488-197. *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*. Ed. Aviezer Tucker. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2009; Allen M. Wood. *Karl Marx*. New York: Routledge, 2004. pp. 76-81; Peter Singer. *Marx: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. pp. 47-58; Louis Althusser. "Marxism is not a Historicism" in *Reading Capital*. New York: Verso Books, 2016; G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

result of a specifically *anti-methodological* reading. This anti-methodological reading and analytical Marxism's opposition to 'holistic thinking' (i.e., a rejection of Hegelian method) is what produces a problematically mechanistic view. And, moreover, the 'analytical' reading of Marx quells and obscures the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist potential of Marxist thought. More importantly, elaborated in the context of a global capitalism, its allegedly emancipatory prescriptions in fact coincide with dominant, imperial policy and liberal solutions to structural global inequality.

Before undertaking such a critique of this misreading of Marx's philosophy of history, we should get clear on the resources that *The German Ideology* has to offer the project of radical social critique. To do so, it is necessary to introduce an important terminological distinction concerning

'historical materialism.' Though I have suggested that there is a dearth of literature which addresses Marx's thinking about history *as a philosophy of history*, the same cannot be reported of historical materialism or its application. That is, there is a slew of texts dating back to the early twentieth century which concern themselves with 'historical' or 'dialectical materialism' wherein the terms have varied meanings. The term is often used to capture, very broadly, the elements of Marx's thinking on history which inform Marxists' approach to concrete and particular historical cases as well as larger trends and shifts over time. The term sometimes refers to Marx's taxonomy of historical social forms or accounts which rely on that taxonomy. Distinct from this more historiographical view, I use the term to refer to the method of analysis which is informed by Marx's materialist philosophy of history. *Historical materialism*, then, is the form of critical examination which portends a Marxist or Marx-informed critique of existing societies, i.e., the *analytical framework* whereas the *materialist philosophy of history* is what provides the *normative justification and ground* of the critical method. In sum, my reading of *The German Ideology* understands this text as supplying the *philosophical grounds* and clarification of the foundations of Marx's historical materialism *as a historical method*.[4]

Finally, we also must broach the subject of the status of *The German Ideology* in Marx's corpus and its somewhat late arrival to those working in the Marxist tradition. As Jorge Larraín has highlighted, although *The German Ideology* lacks explicit formulation of some crucial

[4] Still further, there is the topic of 'Marxist historiography' which I do not address here, since it is largely a method 'applied' by practicing historians, many of whom do articulate a theoretical basis for historiographical practice drawing on Marx. However, as my focus is on the substantive philosophical foundation of that practice, I have refrained from surveying that rich literature here.

concepts that appear in Marx's later works (e.g., labor power, relations of production) this is not cause to suggest that this 'middle' work is aberrant or marginal.[5] "It is hardly disputable," he writes, "that its main conclusions constituted the theoretical basis of, and a programme for, future work".[6] For precisely this reason, *The German Ideology* is crucial for understanding Marx's method, especially his approach to history and ideology. Indeed, "apart from the 1859 'Preface'," it is the only text "where one can find a general exposition of Marx's principal ideas about society and history".[7] It is, thus, not only the foundational exposition of his philosophy of history but also—by no coincidence—the only of Marx's writings where "one can find a formal definition or a systematic treatment of ideology".[8] Following this logic, the exegesis and analysis which follows heeds the interconnectedness of the concepts of history and ideology in Marx's thought.

The text's import notwithstanding, the reception of both Marx's philosophy of history and his conception of ideology were long developed in the Marxist tradition in the absence of *The German Ideology*. The first published edition appears in Russian in 1924 and in German in 1926 (Larraín 1983, 54). Some of the most well-known Marxist thinkers—e.g., Lenin, Lukács, Gramsci, Labriola—worked in the 80 years during which the text was simply unavailable. Thus, where the first two generations of Marxists are concerned, this methodological exposition was a matter of reconstruction from works less explicitly devoted to philosophical foundations.[9] The text's 'late' arrival in the tradition, the time and place of its first publication (the Soviet Union under Stalin), Engels's subsequent harsh criticism of the text, and its polemical tone and style present some hermeneutical difficulties. Nonetheless, as Larraín suggests, "this cannot hide the seminal character of this first breakthrough" (1983, 17). It is this seminal character that is drawn out below.

Materialist Philosophy of History in *The German Ideology*

"The first premise of all human history," writes Marx, "is, of course, the existence of living human individuals" (GI 37/DDI 17). "All historical writing," he insists, "must set out

[5] Jorge Larraín. *Marxism and Ideology* (London: MacMillan, 1983). p. 17.
[6] Ibid. p. 16.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid. p. 17.
[9] In some cases, this fact makes the works of those earlier generations more appreciable. For example, it is has been noted that Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* was written nearly 10 years prior to the release of the *1844 Manuscripts*, texts which are strangely foreshadowed by this 'secondary' text and, furthermore, elaborated on with ingenuity. If we further consider that Lukács's did not have access to *The German Ideology* at that time, the book appears all the more prescient, even with its weaknesses (discussed in 2.1.a and 2.1.b).

from these natural bases and their modification in the course of history through the action of [humans]" (GI 37/DDI 17).[10] In this passage the reader encounters the most preliminary commitment of the materialist philosophy of history: *the centrality of the reproduction of bodily life*. However, Marx also cautions that the foregrounding of bodily life should not amount to a crude form of physicalism or biologism. Rather, the "natural bases" must be understood in relation to their alteration through human action. Forewarning his reader against the temptation to grasp the reproduction of life as an immediate fact, as one might in an empiricist or positivist fashion, Marx insists from the very outset that the commitment to materialism is one which is closely bound up with understanding materiality as produced and reproduced by and among human beings.[11] As Marx himself would note, however, this basic commitment alone does not suffice to elaborate a conception of history. Historical writing must "set out from these natural bases" but cannot be content to remain there. The preliminary foregrounding of the reproduction of bodily life must be understood beyond its status as a bare fact.

"Definite individuals," Marx writes, "who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations" (GI 41/DDI 21). That is, in the course reproducing their lives, human beings reproduce the *social* life which continues to make the reproduction of life possible; this is the 'second premise' of human history.[12] The manner in which the need for reproduction is satisfied is bound to shape the relations between human beings. As a development of the most basic commitment of the materialist philosophy of history one could reformulate these first two premises as follows: *history consists foremost of living human beings whose activity concerns the reproduction of their life and this reproduction is not done at a strictly individual level but occurs through social relations shaped by the very conditions under which their life is reproduced*. These first two elements of the materialist conception of history—materiality and relationality—give way to a 'third premise.'

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[10] In the English translation of *The German Ideology*, the term 'Mensch' and its derivatives (e.g., 'Menslichen,' 'Menschen') are translated as 'man,' 'men,' or 'mankind.' I have chosen to translate these terms as 'human' or 'human being,' as the masculine gender is both exclusive as well as inappropriate to the original language. The altered translation appears in brackets wherever relevant henceforth.

[11] For a critical examination of the apparently 'empiricist' bent of *The German Ideology*, See, Georg H. Fromm. "Empiricism, Science, and Philosophy in *The German Ideology*." Translated by Manuel S. Almeida. *Rethinking Marxism*, 27(1) (2015): 9-32.

[12] Marx himself does not designate 'three premises.' However, I have adopted that language to clarify what I take (and what Marx takes, in my view) to be the central features of the material conception of history.

This 'third premise' pertains to "the production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness" (GI 42/DDI 22). This premise describes two related but distinct things: 1) *the production of ideas* and 2) *the concept of ideology*. The former is a description of a process which need not necessarily be problematic but simply follows from 'first premise' of history. The latter is a critical category which is *not* a feature endemic to consciousness but to *specific forms of social life* as the context for consciousness.[13] In this formulation of the concept, "[Human beings] are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. that is real active [human beings], as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these" (GI 42/DDI 22).[14] The reader will note that Marx begins with the fact of human beings' being the producers of their ideas; he does not describe ideas as being spontaneously produced from 'things themselves' or emerging directly from productive forces. We will revisit the theme of 'productive forces' in the discussion of analytical Marxism to follow. Though Marx does think that ideas are formed from the material conditions of the reproduction of social life, he understands the relation between ideas and material conditions to be, per the 'second premise,' mediated by *our relation to those conditions*. The passage mentioned above, furthermore, pertains to the production of ideas *in general*.

The second component of the 'third premise' pertains specifically to the problem of ideology. "If in all ideology," Marx writes, "[human beings] and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life process" (GI 42/DDI 22). In this passage, Marx is not conflating the 'inversion' of ideology with the natural fact of retinal correction.[15] He does not insist on the necessarily fictive or distorted character of ideas in general but, rather, is referring to the specific function of ideology to generate a contradictory appearance of actual, concrete circumstances. Marx is, in fact, asserting the *material* basis of ideological inversion. He clarifies this when he writes that "The phantoms

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[13] See, Larraín 1983, pp. 19-24.

[14] Elsewhere in *The German Ideology*, Marx clarifies what is meant by the term 'productive forces.' The term is hardly reducible to technological or industrial instrumentation in itself, but rather emphasizes the social relations made possible by and which makes possible the development of forms of production. See, Marx, *The German Ideology*, 49 (DDI 29): "The production of life, both of one's own in labor and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'productive force.'"

[15] See, Larraín 1983, 16.

formed in the brains of [human beings] are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process" (GI 42/DDI 22). Ideology, even as it pertains to ideas and concepts, has its basis in the material conditions of the reproduction of life. The 'inverted' appearance is a consequence of a *specific relation to the contradictory conditions of reproducing life in class societies.*

It is for this reason that Marx can say that ideology (including, morality, religion, and metaphysics) and the forms of consciousness emerging from it has "no history" and "no development" (GI 42/DDI 22). These forms of thinking, when viewed from the standpoint of a materialist conception of history, "no longer retain the semblance of independence" (GI 42/DDI 22). They cannot have a history or development *of their own*. Rather, their history can be indexed to the history of "[human beings], developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter[ing], along with this their actual world, also their thinking and products of their thinking" (GI 42/DDI 22). Even as Marx is describing the distortion produced by our relation to the contradictory conditions of the reproduction of life in capitalist society, he foregrounds the active role human beings play in shaping their world and their thinking about that world.

Compounding these three premises, then, we can briefly summarize the most basic features of Marx's materialist philosophy of history as follows: *History consists foremost of living human beings whose activity concerns the reproduction of their life and this reproduction occurs through social relations shaped by the conditions under which their life is reproduced. In the course of these processes, human beings' conception of those processes is shaped by the processes themselves. Our relation to the material conditions of reproduction shapes our conception of the life process and, when that process is contradictory in character, our relation to those contradictions can produce ideology. In turn, ideology covers over the very material processes which constitute objective and lived contradictions, obscuring the irrationality of antagonistic material conditions.*

This conception of history is developed in a critical relation to both idealism and empiricism; in this regard, the fact that the text is polemical offers us some insight into its significance. "As soon as this active life-process," entailing both material conditions and our conceptions of them, "is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists…or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists" (GI 43/DDI 23). In categorizing the empiricist view and the idealist views as equally insufficient, what Marx is highlighting as problematic is the presumption of *immediacy*. His philosophy of history is, at its core, not about the bare fact of reproduction—though foregrounding this fact is necessary—but about how that fact is mediated by social relations, relations which in turn

impact the manner in which life is reproduced. Indeed, the materialist philosophy of history is not formulated for the simple sake of developing an accurate philosophy of history, but rather *because such a philosophy of history is necessary for undertaking a critique of capitalist society*.

This is especially important to note since Marx intended his philosophy of history, not merely as a neutral statement about the nature of history *as such* (though the formulation entails stable facts about what history is and how it is made) but as *itself a critical project*. This is one reason, in fact, that reconstructing his philosophy of history requires much care. Because Marx never dedicated an entire treatise to the philosophy of history and, moreover, because his priorities lay elsewhere (i.e., in transforming the historical future) the fact that it is presented as part and parcel of a polemic against 'idealist' conceptions of history is not accidental. For Marx, the materialist philosophy of history is constitutive of a critique of history's extant course as much as it is a clarification of history's misunderstanding or misapprehension by those who deemphasize the social reproduction of human life.

With this in mind, we are better prepared to contrast and contextualize the formulation of *The German Ideology* with the more 'mechanistic' formulation in *Capital Vol. I*, which echoes an earlier formulation in the 1859 preface. Second only to the *Manifesto*, "The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation" contains the most well-cited and controversial formulation of Marx's thinking on history: "...Capitalist production begets," Marx writes, "with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation" (929). This coincides with the famous passage in the *Manifesto* which claims that "What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (PEM 22). The two passages seem to support the view that socialism and the triumph of the working class are immutable facts about the political future.[16] If, in fact, this is what was intended in these passages, then it is clear that the demise of capitalism via the triumph of working class struggle has not been brought about, though revolution was all around in what historians now refer to as the 'Revolutions of 1848'.[17] Marx and Engels, in this

[16] Interestingly, Cohen argues against this reading of 'inevitability.' See, Cohen, "Historical Inevitability," 65: "Marx and Engels thought socialism was inevitable, not whatever people might do, but because of what people, being rational, were bound, predictably, to do. It is therefore no more irrational for Marxists to struggle for the goal they regard as inevitable than it is for an army of overwhelming strength to fight and thereby achieve its inevitable victory". This, in part, has contributed to reading his interpretation as a variation of 'rational choice Marxism.'

[17] In Chapter 3, we will reconsider these passages about inexorability and inevitability in light of the threat of climate change, which although not in the sense Marx and Engels intended, may resignify what might otherwise be simply understood as a failed prediction.

case, are not especially skilled in long-range divination with regard to the end of class society, a fault which few which any would begrudge them.[18]

However, this alone is not sufficient to dismiss the materialist philosophy of history; the framework is not reducible to its descriptions and certainly not to its futural speculation. More importantly, the claim that capitalism "brings into the world the material means of its own destruction" expresses something tenable, even if the fact of that destruction does not come about. As many theorists have highlighted, the basic insight here is true. Capitalism *does* produce the conditions of possibility of its own destruction, insofar as it is fundamentally contradictory and crisis prone. What is absent from Marx's formulation of the immanent possibility of the end of capitalism is that its institutions have developed strategies of containment and displacement as well as violent repression to levy against what might otherwise be systemic threats. This is, in effect, what so many theorists are referring to when they describe the conditions of neoliberalism.[19] Put another way, the basic insight of these passages (i.e., that capitalism is self-undermining) can be true even if the claim that this will inexorably or inevitably produce its demise is not. The underlying method is not refuted by the failure of a prediction. The connection between prediction and the claims made in *The German Ideology* is even more tenuous; the 'three premises' of the materialist philosophy of history and what they imply about the 'historical' nature of critique are not nullified by the fact capitalism persists. On the contrary, as Ellen Meiksens Wood insists, the persistence of capitalism only implies the need for a more rigorous application of such a method, a method which is not Marx's alone, but the bequest of his controversial predecessor Hegel.[20]

Hegel's 'Rational Intelligibility' in The *Philosophy of Right*

Hegel's philosophy, especially his philosophy of history, has faced considerable criticism, but it is primarily one fraught premise that concerns us here. The notion of 'reason

[18] In his essay, ""The Hungry Forties': The Socio-Economic Context of the *Communist Manifesto*," Michael Levin makes a compelling case for reading the 'inevitability thesis' in the *Manifesto* as a historically particular claim about the concrete conditions of Europe in the 1840s. He aims to make to basic points: (1) the Manifesto was written "during a period of quite unusual economic and social stress" (in Europe, in any case) "and is in many ways a product and expression of that particular situation" and (2) "Marx and Engels's expectation of violent revolution" is more appropriate and less far-fetched in their own historical context and, furthermore, "revolution broke out in the very month after" the *Manifesto* was published (49). This implies that, rather than predicting such an occurrence as the *general* outcome of social contradiction, that Marx and Engel's were speculating within a context wherein such a prediction was not obviously false.

[19] See, for example: David Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Rahel Jaeggi. *Critique of Forms of Life*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). pp. 215-265; Naomi Klein. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Knopf Publishing, 2007).

[20] See, Ellen Meiksens Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, 1.

in history,' both in the *Lectures* and the *Philosophy of Right*, according to some, represents the epitome of what ails Hegel's philosophy: a fundamentally apologetic and conservative form of 'rationalism.' Yet, such a reading, contemporary scholars have demonstrated, misses the beginnings of a crucial element which would be generative for not only Marx but for the critical philosophical tradition in the Euro-Atlantic henceforth. At least one strain of Marx's inheritance of Hegel amounts to more than a negative distinction of setting his philosophy apart, especially a philosophy of history, from Hegel's.

Hegel's thought, precisely at one of the points where it is most controversial, offers something indispensable to critical social theory, as those in the Hegelian Marxist tradition have tried to highlight, if perhaps only partially and not always with obvious citation for their indebtedness. It is through that tradition that I calibrate my treatment of Hegel's philosophy of history. To begin recovering what is left to be learned from Hegel's philosophy of history, we can calibrate what is carried over in and through the critical transformation conducted by Marx, while not neglecting that his own remarks about his Hegelianism do not exhaust the depth or breadth of its influence. The approach I take here is an *interstitial* one; Hegel appears where credit is due to his most basic methodological insights and where debates concerning these insights arise in the development of Marx's thought.

The 'Hegel-Marx connection' has been formulated in myriad ways: on the subject of their conceptions of dialectics and immanent critique[21], comparatively on the question of alienation[22], through the purported controversy of an 'end of history thesis',[23] through a

[21] See, for example, Andrew Buchwalter. "Hegel, Marx, and the Concept of Immanent Critique". *Journal of the History of* Philosophy, 29:2 (1991). pp. 253-279; Rocío Zambrana. "What's Critical About Critical Theory?—Redux" *in From Alienation to Forms of Life: The Critical Theory of Rahel Jaeggi*. Ed. Amy Allen and Eduardo Mendieta (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2018); Karen Ng. "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory." *Constellations*, 22:3 (2015). pp. 393-404; Rahel Jaeggi. *Critique of Forms of Life*. Trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[22] See, for example, Raya Dunayevska. "The Theory of Alienation: Marx's Debt to Hegel" in *The Free Speech Movement and the Negro Revolution* (Detroit: News & Letters, 1965); István Mészáros. *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970); Sean Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Rahel Jaeggi. *Alienation*. Trans. Federick Neuhouser, Alan Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[23] See, for example, Kojève, Alexander: *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); Howard Williams, "The End of History in Hegel and Marx" in *The Hegel-Marx Connection*. Ed. Tony Burns and Ian Fraser (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2000); Eric Michael Dale, *Hegel, the End of History, and the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The claim of a supposed 'end of history' in either Hegel or Marx has not been given credence here, as there is overwhelming evidence that such a reading relies on equivocation and misunderstanding, as Dale (cited above) points out. For further consideration of the 'end of history' reading, See Jon Stewart, *Hegel Myths and Legends* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

contrast of the content of their philosophies of history[24], and through the popular reading of Marx which claims that he simply 'turned Hegel on his head' (i.e., the 'inversion thesis').[25] Still another has been to trace the relation between Hegel and Marx (and on to critical theory) through the category of negativity; this approach is taken up in Chapter 5, as part of my interpretation of Adorno's 'negative universal history' and so I will forego discussion of it for now. The first two—reading for the conjuncture and divergence in Marx and Hegel's dialectical methods, means of critique, and on the conception of alienation—have proven incredibly generative and constitute an important part of thinking critique after Hegel and Marx. The latter two represent once-conventional accounts of the Hegel-Marx relation, which are either misleading or overly simplistic; more contemporary thinkers have worked to demonstrate that this connection is more complex.

Avoiding the temptation to render this philosophical interstice as either simple opposition or mere conflation, the approach taken here is to examine a feature of Hegel's philosophy which is indispensable to the thought of Marx and later critical theory and which portends critical categories such as social totality and ideology operating at a fundamental level in Marx's philosophy of history; this category is *rational intelligibility*. Indeed, the necessity of this feature of Hegel's thought is so fundamental to Marx and his inheritors' thinking that it is rarely remarked upon in a way that does not compound it with other features of Hegel's philosophy of history, including the teleological elements of his thought. In a literal sense, the feature of rational intelligibility often 'goes without saying' in the Marxist tradition. The notable exception to this tendency is György Lukács, whose Hegelian Marxism is focused specifically on the critical import of the notion of social totality.

In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács clearly attributes the origins of the notion of 'social totality' in Marx to Hegel. Lukács's discussion of this inheritance synthesizes several important features of Hegel's thought as they bear on Marx's critical thought.[26] However, as I hope to demonstrate, these features should be (if only analytically) separated in order to closely

[24] See, for example, Allen W. Wood. "Hegel and Marxism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*. Ed. Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert Fine. "An Unfinished Project: Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" in *Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy*. Ed. Andrew Chitty and Martin McIvor (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009).

[25] See, for example, Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*.; Louis Althusser. *For Marx*. Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso Books, 2006). In fact, these are only some of the most famous articulations of this line of thinking. The 'inversion thesis,' as I call it, abounds in the secondary literature on Hegel and Marx as well as scholarship on Marx more generally.

[26] Lukács, pp. 27.

consider the most basic feature of Hegel's 'totality' which operates in Marx's account. That is, before we critically employ the normatively laden concept of 'social totality' (which also relates to historically specific forms of totalization) we must grapple with a more basic presupposition, one that has become especially controversial in contemporary political thought. Indeed, both the philosophy of history and the concept of social totality have been rejected on the basis of their 'rationalism'. In order to better clarify the concept of social totality, we will need undertake consideration of this quintessentially Hegelian feature of Marx's method.

Rational intelligibility as we encounter it in Hegel's philosophy of history emphasizes two distinct but mutually determining elements of his claims about 'reason in history'.[27] On the one hand, reality is *in itself* rational, in the sense that it is objectively amenable to rational consideration and that objects have a 'logic' to them. On the other, the phrase also indicates a subject's capacity to grasp that reality rationally and to conceive of it *as a rational whole*. These two moments depict the dialectical relation between subject and object, rather than a more positivistic description of history as rational in spite of or in opposition to subjectivity. Focusing on this dimension of Hegel's philosophy of history cannot resolve all the tensions in and controversies about Hegel's thought. Nonetheless, this feature of Hegel's thought requires our attention because it is indispensable for a critique of society. My approach is akin to that of thinkers like Rocío Zambrana who argues that "what is most productive in Hegel is not the content of his dialectics, but rather the form," a view she shares with Jaeggi.[28]

The *Philosophy of Right*, though a robust text, is most cited for only a small fraction of its contents, passages which are often taken as the 'last word' on Hegel's understanding of reason and history. "What is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational" (POR 20/GPR 14). This passage has been read in widely disparate ways, ranging from an apology for Prussianism to mere idealist naïvete. In fact, such potential for misunderstanding was not lost on Hegel. He himself anticipated the hermeneutical difficulties of this passage:

[27] Although Hegel scholars (e.g., Pippin) I have chosen not to refer to this premise as 'rationalism,' since that term is loaded with content that is both historically and philosophically foreign to the texts we consider here. This avoids equivocation with other philosophically distinct uses of the term which might place, for example, reason and affect or reason and experience, in an oppositional relation, which is contrary to the meaning intended here.

[28] Zambrana, Rocío. "What's Critical about Critical Theory?—Redux" in *From Alienation to Forms of Life: The Critical Theory of Rahel Jaeggi*. Ed. Amy Allen, Eduardo Mendieta (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018).

> It is in *this very relation of philosophy to actuality* which is the subject of misunderstandings, and I accordingly come back to my earlier observation that, since philosophy is the *exploration of the rational*, it is for that very reason the *comprehension of the present and the actual*, not the setting up of a world beyond which exists God knows where—or rather, of which we can very well say that we know where it exists, namely in the errors of a one-sided and empty ratiocination (POR 20/GPR 14).

Hegel's anticipation supports three distinct but related readings of the 'actual is rational' thesis: (1) as a strong formulation of the primary principle of immanent critique over and against transcendental critique,[29] (2) as a stern inoculation against political utopianism,[30] or (3) as a conservative insistence on the impossibility or undesirability of transcending the conditions of the present. The third reading has been irreversibly troubled by more recent scholarship as well as some of the historical details of the text's publication.[31] All but the last of these speak

[29] Axel Honneth's work in *Freedom's Right* is exemplary of the first reading, relating the chiastic refrain to Hegel's affirmation of immanent critique. Moreover, Honneth issues an important historical caution. Although it is both common and appropriate to discuss the division between the 19th century 'right' and 'left Hegelians,' "this division" has also "made it possible for later generations, after nearly all revolutionary ideals had died out, to shove the entirety of Hegel's political philosophy into the conservative camp" (FR 1). In other words, Honneth warns that what remained, "the primitive idea that given institutions must be given an aura of moral legitimacy," has often appeared to exhaust the interpretive tensions that once fractured these camps (FR 2). Honneth claims that this "nearly sealed the victory of a Kantian or Lockean theory of justice" (FR 2) in Western philosophy. Indeed, in this defense, Honneth advises that "we should follow Hegel in abstaining from presenting a freestanding constructive justification" for critique which is "prior to analysis" (FR 15). This fidelity, however, is not without its costs. As Amy Allen points out, this formulation relies on a descriptively progressive view of historical change insofar as Honneth claims that this "additional justification becomes unnecessary once we can prove that the prevailing values are normatively superior to historically antecedent social ideals" (FR 5) [EP 3-5]. We might ask, in fact, whether Honneth's reconstruction does not lend credence to the third, more conservative reading in its optimism about modern Europe (FR 329-335).

[30] In an equally deflationary but somewhat different vein, Robert Pippin's reading of these methodological remarks in the Philosophy of Right falls into the second category, i.e., an 'anti-utopian' reading. According to Pippin, Hegel introduces the notion of "actuality" (as distinct from extant reality) as a way to distinguish between "an idealized or utopian (and thereby practically distorting and possible naïve) notion of a free life," on the one hand, and "an insistence on a realistic account" of what a "free life" could be, on the other (HPP 92). He addresses common accusations of both "anti-individualism" as well as "historical positivism" (HPP 93). Pippin goes a step further to say, in response to these criticisms, that Hegel self-consciously understood his account not predictively but instead as "a retrospective and reconstructive sort of teleology" (HPP 238). Both Honneth and Pippin address some important questions about how to read Hegel's claims about 'reason in history.' However, neither Pippin nor Honneth thoroughly appreciate the more basic insight of rational intelligibility. In spite of their efforts to lighten the burden of proof placed on deflationary readings of the Philosophy of Right, their non-metaphysical accounts fail to fully grasp the critical traction that can be gained from the claim to rational intelligibility.

[31] See, for example, Ed. Jon Stewart. *Hegel Myths and Legends*. (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1996). There are far too many examples of the third reading in the literature to cite. Suffice it to say that, for those not working explicitly in Hegel scholarship, this tends to be the most prominent assumption about his thought.

to crucial aspects of Marxist critique, but the indispensability of Hegel's 'rationalism' remains implicit.[32]

Many contemporary readings bolster their interpretation of the *Philosophy of Right* through recourse to Hegel's *Logic*. Although I do not address the *Logic* at length here, we cannot forego acknowledgement of a crucial terminological clarification that has been present in the recent literature drawing on this text. The term 'actuality,' as Hegel himself anticipated, has been the crux of the problem in approaching the preface to *The Philosophy of Right*. Through careful reading of the *Logic*, contemporary readers of Hegel have highlighted the error in conflating 'reality' and 'actuality' and, thus, of presuming the 'actuality' of what currently exists. 'Actuality' (*wirklichkeit*) reflecting a unity of subjective and objective dimensions of both concept and reality, is simply not reducible to the 'reality' as that which happens to exist.[33] The third, more conservative reading mentioned above relies on mistakenly conflating these terms. Furthermore, the notion of 'actuality' is crucially linked to the question of totality. As Zambrana clarifies, "Actuality, according to Hegel, is indexed to a totality of conditions. Such totality is posited as a totality of conditions through the self-manifestation of actuality that it produces".[34] Thus, Hegel's conception of actuality—because it is not merely formal but concrete and historical—can "account for thwarted possibilities within actuality".[35] Zambrana's reading, which does more than simply counter the apparently 'conservative' bent of conventional readings, suggests that 'actuality' and its relation to 'totality' are a precondition for social critique.

Rational Intelligibility and the Possibility of Critique

If Marx often seems to 'denounce' Hegel's idealism, this does little to diminish Hegel's influence on him. Lukács's foregrounding of social totality explicitly directs our attention toward the import of rational intelligibility.[36] We need not take word, however, on the importance of rational intelligibility. Marx himself may inadvertently allude to this very point. His apparent repudiation of Hegel foreshadows what proves to be insurmountable in his

[32] In Honneth and Pippin's formulations the primary concern is to show that the precept of 'reason in history' does not negatively impact the possibility of critical or emancipatory readings of Hegel's thought. However, as I argue in the following section, Hegel's philosophy of history offers something more to social critique.
[33] Zambrana, 2015, 84; Pippin, 92-242; De Boer, 190.
[34] Zambrana, Rocío. "Actuality in Hegel and Marx." *Hegel Bulletin*, 40.1 (2019): 74-91. pp. 3-4.
[35] Ibid.
[36] See Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 16: "The deep affinities between historical materials and Hegel's philosophy are clearly manifested here, for both conceive of theory as the *self-knowledge of reality*."

thought as well. Recall that in the now-famous appendix to *Capital Vol. I*, (originally the postface to the second edition) Marx writes:

> The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell. (102-103)

These passages, and the ones preceding, are the source of the widely cited 'inversion thesis,' the claim that Marx simply inverts Hegel and reverses the valuation typical of his system. In this addendum, Marx characteristically and harshly distinguishes himself from Hegel's 'idealist' philosophy. Though contemporary scholars have worked, quite rightly, to indicate that Marx himself was more Hegelian than he perhaps publicly acknowledged, on the basis of passages such as these. Nonetheless, I think something useful to be discerned in them.[37] While most cite Marx's criticism of those who think of Hegel as a 'dead dog,' his uptake of Hegel may be more fundamental than even his explicit but tentative claim initially suggests.[38] The very formulation of his apparent 'inversion' reveals that Marx's thought is precisely not *opposed* to Hegel's so much as it is a transformation of his basic insights.[39] In order to turn Hegel 'right side up' what must be salvaged is "the rational kernel within the mystical shell" (103). Marx's emphasis on "the rational kernel" is perhaps more apt than even he realized. As Lukács would propose a half century later, the category of social totality (which entails rational intelligibility) is an indispensable and fundamental part of Marxist method and the subject-object dialectic which grounds rational intelligibility is a foundational feature of Marx's materialism (counterintuitively borrowed from the 'absolute idealist').

To arrive at a clearer sense of how Marx carries out the preservation of this "rational kernel," we can turn to his 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge (often anthologized as 'A Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing'). Marx's articulation of the ground of critique is strikingly similar to that which we find in the *Philosophy of Right*:

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[37] See, for example, Wood, "Hegel and Marxism," pp. 427-429; Beiser, "Hegel's Historicism," pp. 277-278; Houlgate, pp. 55. Though these scholars expound more conventional readings of Hegel's philosophy, much of which is undermined in deflationary readings, they are right to note the degree to which Marx's critiques of Hegel's are occasionally rooted in oversimplification.

[38] Marx, Karl. Capital, *Vol. I: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Ben Fowkes. (New York: Penguin Classics, 1992). p. 14.

[39] Marx does write that his "dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it" (102). However, as those scholars mentioned above point out, Marx's reading of Hegel may take Hegel's idealism too literally.

> Reason has always existed, only not always in reasonable form. The critic can therefore start out by taking any form of theoretical and practical consciousness and develop from the *unique* forms of existing reality the true reality as its norm and final goal...We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles...We only show the world what it is fighting for, and consciousness is something the world *must* acquire" (MER 14-15).[40]

The fact of reason's presence in history seems to reflect the most basic presupposition of the *Philosophy of Right*: that, even in contradiction, social reality takes a rationally intelligible form which must be discerned in order to be assessed. The comprehensive disclosure of the *ratio* of that reality is the precondition for an immanently grounded critique of existing society. Critique is rooted in 'what the world is fighting for' the self-clarification of practical activity which, even unbeknownst to itself, speaks of exceeding the limits of the present order. We can note Marx's resemblance to Hegel when the latter writes, that "To comprehend what *is* is the task of philosophy" and that "philosophy is its own time comprehended in thought" (POR 21/GPR 16). Critique, for Marx as for Hegel, entails the exposition of "its own time comprehended in thought." Though this is by no means the only articulation of the ground of critique in Marx, it is certainly a crucial one and one that makes it difficult to deny his inheritance of Hegel's rational intelligibility.[41]

This resemblance is only further exemplified in the final passages of the l843 letter, wherein Marx summarizes the task of the *Deustch-Französische Jahrbücher*: "the work of our time to clarify itself (critical philosophy) the meaning of its own struggle and its own desires. This work is for the world and for us. It can only be the work of joint forces" (MER 15). It is important to note, however, that here the comprehension of 'our time' highlights what were then the political struggles of French and German radicals. In Hegel's case, the comprehension of 'our time' tends to emphasize the dominant institutions and ideas of one's time. Though Hegel's account does not preclude the analysis of existing struggles against those institutions,

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[40] Cf. Zambrana 2015, 85. Zambrana's clarification of the process of actualization supports this comparison further. The claim that an idea, e.g., freedom, "gives itself actuality by gaining rational form" is reflected by Marx's claim that "consciousness is something the world *must* acquire".

[41] Later we will consider some limitations of critique taking its lead from existing struggles. Although the claim of 'self-clarification' is crucial to Marx's thought, the tethering of that clarification to a specific class position (as presented by Lukács) is a claim which is more historically specific to the Marx's context. That is, the task he poses for himself in 1847 is a task for that historical conjuncture and not necessarily the *only* ground for critique which is immanently rooted in the present state of things. Taken in isolation, this formulation is perhaps ill-suited to a historical moment wherein there is a deficit of struggle or where forms of struggle are highly precarious and prone to cooptation.

he tends to focus on established institutions. This difference aside, the resemblance is significant, especially since Marx's formulation entails the analysis of what is 'unique' in existing institutions in order to clarify the struggles of his day. Though many have noted the influence of Hegel in Marx's early works, it is rarely stated clearly that such an influence (which, in fact, cannot be restricted to early Marx) is evident at such a fundamental level. A "rational kernel" is, in fact, what persists in Marx. Indeed, we can see this in Marx's insistence that "this work is for the world and for us," which reflects the reciprocal determination of subject and object which is constitutive of Hegel's thought.

Tracing this continuity also helps to clarify another instance where, when read apart from the insight that Hegel's thought is concrete and historical, Marx seems to diverge more drastically from Hegel than he actually does. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*,[42] Hegel writes:

> The only thought which philosophy brings with it, in regard to history, is the simple thought of Reason—the thought that Reason rules the world, and that world history has therefore been rational in its course" (LPH 12/VPG 48-49).[43]

Where one might normally read the translated phrase 'reason rules the world,' as antithetical to Marx's commitment to the primacy of materiality and the reproduction of life, we can mine this passage from a different vantage point.[44] Firstly, we should recall that 'reason' is not synonymous with actuality and that it is possible for something to be irrational (e.g., in itself irrational even if it serves a rational function in society overall) in a rationally discernible way. Thus, the claim that reason is a regulatory feature of history's course might amount to saying that history, from a philosophical perspective, in both its objective and subjective dimensions

[42] We will return to these lectures in Chapter 3, as we consider Hegel's taxonomy of different approaches to history. For now, it will suffice to address the premise of rational intelligibility as it appears there and, often, is read in tandem with the famous chiastic passage from the *Philosophy of Right*.

[43] "Der einzige Gedanke, den die Philosophie mitbringt, ist aber der einfache Gedanke der Vernunft, daß die Vernunft die Welt beherrsche, daß es also auch in der Weltgeschichte vernünftig zugegangen sei" (VPG 48). It is worth noting that the word *beherrsche*, which is translated above as 'rules,' has a somewhat more flexible connotation in German than in English. For example, one might use the term to mean that a theme or topic is 'governing' one's thinking at a particular time. It may help to think about the double entendre of 'rules' in English.

[44] Hegel, once again, anticipated some of this misreadings that have made this passage so controversial. "'Reason'–which is said to rule the world—is just as indefinite a term as 'Providence.' We hear Reason spoken of without anyone being able to say what its definition is, or its content (according to which we could judge whether something is rational or irrational)" (LPH 18/VPG 56-57). That 'content,' for Hegel, this must be "the outcome of the study of history," and thus is concrete and itself historical (LPH 13/VPG 50).

is possessed of a certain 'logic.' Granted, Hegel seems to say more than this in his affirmation of freedom's unfolding in that rational course, but these two aspects are separable.

It is important to note that what has been rational is the *course* of history and not its *ends*. Although, as we will consider later in the chapter, Hegel's view of history's course is unduly optimistic, we can distinguish between that optimism and the premise that history's course is *rationally intelligible*. The latter, furthermore, is entailed in Marx's own philosophy of history and, indeed, his critique of class societies. For Marx, history has developed according to a certain logic; the irrationality of class societies is only intelligible if we accept this. Rather than describing that irrationality as a spontaneous occurrence, this feature is necessary for the critical theorist to grasp how irrationality is systematically *produced by the rationality* of an antagonistic society. For Marx, the critique of capitalist society is a critique of irrational ends (i.e., ends which are anti-social and therefore antithetical to what a society is in principle).

We have already examined the ways in which the claim to 'reason in history' has been misunderstood; we clarified that Hegel's claim to the rationality of 'actuality' cannot simply be read as an apology for the existing state of things. Moreover, this reading does not emerge seamlessly from the fact of rational intelligibility. However, the problem of apologism nonetheless persists in the *positive* and *descriptive* claim about the telos of history as freedom. Hegel does suppose that history is the unfolding of consciousness collectively toward freedom, as evidenced by the developmentalist account he gives in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.[45] The racial, ethnic and geographical underpinnings of that taxonomy are as problematic as the claim that a progressive consciousness of freedom (at the level of the *ratio* of various societies) is to be found in history's development without consideration for its most egregious antinomies (e.g., the abstractly 'universal' freedom of German and Christian nations which coexists with slavery, colonization, and women's subordination).[46] To positively assert that, in spite of the 'slaughterbench,' historical events represent a continuity of increasing clarification of freedom is, indeed, untenable. There is no deflationary reading that can correct Hegel's optimism But, to be clear, Hegel was not convinced that Western societies were concretely 'actual' embodiments of the notion of freedom, but he was convinced that their self-conceptions were a significant improvement over those preceding' them. All of this, without

[45] See, Zambrana, Rocio. "Hegel, History, Race." in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Race*. Ed. Naomi Zack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). 252.
[46] Ibid., 253.

a word for the deep contradictions represented in these societies, whose enslaved, colonized, racialized, and gendered subjects were simply overlooked in favor of the ostensible or expounded rationality of modernity. It is perhaps most surprising that Hegel, the progenitor of thinking contradiction as constitutive of totality, failed to fully appreciate the error of his position.

In a recent article, Zambrana suggests approaching the problematic content of Hegel's philosophy of history not *either* in terms of its form or its content, as is represented by scholars such as Honneth and Bernasconi, respectively, but with an eye to both form *and* content.[47] Her recommendation is a "critical-interruptive reading of Hegel" which "would need to transform the two general approaches to Hegel's thinking about history".[48] This requires "Acknowledging that although the form and content of Hegel's claims can be distinguished, they cannot be seen as separable".[49] Zambrana's insights pertain specifically to the problem of Hegel's Eurocentrism and his racism. This approach is equally helpful in the case of his historical optimism, which is a constitutive feature of his historical thought and, moreover, implicated in these problematic views. In other words, there is a lesson in all of this which is more than the very necessary cautionary tale against historical optimism: to learn from Hegel, especially his philosophy of history, we must interrogate the tension between form and content, as this tension invites us to reconsider the notion of historical teleology more carefully. It is on this point that we can turn to an examination of Marx's thought and, indeed, his critique of Hegel. In Marx we find that what was violent and injurious as a *description* may be its undermining in the form of *normative* injunction; where Hegel posits a necessary continuity of freedom, Marx identifies its practical and normative failures in history, in which the need for social transformation finds its justification.

The account of rational intelligibility that I have forwarded above is heavily indebted to the work of Rocío Zambrana, whose analysis in *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility* serves as a model. Further, Zambrana's key insight into the "necessary historicity of intelligibility" serves as a helpful counterweight to the manner in which I have articulated the status of reason in Hegel and Marx's philosophy of history thus far (3). In this chapter, I often emphasize the

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[47] Ibid. pp. 251-252; See Bernasconi, Robert. "Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti" in Hegel After Derrida. Ed. Stuart Barnett (New York: Routledge, 1998): 41-63. See also, Honneth, Axel. *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory*. Trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).
[48] Ibid. p. 258.
[49] Ibid.

ontological and epistemological dimensions of intelligibility in order to distinguish the claim as a philosophical precursor to Marx's critical thought.[50] As Zambrana reminds us, however, intelligibility is "the result of historically specific practices of rendering intelligible" (3). That is, intelligibility is neither isolated nor autonomous from the concrete and historically specific conditions from which it springs.

I have tried to emphasize the objective dimension of intelligibility (since that is what is so often repudiated) but this should not be understood as a claim to reason's *immediacy*. Rather, intelligibility, as Zambrana suggests, is the result of "ongoing articulation by and within practices and institutions" (3). In sum, while the rational intelligibility must be objectively and subjectively possible throughout history (i.e., transhistorical), such intelligibility is always encountered in its historically specific form. This highlights the importance of yet another insight:

> Following his critique of external reflection, Hegel transforms modality in a way that responds to the notion of ground that he has developed—ground now understood as a totality of existent conditions. Modality is no longer a question of the conditions of human cognition. Rather it is a question of a *reciprocal determination* (77).

For Zambrana, this is pivotal to the primary aim of Hegel's *Logic*. The *Logic* is an "account of reason that, on the one hand, denies that reason is external to matters themselves, and, on the other denies that reason is an ontological constant that shapes history irrespective of differentiated material conditions".[51] Though I do not offer a sustained reading of the *Logic*, Zambrana's extrication of Hegel's theory of intelligibility nonetheless makes possible the clarification of 'rational intelligibility' as a precondition for social critique. Zambrana clarifies that concrete articulations of freedom, in their historical specificity, form the basis for "assessing its actuality. This concrete articulation of freedom makes possible assessment of this society (modern, Western, European) in this moment in time (nineteenth century)".[52] Without the present 'comprehended in thought,' critique of the present is not possible except

[50] Michael Inwood distinguishes between four 'senses' of the rationality of the 'actual': (1) ontological (i.e., "things could not be unless they were structured in accordance with the thoughts of the Logic), (2) a "theological sense," (3) an "epistemological sense" (i.e., things are fully intelligible and knowable," and (4) an "evaluative sense" (things are reasonable and conform to rational standards" (34-35). I have emphasized the importance of (1) and (2) for the purposes of examining the necessity of rational intelligibility for critique. See, Michael Inwood. *A Hegel Dictionary* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 1992).

[51] Zambrana, *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility*, 87.

[52] Ibid., 84.

by utopian means of "a one-sided and empty ratiocination," against which Hegel keenly warned (POR, 20).[53]

Some more contemporary examples may help to clarify this further. When we critique or oppose, in theory or practice, racism as a *systemic*, *structural or institutional* phenomenon (and not simply individual prejudice), it presupposes that our society is, indeed, structured according to a certain logic or *ratio* (in this case, a racist one which maintains white supremacy).[54] Likewise, when we treat male-dominance, cisheterosexism, misogyny and gender oppression as *structural or systemic* form of oppression (i.e., as amounting to more than the women's oppression by particular men) we presuppose that our society is rationally intelligible (i.e., structed by the logic of gender oppression), if only to point out its *un*reason.[55]

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[53] Interestingly, a version of this claim is echoed by both Robert Pippin and Karin de Boer, albeit in increasingly stronger formulations. In Hegel's Practical Philosophy, Pippin writes: "according to Hegel there is no place to stand putatively outside such institutions," a qualification characteristic of his reading of the Philosophy of Right as a bulwark against the weakness of transcendental critique (264). From this he concludes that "Marx was right about Hegel," in a sense, since "The point of his philosophy for Hegel is to comprehend the world, not to change it" (272). In De Boer's Hegel: The Sway of the Negative, the claim is stronger still. Her conclusion is that, "The principle of rational freedom develops...because civilizations at a certain point—by means of particular individuals or groups—that the particular determination of freedom upon which they rely is not in accordance with the principle of freedom as such" (183). Moreover, she claims, "The insight into this discrepancy can only occur, according to Hegel, when a civilization has exhausted the possibilities of opened up by its particular determination of freedom" (183). De Boer's Hegel, in these passages, closely resembles Marx in that the emphasis on a comprehensive understanding of the present is the condition of possibility not only of critique but also radical transformation. "This new determination of freedom," she argues, "emerges within the existing civilization" but can only fully develop when that determination's "and the socio-political structures evolving from it—has been abolished" (183). In her view, as in Pippin's, Hegel's refrain from social critique is a kind of conscientious objection. In De Boer's view, Hegel's injunction that we first comprehend 'our time' before transforming it is elaborated with a greater focus on transformation than is made explicit by Hegel himself. Still, this clear articulation of the implications of Hegel's thinking cannot override his moratorium "on the subject of issuing instructions on how the world ought to be" (POR 23/GPR 17).

[54] This is the starting point for several strains of critical race theory, Black feminism, and theories of racial capitalism. Indeed, the claim that racism is structural, systemic, or institutional has long been a constitutive claim of the Black radical tradition, in not only theory but in practice (e.g., in the Black Panther Party's 10-point program). See, for examples: Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Eds. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. 3rd Edition (New York: New York University Press 2017). pp. 11-13; Patricia Hill Collins. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009). esp. 203, 276-278; Cedric Robinson. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 2nd Edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). pp. 2-3, 11-13. Erin Gray, Asad Haider, and Ben Mabie Eds. *Black Radical Tradition: A Reader* (New York: Verso Books, 2021); Stokely Carmichael, Charles V. Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

[55] See, for examples: bell hooks. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2014). p. 22; Marilyn Frye. *Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (New York: Random House, 1983). pp. 5-15; Kimberlé Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299; Catherine MacKinnon. *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); Gayle Rubin. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex" in Rayna R. Reiter, Ed. *Toward an Anthropology of Women* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

When we work to clarify the ongoing continuation of colonial and imperialist practices as *constitutive of the global capitalist system*, we presuppose that our world operates as a system, which by definition is a whole with a constitutive logic. Indeed, the very premise of a 'critique of society' demands that we understand society as a cohesive (though contradictory and incoherent) whole, with a logic which operates not simply according to our intentions but in excess of them (i.e., what positivists and analytical Marxists and others pejoratively call 'holism'). If we hope to go beyond identifying characteristics or specific aspects of our society as socially and morally wrong, the notion of rational intelligibility is a requirement, where it is explicitly cited or not. In order to claim that our society is a contradictory one, we must first presuppose that it can be possessed of a certain logic which is shared by all of its constituent parts. The claim that social reality is rationally discernible, then, *need not be an affirmation of the form or content of its rationality*; the claim of rationally intelligibility, rather, insists on the fact that social reality not only has its own 'logic' but that it is amenable to our rational (i.e., non-contradictory, non-antagonistic), transformative interventions.

Even if the content of Hegel's own views on race and colonialism are antithetical to the emancipatory aims of anti-racism, women's liberation, or anti-imperialism, this basic feature of his thought remains integral to mounting critiques not only of Hegel's own view but of oppression and domination more generally. Although Hegel's 'rationalism' and his insistence on the comprehension of the whole are often derided as the most contentiously 'metaphysical' or naive elements of his thought, this condemnation does not account for the fact that our contemporary social criticism already relies on rational intelligibility for its critical import. This fact is not a challenge to contemporary social criticism, but rather to those of Hegel's critics whose would dismiss his thought and, thus, lose sight of this crucial if complex contribution.

Analytical Marxism and the History of 'Underdevelopment'

It is this patently 'anti-Hegelian' tendency that forms the basis of 'analytical' Marxism, which itself have been the source of many 'urban legends' about Marx's thought. Much scholarly literature which addresses the role of Marx's thought in the domain of world history or colonialism assumes the complicity of Marx's materialism with Euronormative

developmentalism or even colonial apologism, though this does not stop numerous anti-colonial thinkers and movements from adopting and adapting a Marxist framework.[56] The status of Marx's original analyses of colonialism is somewhat complex, varying by text. Many contemporary scholars of Marx have worked to clarify, complicate, and contextualize the aspects of Marx's thought that have raised concerns among postcolonial and, more recently, decolonial thinkers.[57] Often one of the most controversial elements of Marx's historical analyses pertain to the apparent endorsement of stadialism or stagism.[58] Though Marx cautions against what he calls the 'speculative distortion,' wherein "later history is made the goal of earlier history, e.g., the goal ascribed to the discovery of America is to further the eruption of the French Revolution," the cautionary remark has not dispelled such accusations (GI 58). Many of these criticisms also rely on the assumption of a seamless continuity between Hegel and Marx's philosophies of history, a tendency I have tried to complicate and contest in this chapter.[59] Questions of progressivism and stadialism have also come to the fore of critical theory, with the publication of Amy Allen's *The End of Progress*.[60] In sum, one could devote a scholarly project, in its own right, to examining the aspects of Marx's thought that sometimes are and other times are not portended by the tendency to think modes of production as stages of historical development.[61]

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[56] See, for examples: Nikita Dhawan. "Marxist Critique of Postcolonialism." *Krisis*, 2 (2018). Edward Said. *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): pp. 2-3, 153-157, 206-207. Also, Robinson, *Black Marxism*, pp. 2-3, 9-10.

[57] See, for examples: Nick Hostettler. *Eurocentrism a Marxian Critical Realist Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Cemal Burak Tansel. "Deafening Silence? Marxism, International Historical Sociology and the Spectre of Eurocentrism." *European Journal of International Relations*, 21.1 (2014): 76-100. Kevin B. Anderson. *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, Eds. *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Lucia Pradella. "Postcolonial Theory and the Making of the World Working Class." *Critical Sociology*, 34.4 (2017): 573-586. Kamran Matin. "Redeeming the Universal: Postcolonialism and the Inner Life of Eurocentrism." *European Journal of International Relation*, 19.2 (2013): 353-377. Samir Amin. *Eurocentrism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010).

[58] See, for example: Marx and Engels. "The Communist Manifesto" in Lawrence H. Simon, Ed. Selected Writings (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994). pp. 160-161; Ibid. "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy," pp. 211-212. See also, Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 38-41. For critical responses to the claim that Marx was rigidly developmentalist or stadialist, See: Maurice Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 99–107; August Nimtz. "The Eurocentric Marx and Engels and Other Related Myths" in Crystal Bartolovich, Neil Lazarus, Eds. *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 65-80;

[59] See, for example, Edward Said. *Cultural and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 168.

[60] Allen, Amy. *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). pp. 19-20, 47.

[61] For scholarship on the complex trajectory of Marx's thinking on colonialism, See: Luca Basso. *Marx and the Common: From Capital to the Late Writings* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017); Thierry Drapeau "'Look at our

However, one thing is clear; Marx does not posit a single trajectory or uniform framework for thinking about either the transition to capitalism or the transformation beyond it.[62] Rather, Marx's historical materialism—which is grounded in his materialist philosophy of history—is self-consciously adaptable to local and historically specific material conditions. Marxism *as a method* (per Lukács's injunction), is an incredibly flexible framework, as is made evident by the heterogenous strains within the tradition, including anti-colonial and regional variations of that method. What analytical Marxism does, in narrowing the range of 'material conditions' to simply reflect changes in productive forces, then, is also to pare down the robustness of the framework's applicability and, moreover, its capacity to be amenable to historically determinate conditions. It is this adaptability to historical and material conditions that makes historical materialism the most adequate framework for the development of a global critique.

With this in mind, we should reconsider the claims made by G.A. Cohen, as his account hinges on a rejection of Marx's Hegelianism and his antithetical stance toward method and totality point to the hard and fast limits of analytical Marxism, especially regarding the context of the colonized world and a globalizing capitalism. Although analytical Marxism does not enjoy the same scholarly fervor as it did during the 1980s, many of the basic insights forwarded by Cohen have that status of 'common knowledge' about Marx's philosophy of history. Indeed, those of Marx's proponents who are critical of analytical Marxism nonetheless reproduce some of its basic claims, even if they do not take an anti-methodological view of Marxism.[63] This is to say nothing of Marx's critics. Accusations of 'determinism' or 'reductionism' remain a steadfast feature of the discussion of Marx's philosophy of history,

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Colonial Struggles': Ernest Jones and the Anti-Colonialist Challenge to Marx's Conception of History." *Critical Sociology*, 45.7 (2019): 1195–1208; Pranav Jani. "Karl Marx, Eurocentrism, and the 1857 Revolt in British India" in Crystal Bartolovich, Neil Lazarus, Eds. *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009): 81-97; Lucia Pradella. *Globalization and the Critique of Political Economy: New Insights from Marx's Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Teodor Shanin, Ed. *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and the 'Peripheries' of Capitalism* (London and Melbourne: Routledge, 1983).

[62] See, Marx, "Letter from Marx to Editor of the Otecestvenniye Zapisky": " [My critic] feels himself obliged to metamorphose my historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into an historico-philosophic theory of the marche generale [general path] imposed by fate upon every people, whatever the historic circumstances in which it finds itself, in order that it may ultimately arrive at the form of economy which will ensure, together with the greatest expansion of the productive powers of social labour, the most complete development of man. But I beg his pardon. (He is both honouring and shaming me too much." See, Ed. Teodor Shanin. *Late Marx and the Russian Road, Marx and the 'Peripheries of Capitalism'* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).

[63] See for example, Etienne Balibar. *The Philosophy of Marx* (New York: Verso Books,2014). pp. 92-94.

terms which rightly apply to account given by Cohen in *Marx's Theory of History.*[64] Still, responding to these objections is not the foremost task of what follows. Rather, my aim is to distinguish analytical Marxism and 'Western Marxism' as strains of thought which are unequally suited to the critique of capitalism *and colonialism/imperialism*. To this end, I focus on the claim of the 'primacy of productive forces' and its implications for a crucial problem in the history of colonialism and decolonization: *the problem of underdevelopment*.[65]

As a distinctive strain of Marxist theory, analytical Marxism rejects that Marxism "possesses valuable intellectual methods of its own" (xvii-xviii). Instead, analytical Marxists take their methodological lead from the social and political science(s), twentieth century positivist and post-positivist philosophy, game theory, and neo-classical economics (xviii). In short, analytical Marxism is defined in opposition to 'dialectical thinking' (xvii). These commitments logically precede not only their disposition toward selecting certain texts over others but in the content of the 'theory of history' itself. Commonly described as 'productive force' or 'technological determinism,' this vein of thinking grants primacy to "productive forces" (134). This primacy is inseparably connected, on their view, to a "development thesis" (134). The claim is as follows: "the nature of a set of production relations is explained by the level of development of the productive forces embraced by it" and "the productive forces tend to develop throughout history" (134).[66]

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[64] The terms 'theory of history' and 'philosophy of history,' in my view, do not represent a precise difference in how one approaches the question of history in Marx's work. Cohen makes a distinction between 'theory' and 'philosophy,' claiming that the 'philosophy of history' refers to "a reflective construal, from a distance, of what happens" in history whereas a 'theory of history' refers to "a contribution to understanding its inner dynamic" (GI 27). There is neither any firm denotative or etymological basis for this distinction; the terms 'theory' and 'philosophy' do not themselves support these particular definitions. Most importantly, however, this opposition between viewing history as a whole (it need not be 'from a distance' however) and discerning its 'inner dynamic' (i.e., its 'logic') is one of the assumptions that the reading which follows is intended to challenge.

[65] The debates concerning Marx's alleged 'developmentalism,' 'stagism,' or Eurocentrism notwithstanding, it is the rich literature both within the Marxist tradition and extending from it that forms the basis of theories of underdevelopment, including dependency theory and world-systems theory. Whatever their limits, these literatures exemplify the adaptability and extendibility of historical materialism in addressing colonialism/imperialism through its historical transformation. For a history of the relation between these literatures and the Marxist tradition, See Joseph L. Love. "The Origins of Dependency Analysis." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 22.1 (1990): 143-168. For debates about the compatibility of Marxism and dependency theory, Anthony Brewer. *Marxist Theories of Imperialism* (New York: Routledge, 1990). See Magnus Blomström and Björn Hettne. *Development Theory in Transition: The Dependency Debate & Beyond, Third World Responses* (London: Zed Press, 1984).

[66] The 'productive force determinism' reading of Marx's philosophy of history also raises important questions about whether Marx's philosophy of history is 'progressivist' or normatively 'stagist.' Indeed, these topics have been closely bound up in post-colonial readings (and criticisms) of Marx.'

'Getting Marx right' on the question of history is important for understanding the development of 'historical critique,' but the dominance of analytical Marxism's assumptions and mischaracterizations has much higher stakes when we consider these distinctive approaches to Marx—the Hegelian Marxist versus the analytical—as they bear on the question of colonialism/imperialism. The possibility of, for example, a 'postcolonial Marx' (or, for that matter, an anti-colonial or global Marx) or of understanding the role of Marx/ism in the decolonization movements of the 20th century, depends crucially on which 'version' of Marx's philosophy one receives and accepts. If our task is to undertake a historical critique of capitalism and colonialism (and I think that *should be* the task of the critical theorist), then analytical Marxism—apart from being a poor reading of Marx—is the most problematic and pernicious strain of so-called 'Marxist' thought toward this end. In fact, it is my contention here, that Analytical Marxism's popularity, direct or indirect, has contributed to the apparent incompatibility of Marxism and decolonization and to the seeming Eurocentrism of the Marxist tradition.

Analytical Marxism's claim of 'productive force determinism', pejoratively known as 'technological determinism' demonstrates most clearly the hard limits of that approach for a comprehensive, historical critique of capitalism *as a global system*. When we consider the problem of underdevelopment and the dominant discourses about 'development,' the Euronormative and reactionary implications of this framework are clearest. Even with its original publication in 1978, in the midst of numerous anti-colonial movements and after fervent debates surrounding the question of development, dependency, and imperialism, *Marx's Theory of History* not only remains conspicuously silent on the question of colonialism, but, moreover, supports what can properly be called a Euronormative, capitalist development ideology.[67]

At the core of Cohen's claim to the primacy of productive forces (PPF) are two 'theses': 1) the primacy thesis and 2) the development thesis. The primacy thesis claims that "the nature of a set of production relations is explained by the level of development of the productive forces embraced by it" (134). One important thing to note about this first thesis is that, unlike the much broader claim to the determinative role of the mode of production *as a*

[67] For a succinct history of debates within and among the 'dependency' school and Marxist theories of imperialism, See Anthony Brewer. *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A Critical Survey*. 2nd Edition. (London: Routledge, 1990).

whole, the priority assigned to productive forces (which refers to technical elements of production, i.e., tools, equipment, materials, resources, and 'labor power' insofar as it registers the human knowledge required for these things) is much narrower, focusing primarily on the *technick* of production. The development thesis, as its name indicates, simply states that "the productive forces tend to develop throughout history" (134).

As a composite claim PPF is a reformulation of the classic 'fetters' argument; the claim highlights that capitalism's own development tends to create crises in the production process itself and hinder the accumulation of capital. It draws on the 1859 Preface, where Marx writes "From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure". Never mind that this claim is far outweighed by Marx's analyses in *Capital*, *The German Ideology*, and the 1844 *Manuscripts* or that this is never given the definitive priority assigned to it by Cohen, with the notable exception of the *Communist Manifesto* (a fact which brings with it other hermeneutical difficulties) (145).

Generally, the criticism of the PPF approach revolves, as Cohen himself anticipates in the 2000 edition of *Marx's Theory of History*, around the apparent lack of significance of human agency in social transformation (147-150). That is, many critics understand the problem with 'technological determinism' to be its determination, rather than the primacy of the 'technological' *per se*. In the critique to follow, I will emphasize the latter, to demonstrate its complicity with neo-colonial and imperialist projects of 'development' in the former and neo-colonies. Thus, my critique of Cohen is hinged on his framework's lack of responsivity to the problem of underdevelopment. This analysis presents us with two problems: 1) the problem of what I call the 'technological fix' and 2) the problem of the 'ends' development or the social mediation of technology, both of which are revisited in Chapter 5 in light of the current climate crisis.

Initially, one may ask whether the development thesis is not simply too general or abstract. However, Cohen qualifies the 'development thesis,' by acknowledging that while productive forces tend to develop throughout history they are occasionally arrested in their development, but "this enforces only minor qualifications […] It means that temporary fossilization and regression are possible" (142). Temporary 'fossilization' can take place and the productive forces may be halted in their natural propensity to increase productivity and

human mastery over nature (140). Thus, "the arrival of the new society," whichever it may be, "may be delayed, and there may be some backward steps on the way to it, but come it must in the end" (142). The development thesis explains a necessary tendency, one whose necessity is a consequence of "the preponderance of reason against it" (155). This adds a new dimension to the problem of development in the framework of the primacy of productive forces (PPF): the historical tendency of technological development arises out of human beings' rational capacity to act upon the process of production. In Cohen's account this rational capacity *appears immediate and unimpeded* by, for example, ideological consciousness, objective social contradiction, or the alienated relations of production necessary to capitalism itself. Furthermore, His account lacks attention to class at both the national and international registers.

Cohen's attempt to qualify these alleged 'exceptions' to the development thesis, however, demonstrates a failure to register the structural and systematic character of imperialist underdevelopment. For Cohen, underdevelopment must appear as an *aberration* of capitalism's historical development rather than a constitutive feature of the accumulation process. This begins to highlight the inadequacy of PPF as a framework for grasping the actual historical conditions of capitalist development into a global system. When he writes that "[…] productive forces are frequently replaced, by better ones," he does not ask *in what sense* or *for whom* the development of productive forces is 'better' (154).

Under conditions of extreme global inequality and a violently enforced international division of labor, Cohen's position would prescribe a 'technological fix' for the problem of underdevelopment and global inequality. If the productive forces have the primacy and determinative power that Cohen's account, and analytical Marxism more generally, would assign to them, then it is as the level of these forces that the transformation of exploitation should occur (expropriation does not figure into his equation at all). And yet, the history of neo-colonialism and imperialism suggests the exact opposite.

In his now-classic *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney lays the groundwork for understanding underdevelopment as anything but an 'aberration' or 'temporary fossilization'. Rodney's work, and those it has influenced, establishes the necessity of colonial underdevelopment for the project of capitalist development in the Euro-Atlantic. The productive forces of these capitalist powers did not develop, as Cohen would describe them, from "a perennial tendency to productive progress, arising out of the rationality and

intelligence in the context of the inclemency of nature" (155). These selective and unequal 'developments' occur through the enslavement, extraction, and exploitation from the colonies. Underdevelopment does emerge from a specific rationality, namely the *ratio* of capital accumulation and the needs of its reproduction; this is an *irrational* rationality. Modern underdevelopment, for Rodney, is an extension of the logic of accumulation, of the extraction of surplus-value:

> Modern underdevelopment […] expresses a particular relationship of exploitation: namely, the exploitation of one country by another. All of the countries named as 'underdeveloped' in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist, and colonialist exploitation.

These relations, however, are not simply matters of unequal trade, as some contemporary liberal critics might suggest. Rather, they are "more far-reaching than just trade" because they involve "the actual ownership of the means of production in one country by citizens of another" (27). To this, we might add, the ownership of the means of production by a subset of the colonial population which has its interests aligned with imperial power (i.e., the national bourgeoisies) for either ideological reasons or for personal gain. Rodney is thus building on the conception of exploitation to extrapolate beyond wage-labor (long thought by some to be the singular distinctive feature of capitalist social relations) to include the social relations of production between nations, on a global scale (including the internal class relations within the colonies.

Underdevelopment, as Rodney insists, is not a failure of capitalism but the historical conditions of possibility of its success. The expansion and development of productive forces, since they are instrumentalized toward capital's ends, *accelerates* the rate of extraction, exploitation, and, as we will examine in Chapter 5, ecological destruction which is disproportionately carried by former/neo- colonies. As more and more technological advancements become available, on 'third world' markets, and as more mainstream thinkers of 'development' place their faith in these 'advancements,' the greater, more entrenched neo-colonial and capitalist forms of domination become constitutive of the global system. Be it through systems of loans, aid, or privatization, the procurement of 'technological fixes'—for a problem which is predicated on a set of contradictory and alienated social relations—is but an ideological pretense, to extend imperial control without annexation. Even the apparently

'progressive' increase in access to consumer goods has proven an effective strategy for further capitalist integration to increase profits and generate new markets. This further emphasizes that, rather than relations of uneven consumption or generalized 'poverty' which dominate the mainstream discourses on global inequality, it is *relations of production* which primarily mediate the process of development and shape its ultimate aim.

Contrary to the self-acclaimed productivism of analytical Marxism, Marx himself was aware that any transformation of society to meet human ends rather than the self-valorization of capital, could not be carried out primarily through alterations and improvements in the means of productions themselves:

> We thus see how the method of production and the means of production are constantly enlarged, revolutionized, how division of labour necessarily draws after it greater division of labour, the employment of machinery greater employment of machinery, work upon a large scale work upon a still greater scale. This is the law that continually throws capitalist production out of its old ruts and compels capital to strain ever more the productive forces of labour for the very reason that it has already strained them – the law that grants it no respite, and constantly shouts in its ear: March! march! This is no other law than that which, within the periodical fluctuations of commerce, necessarily adjusts the price of a commodity to its cost of production. (Wage Labor & Capital, [1891])

Indeed, this acknowledgement is echoed much earlier in Chapter 15 of *Capital Vol. I*, which is devoted precisely to the topic of 'the machine' in capitalist industry. In that chapter, Marx gives an extensive analysis of 19th century large-scale industry and its impact on workers. He contends that, not only does the 'revolutionizing' of the means of production not produce human emancipation or freedom from toil, but that "The labour of women and children" (his referent here is industrial England) "was therefore the first result of the capitalist application of machinery!".[68] The development of more efficient instruments, tools, and machinery "since it dispenses with muscular power," i.e., precisely because they make the work 'easier,' helped to integrate larger and larger numbers of workers, like women and children, who were previously untapped in the realm of commodity production (though well-worn as unpaid laborers in the sphere of social reproduction and the reproduction of the worker).[69] As this

[68] Marx, *Capital*, 517.

[69] Recent work in Marxist feminism has generated renewed interest in the capitalist integration of the broader sphere of social reproduction (including but not restricted to the circuit of commodity production): See, for

example illustrates, no transformation of the productive forces alone, without the transformation of the social relations through which they are implemented, could every guarantee the liberation of workers in general from the need to sell the labor, from the position of being dominated and exploited. "Thus we see that machinery," writes Marx, "while augmenting human material that forms capital's most characteristic field of exploitation, at the same time raises the degree of that exploitation" (Capital 518). This increased degree of exploitation is explicable only in terms of *social relations*, the sphere of Marx's thought to which analytical Marxism denies determinative import.

In the colonial context, the situation of technological development initially appears somewhat differently, as the technological abundance of the European imperial states relies on the extraction of raw materials, including fuel sources, from the colonies. Rodney's account of 'underdevelopment' is deeply attuned to this very fact:

> Europe benefitted technologically from its external trade contacts, while Africa either failed to benefit or actually lost. Vital inventions and innovations appeared in England in the late 18th century, after profits from external trade had been re-invested. Indeed, the new machinery represented the investment of primary capital accumulated from trading and from slavery. African and Indian trade strengthened British industry, which in turn crushed whatever industry existed in that is now called the 'underdeveloped' countries. (118)

This fact brings to our attention another important aspect of why it is not only insufficient but, indeed, deeply problematic to assert the primacy of productive forces. As Rodney elaborates, there are a host of effects that European colonization has on the African continent that would impede the development of productive forces—instruments, tools, and machines—that could stabilize food supply, make available basic items like housing, clothing, make possible the construction of better health infrastructure, etc. Also present in Rodney's mind is the decrease of inventive solutions to these problems, a decrease caused by enslavement. That is, in Rodney's view, what little innovation might have taken place under the unequal and constrained conditions of colonization were functionally eliminated by the slave trade: "Those who remained in areas badly hit by slave-capturing were preoccupied about their freedom rather than with improvements in production" (120). Still, Rodney asks, why

example, Tithi Bhattacharya, Ed. *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression* (London: Pluto Press, 2017); Lise Vogel. *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*. Revised Edition (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Silvia Federici. "Social Reproduction Theory: History, Issues and Present Challenges." *Radical Philosophy*, 2.4 (Spring 2019).

European technologies were not transferred as part of the colonial relation, as transnational and transcultural 'contact' is said to do.

"The basic reason" that technology did not transfer into the colony "is that the very nature of Afro-European trade was highly unfavourable to the movement of positive ideas and techniques from the European capitalist system to the African pre-capitalist (communal, feudal, and pre-feudal) system of production" (121).[70] Rodney here describes the fact that the nature of the *relation* between Europe and Africa is what stymied development on the African continent; social relations, in this case, far superseded any generalized 'tendency to develop' or alleged 'primacy of productive forces' to not only impede but, in fact, actively cause regression in the technological resources of the African continent (Rodney 124). Thus, the case of the European slave trade and, following that, the annexation and expropriation of other kinds characteristic of neo-colonial and imperial control directly contradict the most basic assumptions of 'productive force determinism,' so to the point that, should we take Cohen's intervention seriously, we risk complicity in a myriad of imperial assumptions and practices, a program which is already the dominant mode of understanding and 'mitigating' (read: reproducing) global inequality.

The colonial question makes no appearance in *Marx's Theory of History*, which is neither explicable by reference to Marx's own work (as even his critics will concede) nor in terms of historical, intellectual context (the latter makes its absence only more striking). What does explain Cohen's framework, however, is a pretense maintained by a small minority of 'Marxists' (both analytical and not): *colonialism is neither specific to capitalism nor constitutive of its 'internal' logic and, thus, there is no need to feature prominently nor centrally in our analysis of capital.* In contradiction to the most basic terms of historical materialism as a method, these thinkers (early in the development of 'dependency' and 'world-systems' theories) resisted the claims of those traditions to the centrality of colonization and global integration as a capitalist

[70] Economies across the African continent, at the time of colonization, were in fact pre-capitalist; Rodney's description is not a commitment to unilinear stadialism, but a description of the continuum of labor processes before and within capitalism. The process of colonization constitutes what Marx once called the 'formal subsumption of the labor process,' wherein African economies were being integrated into a global capitalism without a profound transformation in relations and processes on the continent itself (i.e., even enslavement is a pre-capitalist form which is then transformed for the needs of capitalism and the need for which is astronomically compounded by capitalism's originary accumulation). African economies after formal independence, however, have been fully integrated into global capitalism. In short, Rodney's claim to Africa's 'pre-capitalist' character in, in part, a transitional account of Africa's, at the time, nascent integration, in the sense that African resources and labor would be the conditions of possibility of capitalist expansion but would become capitalist in nature itself (i.e., transformed by the logic of accumulation).

dynamic—a tendency which is, itself, a break with the long tradition of Marx's theories of imperialism dating back to Lenin, Luxembourg, and Bukharin.[71]

Thus, analytical Marxism where it is most distinctive and original is also the *least* Marxist (or historical materialist, if one prefers). In its rejection of 'holism,' it fails to think capitalism as an *integrated* global system—the hallmark of its expression in the late 20th and 21st centuries, though its international character was evident long before. Its rejection of dialectics renders it incapable of grasping reciprocal determinations such as 'core' and 'periphery'. And, most importantly, its prioritization of 'productive forces' fail to challenge the *logic* of capitalist production, its ultimate aim and, thus, leave both the fundamental conditions of colonialism and capitalism unperturbed. The rationale of capitalist underdevelopment is a fundamentally anti-social one, one which does not simply result from the use of human reason *as such* but emerges from historically specific relations of domination. Rodney is not alone in such a diagnosis; he is joined by thinkers such as Samir Amin, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein.[72] Whatever one's position on the 'dependency' and 'world-systems' theory debates, the very nexus of these debates and the immense literature they have produced suffice to demonstrate that 'underdevelopment' is anything but a liminal, occasional occurrence.

Furthermore, based on the starting premises of PPF, we can safely assume that Cohen would advocate for a 'technological fix,' for the further development of the productive forces in the postcolonial world from which a transformation of social relations would follow. The 'technological fix'—notably also the 'fix' prescribed by the foreign and 'humanitarian' aid industries, the non-profit sector (typified by organizations such as the Gates Foundation), and mainstream neo-classical economics—has transformed the productive forces in numerous postcolonial, dependent states, but this transformation has led to *more not less* capitalist development and firmly away from anti-capitalist alternatives, to say nothing of socialism itself. Indeed, the hallmark of capitalist globalization in the 21st century is precisely the re-organization of production away from the former 'industrial centers' and the Fordist model of manufacture to a decentralized, 'denationalized', and displaced production of commodities, a new international division of labor.

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[71] See, V.I. Lenin. *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010 [1917]); Rosa Luxembourg. *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003 [1913]); Nikolai Bukharin. *Imperialism and World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press Classics, 1973 [1915]).
[72] Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism*, 161-198.

The productive forces from New Delhi to Manila to Jakarta to Tijuana to San Juan to Lagos and across the formerly colonized world certainly have been transformed but we must ask: *by and for whom?* and, most importantly, *to what end?* Postcolonial states continue to struggle in the global economy and, internally, with massive inequalities. The existence of 'export-processing' zones (also known as 'special economic zones,' 'free trade zones') are highly industrialized, with cutting-edge production technologies. These zones—an extreme example of what has been theorized under the umbrella of 'export-oriented industrialization' more broadly—have *exacerbated relations of inequality, exploitation, expropriation*, which predate their existence and coincide with it.

No amount of productive force 'development'—if takes places within the system of capitalist relations of production, for the ends of capital accumulation, could foreseeably produce a more just (much less sustainable) [For more on the 'technological fix' and the climate crisis, See Chapter 5]) form of life. PPF implies that we do precisely that, alter the productive forces and await the change in relations. This is precisely what the IMF, World Bank, USAID, the UN, and countless NGOs and charitable foundations have prescribed to resolve the crises of underdevelopment and, most recently, the climate crisis in the formerly colonized world.[73] The aid industry has prescribed a variety of ways to accelerate the development of productive forces—through advancing productive technologies, commercial investments, equipment loans, commercial and small business loans, and other 'entrepreneurial' solutions—without altering the fundamentally unequal and uneven global relations in which these instruments are used with the aim of capital accumulation rather than genuine human development, without questioning the international division of labor or predatory export relations.

Counterintuitively, the strain of critical thought commonly referred to as 'Western Marxism'—while it often lacks focused analysis of colonialism and imperialism—is not characterized by any methodological premises that make its approach *exclusive* of anti-colonial critique. In fact, it is precisely the methodological focus on totality that makes its tools most

[73] See, for example: The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, https://www.gatesfoundation.org; IMF's 'Digital Revolution': https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2018/06/impact-of-digital-technology-on-economic-growth/muhleisen.htm; the World Bank's 'Digital Development revolution': https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/digitaldevelopment/overview; USAID's 'digital strategy': https://www.usaid.gov/digital-development; the UN's Commission on Science and Technology for Development: https://unctad.org/en/Pages/CSTD.aspx.

compatible with the anti-colonial strain of Marxism. Though nominally counterintuitive, it is a connection that is expressed throughout this project, in different forms and in regard to different dynamics of capitalism as a global system.

In this chapter I have tried to clarify that which reading of Marxism or, rather, the materialist philosophy of history one abides by has crucial consequences for a materially grounded, historical critique. Moreover, I have tried to demonstrate that precisely where Hegelian method (to say nothing of the content of Hegel's thought) is most contentious—i.e., the claim that history and the world it describes is 'rational'—is also a necessary precondition for a systemic critique of capitalism, as is evident in Marx's inheritance. That is, the fact of rational intelligibility, is a crucial tool of any systemic critique. Thus, the Hegelian influence in Hegelian Marxism—the very aspect which analytical Marxism rejects—is the aspect that equips this tradition with the methodological tools to apprehend a capitalist totality, even where that has not been made the explicit focus of analysis. If historical materialism asks anything of us, it is to rigorously analyze the historical conditions of the object of critique as a totality. For some time now, the historical object has been and is increasingly an integrated (if differential, uneven, and unequal) global totality. It is thus the logic of capitalism that demands a *global* critique. Marx's materialist conception of history offers us *both* the universal conditions of possibility for that critique *and* requires that we understand that condition's mediation by capitalist stratification, hierarchy, and unevenness.

It is the quintessential characteristic of capitalist dynamics in the late 20th and 21st centuries that accumulation takes place not only on a world scale, but through global relations of domination, expropriation, and exploitation. For this historically specific reason, any critique of capitalism—if it is to be adequate to its object—*must be a global critique*. It cannot content itself either with the immediate appearance of capital within specific national boundaries, nor superficially with 'historical transformations' in production that leave capital's fundamental social relations intact, and it most certainly cannot dispense with analyzing its propensity for totalization, in multiple senses and registers. Whatever one makes of the term 'Western Marxism,' the concepts that tradition has offered are as indispensable as those we find in anti-colonial readings and applications of Marx. The two frameworks represent mirrored loci of capital's operation and critiques of its respective processes, analytically separable but logically and practically mutually constituting. A reconsideration of some of Western Marxism's—i.e., the Budapest School and the Frankfurt School— most fundamental

features is, thus, of pinnacle importance to understand its role as a counterpart to the systemic critique of the anti-colonial tradition. In order to consider such features, we need to evaluate the shifting and often elusive status of the 'historical' in 'historically situated' critique as it appears there.

III: TWO MODES OF CRITIQUE: TRANSHISTORICITY AND HISTORICAL SPECIFICITY

Introduction

In chapter one, we examined some fundamental, but often under-theorized or misconstrued aspects of Marx and Hegel's philosophies of history—i.e., reason, materialism, totality—to demonstrate how some aspects of their philosophical projects as they pertain to historically situated social theory. In this chapter, we will consider the meaning of 'historical critique' in some of their inheritors. Here I have reconstructed a debate about the historical status of certain critical concepts and, more importantly, what is meant by the term 'historical' in historical critique. I focus primarily on István Mészáros and Moishe Postone, as well as Lukács and Adorno. Each of these thinkers registers a different aspect of what it means for critique to be 'historical.' In our own time, much critical theory presupposes the equivalence of 'critical' with 'historically specific' or 'historically particular'. Indeed, this is perhaps the most common use of historical inquiry as a critical tool. Such a tendency is concerned with dereifying falsely naturalized or normalized features of social life which, while appearing fixed and inalterable, are in fact contingent and mutable. When this is the exclusive or primary goal of historical contextualization, I refer to this mode of critique as dereifying critique. Undoubtedly, this is a crucial aspect of critique, such a mode corresponds closely with critiques that prioritize historical specificity. However, this is but one aspect of historically situated critique.

This chapter grapples with precisely how to think critically about history, including the unsettling, disruptive function of historical specification or provincialization, but without making critique *reducible* to that function. A second mode of historical critique is considered to weigh its role in grounding social critique, including de-reifying critique. The focal points of this chapter are the concepts of 'transhistoricity' and 'historical specificity' as they operate within critical theory. In doing so, I foreground categories such as ideology and labor to examine how the transhistorical and historically specific are reciprocally mediating and constituting. Considering the historical status of central concepts in the Hegelian Marxist and Frankfurt school tradition offers us some helpful illustrations of that reciprocal mediation and, moreover, helps us to clarify these concepts. In the course of these considerations, the chapter

considers the operation of broader modal categories such as contingency and necessity, as they operate in these forms.

Lukács and Historical Critique

György Lukács stands out as the preeminent thinker of the concept of reification and of social totality in the tradition of Western Marxism. Indeed, it is the concept for which his work is most well-known. Thus, Lukács's thought represents a pivotal moment in the development of historical critique in the Marxist tradition. His reading of Marx is virtually antithetical to that of the analytical Marxists' in its emphasis on the specific methodological features of Marxism and it has also been influential to a variety of critical traditions. To begin, we can consider Lukács's starting point for reading Marx:

> Marx's dictum: 'The relations of production of every society form a whole' is the methodological point of departure and the key to the historical understanding of social relations. All the isolated partial categories can be thought of and treated—in isolation—as something that is always present in every society…But the changes to which these individual aspects are subject give no clear and unambiguous picture of the real differences in the various stages of the evolution of society. These can really only be discerned in the context of the total historical process of their relation to society as a whole. (9-10)

For Lukács, and for many of his theoretical successors, the capacity to think social totality is a crucial feature of Marx's critical theory. However, as Lukács is cautious to point out, "This concrete totality is by no means unmediated" (8). It is neither empirically obvious nor immediately transparent. Indeed, social totality is precisely the kind of conceptual tool which is warranted, for Lukács, by a system whose contradictions work to maintain its opacity and indiscernibility as a system of domination, *as a form of totalization*. This emphasis on social totality emerges from the premises of Marx's materialist philosophy of history described in Chapter 1.

A concrete social totality, though it is not necessarily empirically observable (i.e., its totalistic quality often exceeds what is portrayed by additive or cumulative empirical data), is no less material and that totality is also reciprocally mediated by social relations. The relations that constitute that totality, rather than appear as *relations appear as things*, objects wherein the contingency of historically specific properties endowed by capitalist social relations are made into endemic properties. Social relations take on a "phantom objectivity," "an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature:

the relation between people" (83). "The reified world," Lukács writes, "appears henceforth quite definitively […] as the only possible world, the only conceptually accessible, comprehensible world vouchsafed to us humans. Whether this gives rise to ecstasy, resignation, or despair […] this will do absolutely nothing to modify the situation as it is in fact" (HCC 110). Lukács's account of reification is deeply informed Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism, although the concept of 'reification' is often employed in a much more obtuse and general sense. This is an important theoretical continuity.

Let us briefly consider Marx's articulation of the "mystical character" of the commodity. "The mysterious character," he writes, "of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of [human being]'s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things".[74] In other words, commodity fetishism obscures relations of production, instead assigning value to commodities in themselves. In *Capital*, Marx's emphasis is on those relations which are historically specific to capitalist production, the critique of fetishism and, by extension, Lukács's critique of reification have a crucial—if sometimes forgotten—role in the critique of global relations of production, consumption, and distribution. In contrast to Cohen, whose account we considered in Chapter 1, who would eschew the constitutive role of social relations, Marx and Lukács emphasize the capacity of capitalism to naturalize and normalize the conditions of possibility of its own systematic reproduction. For this reason, much of the capitalist world and the narrative of its development, i.e. 'Western history' has obscured the colonial and imperial extraction, enslavement, expropriation, and exploitation which flooded the coffers of Europe to provide the fulcrum for its invaluable technological and scientific contributions. While Cohen places value in the apparently natural development of productive forces, he fails to register the mediation of such developments by colonial and imperial practice as a constitutive feature of capitalist social relations, a reification of the social relations of production into apparently neutral and objective tendencies toward 'development'.

Social totality as a critical category is, in part, intended to combat the problems posed by reification and commodity fetishism, to rejoin what is made to appear 'autonomous' from its material basis. In the same fashion, we can understand the need for the category of social

[74] Marx, *Capital*, 165.

totality as *precipitated by historical conditions themselves*.[75] If one of capitalism's most distinguishing features is its tendency to totalize, to subsume and integrate even heterogenous elements of social relations and the production process and this prompts the theoretical need to foreground its operation as a totality, then this insight has only become more prescient with the advent of capitalist globalization. Both Marx and Lukács are well aware of the 'infinite' expansionist impulse of capitalist accumulation long before the reconfiguration of global hegemony in the post-Cold War era, but neither could have foreseen the extent to which capitalism would be not only expansive but integrative, incorporating—in an uneven, differentiated, and heterogenous way—greater and greater swathes of labor processes, lands, and peoples into a systemic whole. If the analyses of the international division of labor expounded by Lenin, Bukharin, and Luxembourg were not sufficient to demonstrate how 'social totality' maps onto the development of a global capitalist order, then the reorganization of that division of labor (sometimes referred to as the 'new international division of labor') analyzed by dependency theorists, world-systems theorists, and theorists of underdevelopment should prompt us to trace these classical Marxist insights as constitutive of a *global critique of capitalism*.[76]

As Lukács, and to a lesser degree Marx, formulated these concepts the intellectual terrain of Europe was firmly rooted in positivist, empiricist, and physicalist tendencies, themselves inconspicuous forms of idealism (HCC 7). Thus, Lukács's understanding of the historical nature of critique, in general, tends to emphasize the dereifying function of critique, rather than elaborating on its normative foundations, e.g., on concepts such as philosophical anthropology or social metabolism. There is no question that Lukács accepted and, indeed, in many foreshadowed the availability of Marx's early works on human nature and social ontology, but the 'History' in *History and Class Consciousness* has a critical function largely in the sense that it de-reifies. In general, Lukács was often concerned primarily with how positivist thinking "obscures the historical, transitory nature of capitalism society," making it appeared natural and fixed (9). These facts notwithstanding, it is important to understand his emphasis

[75] Lukács, *HCC*, 10, 19.
[76] Nikolai Bukharin. *Imperialism and World Economy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010). Vladimir Lenin. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2000). Rosa Luxemburg. *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Routledge, 2003). See also, Jorge Larraín. *Theories of Development: Capitalism, Colonialism, and Dependency* (London: Wiley, 2013). Immanuel Wallerstein. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

on the historical specificity of social totality as a category is itself historically specific to the intellectual conditions under which his analysis was undertaken.

Contextualizing Lukács's Historical Critique

The notion of social totality is "the production of history in a double sense," according to Lukács (22). First, he writes, "historical materialism became a formal, objective possibility only because economic factors created the proletariat…and because the subject and object of knowledge of social reality were transformed" (22). Secondly, "if the meaning of history is to be found in the process of history itself and not, as formerly, in a transcendental, mythological, ethical meaning…this presupposes a proletariat with a relatively advanced awareness of its own position" (22). Lukács is firmly situated the development of Marxist method as a product of the history of class struggle. In the first case, Lukács performs a kind of self-reflexive analysis of the historical emergence of historical materialism. In the second case, Lukács is extrapolating from another element of his reading of Marx which is that "the knowledge of reality provided by the dialectical method is […] inseparable from the class standpoint of the proletariat" (21). Thus, for Lukács the unique epistemic position of the working-class constitutes the historically specific origin of historical materialism as a method.

The practical activity of the working-class, for Lukács, and the knowledge of capitalist society as a social totality are indelibly linked. In his view, the concrete struggles of that class and its social location are what make possible knowledge of the social totality. Lukács is careful to qualify this commitment by reminding his reader that "it does not follow form this that this knowledge or this methodological attitude is the inherent or natural possession of the proletariat as a class" (21). It is not an automated or seamless process by which the appropriate kind of class consciousness comes about. Still, Lukács's account is burdened with a certain theoretical ambivalence which stems from precisely the claim that the positionality of a class generates the epistemological resources for critique.

The limitations of Lukács's account stem from too closely indexing his methodological and epistemological insights to the practical activity *of a specific class*.[77] Indeed, the category of

[77] This is where Adorno and Lukács's accounts of 'totality' diverge. Indeed, one distinctive quality of Adorno's conception of ideology is that the ideological status of a premise or category is not tied to a specific class position but, rather, the way it serves to mask, obscure, or perpetuate social contradictions which are broader (but by no means exclusive of) class antagonisms. Martin Jay offers a similar account of this divergence. See, Martin Jay.

class consciousness has been as controversial as it has been influential, colluding with the assumption that Marx epistemically 'privileged' the working-class *a priori*. To be clear, this limitation comes not from any fundamental inaccuracy in the claim that class position and epistemic location are related or reciprocally mediating. And, neither does the limit emerge from the fact of historical materialism arising out of particular historical and material conditions (often formulated, by critics as a claim to Marxism's obsolescence). Rather, Lukács's trouble arrives with the claim that historical materialism's specificity "presupposes a proletariat with a relatively advanced awareness of its own position" (22). This component of his argument for the historically specific character of the method would seem to require the appropriate class consciousness in order to develop the very category which is able to identify that consciousness.

Even if one agrees that such a consciousness is requisite, it is not restricted to the minds of the working-class. Indeed, Lukács concedes this point, but he offers little in the way of elaboration as to how and why such a critical consciousness can emerge among, for example, members of the bourgeoisie (for which there is much precedent, including Marx himself). Lukács's formulation is perhaps best understood as a claim about the *intelligibility* of social totality arising only with the practical and material conditions under which the proletariat develops. However, Lukács's emphasis on historical specificity—while urgent in his own context and continually relevant now—as both the source and mode of dereifying critique is incomplete, especially at the present theoretical-historical juncture where historical specificity has come to represent the *only* form of legitimate 'historical critique' and transhistorical foundations are largely rejected.

It is vital that we view Lukács's theoretical emphasis in its historical context. *History and Class Consciousness* was originally published in 1923, just six years after the success of the Russian Revolution and just one year after the establishment of the Soviet Union by the Bolsheviks. These events, directly and indirectly, mobilized class-based movements and revolutionary fervor around the world. Not unlike the 1848 European Revolutions, this was a period of considerable political optimism, as much had been achieved which had once appeared inconceivable and social relations and forms centuries old had been overturned. It

"Theodor W. Adorno and the Collapse of the Lukácsian Concept of Totality" in *Marxism and Totality*, pp. 241-275. New York: Polity Press, 1984. However, I do not share he generally 'pessimistic' reading of Adorno (e.g., when he claims that Adorno "[ruled] out in advance the possibility of a liberating collective subject," 271). I address some of, what I consider to be, his misreadings of Adorno's thoughts on history in Chapter 3.

is in light of this historic optimism, we can understand Lukács's desire to locate political potentialities in structural features of the social system, latent features of specific subjects, and, thus, more generally to characterize liberatory ideas and actions as latent tendencies with a natural propensity to express themselves. This disposition is much more intelligible in its historical context, but its confidence would soon be shaken by the second World War and then, again, by Cold War and its precarious nuclear arms race. Further, it would be troubled by the lack of revolutionary fervor in the rest of Europe and the capitulation of the European working classes to moderate reforms and the containment strategies of a post-war welfare state (which would become a programmatic feature of Lukács's most sustained inheritors: the Frankfurt School).

This is not to say that Lukács's insights are strictly provincial. Rather, this context helps to qualify the emphasis that Lukács places on the historic role of the working-class. Lukács's own thought implicitly admits that social totality could be "always present in every society." When Lukács rightly describes de-reification as a critical project he presupposes the fact of social totality *prior* to the emergence of the proletariat, as it transcends specific social forms. His account requires that social totality (and thereby the fact of rational intelligibility) was a fact, if not consciously posited, of all human societies. The category is both transhistorical and historically specific, though these distinct modes describe different valences of the category. The transhistorical sense of the term describes the coherence of social forms and the reproduction of life, undertaken as a social project; the historically specific sense of the term refers the specifically capitalist tendency to totalize its anti-social aims. This ambivalence in Lukács offers us a way to raise some crucial questions about the historical status of critical categories more generally. In the following section we will examine this problem in some of Lukács's successors, Moishe Postone and István Mészáros, who undertake 'historical' critique rather differently, presenting us with an opportunity to explore the theoretical ramifications understanding historical critique dialectically.

Postone's Rejection of the Transhistorical

Moishe Postone's *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* is primarily concerned with the question of historical specificity and, in particular, the theoretical consequences of the presence of transhistorical categories. One reason to turn to Postone specifically is that his reading of Marx raises important questions about *how* Marx's critique was 'historical.' Postone's

'rethinking' of Marx's critical theory entails two related but distinct components. Firstly, Postone argues, 'traditional Marxism' has failed to live up to its fullest critical potential because it has adopted and maintained a 'transhistorical conception of labor.' This reproach extends beyond the category of labor, however, apparently applying to *any* possibility of transhistoricity in Marx's critique. It is because Lukács's work "permits an analysis of the ways in which historically specific social structures both constitute and are constituted by practice" that Postone is especially appreciative of his reflections on history (Postone 73). Secondly, Postone's more substantial intervention is to call into question the utility of the critique of capitalism 'from the standpoint of labor.' That is, Postone affirms the continued relevance of Marxist critique, but is critical of the form that critique has taken in much of the tradition.

In Postone's view, these two components are logically related. If one has a transhistorical conception of labor and posits labor's status as a perennial feature of human societies then labor's historical specificity under capitalism is elided. Further, the critique from the standpoint of transhistorical labor, according to Postone, cannot account for the standpoint of the critique itself, lacking the 'self-reflexive' quality which characterizes it as 'critical.' In other words, the conception of labor which is transhistorical, for Postone, can only be established through 'metaphysical' and therefore questionable means, making it an inadequate ground for critical social theory. One can raise questions about how logically intertwined these two claims are (one might, after all, have a transhistorical notion of labor *and* also emphasize another contradiction in one's critique of capitalism) but instead we will focus his account of a radically historically specific ground for critique.[78]

Postone's critique of the transhistorical conception of labor is part of what seems like a rejection of transhistorical categories *in general* as the ground of critique. Interpreting what he refers to as Marx's "turn to historical specificity" (characteristic of the 'mature' works), Postone generalizes this emphasis on historical specificity as *the* critical feature of Marx's critical theory:

> The historical relativization of the object of investigation is also reflexive for the theory itself…. This implies the necessity for a new, self-reflexive sort of social critique. Its standpoint cannot be located transhistorically or transcendentally. In such a conceptual framework, no theory—including Marx's—has absolute, transhistorical validity. The impossibility of an extrinsic

[78] Cf. Rahel Jaeggi. "What (If Anything) is Wrong with Capitalism? Dysfunctionality, Exploitation, and Alienation: Three Approaches to the Critique of Capitalism." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 54 (2016): 44-65.

> or privileged theoretical standpoint is also not to be contravened implicitly by the form of the theory itself. For that reason, Marx now feels compelled to construct his critical presentation of capitalist society in a rigorously immanent fashion, analyzing that society in its own terms, as it were. The standpoint of the critique is immanent to its social object; it is grounded in the contradictory character of capitalist society, which points to the possibility of its historical negation. (140)

There are several methodological points to note in Postone's formulation. Firstly, Postone equates 'historical relativization' with self-reflexivity. Given that Postone thinks that 'self-reflexivity' is what makes critical theory critical, this suggests that the role of historical relativization is constitutive of social critique (5, 88-89). Secondly, Postone conflates 'transhistorical validity' with an 'extrinsic standpoint'. On this view, transhistoricity and historical specificity are not only mutually exclusive but the former necessarily implies a position 'outside' of historical particularity. Thirdly, Postone is clear that he values a commitment to analyzing "society on its own terms" (140). Here he is harkening to a long tradition of immanent critique as the basis of critical theory. In this case however, upon further examination, we will find that Postone's rejection is only superficial.

When Postone seems to reject the transhistorical conception of labor, he is not suggesting that human beings have not in the past (or will not in a post-capitalist future) engage in what is conventionally understood by the term 'labor.'[79] In spite of his repeated emphasis on the purported problems of the transhistorical notion of labor, his is not a rejection of the fact of human beings' need to reproduce their life through purposive activity. Postone clarifies that "While it is obviously true that the 'metabolic' interaction with nature effected by labor is a precondition of existence in any society, what determines a society is also the nature of its social relations" (157). Rather, according to Postone, "In Marx's mature works, the notion that labor is at the core of social life does not simply refer to the fact that material production is always a precondition of social life" (157). He quite rightly points out that "the sphere of production in capitalism should not be understood only in terms of the material interactions

[79] Cf. Herbert Marcuse. *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Humanity Books, 1999). pp. 287-295. Postone's view is, in a sense, foreshadowed by Marcuse in Reason and Revolution. There, Marcuse highlights passages in Marx which seem to demand the 'abolition of labor' rather than its being freed from alienated conditions. Marcuse's argument for the 'abolition of labor,' though it constitutes a small portion of the text overall, is of interest in that it also claims that the determinative power of material conditions will also be diminished in a post-capitalist society—i.e., even the commitment to materialism is in itself radically historically specific, in his view. Interestingly, Postone cites Marcuse in *Time, Labor, and Social Domination* but not *Reason and Revolution*, where this uncannily similar account appears.

of humans with nature," which coincides with his overall emphasis on historical specificity (157).

Postone is warning against treating the historically specific relations in capitalism as natural, lest we mistake a reified appearance for reality (as Lukács also forewarns). What Postone *does* think is specific to capitalism is that "its fundamental social relations are constituted by labor" (157). In sum, labor should not be conceived transhistorically because *its determinative power on social life is not transhistorical*. "Labor as such does *not* constitute society per se; labor in capitalism, however, *does* constitute that society" (157). Postone's specification of Marx's critique, as previously mentioned, extends beyond labor to include even the concept of social totality (which is in his view is only total because it is mediated by labor). "…Marx's analysis," writes Postone, "does not ontologically presuppose the existence of this 'social system'" (158). On his reading, the category of social totality *only* appears in Marx's critique because of the characteristic totalization of capitalist social relations, as critique takes its terms from the object of critique. Postone insists on a necessary tie between the phenomenon of alienation and the appearance of social totality (158-159). In his view, the category of social totality can *only* grasp reified and alienated relations. This category, like labor, is radically historically specific.

It should be said that the stakes of claiming that neither labor or social totality are transhistorical are rather high when we consider that, as Postone himself acknowledges, these categories have served to ground critical social theory in the Marxian vein for much of the twentieth century. In other words, what is at stake is not simply terminological rigor but the very ground of critical theory as it has often been understood hitherto. If the less charitable version of this apparent rejection of transhistoricity were to stand, then it is unclear from whence the normative force of critical theory can come. Indeed, this remains a central question for critical theorists such as Habermas and Honneth today. Their work, in my view, represents an overcorrection, lapsing into an ahistorical critique, for the apparent failure of much Left theory to clearly state its presuppositions and normative justification. The persistence of a quasi- or straightforwardly transcendental approach is a testament to the gravity of the problem. If we too hastily dismiss this normative ground of critique, the critical theorist may, as Postone worries, not be able to account for her own critical standpoint (5).

Although Postone's reinterpretation of Marx's critical theory ostensibly relies on the rejection of transhistorical categories altogether, closer examination raises serious doubt as to

whether such a rejection is in reality possible. Postone's own account of historical specificity seems more ambivalent than his explicit remarks about the problematic role transhistoricity has played in 'traditional Marxism.' For instance, Postone (rightly) insists that Marxist critique "does not simply—and affirmatively—oppose the universal to the particular, nor does it dismiss the former as a mere sham" (162). Correctly qualifying Marx's view as neither one-sidedly particularist nor universalist, Postone seems to miss that such a succinct description of the dialectical relation between universality and particularity is only a *spatial* form of the underlying logic of a *temporal* opposition he has already posed: *the mutual exclusivity of transhistoricity and historical specificity*. If we should not accept a mutually exclusive opposition between universality and particularity, then it is unclear why we should accept an equivalent opposition between historical specificity and transhistoricity.

This is not lost on Postone as he eventually concedes that "Labor in some form is a necessary precondition—a transhistorical or *'natural' social necessity*—of human existence as such" (161). Still, he maintains that "This necessity can veil the specificity of commodity-producing labor" (161). The fact that "one does not consume what one produces" and that "one's labor is nevertheless the necessary social means of obtaining products to consume" is, on the other hand, "a *historically determinate social necessity*" (161). These two distinguishable forms of necessity seem to have been what is underpinning the apparent rejection of the transhistorical throughout *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. Given that, as in the passages cited previously, Postone has suggested that no critique can have 'transhistorical validity' this raises the question as to why he would concede transhistoricity elsewhere in the text. Though Postone seems intent on jettisoning any transhistorical category for much of the text, he is nonetheless willing to admit the transhistoricity of labor *only not as the basis of a critique of capitalism*.

On this point we must ask: *what is the logical relation between Postone's critique of the transhistorical conception of labor and his rejection of the 'critique from the standpoint of labor'?* If we accept, as Postone does, that labor is a natural-social necessity which will not fall to the wayside when capitalism does, then why expend such effort denying its transhistoricity? One response to this question is that Postone is intent on 'updating' Marxism and, therefore, is tendentially bound to emphasize historical specificity. The prominence of one of the categories to the detriment of the other (transhistoricity) may simply be a question of emphasis, an emphasis that emerges under historically specific conditions—i.e., when the 'exploitation' critique has apparently lost

its fervor and no long appears to have the explanatory capacity it once did. If so, then we can temper Postone's claims to read something like: under the present circumstances we should emphasize historical specificity over transhistoricity *for historically specific reasons*. Otherwise, the *rejection* of the transhistorical would *itself be ahistorical*. This would be consistent enough, given the overall tenor of *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*. What this does not explain, however, is precisely *why* critique should not be grounded by transhistorical categories. If the logical connection between transhistorical categories and the critique of exploitation is not clear, then we are given less reason to be compelled by the claim that historical specificity ought to be privileged in critique (which we can now see is largely as question of emphasis). Furthermore, it is unclear how the historical specificities of our time *in themselves* warrant disproportionate emphasis on historical specificity in lieu of any transhistoricity.

Postone's worry is that a transhistorical ground will either generate a fetishism of production and productivity (a description which has a tenuous relation to the historical realities of the twentieth century) or that, from it will follow the seeming necessity of the 'exploitation' critique.[80] It is by no means self-evident, however, that the acceptance of a transhistorical conception of labor necessitates that any and all critiques of capitalism are rooted in that transhistorical conception *to the same degree or in the same manner*. In the following section, I consider one theoretical alternative, offered by István Mészáros, to positing a hard distinction between transhistoricity and historical specificity with the aim at arriving at a more dialectical conception of these categories, preserving their critical purchase.

Transhistoricity or Historical Specificity? 'Yes, Please'

In contrast to Postone, Mészáros self-consciously specifies what he means by the term 'transhistorical' and to clarify its relation to historical specificity. Rather than pose a strong distinction between these categories, Mészáros takes seriously their "dialectical interdeterminations" (11-12).[81] In addition, Mészáros offers further elaboration on the distinction that is sketched by Postone as 'social-natural necessity' and 'historically determinate

[80] According to Postone, the objectionable practices of the Soviet Union emerge from a fetishization of production which, he claims, grows out of a transhistorical conception of labor (9-11, 16-17). However, this paints the conditions of rapid industrialization and famine in primarily conceptual terms which ignore the concrete conditions under which such practices take place (e.g., the War Scare of 1927, declining relations with former Western allies, pressure to prevent another Povolzhye famine). Postone's profoundly theoretical diagnosis of 'productivism' in the Soviet Union, however, emphasizes (and falsely equates) the 'productivist' impulse to a conception of labor.

[81] István Mészáros. *Social Structure and Forms of Consciousness, Volume 2: The Dialectic of Structure and History* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

necessity,' modal categories which help navigate how contingency and necessity figure into the 'historical' status of critique. Later, we will consider some of the limitations of Mészáros's account of critique (including his conception of ideology), but in the meantime, we can review some important contributions he makes to clarifying the character of transhistoricity.

Mészáros makes two important qualifications regarding transhistoricity. Firstly, the term transhistorical is not synonymous with either "suprahistorical" and nor is it 'ahistorical'. The former, in his view, is a "metaphysical mystification" while the term transhistorical describes "the continued reproduction [...] of determinate conditions or processes across historical boundaries" not simply 'beyond' or 'outside' of them, as some critics of Marx have suggested (59-60). Secondly, "Although the fundamental material determinations of social life persist throughout history" these processes are "constituted from a multiplicity of interdeterminations with a changing relative weight of each [...] in the overall complex" (60). This means that features of these mutually reciprocal determinative conditions can come to the fore or recede from it on account of specific historical conditions; such a change would reasonably require that critique adjust itself to the dominant practices and narratives as capitalism appropriates new means for its reproduction.

Mészáros is content to base critique on the normative ground of transhistorical claims about the kinds of creatures human beings are (i.e., philosophical anthropology) and the features which are perennial in social as well as bodily life. However, this starting point should not be misunderstood, although the bare fact of material and social needs is permanent the means employed and the meaning of that fact is mutable. Although the above qualifications clearly state the difference between transhistoricity and supra- or ahistoricity, they do not offer a clear articulation per se of the modal status of the category which is perhaps where much controversy emerges surrounding the concept. As previously mentioned, Postone sketches an important distinction in how we can grasp the category of *necessity*. Following what appears to be a parallel intuition, Mészáros draws a similar distinction to Postone's using the terms "historical necessity" and "natural necessity" (155).

For Mészáros, Marx's dispute with classical political economists is not that they posit any transhistorical categories but that "they tend to conflate natural and historical necessity," reifying present contingencies into ineradicable facets of human societies (155). He thus shares the worries, and rightly so, of both Lukács and Postone. To be clear, "natural necessity" according to Mészáros *is* ineradicable; we can never live in a world where human beings do

not have bodily needs and where those needs do not entail a metabolic, as well as socially mediated, relation with nature which is organized around labor. The specific conditions under which the satisfaction of those needs takes place and the new 'needs' that social formations generate, however, are alterable.

Although Postone places greater emphasis on the role of historical specificity for critical theory and insists that we must avoid grounding critique in transhistorical premises, his account is not far from Mészáros's in striving to distinguish between forms of necessity. "Natural social necessity" (or just "natural necessity" for Mészáros) is straightforward enough; it follows from the 'first premise' of history, from the most basic commitment to materialism. Even Postone concedes the permanent status of labor broadly conceived, only he refuses to make that the ground of his critique of capitalism (161). This kind of necessity, as it mediates other forms of necessity also serves as the basis for contingent practices in the current social formation.

The case of "historical necessity" (or "historically determinate necessity"), however, is more complex. This is because, not only does this form of necessity not describe a perennial feature of human life, but because the origin of its necessitation is also contingent. In other words, the necessity in "historical necessity" emerges not directly from the facts of human bodily life (as in natural necessity) but from the specific terms of contradictory social formations themselves. It is, counterintuitively, *a contingent form of necessity*.[82] The reproduction of the political present may require a concept's or practice's continuation in order to secure the means of its reproduction. The social formation which requires what appears as a necessity, however, is itself contingent. Capitalism is not a natural necessity (indeed, such a claim epitomizes what Lukács called reification) but it does generate historical necessity insofar as it, as a system, has basic requirements for its ongoing function. Let us look at one example that might help clarify what is meant by "historical" versus "natural-social" forms of necessity.

[82] Cf. Zambrana, *Hegel's Theory of Intelligibility*, pp. 80. Zambrana emphasizes that Hegel's conception of necessity also has its basis in "a concrete totality—a totality of contingent conditions." The reader may note a conspicuous absence of any discussion of Hegel's conception of contingency and necessity. This absence is due largely to my focus on the *Philosophy of Right* and its reception; these categories are more fully discussed in his *Logic*. While a comparative analysis of Marx and Hegel on necessity would be an important contribution to the critical literature, for our purposes it suffices that we address the second-order categories (e.g., actuality, rationality, teleology) as they represent points of unity as well as tension in their philosophies of history. This is addresses the 'problem' of necessity without exhaustively explicating its significance in Hegel's thought.

Male-dominance and cisheterosexism as a system, the critical theorist should agree, is not a natural necessity.[83] Women's subordination does not follow from 'immediate' facts of anatomical or morphological differences. The social category known as 'gender' does not follow from these facts, though such a belief is commonplace in uncritical and traditionalist notions of gender. Gender is not a natural necessity. Gender oppression, as a system of relations which serves certain interests, tends to generate conditions which are favorable to its perpetuation. This process of generation is what we talk about when we talk about "historical necessity." Although gendered relations of production and women's subordination are not natural features of all human societies, those contingent features necessitate categories and practices to maintain and ensure the gender system's continuation. Some examples of what that system necessitates include: specific conceptions of gender which justifies and normalizes the division of labor, gender identity, compulsory monogamy which regulates property and ownership, and heterosexuality to discipline the reproduction of workers, etc. These are not natural necessities but, rather, products of a contingent social formation's *need to reproduce itself*. Such features also work to obscure the possibility that things could be (and, indeed, could have been) otherwise, further increasing our sense of things like heteronormativity and the sexual division of labor as 'natural.'

Returning to the question of the transhistorical, gender oppression/exploitation remains a good example for considering *how and in what sense* a system can be transhistorical. A category or practice can be transhistorical in at least two senses: (1) it emerges more or less directly out of natural necessity, though it is no less mediated by historically specific social relations or (2) it emerges from social-historical necessity, existing outside the present social formation (e.g., mode of production) but emerging from the need of a contingent system of relations need to reproduce itself. The latter form of transhistoricity is, undoubtedly, more robust and numerous, increasing with the complexity of social life. It is also what is most

[83] The question of patriarchy's 'transhistorical' status in relation to capitalism has long been a source of debate and contention among materially-oriented feminists (materialist feminists, socialist feminists, Marxist feminists). Indeed, the stakes of parsing out the specific dimensions of transhistoricity has rather high stakes for feminist theory. See, for example, Martha E. Gimenez. *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction* (Boston: Brill, 2019); Michele Barrett. *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist/Feminist Encounter* (New York: Verso Books, 2016); Lise Vogel. *Marxism and the Oppression of Women* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014); Christine Delphy. *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (New York: Verso Books, 2016); Ed. Lydia Sargent. *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminist* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1981).

commonly being referred to in the course of a *critique* of an existing society, though it is sometimes mistaken for natural necessity by critics and thus is mistakenly reified.

When a critical theorist is referring to the 'necessity' of specific social practices or ideas, they are referring to historical and not natural necessity, the latter of which would render the critique entirely self-defeating (as some critics are quick to highlight). The same terminological problem emerges when 'transhistorical' is used or understood equivocally to conflate transhistoricity which is derived from natural *or* historical necessity. To make matters still more complex, in the tradition of Hegelian Marxist critique, *the natural and the historical are dialectically related* and reciprocally mediating. A key element of both Hegel and Marx's thought was to overcome this classical opposition between history and nature.[84] That is, although a particular social formation is not *necessarily* the means through which natural necessities need be satisfied, its historical necessity makes it the means through which they *are* satisfied. If historical necessity had no relation to natural necessity, it would not have sufficient force to operate with seemingly natural facility (i.e., as 'second nature').

Historical Conceptions of Ideology

What is expressed by 'necessity,' as we have seen, is closely related to a premise, concept, or category's status as historically specific, transhistorical, or both. The status of a concept being ideological is equally variable and dependent on such categories and, furthermore, often expresses the conflation of these categories. This is further complicated by the fact that the concept of ideology itself is understood in a variety of ways and sometimes with distinctive analytical and practical aims. With regard to the theory of ideology, the historical (or, among critics, ahistorical) status of the critic's standpoint and, indeed, the concept itself have high stakes. It is necessary for us to clarify these distinct conceptions of ideology and, moreover, consider in what sense the concept is 'historical.' Certainly, the notion of 'ideology' has a long and varied history and its varied appearance is undergirded by specific historical conditions. What we must ask then, is which can best aid critical theory in its critique of society and moreover allow that critique to be 'historical.'

[84] Karen Ng places a distinctive emphasis on this overcoming. See, Ng, "Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History: The Dialectics of Species Life" in *Creolizing Hegel*. Ed. Michael Monahan (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017). Though with a more complementary view of his relation to Hegel, she draws on Adorno's foregrounding the limits of this classical opposition in both *Negative Dialectics* and the *History and Freedom* lectures.

It is not possible to articulate a complete or comprehensive theory of ideology here. Such a task would require a project of its own. However, there are several points of clarification which can shed some light on the 'third premise' of Marx's materialist philosophy of history and the framework used throughout this project. In order distinguish between forms of historicization which are adequate or inadequate to the object of their critique, I will rely on a kind of immanent criticism which takes the antinomies of contemporary historicism as resulting from *ideological mediation*. Before carrying out such an analysis, however, we need to be clear on what conception of ideology is at work, since different conceptions have not only different underlying historical assumptions but markedly different functions.

In the expansive literature on the theory of ideology and ideology critique, there are two broad groups into which a particular formulation can be understood. The first claims that ideology is *neutral* (not in the sense of a neutral standpoint but, rather, that ideology *can be positive and negative*). The second maintains that, on the contrary, ideology is strictly *critical* or 'negative' concept (to be used only pejoratively and to diagnose). Althusser and Lukács, following Lenin, are perhaps the most well-known proponents of the neutral conception of ideology.[85]

This fact has had a considerable impact on the historical development of the theory of ideology in the West. Especially in North America, when one hears the term 'ideology' correlates such as 'interpellation' and 'ideological state apparatuses' quickly leap to mind. This is true across subfields as well as disciplines ranging from feminist theory to literary theory to discourse analysis to contemporary theories of subjectivity.[86] In contrast, those in the critical camp have had a scarce reception in the English-speaking theoretical traditions, particularly in

[85] It should be noted here that, although I advocate for using the term in its strictly negative since, there are historical reasons why the neutral conception may not have been foreseeable as a problematic conception. Often, the neutral conception has distinctively strategic or organizational aims, e.g., cohering members of a class or group, generating an self-conscious basis for unified action). Historically, the term is often employed in a context where the very basis for making claims about 'reality' are not being threatened and in situations where the notion of objectivity itself is not being problematized. Lenin, Lukács, and even Gramsci would have little cause for concern about their descriptions of ideology collapsing the distinction between discourse and reality as, I would argue, is now the situation the critic of ideology faces. In short, although the merits of the negative conception exceed those of the neutral conception, in my view, the latter is only especially pernicious after the 'linguistic' or 'postmetaphysical' turn in the humanities. Ultimately, the privileging of the negative conception of ideology is motivated by the present state of critical political theory.

[86] See, for example, Judith Butler. *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Alison Assiter. *Althusser and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1990); Ed. Ken Hyland. *Discourse Studies Reader: Essential Excerpts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Donald E. Hall. *Subjectivity: The New Critical Idiom* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

the U.S. This would include the early Frankfurt school theorists like Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. Nonetheless, the *criticism* of the concept of ideology is largely focused on its negative, critical formulation. This is in part because few take stock of the neutral versus critical conception, not least of all its deeply ambivalent appearance in Althusser's conception.

This manner of classifying the different conceptions of ideology has been articulated by both critics of ideology such as Raymond Geuss, as well as proponents of the concept such as Jorge Larraín. Both, albeit to different ends, employ a similar theoretical taxonomy. In Guess's case, he further includes a category for ideology in the 'descriptive' sense (5).[87] I have excluded that usage here to avoid equivocation and because the basic impetus of such a conception is sufficiently captured by the 'neutral' category, precisely because it can be understood as "non-evaluative" (5). In addition, I have resorted to the terms 'neutral' and 'critical' to make the vocabularies of these thinkers mutually intelligible. Larraín, for example, uses the terms "positive" and "negative" self-consciously in order to highlight not only the definition of the concept but its methodological underpinnings. Geuss uses the terms "positive" and "pejorative," gesturing toward the function of a particular conception of ideology (12, 23).

According to the neutral conception, ideology describes a general process through which ideas emerge out of material conditions. The status of a system of ideas being 'ideological' is shared by all social locations and class positions; all claims are ideological regardless of their content. A confrontation between groups whose relation is antagonistic is inter-ideological. In this conception, one can unproblematically refer to 'proletarian ideology' and 'bourgeois ideology' as, for example, Althusser does.[88] In the critical conception, ideology refers not to the generation of ideas *as such* but to a specific manner (i.e., false, illusory, distorted) in which they are produced and a specific function they serve (e.g., the rationalization of social contradictions). The neutral conception of ideology collapses the two distinct components of the 'third premise' of Marx's philosophy of history as I have described

[87] Raymond Geuss. *The Idea of Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[88] As Larraín points out, a survey of the course of Lukács's intellectual development reveals that his conception, though less explicitly than Althusser's, is also not strictly pejorative and largely follows that of Lenin. "It is therefore surprising," he writes, "that most accounts of Lukács's concept of ideology seem to be unaware of this fact" (57). See Jorge Larraín. "Lukács's Concept of Ideology" in *Lukács Today: Essays in Marxist Philosophy* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1988).

it above (i.e., it conflates the relationship between ideas and material conditions *in general* and the specific problem of ideology).[89]

The critical conception takes these two elements to be analytically distinct, all the while understanding that one is made possible by the other (ideology by material mediation in general) but is not reducible to it. Each of these camps, while heterogeneous on other points, accept that their reading of the concept of ideology is the more felicitous toward Marx himself. On this point, I am also aligned with the critical camp, but still feel the need to acknowledge that there is some ambiguity in Marx and Engels's usage, though the connotation is disproportionately critical in their work. Rather than focus on the question of hermeneutical felicity, we can take a different approach to the confrontation between these two camps while maintaining the crucial distinction it establishes.

Geuss introduces several other analytical distinctions pertaining to the critique of ideology that are worth reviewing here as well. In trying to describe how ideology critique works, Geuss identifies three ways in which the critique of ideology appears to operate. First, it may be an "epistemic criticism," in which case its task must be to "give an account of what it means to say that the agents 'could not acknowledge' certain motives'" for believing what they do (30). Second, it may be a "functional" critique insofar as "ideology is a world-picture which stabilizes or legitimizes domination" (31). The "genetic" critique which, for Geuss, raises the question as to whether consciousness can "be 'false' in virtue of something about its origin, history, or genesis" (36). Though many of Guess's formulations contain elements which are, in my view, questionable, his taxonomy does give us a helpful starting point to clarify which conception of ideology is best suited to the aims of historically situated critique.

The conception employed in this project is largely inherited from Adorno and it is specifically a critical one. Indeed, he defines it negatively over and against the conception of Mannheim on the basis that the latter employs the term neutrally, which amounts to a kind of standpoint epistemology. Ideology, in Adorno's view, is best described as "socially necessary semblance" (occasionally, "socially necessary false consciousness"),or by way of metaphor, as the "spell." Preferring the first of these, I will refer to that phrase going forward. The conception of ideology as socially necessary semblance extends from the basic features of

[89] See, Larraín 1983, 24: "It is necessary to emphasize that the text does not say that the ruling ideology is the ideology of the ruling class, for this is perhaps one of the most frequent misconceptions one finds in the literature. Here Marx and Engels speak of ideas in general and not of ideology."

Marx's materialist philosophy of history as well as makes some important original contributions to the tradition of ideology critique. There are four defining features that need to be foregrounded here, some of which can be organizes in the terms suggested by Geuss. These features include: (1) ideology as *both* true and false, (2) ideology relates to but is not *reducible* to class position or social location, (3) ideology critique, as a form of immanent critique is, as Rahel Jaeggi recently put it, "transformative" insofar as it requires the alteration of both norm and reality.[90] Lastly, (4) ideology critique is a critique of its own material conditions of possibility, i.e., a critique of an antagonistic society.

In the case of the first feature, Geuss questions whether such a conception is possible. Given that ideology critique is intended as a "definitive judgement," he wonders whether "we would want to avoid cases in which we say of the same belief that it is both true and false" (33). However, the advantage of maintaining the dual truth and falsity of an ideological premise is that it avoids reducing ideology critique to an epistemic critique. If ideology were merely and wholly false and did not reflect the reality of a contradictory reality or satisfy a real need of the social totality to reproduce itself, then it would only require an epistemic solution, and the very fact that some falsities resist rational intervention shows this to be insufficient. However, ideology critique as Adorno (and most other Marxists) understand it diagnoses something more than just a misconception or mere false belief. Such beliefs are *socially historically necessary* when they are ideological. However, and this brings us to the issue of the second feature, this necessity emerges from a historically specific and contradictory totality and not immediately from class relations themselves.

In the case of the second feature, although ideological beliefs *can* arise from the rationalization of social antagonism (e.g., in the form of a worker with bourgeois aspirations) Adorno's account is also intended to capture contradictions which are *broader* than those specific class relations. These broader contradictions sustain the reproduction of capitalist society but are not necessarily observable in the contradiction between capital and labor (which is nonetheless not irrelevant for Adorno, but does not play the focal role it does in other critiques of capitalism).[91] One such contradiction is between use-value and exchange-value,

[90] Rahel Jaeggi. "Rethinking Ideology" in *New Waves in Political Philosophy*. Eds. Boudewijn de Bruin, Christopher F. Zurn (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009). p. 76.
[91] See Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 139-140.

exemplified in the aim of society as accumulation rather than the satisfaction of human needs.[92] His critique is 'material' in a sense which is not reducible to direct class antagonism; rather, ideology is also 'material' because it emerges from a constitutive relation of modern society: the division of intellectual and manual labor.[93] Again, this is not exclusive of other ways to construe the 'material' basis of ideology but Adorno emphasizes it more clearly. In sum, the social location or position of the subject which generates ideological belief is not always historically necessary (and is certainly never a question of natural necessity). The ideological status of a concept cannot simply be deduced from one's class position. This avoids the limitations of a "genetic" critique, since Adorno's critique is not predicated on an idea's genesis but on *a combination of the epistemic and functional critiques*.

The functional element of ideology critique, for Adorno, is borne out of the historical necessity which is the condition of possibility of ideology in the first place. Furthermore, as Jaeggi highlights, the critique of ideology is intended to facilitate practical transformation. Its aim is not merely to point out social contradictions but to show that such contradictions are *constitutive and therefore irresolvable within the existing system*. This third feature is controversial for Geuss. Indeed, he is somewhat reluctant to accept that contradictions can be declared constitutive and this is the basis for his skepticism toward the functional aspect of ideology critique (32-33). His suspicion is that this mode of critique relies on "a claim that no true world-picture could yield arguments for the legitimacy of the institutions" it critiques (33). Geuss is correct to be concerned about the possibility of giving arguments for the legitimacy of existing institutions, but his reservation should be about those institutions rather than our failure to produce a justification for them. With regard to the epistemic dimension, Adorno's account of ideology imputes neither ideological nor anti-ideological consciousness to any specific epistemic agent (as, for example, Lukács tends to). The emphasis is not simply on a misidentification of one's class interest (although such a thing is, indeed, ideological) which is expressed by the phrase 'false consciousness.' Rather, ideology's epistemic dimension emerges

[92] See, Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, pp. 133: By calling this society irrational I mean that if the purpose of society as a whole is taken to be the preservation and the unfettering of the people of which it is composed, then the way in which this society continues to be arranged runs counter to its own purpose, its *raison d'être*, its *ratio* […] While the means used by society are rational, this rationality of the means is really...only a means-end rationality…one which obtains between the set ends and the means used to achieve them without having any relation to the real end of purpose of society, which is the preservation of the species as a whole in a way conferring fulfillment and happiness."

[93] Adorno, "Ideology," 182.

from a more basic insight: irrationality, because it coincides with society's ratio, ceases to appear to us *as irrationality*. Capitalist social reproduction historically necessitates certain failures of consciousness to grasp the fundamentally irrational aim of capitalist irrationality, otherwise its continuation is threatened. The breaking of such a 'spell' is only further complicated by the fact that it is difficult to repudiate at the level of the concept, those conditions which, however unequally or however alienating, nonetheless provide the possibility of one's very existence.

Rational Intelligibility, Irrationality, and the Concept of Ideology

In Chapter 1 we noted the significance of rational intelligibility, inherited from Hegel, in the thought of Marx. Though we emphasized the possibility of critiquing society as a whole with a certain logic, we did not delve into the problem of society's irrationality and whether that fact is in tension with the claim of rational intelligibility. The critique of society as irrational which is reflected in the critique of ideology no less requires the capacity to think the whole as 'rational' in its irrationality.[94] Entailed in a critical concept of ideology is, first, a materialist framework for understanding the relation between the reproduction of life and our ideas and beliefs about that process of reproduction and, secondly, a comprehension of that process as a *totality*, as comprising objective and subjective relations operating cohesively as a rationally intelligible whole. Ideology—understood negatively as 'socially necessary semblance'—requires not only that we comprehend the whole of society and our relation to it but that we also discern its *ratio* especially where its coherence is lacking A critical conception of ideology requires a concept of social totality which can grasp the ways that contemporary societies contain and manage profound *contradictions*. It may be unexpected to find Hegel, so frequently charged with an assimilative 'rationalism' to be of any use here and it may seem counterintuitive given Hegel's status as an 'idealist,' that he should be of any help. Nonetheless, Hegel once more appears to have something crucial to offer the critical theorist.

Without delving into the status of the term 'idealism,' as it refers to Hegel, we can at least note—as scholars such as Frederick Beiser do—that nothing in Hegel's account *precludes* the possibility of material conditions being generative of ideas.[95] Further, as contemporary scholars like Zambrana, Ng, and, to a degree, Pippin have highlighted, Hegel's idealism is anything but a rejection of the concrete; on the contrary, Hegel's idealism is distinctive because

[94] See, Adorno, "Ideology," 189-190.
[95] Frederick Beiser. *Hegel* (New York: Routledge, 2005). p. 238.

it refuses to accept as mere opposition the relationship between reason and concrete reality. This is one reason why, thus far, I have avoided reading the 'Hegel-Marx connection' as a simple opposition between idealism and materialism. Given this qualification, we can foreground the importance of Hegel's rational intelligibility for grounding a theory of ideology.

Few scholars have clearly tracked the influence of Hegel in Marx's conception of ideology, though many in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition have gestured in this direction by foregrounding the notion of social totality, not least of all Lukács whom we have already discussed.[96] In a sense, some of the limitations of Lukács (and, indeed, the neutral conception more generally) are, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, issues which emerge if we conflate the basic framework of making sense of how material conditions are generative of ideas and the specific problem of ideology. This conflation is undergirded by a failure to broach an important difference (but not opposition per se) between Hegel and Marx. Hegel's concept of rational intelligibility describes a feature of social wholes which is a transhistorical, social-natural necessity. Marx's conception of ideology requires this transhistorical feature but emphasizes its socially and historically specific valence: i.e., the process of reflecting and reproducing a socially antagonistic whole. In sum, the neutral conception of ideology seems to take up the descriptive character of Hegel's rational intelligibility and prioritizes that fact over and against the historically specific form that rational intelligibility must takes in class societies in order to grapple with contradictions. In the negative conception, both moments are present but the fact of rational intelligibility 'goes without saying'.

Working with a negative conception of ideology and without presupposing a simplistic opposition between Hegel's 'idealism' and Marx's materialism, Karen Ng has offered an account of ideology critique which draws a clear trajectory from Hegel to Marx and finally to Adorno. "Hegel unfolds the experience, development, and transformation of consciousness by demonstrating the entwinement of subject and object at every stage," Ng writes, "continuing and radicalizing this Hegelian tradition, Marx sums up the aim of immanent

[96] See also, Mihailo Marković. "The Critical Thought of Georg Lukács" in *Lukács Today*, Ed. Tom Rockmore. London: Springer, 1988. p. 17: "...the decisive influence was that of Hegel and Marx. That is why he treated the society of his time as a totality, saw cultural phenomena in the context of history, focussed on the antinomies of bourgeois thought, and searched for the possibilities of a radical transcendence (*Aufhebung*)." Cf. Tom Rockmore. *Irrationalism: Lukács and the Marxist View of Reason* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992). esp. pp. 99-101. See also, See, for example, Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept of Lukács to Habermas* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984). pp. 56-65. György Lukács. *The Young Hegel: Studies in the Relations between Dialectics and Economics*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1976). Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, pp. 112-113.

critique succinctly: 'We develop new principles to the world out of its own principles"'.[97] Ng foregrounds the dialectical relation between subject and object in Hegel's thought that, as other have already highlighted, makes Hegel more 'concrete' than he might initially appear. Furthermore, in turning to Hegel and Marx, she argues that "what becomes evident is that the dialectics of immanence and transcendence must be understood more concretely as the dialectics of life and self-consciousness, a relation that defines the universal form of rational, free activity" (393). Those classic categories that have characterized numerous debates in the critical philosophical tradition are concrete categories; this helps to show that Hegel's immanent critique at least reaches further toward the consideration of the reproduction of life than others we might call 'idealists.'

This trajectory from Hegel to Marx and Marx to Frankfurt school is apparent at the most basic level of Ng's definition of ideology:

> …We can say that ideologies are at once social practices and forms of rationality that distort the relation between life and self-consciousness and block the full actualization of human reason and freedom. Ideologies are thus social pathologies, wrong ways of living (393).

If we define ideology as "forms of rationality that distort" social relation and practices, then we tacitly imply that irrationality (i.e., irrationality of the aims of society) is a constitutive part of the rationally intelligible reproduction of society as a whole. Furthermore, "wrong ways of living" emerge from not simply a deficit of reason but the formulation of rationality toward irrational or contradictory ends. In this sense, any theory of ideology requires the Hegelian insight of rational intelligibility. Ideological distortion works neither because it is random or merely false; it works, in a sense, because it is rational *for that society* and, therefore, internalized or assimilated without appearing as mere fantasy, which could be remedied only by dissuading someone of their poorly formed ideas. Thus, though it may seem counterintuitive, the claim to society's fundamental irrationality *presupposes* the possibility of comprehending it rationally. Although Hegel's own conception of 'social totality' places emphasis on the 'truth' of the whole, his understanding of the whole as being constituted by partialities and tensions is a

[97] Karen Ng. "Ideology Critique from Hegel and Marx to Critical Theory." *Constellations*, 22.3 (2015): 393-404. p. 394.

precursor to grasping what Adorno would later emphasize as the falsity of the whole, a premise which is vital to his critical conception of ideology.[98]

The 'Historical' Status of Ideology

To continue in pursuit of this contextualized understanding of ideology and, more importantly, to account for the position from which we can critique contemporary forms of historicism which function ideologically, we must consider one final question: *is ideology transhistorical or historically specific, and in what sense?* Although I have so far emphasized what is lacking in accounts which emphasize historical specificity in lieu of transhistoricity, this is only a differential emphasis rather than an opposition. It is precisely out of a commitment to remaining clear about the normative foundations of the critique *as historical* that the inquiry takes this direction. In order to be faithful to the commitment to critical self-reflexivity, the position of the critic must be honestly accounted for. In the previous section of this chapter, we discussed two possible positions in the debate about transhistorical categories in Marx's critical theory. If we consider the implications of the neutral and critical conceptions of ideology in relation to the acceptance or rejection of transhistorical categories we get a better sense of *how ideology and ideology critique are themselves historically situated*. Assessing these broader sensibilities in relation to the categories of transhistoricity and historical specificity will also clarify how ideology fits into the ongoing inquiry sustained in subsequent chapters.

In order to calibrate the relation between ideology, transhistoricity, and historical specificity and, thereby, gain a sense of how ideology is a historical product and is historically situated, we can take stock of positions on this question from thinkers we have already considered for other reasons in this chapter. Preliminarily, we can note one thing about the thinkers to be examined—Lukács, Postone, Mészáros, Adorno, and, transitively, Marx—their conceptions of ideology cannot be seamlessly indexed to either their rejection or acceptance of transhistorical categories in general. These thinkers' views on the historical status of ideology is varied and heterogeneous. However, upon close examination, one does find a significant pattern, one that indicates the relatedness of these categories even if they are not explicitly acknowledged by the thinkers themselves.

[98] Cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life* (New York: Verso Books, 2006). p. 50. In Chapter 5, we will consider further the differential status of totality as either 'positive' or 'negative,' an element which is not only contrasting in Hegel and Adorno but, further, rather ambivalent in Adorno's corpus.

To begin we can construct a debate between Mészáros and Postone, as we did on the questions of transhistoricity versus historical specificity earlier on, only adding a second dimension: surveying their conceptions of ideology. Mészáros—a proponent of both transhistorical and historically specific categories but locates the ground critique in the transhistorical categories—holds what I have referred to here as the 'neutral' conception of ideology. This is exemplified by his distinction between "positively sustainable ideology" and "ideology as false consciousness" (193). Interestingly, Mészáros is singular in his self-conscious repudiation of the critical conception (few who take up the neutral conception have even addressed the possibility of a strictly pejorative usage, even to refute it). Mészáros's defines ideology as any ideational framework which grasps or reflects a class interest (though it need not be reducible to that interest). In short, Mészáros's conception of ideology is a historical necessity and is transhistorical (spanning multiple modes of production) by virtue of that kind of necessity.

However, its transhistorical status does not make it a permanent feature of human consciousness (as it sometimes seems to be for Althusser). Rather, ideology is "the *inescapable practical consciousness of class societies*, concerned with the articulation and assertion of *rival sets of values and strategies*" (194). For Mészáros, ideology can neither be dispelled nor superseded until society itself is no longer contradictory, until social practices are not founded on irresolvable antagonism. He articulates this at greater length in *The Power of Ideology*, but this view is also clearly present in *Consciousness and Social Structure*. This lack of an 'outside' to ideology within capitalist society rings familiar to the reader of Althusser or post-Althusserian thought which constructs the distinction in terms of 'science' and 'ideology.' The crucial difference here is that Mészáros does not posit the existence of 'science' but rather accepts the shared 'ideological' character of all interested positions. It is simply not a problem, for Mészáros, that there is no 'non-ideological' position (whereas Althusser seems to have been 'of two minds' about it).[99] In sum, Mészáros is willing to ground critique in transhistorical categories and, for him, it follows that we should have a neutral conception of ideology.

Postone, on the other hand, does not offer any substantial discussion of ideology, much less any self-conscious reflection about its critical or neutral character. Indeed, he says rather little about ideology at all. However, what few remarks he makes concerning ideology

[99] Louis Althusser. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (New York: Verso Books, 2014). pp. 174-183.

make clear that he neither rejected the term nor the practice of ideology critique. On the contrary, Postone claims that his own historicized account of Marx's critical theory can serve as a "better basis for a theory of ideology" (258). This claim remains to be evaluated but we can safely say that Postone subscribes to a critical conception of ideology. In every instance he employs the term it is derogatory without exception.[100] It also seems safe to infer that he would insist on its historically specific status of ideology given the larger intervention of his reinterpretation of Marx. Since he precludes grounding critique in transhistorical categories we can assume he would accept that ideology critique is grounded transhistorically. This would mean that, for Postone, ideology is not only historically specific (which could be permitted by Mészáros's account as well) but that it is specific *to capitalism*, not unlike the category of labor. This is, of course, a reconstructed position drawn from his sparing use of the term rather than from a systematic articulation of his position. However, I have done my best to abide by Postone's own logic in order to arrive at such a reconstruction. In order to live up to his own commitments to maintain an 'epistemologically consistent' critique, this would seem to be the most plausible conclusion. Postone, in short, rejects grounding critique in transhistorical categories and appears to have a negative conception of ideology, a view that is unsurprising given his emphasis on the historical specificity of critical categories.

In this hypothetical debate we have encountered two possible positions on the historical status of ideology. [1] Ideology is contingently transhistorical because it is necessitated by the social tensions of a historically specific set of social formations (e.g., class societies) but has existed outside of that formation; this dual historical status is what grounds any 'critique' of ideology (Mészáros's view). [2] Ideology is radically historically specific, bound to the specific terms of the present social formation and the critique of ideology can only be properly understood in terms of that present (Postone's view). Based on Postone's view on 'transhistorical labor', we can safely assume he would consider the application of the term beyond the present to be an unnecessary abstraction. However, what needs to be determined is whether Mészáros's view of ideology (i.e., the neutral conception) necessarily follows from his willingness to ground critique in transhistorical categories and, moreover, whether the critical conception of ideology (which I am attributing to Postone) necessarily follows from grounding critique exclusively in historically specific categories. We need to discern the logical

[100] Postone, 40; 84; 161; 258.

connection between these claims. In doing so, I argue, we can see that ideology as a critical category *is both transhistorical and historically specific*.

Taking seriously the task of clarifying the ground of ideology critique, we should ask: *what provides the normative foundations of the critique of ideology?* As Jaeggi has highlighted, ideology critique extends from the basic commitments of immanent critique. However, Zambrana has also pointed out, immanent critique has a long and varied history in the critical philosophical tradition and there are crucial divergences in the different conceptions of 'immanence' ranging even as short a distance as that between Hegel and Marx.[101] Recently, as I briefly cited above, Ng has suggested that the normative ground of ideology critique lay in Marx (as well as Hegel's) "critical naturalism." This is perhaps the more transhistorically-minded grounding which could respond to the paradox of ideology critique's 'parasitism' as Jaeggi refers to it (71). Whether one understands the ground of ideology critique to be a philosophical anthropology, the 'negative' category of suffering, social and logical contradictions in themselves, or some combination of these, entails a certain position on the *historical status of ideology*. One could approach the question of the normative foundations of critique from these other vantages, but I am interested specifically in the normative relation to its historical conditions of possibility which requires that we consider what should now be, by now, a familiar logical alternative to the mutual exclusivity of historical specificity and transhistoricity.

Conclusion

When we insist that philosophy of history must be developed in relation to social critique (a claim which is itself historically specific), adapted for those ends and not as an end in itself, we need to think clearly about what is entailed in the very concept of social critique. Often, when we employ the term we think primarily of our own society as it appears before us, as something self-contained and immediate as such. For reasons both practical and not, theorists frequently do not concern themselves with interventions on a global scale. Indeed, the Frankfurt School has tended to take the Western consumer society as its paradigmatic critical object. Such a task is certainly worthwhile, as these societies are in need of critical consideration and, moreover, shape the imagination and aspirations of many in the colonies, but if we were only to focus on capitalism's contradictions in these societies, we would fail to grasp not only the extent of capital's harm, but the conditions of possibility for capital's

[101] See, Zambrana. "Critique in Hegel and Marx" in *From Marx to Hegel and Back: Capitalism, Critique, Utopia*. Eds. Victoria Fareld, Hannes Kuch (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

reproduction. Without a philosophy of history our historical analyses are left either to reproduce ideological assumptions about history's course or to explain colonial domination as something capricious rather than calculated, unconscious rather than willfully carried out.

Philosophy of history as a necessary precondition of a *global* social critique, one which understands different forms of domination is constitutive of a global system of interdependent modes of oppression, exploitation, expropriation, and violence. The 'global north' and the 'global south' constitute a single social totality with differential and uneven harms, but both are subject to the logic of accumulation. In the following three chapters, I reconstruct a philosophy of history which is attuned to the needs of this global critique, often by thinking disparate traditions jointly. In chapter 3, the reader will encounter both the Frankfurt school (and thereby Marx and Hegel), as well as critiques forwarded by both postcolonial and decolonial thought, and, most importantly, engagement with the often-neglected anti-colonial tradition. Tracking the role, or lack thereof, of natural-historical considerations in critique of colonialism and global capitalism, the following chapter reconstructs the category of 'natural history' toward the ends of global social critique.

IV: NATURAL HISTORY AND THE CLASSICAL OPPOSITION OF HISTORY AND NATURE

Introduction

Often the Frankfurt school, Adorno in particular, is most closely associated with critiques of Western 'consumer societies.' This is, disproportionately, the emphasis of critical analyses of the early Frankfurt school. This focus has been the subject of criticism by postcolonial scholars.[102] In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said notes that the Frankfurt School has, historically, been "stunningly silent on racist theory, anti- imperialist resistance, and oppositional practice in the empire".[103] This criticism has more recently been foregrounded in Amy Allen's *The End of Progress.* Acknowledging this silence, I nonetheless maintain that the methodology of the Frankfurt school is neither normatively Eurocentric (i.e., Euronormative) nor portended by colonialist assumptions, as some critics have suggested.[104] Indeed, it is where critical theory has seemingly been most controversial that it proves beneficial. In order to clarify the critical potential of 'natural history' I have chosen to focus specifically on at least one dimension of its merits for specifically anti-colonial ends; this both begins to mitigate the Frankfurt school's aforementioned 'silence' and also clarifies what resources that tradition (i.e., Western Marxism) offers to the critique of colonialism.[105]

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[102] Cf. Ina Kerner. "Postcolonial Theories as Global Critical Theories." *Constellations*, 25.4 (2018): 614-628. See also, James D. Ingram. "Critical Theory and Postcolonialism" in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*. Eds. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, Axel Honneth (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[103] Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). p. 278.

[104] For example, in the introduction to *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, Walter Mignolo identifies an affinity between decolonial thought and the methodology of the Frankfurt School. This connection is, however, made very briefly and not well-elaborated. Furthermore, the modernity/coloniality group's reading of the Frankfurt school, contrary to my own, finds that school opposed to political economy (as exemplified by the work of Ramón Grosfoguel. See, Eds. Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar. *Globalization and the Decolonial Option* (New York: Routledge, 2013). This opposition has been contested but nonetheless remains somewhat underexplored. See, for example, Douglas Kellner. "Review: The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*." *New German Critique*, 4 (1975): 131-152. esp. pp. 140-142.

[105] A terminological distinction is in order: in this section the reader will encounter three related but distinct terms: postcolonial, decolonial, and anti-colonial. Some contemporary scholars have discussed the distinction between postcolonial theory (and the postcolonial condition) and decolonial thought, emphasizing both methodological and geographical variances. See, for example, the special issue of *Transmodernity* titled "Thinking through the Decolonial Turn: Post- Continental Interventions in Theory, Philosophy, and Critique." See also, Fernando Coronil. "Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization." *Worlds & Knowledges Otherwise*, (2013); G.K. Bhambra. "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues." *Postcolonial Studies*, 17.2 (2014): 115–121. Less often, however is the term 'anti-colonial' explicated. For one notable exception see, Dipesh Chakrabarty. "An Anti-Colonial History of the Postcolonial Turn: An Essay in Memory of Greg Dening." *Melbourne Historical Journal*, 37 (2009). Although I have serious reservations about his characterization of the anti-colonial position in general, he sums up clearly one crucial aspect of the distinction that needs to be noted here:

The category of 'natural history' is perhaps another unexpected avenue for beginning to correct the historical lacunae of Western Marxism, especially given the anti-naturalist or 'anti-essentialist' bent of both post- and decolonial thought, which has raised that critique and which presents itself as an alternative. Indeed, for similar reasons, it has not been well examined even among Adorno scholars. For many Adorno scholars, as Max Pensky notes, it is "surely a candidate for the most troubling and resistant theoretical element of Theodor Adorno's intellectual legacy".[106] More generally, as Tom Whyman notes, even though the concept is perhaps one of the most consistent throughout Adorno's corpus this is not well reflected in scholarship on his work and, moreover, has not established a scholarly consensus about its role and significance.[107] The recurrence of 'natural history,' to some of the Frankfurt school's critics, would seem to suggest that, in fact, the thinkers of this school have not seriously considered the exclusionary and oppressive uses to which categories such as 'nature' have been put. The appearance of a concept so thoroughly associated with the philosophical disposition of nineteenth century Europe—and this is equally true for the concept of 'universal history' if not more so—threatens to complicate Adorno's status as a genuinely critical thinker of modern capitalist society.

Although the critique of colonialism and imperialism are not the focus of Adorno's thought, this lack of focus does not determine the critical import of the concepts developed in his work toward those ends. On the contrary, I argue that Adorno's conception of natural history as a critical concept—defined by its contrasting relation with its traditional formulation—is productive for thinking about the difficult nexus of purportedly 'natural' justifications of domination, exploitation, and expropriation, the impetus to dominate nature, and the reified conception of nature that portends these oppressive rationalizations. Equally important, his conception of natural history, organizes concpetually historical analyses already present in the work of anti-colonial thinkers in the 20th century, including Frantz Fanon, Walter Rodney, and C.L.R. James.

"...If anti-colonialism spoke to the project of decolonisation, postcolonial writings have been an essential part of the struggle to make the liberal-capitalist (and, in the beginning, Anglo-American) Western democracies more democratic with respect to their immigrant, minority, and indigenous populations (though there have been tensions between these groups)." These tasks are both important but distinct, though not often thoroughly distinguished. It is *anti-colonial critique* that is the focus here.

[106] Max Pensky. "Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno." *Critical Horizons*, 5.1 (2004): 227-258. p. 227.

[107] Tom Whyman. "Understanding Adorno on 'Natural-History." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 24.4. (2016): 452-472. p. 452.

Through the chapter, I distinguish between theoretical dispositions which either refrain from naturalistic argument or, conversely, employ them uncritically. I use the following terms to make such a distinction. **Historicism** refers to the tendency of contemporary critique to privilege the historical as opposed to the natural; this tendency is exemplified in critique which exclusively or disproportionately de-reifies, demystifies, and 'de-naturalizes,' or affirms the normative priority of historical contingency or specificity. **Naturalism**, on the other hand, refers to affirmative appeals to nature in contemporary critique, exemplified critique which inverts the traditional devaluation of the natural in an attempt to undermine dominant norms and narratives.

Natural History as Ideology[108]

Natural history, in its most conventional form, represents a calcification and institutionalization of the traditional antithesis of nature and history .[109] In its 19th century variety, natural history is exemplified in the cataloging, taxonomizing, and classification of natural artifacts and these processes' location in a larger arc of development and alteration 'internal' to natural objects purportedly 'independent' of human interaction or impact. In short, natural history has classically been understood as the history of natural objects *as natural objects in themselves*. The term 'history' in the phrase is, thus, somewhat dubious. After all, how can natural objects be said to have a 'history,' or at least what is conventionally meant by the term in the European tradition—a self-conscious, sequential, chronological narrative about a course of activity), allegedly distinct from folkloric or mythical explanations of the natural world? Since flora and fauna are not, in any clear sense 'self-conscious' in the same way or to the same degree of abstraction, imputing a historical dimension to these objects qua objects is anything but intuitive. This is not to say that natural objects exist in stasis or 'equilibrium' or that the properties of natural objects are irrevocably fixed. Rather, the problem arises when, for example, phylogenetic or adaptive change and transformation are understood as 'historical' in the same sense as 'human history'.

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[108] In chapter 2, we considered some of the ways that ideology has been variously categorized and applied both within and outside the tradition of ideology critique. As per the explication in that chapter, here ideology refers to the negative/critical conception and, moreover, should be understood as a hybrid formulation between the functional and epistemic accounts. In sum, natural history (and, respectively, the categories of history and nature in isolation) functions ideologically if it obscures the material conditions of possibility of colonial domination and is epistemically ideological insofar as it is both in the interest of colonialists to maintain this obfuscation (vis-à-vis 'social necessity' of colonial and imperial accumulation) and because it comprises a part of a larger ideologically distortive picture of capitalist social totality.

[109] Theodor Adorno. "The Idea of Natural History." *Praxis International*, 4.2 (1984): 111-124. p. 111.

This most basic gesture demonstrates that, even an intellectual process ostensibly bent on taking the natural for 'what it is' in its objective alterity (rather than, for example, offering a history of industry or technology) surreptitiously permits the tendency of instrumental reason to reduce objects to what is graspable through human thought and perception, without accounting for that perception as mediating. With complete coincidence between subject and object, the classical conception of natural history—even as it attempts to bring nature 'closer' or make it more familiar and knowable to humankind—posits the observer and their vantage as the primary of the two. Where one might expect a kind of reciprocal relation, in the classical conception, one finds primarily reification and self-undermining instrumentalization (i.e., the domination of nature, at a conceptual level). It is, thus, unsurprising that the modern practice of naturalism is closely bound up with the exploitation and destruction of its object, since that object is rendered inert and pliable, reducible to human appearance as exploitable and expendable. A phrase that should have indicated the imbrication of nature and history instead functions as a forceful divider of the categories of history and nature. One is most properly a 'natural historian' or 'naturalist,' in the classical sense, when one is apart from and externally observing the non-human natural world, and thereby a properly historical subject.

The history of the concept natural history is robust and complex and, admittedly, too long to confront comprehensively here. However, we can consider a paradigmatic institution to understand how the concept of natural history, traditionally conceived, is a distancing or, if you will, an alienation from the natural world rather than a proximity to it. Consider the institution of the natural history museum. Without succumbing to an oversimplified and strictly genetic account, we must first note that their development as 'public' institutions has a less than reputable basis. Natural history museums have, historically, been linked to the tradition of the 'cabinet of curiosities' (*Kunstkammer*) specifically dedicated to displaying the foreign and exotic and 'curious' objects of natural occurrence, private collections by wealthy and aristocratic collectors. Although the tone and manner of display in the Smithsonian is distinct from the practice of curio collecting in the 16th and 17th centuries, the presupposition that what one encounters in the museum is not oneself and, indeed, something wholly alien to oneself as a human being, persists largely unperturbed. Without conceding ground to a division that this chapter aims to challenge, this is not entirely without logic. After all, a human being and geological formation, though we can make many analogies, are *in fact* not one and the same. The history of natural history demonstrates however, that what is 'human' and

'inhuman,' 'observer' or 'artifact' has been anything but clear to colonialists.[110] If we recall such cruelties as those experienced by Sara Baartman, a Khoikhoi woman from the eastern cape of South Africa known through extensive exhibition in England and France as a 'Hottentot Venus,' the exoticization and display of 'natural artifacts' can hardly be left uncriticized. It is this chasm, between the status of 'human' and the category of 'natural' which constitutes natural history *as ideology*. Fraught and troubled, I hope to demonstrate, is the tendency to falsely naturalize what is, in fact, social and historical. Equally troubled, but under rather different circumstances, is the tendency to evade any claim to natural facts.

The Opposition of History and Nature as Colonial Rationalization

One of the most common techniques in the critique of colonial discourse and practice is to demonstrate the falsity of what, for the colonizer, is staked as natural 'fact.' Since its earliest appearance in the academy, postcolonial theory has rejected the colonizers' naturalistic arguments in favor of demonstrating that colonialism is a crass, duplicitous rationalization of historically contingent violence and domination. This demystification of colonial rationalization has been offered by thinkers such as Franz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak, C.J. Young, Edward Said, and Paul Gilroy.[111] In the Latin American/Iberian context, the critique of naturalistic justification is evident as early as the 16th century, in the debate between Bartolome de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, now known as the 'Valladolid debate.'[112] More recently, decolonial thinkers such as Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, and others of the modernity/coloniality group, have carried out a similar critique of the supposedly 'natural' passivity and servility of indigenous, native, and colonized peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. Suffice it to say the revelation that colonialism and colonial subjects are neither natural phenomena nor, moreover, justified by a natural hierarchy, has long been the starting point of both postcolonial theory and decolonial thought. The critique of the naturalistic justification of colonialism is a continually necessary one, even as its target has shifted from classical descriptions of natural inferiority to new discourses about the 'autonomy' of nations,

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[110] In this chapter I use the term 'colonialist' to refer not only to colonizing agents themselves but to thinkers and actors whose thought and practices explicitly apologize for or fail to sufficiently denounce colonialism and imperialism. The term is slightly broader than the term 'colonizer,' as often much justificatory work was not initiated or generated by colonizers but, rather, adopted or coopted from other domains.

[111] Edward Said. *Orientalism*. 12,29, 46-49. Gayatri Spivak. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*: *Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). pp. 12-13. J.C. Young. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Malden: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2016). pp. Xix, 32.

[112] See Alejandro Santana, "'The Indian Problem': Conquest and the Valladolid Debate" in *Latin American and Latinx Philosophy: A Collaborative Introduction*, Ed. Robert Eli Sanchez Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2020).

'ethnopluralism,' and the safeguarding of the purportedly discrete and particular ethnic and cultural identities.[113]

The appeal to nature, as a justification of colonialism, operates on several levels, some dependent on the particular colonial context, varying with cultural, material, environmental, and historical specificities. This variation notwithstanding, we can identify two broad ways through which the naturalistic argument operates. Firstly, in the establishment of a systematically organized racial and ethnic taxonomy (i.e., 'biological' or 'scientific racism'); the hierarchical description of 'races' as part and parcel of the classical conception of 'natural history' prior and into the 18th and 19th centuries. This taxonomy is developed in scientific and Christian varieties, often mutually supporting. This form of the naturalistic argument is further bifurcated into claims vis-à-vis paternalism (e.g., the 'white man's burden' and the 'white savior') and claims vis-à-vis 'might makes right' (e.g., social Darwinism).[114] Second, the naturalistic justification takes form of imputing to the colonized a certain 'proximity to nature', either on the basis of essentialism (i.e., natives are naturally 'closer to nature') or cultural/historical specificity (i.e., modernization has yet to take place but could). The colonized, in this second case, are seen as 'more natural' than their colonizers, either because of a cultural/racial particularity or in their 'failure' to reach modernity's benchmark of development. It should be noted that this is not always motivated by pity or rebuke. Indeed, the claim also inspires the fetishization of the supposedly 'primitive,' elevating it as a cure or alternative for the ills of modernity (the object of criticism in the section below titled 'Naturalism and the Opposition of Nature and History).[115] This is only the barest sketch of the appeal to nature for the justification of colonialism, However, but it helps us to sort out some of the basic elements of how the claim has been used.

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[113] Here I allude to organizations such as Identity Europa, Génération Identitaire (France), Generation Identity (Germany), Identitarian Movement UK, Rise Above Movement (U.S.), American Identity Movement (U.S.), and others who have justified white nationalism on the basis of what is often called 'ethnopluralism.' The appropriation of identity politics and the apparently 'isolationism' and 'protectionism' of these groups takes the shape of rigid anti-immigration policy, 'white pride,' 'heterosexual pride,' and eugenic views of racialized reproduction. The discourse is not, overtly, concerning a natural hierarchy but rather 'natural difference' which should be preserved and 'celebrated' through tribalism and regional/national homogeneity. These dispositions are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

[114] See also Partha Chatterjee. *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). p. 49: "The idea of slavery based on natural reasons would be easily transmuted later into one that claimed that the imperialist had to defend those who were incapable of defending themselves, or indeed of acting politically."

[115] For historical discussion of 'negrophilia' in twentieth century France, See: Petrine Archer Straw. *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000.

Although the belief in a supposedly natural racial hierarchy persists, the existence of more contingent 'proximity' claims is perhaps more pressing for us in the 21st century, as even many conservative colonial apologists would be unwilling to support the 'unscientific' taxonomization of human 'races,' if only because they fear appearing out of fashion. The second variety of the naturalistic argument cited here, however, often persists, even in the most well-meaning of conversations about colonialism. Whereas the first version of the claim would be subject to the yardstick of respectability politics and quickly dismissed (even if its presuppositions are covertly sustained), the second variation of the claim has a more ambiguous status both in the dominant discourse and in postcolonial theory itself. Thus, I have chosen to focus on the second version of the naturalistic justification of colonialism and the purportedly critical uses of 'nature' as well as the repudiation of the natural as a critical move.

The critique of claims about the supposed 'nature' of the colonized often takes the form of offering empirical or historical evidence to demonstrate the full humanity of the colonized; in these cases, the response is to say that what has been said of the colonized is simply *untrue*. Other times, in practice and policy, it takes the form of insisting on the equal capacity to live up to modernity's demand in formerly colonized nations and the valorization of Western modernity's developmental model, thereby proving the equal capacity of non-Western peoples to be 'modern.' Still other challenges to the 'proximity to nature' claim take the form of inverting the charge and maintaining that there is nothing 'wrong' with being 'close to nature,' and, moreover, that such a presupposition is itself a precept of colonialism. In this last case, we encounter *both* attempts to question the epistemological privilege of the Euro-Atlantic vantage, especially concerning the exploitation of nature and the imputing of proximity to nature as a characteristic, and even essential, feature of native peoples. This chapter's task is to clarify how the classical opposition of history and nature operates within colonial discourse and, moreover, to demonstrate that *even critical responses to colonial discourse are mediated by this ideological opposition* and, therefore, inadequate for addressing the simultaneously material and cultural violence of colonialism.

Reflected in both concrete and intellectual history, the category of 'nature' has long played a crucial role in the justification of European colonization. From the 'exploratory' expeditions of James Cook, Louis Antoine de Bougainville, Jan van Riebeeck, Vasco da Gama and, most famously, Christopher Columbus, the 'discovery' and classification of the natural

world has been closely associated with colonial and imperial expansion[116]. During and after the 'Age of Discovery,' these expeditions were christened by colonial powers as benefiting not only trade and the glory of empire but also for enriching humankind's knowledge of 'our' habitat. With each fleet and flotilla travelled a naturalist who, in the mind of colonialists, was poised to seize upon the opportunity to observe and record 'never-before-seen' natural artifacts. Their observation, however, was far from neutral. It typically instrumentalized not only mineral and botanical resources but led to, if not directly advocated for, the instrumentalization of native, indigenous, and enslaved peoples, often employed in extracting natural resources. It is, thus, entirely understandable that postcolonial and decolonial thinkers have developed a suspicion of naturalistic claims, since such claims have often been the basis of biological racism. In short, these thinkers have long rejected nature (and the concept of natural history) in its *ideological* form.

The classical conception of natural history, as a *socially necessary semblance* (i.e., as ideology) generated by and for societies reliant on domination and enslavement for their 'prosperity' and their supposed 'humanism,' obfuscates some of the most fundamental contradictions of colonial society: the duplicitous implementation of 'spiritual improvement' by means of torture and murder, the cultivation of genteel colonial womanhood while simultaneously relying on the rape and enslavement of indigenous women, and claims of charity and good will which thinly veiled practices of usurpation and irrevocable degradation of colonies' natural resources. The reproduction of colonial societies as colonial societies requires the systematic extraction, enslavement, and domination of the colonized. This social necessity and its material conditions have profoundly shaped our understanding of the character and function of the categories of history and nature, typically conceived as an opposition.

Though discourses justifying racialized, gendered colonial domination are varied, we can note that the basic shape of these justificatory discourses operate within this opposition conception of history and nature. Though this opposition is not the *cause* of colonization, it is crucial for understanding its perpetuation and rationalization. The opposition of history and nature in classical European thought underpins many of the claims made by colonialists, both implicitly and explicitly. If we consider some of exemplary claims of colonialists, we can see

[116] See for example: Said, *Orientalism*, 119, where he identifies 'classification' as the fourth basic element facilitating modern Orientalist thought.

that wherever European settlers and colonial administrators asserted the *historic* quality of their 'discoveries' and 'advancements,' this historical quality relies on the domination of nature and of those associated with nature. The establishment of European men as proper historical subjects is predicated on their dominion over nature and, counterintuitively, the fact of male European dominance is established as a *natural* fact. Historical subjectivity is endowed by nature so that it may dominate nature. By this logic, nature is intended for domination and the fulfillment of that intent is the course that history should take. Where there is a justification of gendered and racialized domination, it is presupposed that gendered and racialized subjects are, in reality, 'natural' objects, expected to be subdued and subordinated in the production of history and its proper makers. Viewing history as the triumph over a reified nature is part and parcel of the domination of both nature and those artificially 'naturalized'.

In response to the naturalistic justification of domination, many (but not all) critics have often taken one of two broad approaches: (1) to deny that *any* natural facts, about the colonized or about human beings more generally, can be accepted without colonialist implications or (2) to concede that, we can make claims about human beings' relation to nature and that, moreover, native and indigenous peoples' relation to nature is *superior* to that of 'the European' conception. The latter maintains that we need not deny that native or indigenous people are 'closer to nature' but, rather, we need to interrogate the 'Western' view of the natural world. There is some internal differentiation both within these positions and in the 'Western' view of natural world as well. The majority of responses, however, conform to the broader tendencies to *either* reject the category of nature in critical and political philosophy *or* to affirm a singular role of nature in native/indigenous/colonized life and politics. Each view—which I henceforth call 'historicism' (or 'anti-naturalism') and 'naturalism'—maintains the classical opposition of history and nature, if in modified form, and, for that reason, cannot properly account for the historical and material conditions of colonialism.

Historicism[117] and The Opposition of Nature and History

Both implicitly and explicitly, critics of colonial domination (as well as other forms of domination and oppression) maintain that appeals to nature—in addition to being unnecessarily metaphysical—are dangerous, as attributing any natural attributes or defining

[117] See Chapter 2 for terminological clarification.

'human nature' risks excluding ways of life that are different from our own.[118] This view sometimes overlaps with the claim that naturalistic claims or definitions of human nature, because they are formulated under oppressive or coercive conditions, inevitably replicate the presuppositions of those conditions and thereby reproduces an oppressive logic.[119] The first concern, regarding exclusivity, and the second, regarding the reproduction of dominant norms, both maintain that naturalistic arguments should be avoided. There is, on this view, no place for the natural in social critique. Of course, there is an important sense in which certain appeals to nature warrant refutation and many spurious claims about politics have been made on a so-called 'natural' basis. This position, however, does much more than destabilize pernicious conceptions of the natural. The focus on what is *falsely naturalized,* is transformed into the rejection of 'nature' as such (i.e., historicism). There are greater risks in rejecting the category of nature altogether than this position anticipates.

An important clarification is in order: There is nothing naturally necessary about what Europeans claimed was the justification of colonialism and there is nothing about the colonized's 'nature' that could ever warrant or invite domination. Rather little about colonialism, as a violent system of extraction, dispossession, and domination, is a question of 'natural facts.' However, as many post/decolonial thinkers have already pointed out and, indeed, the empirical history of colonial exploration demonstrates, colonialism is far from indifferent to nature and certainly not to natural resources. Without any attention to the distribution of natural resources on the planet and factors of climate and biodiversity, the very appearance of colonial and imperial expansion becomes *inexplicable*. If we do not take the extraction of natural resources and the re-envisioning of racialized and colonized labor and reproductive capacities as 'natural resources' seriously, then our diagnoses of colonial domination would rely on arbitrary prejudices and inexplicable 'cultural' inequality. Put another way, to reject *any* claim to the natural features of colonial practice is to reject that colonialism, at its origin, has a definite material basis. The historicist response to the naturalistic justification of colonialism neglects consideration of these (albeit, arbitrary in themselves) natural facts that make colonialism intelligible (but never justifiable).

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[118] See, for example: Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011). pp. 36-37.

[119] See, for example, Arnold I. Davidson. *Foucault and his Interlocutors* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997). p. 131.

One reason that motivates this neglect of the question of natural resources is the historicists' worry that any admission of natural facts amounts to ceding ground to colonialist arguments. The historicist (i.e., anti-naturalist) response to the naturalistic justification of colonialism understands its appeal to the nature as the normatively significant error. However, in a counterintuitive turn, such reservations presuppose what the colonialist has already claimed, that natural facts as arbitrary as concentrations of sugar crops, rubber or copper deposits, or the natural habitat of bananas *could* justify their extraction and expropriation by violent means and without regard for environmental integrity. Accepting that the concentration and distribution of natural resources necessary for European 'development' are part and parcel of the who, where, and why of the colonial project does not amount to accepting that this historically specific, social necessity is, in fact, natural. Neither does it amount to saying that the course of history *inevitably* must have resulted in colonial expansion, by way of mineral or geological patterns of prediction. There are a host of contingencies that lead to Europe's ascendancy and to the emergence of imperial states. The *necessity* of extraction, usurpation, and domination is generated not by immediate natural facts, but by *the mediation of those facts by the form of social reproduction of colonial societies, societies whose form is itself contingent*.

Historicism in Euro-Atlantic Critique

The tendency to offer history as an antidote to either grounding critique in human nature or making naturalistic claims more generally is prominent among European figures associated with critical theory (broadly construed). The most paradigmatic case of historicism (recalling the definition provided earlier in the chapter) is found in the work of Michel Foucault. Put most boldly in his now-famous claim, in *The Order of Things* he writes, "one can certainly wager that man [*sic*] would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," the idea that 'human being' as natural category is anything but perennial pervades Foucault's work (422). An important part of the way that Foucault frames the problem of 'The Anthropological Sleep,' for example,' is to note the constitutive role of 'anthropology' in modern thinking: "Anthropology as an analytic of man has certainly played a constituent role in modern thought, since to a large extent we are still not free from it" (371). For Foucault, the error of this 'anthropological sleep' is demonstrated by way of historical 'archaeology':

> To all those who still wish to talk about man [*sic*], about his reign or his liberation [*sic*], to all those who still ask themselves questions about what man [*sic*] is in his essence, to all those who wish to take him as their starting-point in their attempts to reach the truth, to all those who, on the other hand, refer

> all knowledge back to the truths of man himself [*sic*], to all those who refuse to formalize without anthropologizing, who refuse to mythologize without demystifying, who refuse to think without immediately thinking that it is man who is thinking, to all these warped and twisted forms of reflection we can answer only with a philosophical laugh – which means, to a certain extent, a silent one. (373)

Foucault's 'philosophical laugh' summarily dismisses the possibility of indexing not only critical thought, but, in fact, knowledge in general to any claim about the "truths of man [*sic*] himself." It is fair to say that Foucault takes a functionally antithetical position to that of classical Marxism and the early Frankfurt school in taking seriously questions of nature or anthropology.[120]

In another formulation, Foucault's aversion to anthropological claims is expressly situated in terms of making apparent the historically contingent character of the concept of 'man':

> One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area – European culture since the sixteenth century – one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it [...] It was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge. As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of a recent date. And perhaps nearing its end. (422)

In Foucault's view, archaeology reveals that what once appeared as ahistorical, eternal claims about human beings can be traced to a historically specific form of organizing and expressing our knowledge about human beings. Thus, the "face drawn at the edge of the sea," refers to the generalizable category of 'man' [*sic*] and not, in the most literal sense, human beings themselves. Although, as Colin Koopman points out, the indication of contingency is not the exclusive task of genealogy, it is a crucial part of the way that Foucault initially 'demystifies' claims about human beings universally. [121] Foucault's skepticism concerning these 'anthropological' claims, by extension, also preclude the kind of claims to a transhistorical 'metabolic relation to nature' that undergirds Marx's (and Adorno's) materialist philosophy of history. In his case, history is the antidote to such untenable abstractions.

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[120] See, David Macey. *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995). 195. Cf. Bradley J. Macdonald. "Marx, Foucault, Genealogy." *Polity*, 34.3 (2001): 259-284. Also, Mark Olssen. "Foucault and Marxism: Rewriting the Theory of Historical Materialism." *Policy Futures in Education*, 2.3 (2004): 454-482.

[121] Colin Koopman. *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013). pp. 140-144.

The dubiousness of naturalistic claims is hardly novel to the 21st century reader. In the 1960s and in the post-war European context, structuralism and the last vestiges of unbridled 'scientific' naturalism may have played a continued role in philosophical thinking. With the appearance of the new millennium, one hardly finds such influence in the context of Continental philosophy and still

less so critical theory. Indeed, a notion of the human being in general no longer play a 'constituent role' in Western thought, the tradition of Continental philosophy, at least, has indeed become "free of it." Whether this has had the critical results that were anticipated remains to be seen.

The implications of Foucault's interventions for critique is clearly visible in a later interview where he defines 'progressive politics.' When asked whether emphasizing historical discontinuity could destabilize political claims, Foucault responds:

> A progressive politics is a politics which recognizes the historical and specific conditions of a practice whereas other politics recognise only ideal necessities, univocal determinations and the free interplay of individual initiatives. (Qtd. in Macey, 195)

Defining progressive politics by its form rather than its content, Foucault privileges the assimilation to contingent and specific conditions over political prescriptions. In this interview, he directly equates historicism with progressive politics. Without specifying any content for such a progressive politics, the fact of "[recognizing] the historical and specific conditions of a practice" is criterion enough for the determination of political 'progress.' Valorizing the suspension of "univocal determinations" (which Macey implies is a reference to classical Marxism's 'economism'), the historicist impulse *itself* becomes the basis for determining whether a politics counts as 'progressive.' This association—of historicist form and progressive (or, liberatory) content—pervades much critique of colonialism and imperialism, albeit in a less explicit form. In the following sections, I argue that such an association is fundamentally untenable, given the consequences it has for grounding the critique of colonialism. If we recall the analysis of Postone's work in Chapter 2, this theoretical move is not unique to Foucault but, rather, belongs to a much broader tendency among critical theorists (broadly construed) to conflate the term 'critical' with the primacy of historical specificity. This conflation, however, is especially ill-suited to thinking the history of colonialism.

Influencing a range of postcolonial thinkers as diverse as Edward Said, Homi K.

Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak, Foucault's historicism forms the more formal basis of what has become a diffuse tendency in postcolonial theory.[122] Amy Allen's recent work also draws on Foucault to critique the use of 'progress' in critical theory.[123] Although I refrain from engaging in an extended discussion of his influence, directly, the avoidance of naturalistic or anthropological claims is sufficient to demonstrate the shared tendency of Western philosophy and a certain strain of postcolonial thought (i.e., subaltern studies) to eschew discussions of 'natural metabolism' and the global distribution of natural resources.[124]

Examples of Anti-Naturalism in Postcolonial Theory

In the Euro-Atlantic context, the tendency to avoid appeals to nature (especially to 'human nature') is often programmatic. However—and this speaks to the necessity of attending to the question of nature—many critics of colonialism find themselves in a much more ambivalent relation to the question of 'nature.' In both postcolonial and decolonial thought, rather than explicitly rejecting the possibility of any natural category's role in a critical theory of colonialism, analysis tends to simply privilege the denaturalization of claims about the colonized or colonials or, conversely, to register extraction or expropriation at a primarily cultural or epistemic level. That is, the aversion to nature is either a question of omission or de-emphasis, rather than principled refutation. Thus, rather than constituting a properly 'historicist' antidote to naturalistic justifications, postcolonial and decolonial thought, respectively, should more accurately be identified by their anti-naturalism (especially in light of either's critiques of 'Eurocentric historicism').

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty's critique of Eurocentric conceptions of 'historicism,' takes recourse to a more historically specific form of historical contextualization.[125] Other than to (quite rightly) redress the false naturalization of history's colonial course or falsely 'biological' conceptions of racial hierarchies, the category of nature

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[122] For a helpful survey of Foucault's influence in the domain of postcolonial theory, See Robert Nichols. "Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization." *Foucault Studies*, 9 (2010): 111-144; Jane Hiddleston. Ed. *Understanding Postcolonialism*. Oxford: Acumen Publishing, 2003); Amy Allen. *The End of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). esp. pp. 177-203; Deborah Cook. *Adorno, Foucault, and the Critique of the West* (New York: Verso, 2018);

[123] Allen, *The End of Progress*, 163-198.

[124] To be clear, I am not establishing a singular trajectory from Foucault to postcolonial theory as establishing an aversion to naturalistic claims. Postcolonial 'discourse analysis,' for example, is also heavily influenced by Derrida. Nonetheless, Foucault remains a singular figure in terms of the express themes of history and nature (or 'anthropology'). Furthermore, as I elaborate below, the tendency to emphasize dereifying or demystifying purportedly 'natural' traits of colonized peoples also works to produce this tendency in postcolonial theory.

[125] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

plays virtually no role in his critique. Failure to discuss any 'natural facts' which organized the colonial project in India (e.g., jute, cotton [local and imported from Egypt], salt, coal reserves [the fourth largest in the world], iron ore, or opium]), come at a great loss to the project's aim of "documenting how—through what historical process—[Enlightenment's] 'reason,' which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated".[126] Part and parcel of the naturalization of European supremacy has been to overlook the extraction and expropriation of natural resources from the colonies to achieve the 'modernity' so widely hailed at the heart of empire.

In his earlier work, *Rethinking Working Class History*, Chakrabarty devotes his energies on the subject of nature to the critique of European discourses of 'natural rights' and, indeed, universalism more generally (the subject of the following chapter) but also offers an extended analysis of the jute industry in India. His critique of materialist analyses of that industry has inspired much debate, but what is most relevant for our present consideration is that this historical account of the jute industry does not suffice as an account of the mediation of 'natural facts' (e.g., regional proximity to natural jute) by colonial practice and discourse.[127] Chakrabarty's own emphasis on the duplicity of 'natural facts' demonstrates that, even in an account concretely focused on an industry built around the concentration of a natural resource (i.e., jute), the normative significance of such 'natural facts' remains under-theorized.

When Chakrabarty writes about the origins of the jute trade in Calcutta, he also critiques the claim to the 'natural advantages' of the Ganges Delta. This critique is composed of two components which, as I hope to clarify, are not only separable but which are more and less truly natural. Chakrabarty writes:

> New and bigger markets had to be found and secured for the Calcutta industry before it could overcome the competition from the Dundee and realize the benefits of its two "natural" advantages, cheap labor and proximity to the source of raw jute.[128]

The reader may worry that not much can be made of such a brief remark, but, in fact, this passage demonstrates both the need for consideration of natural resources in Chakrabarty's

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[126] Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?" *Representations*, 37 (1992): 1-26. p. 20.
[127] Dipesh Chakrabarty. *Rethinking Working Class History: Bengal 1890-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). For a critique of Chakrabarty's opposition to 'conventional' materialist analysis of the jute industry, See Vivek Chibber. *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 2013). pp. 178-200.
[128] Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working Class History*, 24.

account and, simultaneously, an explanation of why such an account is not given. In a sense, the problematization of the concept of 'natural advantages' is, of course, justified in the sense that 'nature' does not simply 'offer' advantages to industry and so the assertion in this context is dubious. However, Chakrabarty fails to make an important distinction: the falsely naturalized 'advantages' mentioned are false in different ways and, in the case of the latter, quite true, in fact. Certainly, the claim that cheap labor is a 'natural advantage' is false in the sense that Indians are no more naturally suited to difficult and taxing work than any other human being, especially not under exploitative conditions. The notion of cheap labor as a 'natural advantage' is a false naturalization of something which is socially necessitated by colonial industry. The proximity to the source of raw jute, on the other hand, is a natural fact of the Ganges Delta (i.e., jute is naturally occurring in the region at the time of British colonization).

The Ganges Delta does possess the natural propensity for the success of jute as a feature of its natural landscape. This fact in no way an indication that the British *should* have extracted and systematized the production of jute (at the expense of workers and environment), but it partly explains *why* the British empire was intent on control of the region. The conflation of these two aspects of 'natural advantage' and their summary problematization (as indicated by the quotation marks in the passage) suggest that for Chakrabarty, either appeal to 'natural advantages' is equally problematic, which explains why no serious consideration of natural facts can be admitted or given any normative weight in his account.

In the case of the Subaltern Studies group more broadly and the wider scope of thinking influenced by its theories one might find it unsurprising that their intervention is primarily historiographical, since the group is largely made of historians and its literature constituted largely by historical writing about Southeast Asia and India. Indeed, a hallmark of the Subaltern Studies group's intervention into cultural and area studies as well as the discipline of history has been to advocated for a subaltern historiography. This tendency is more and less consciously shaped by conventions specific to history *as a discipline*, one which has *either* maintained its *opposition to or identity with* the natural sciences. Thus, the very terrain upon which postcolonial studies was forged and continues to be developed is already marked by the chasm between nature and history in a more profound, methodological way.

Examples of Anti-Naturalism in Decolonial Thought

In decolonial thought, the aversion to 'nature' takes a slightly different form. Decolonial thinkers tend to discuss the matter of natural resources more often. However, the

expropriation and extraction of natural resources appear primarily in the register of their *epistemic* consequences. Mignolo, in his introduction to *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*, clearly identifies the "exhaustion of natural resources, food crisis, bio-technological dreams of 'reproducing nature artificially, etc., are all new aspect of a basic imperial/colonial structure: the colonial matrix of power" (15). Yet, nowhere in the collection is this aspect of that 'matrix' seriously considered in its own right.

Aníbal Quijano's hallmark essay, included in the same collection, in fact, describes colonialism as "a violent concentration of the world's resources under the control and for the benefit of a small European minority—and above all, of its ruling classes" (22). However, this acknowledgement too remains largely an epistemic one:

> In the beginning, colonialism was a product of a systematic repression, not only of the specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, or knowledge that were not useful to global colonial domination, while at the same time the colonizers were expropriating from the colonized their knowledge, especially in mining, agriculture, engineering [...] The repression fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of productive perspectives. (23)

Without oversimplifying the division between cultural ramifications of colonialism and the material practices of colonial domination, it is nonetheless clear that the normative force of the category of 'nature' bears *primarily on the question of knowing* and, thus, only concerns natural resources as they impinge on knowledge practices, rather than as concrete conditions of colonization. Such a prioritization is unsurprising given the broader intervention of decolonial thought (i.e., decoloniality and not decolonization) is a kind of "epistemic disobedience".[129] However, this epistemic attunement to the category of 'nature' is prey to similar pitfalls as those identified in explicit rejections of naturalistic claims.

The 'epistemicization' of the natural is accompanied by other historicist tendencies. In the work of Santiago Castro-Gomez, the opposition of history and nature is equally, if differently, evident. "Traditional and Critical Theories of Culture," reformulates Horkheimer's now-classic formulation of the difference between critical and traditional theory specifically in terms of an opposition between the natural and the historical.[130] Theories of culture, according to Castro-Gomez, can be divided into two broad groups:

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[129] See, Walter D. Mignolo. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture, & Society*, 26 (2010): 159-181.

[130] Santiago Castro-Gomez. "Traditional and Critical Theories of Culture." *Nepantla: Views from the South*, 1.3 (2000): 503-518.

> Those that perceive cultural as "natural facticity," that is, that approach their object as if it were rooted in "human nature"; and those that, on the contrary, consider culture to be a realm structured by praxis, that is, a social construction which theoretical practices is itself a part. Following Horkheimer, I will call the first group the traditional theory of culture and the second the critical theory of culture. (503-504)

Castro-Gomez reiterates the distinction as follows, with the aim of elaborating 'postcolonialism' as a form of critical theory:

> Transferring the distinction introduced by Horkheimer to the present subject [postcolonialism], it can be said that the difference between the tradition and critical theories of culture is the recognition, by the latter, that its object of study is not a natural facticity but a social construction. (507)

In this formulation, Castro-Gomez singularly foregrounds the dereifying capacity of 'critical' as opposed to 'traditional' theory. The opposition he poses is clearly intended to counter the naturalization of extant forms of life and social organization which expound the 'natural' or biological basis of, for example, the social contract, alluding the problem of 'human nature' in political philosophy. Citing the historically specific genesis of the separation of culture and nature, and, indeed, his analysis emphasizes the fact that the opposition of history and nature was predicated on the idea that human beings could "escape the tyranny of the 'state of nature'" (505). Maintaining his focus on the opposition in relation to the social contract tradition. For Castro-Gomez, then, we might say that critical theory is de-naturalizing and concerned primarily with what is socially constituted and eschews concepts like 'human nature' as the basis of critical theoretical practice.

Castro-Gomez takes up and furthers Horkheimer's emphasis on the weakness of 'the given' in the natural sciences. Horkheimer's focus is, in fact, on the positivist and empiricist methods of the natural sciences and their tendency to take 'nature' as immediate, but, this criticism is transposed by Castro-Gomez onto naturalistic claims more broadly. Although this shift may seem relatively intuitive, generally in line with the critical program inaugurated by the early Frankfurt school, this slight widening of scope produces a stronger opposition between nature and history than Horkheimer himself would permit.[131] Castro-Gomez's

[131] See, Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," 201-2: "Even where there is question of experiencing natural objects as such, their very naturalness is determined by contrast with the social world and, to that extent, depends upon the latter." That nature should not be understood immediately in isolation from particular

insistence on denaturalization follows from an interest in what Castro-Gomez takes to be "the intrinsic relationship between the colonial idea of race and the *traditional* [naturalistic] concept of culture" (511).

Interestingly, Castro-Gomez takes a more classically materialist approach to the genesis of the modern conception of race—race as the justification of exploitation or enslavement of the colonized in pursuit of ever-increasing territorial annexation—the materials conditions of possibility for annexation, the concentration of and imperial demand for natural resources, remains undiscussed. In his view, a naturalistic conception of culture is, by definition, complicit in these colonial rationalizations. This leaves out, however, a crucial element of *why* territorial annexations of *these* regions and *these* people, in their concrete specificity, were and continue to be the outgrowth of the "systemic imperative" (or social necessity) of imperialism. Further, his aversion to theory rooted in "human nature," is at odds with this very account of the development of modern conceptions of race. In other words, subtract the transhistorical and fixed necessity of the metabolic relation to nature and eschew any 'natural' basis for critical theory and what one arrives at, per Foucaultian or postcolonial means, is a predominantly cultural or discursive account of colonial domination or, even in a more materially oriented account, an analysis which does not sufficiently delve into the material conditions of possibility of colonial expansion and, thereby, fails to meet its own terms rigorously. This paradox is produced by a reproduction of the opposition of history and nature, as is evident in the claim that the object of critical theory is "not a natural facticity but a social construction" (507).

In a different vein, the lack of discussion surrounding the geographic concentration of natural resources is further bolstered by decolonial thought in the rejection of 'political economy paradigms.' In the work of Ramon Grosfoguel, both postcolonial and political economy fail to unsettle the opposition between 'economy' or material and 'culture,' which is, in his view, a distinctive feature of a "Western man 'point zero' god-eye view" (215). Although Grosfoguel addresses classical binaries such as these more explicitly, his critique of political economy (and postcolonialism) nonetheless reproduces these oppositions through different

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forms of social organization is a critical intervention specific to critical theory. Castro-Gomez's formulation, however, seems to go further in posing the object of critique as unnatural or anti-natural.

means. Grosfoguel's implicit conclusion suggests that, instead of the 'old Marxist' way of thinking (citing the base/superstructure metaphor), we ought to approach coloniality "in multiple dimensions of social life" (218).

As such, this intervention appears unproblematic, merely qualifying what has, at times, been put too strongly or too simplistically. However, the reader should be prompted to ask whether *the epistemic turn itself* does not constitute a reinvigoration of these divisions—which Grosfoguel purports to undermine—only privileging *epistemology* (rather than 'culture,' for which he criticizes postcolonial studies) over and against the 'economic' or, rather, the material. For now, I will forestall the questions of particularity and universality until Chapter 4, wherein his "epistemological critique" of political economy can be addressed more fully. Suffice it to say that Grosfoguel's critique of political economy paradigms further colludes with the primarily epistemic scope of decolonial thought to further deter discussion from the very procedure by which the colonialist not only represses their own dependency on nature but displaces that dependency on the colonized through impoverishment and extraction.

The Critique of Colonialism without Natural History

What the absence of 'natural history' or the mapping of natural resources accomplishes is not simply the de-reification of colonial discourse, a no-less necessary task. This theoretical gesture, especially when it privileges the 'cultural' or 'epistemic' over the material, makes colonialism's origins and perpetuation seem a matter of ideas, linguistic or literary practices, or categories of race as they are detached from the concrete practices of their development. In Chapter 2, we considered how reducing the concept of ideology to its 'epistemic' dimensions surreptitiously circumscribes the object of critique as neatly epistemic or discursive, thus making it more amenable to our conceptual tools. If colonialism could be eliminated through strictly or even primarily conceptual and epistemic work, then we would be forced to ask ourselves why the host of critical studies of these practices and discourses, from varying disciplines, methods, and traditions, were not sufficient to render themselves no longer necessary. Although none of these thinkers would likely defend the exclusive primacy of the epistemic, discursive, or cultural when pressed, the conspicuous absence of any structurally relevant discussion of natural resources (even in cases where the economic is foregrounded, as in Chakrabarty) from their work threatens to obscure the role of 'natural facts' (mediated by colonial and imperialist projects) and, material conditions in *not only accounting for these projects' historical genesis* but the continued relevance of these 'facts' in analyzing

ongoing practices of extraction, expropriation, and dispossession. As these ongoing projects have been obscured by mainstream economics and policy, by 'structural adjustment,' 'free trade' agreements and sanctions, and even environmental negotiations, the stakes of this omission are especially high.

To clarify, the problem is also not solved by a simplistic 'cultural' versus 'material' distinction (which would itself reproduce the logic of the history/nature opposition).[132] However, that numerous attempts to think them jointly take this to mean that one can approach the material by way of the cultural. Indeed, for some this is what is 'culturally specific' about 'non-Western' histories and methods. Though the subversion of the opposition as been the aim of such analyses, they have not always navigated away from re-installing the cultural or the 'constructed' as primary. The claim that even natural needs are mediated by specific social and historical circumstances—which is implicitly maintained in both postcolonial and decolonial thought—is not sufficient to prove those needs as *irreducibly* historical. Some might say, for example, that thought we all require food and, how we eat, how we prepare food, and its social meanings vary widely from society to society. This, however, does not negative the need's objective, shared quality; these are, rather, variable expressions of that underlying condition. The reduction of nature to a set of social categories, without accounting for the objective properties we can neither refute nor be spared from has, in recent years, been increasingly challenged by the fact of *anthropogenic climate change* (discussed in Chapter 5).

Having said this, the analysis of 'natural facts' cannot be understood in any *immediate* or empirically obvious sense if it is to retain its critical potential. Indeed, that would equally undermine the normative impact that such facts can meaningfully have on the critique of colonialism and imperialism. To briefly take one example, the extraction of coltan in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) entails exploitative and often expropriative labor for the process of extraction, as well as land dispossession, and destructive environmental processes (practices which are not themselves natural facts). Moreover, the large deposits of coltan in the DRC remained comparatively undisturbed until the consumer technology boom

[132] To be clear, the artificial and problematic character of the opposition of history/nature (or history/'culture,' history/'society,' as it is often phrased) is not lost on any of the thinkers mentioned in either the decolonial or postcolonial veins. However, the distinction is often problematized, I argue, in such a way that it is not, in effect, undermined. See, for example, Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification," 304-5; Chakrabarty, "Four Climates of History," 201-203; Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies." The acknowledgement of this opposition's pernicious implications is more broadly visible, in not so many words, in the critique of 'Cartesianism' which is shared by both post- and decolonial thought.

of the 1990s.[133] That is, the natural fact of coltan's high concentration in the DRC was not itself a precipitating cause of colonial or imperial intervention until the development and widespread implementation of the tantalum capacitor. In 2009, the government of the DRC signed a contract with the International Monetary Fund (which was later rescinded) to alleviate the nation's $12 billion dollar debt.[134] This 'contract' necessitated further mineral extraction and, indeed, shaped the most basic elements of diamond mining and export in the region. With the involvement of dozens of NGOs, foreign commercial interests, Congolese rebel forces, and Congolese military forces, the extraction, ownership, and export of minerals (including but not limited to coltan) the extraction of coltan can hardly be understood as a bare 'natural fact.' Nonetheless, if imperial intervention in the DRC is to be explicable at all, we cannot overlook the fact of mineral concentration and the interest in such minerals as 'activated' by Western consumer markets.[135] Although mineral mining was common in Belgian Congo (e.g., diamonds, tin, copper, gold), a critical natural-historical approach to the imperial extraction of coltan requires that we acknowledge the historical specificity of 'if and when' this expansionist or extractive 'need' is activated or modified by other historical circumstances.[136] This realization about the mediated quality of natural resources and the processes by which they are extracted (or extracted at all) becomes even more significant in light of global inequalities in contributing to and being impacted by catastrophic climate change. Without attention to this mediation, however, a different, inverse problem emerges: the problem of naturalism.

Naturalism and the Opposition of History and Nature

The indispensability of attending to the role of natural resources and the re-categorization of racialized and colonized labor and reproduction as inert 'natural resources notwithstanding, the concept of natural history is equally problematic if it hypostatizes the

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[133] For a critical introduction to the relation between coltan and the development of consumer electronics, See, Michael Wallace Nest. *Coltan* (Malden: Polity, 2011).

[134] IMF Press Release, 2009: https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2015/09/14/01/49/pr09455.

[135] See also, John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, Richard York. *The Ecological Rift*: *Capitalism's War on the Earth* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2010). pp. 78-82, 132-6, 279. Another scenario of natural resource 'activation' in the colonial context is well documented by Foster, Clark, and York. Their example is that of the Peruvian guano trade. Following a 'soil crisis' (caused by intensive and unsustainable agriculture) in Europe in the 1800s, Peruvian guano became a high-demand alternative source for necessary nitrates and fertilizer. Though formally independent, Castilla (then president) sought to offset post-independence instability by developed what we might now call a neocolonial 'export-oriented' industry which is prone to crisis, scarcity, and, ultimately, collapse.

[136] For a critical history of Congolese colonization and decolonization, See Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja. *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (New York: Zed Books, 2002).

'natural' in the critique of colonialism. In some strains of postcolonial and decolonial thought, the critique of colonialism especially regarding claims about nature or proximity to nature, exhibit a kind of *inversion* of the 'proximity to nature' in colonial discourse. Some critics of ecological imperialism make claims that inadvertently reify the naturalistic justification of colonialism. Such claims take two broad forms: (1) the presupposition of nature's inferiority is unjustified, and that indigenous people are, in fact, in a better, closer relation to the natural world and (2) proximity to nature is desirable as a distinct and culturally specific way of life and better than the 'Western' relation to nature. Although this inversion is intended as a critical move and meant to affirm the value of indigenous ways of living and knowing, this approach surreptitiously reproduces the classical opposition of history and nature which is operative in colonial discourse and, moreover, risks participating in the *exoticization* and *fetishization* of native, indigenous, and colonial difference, difference which is not a natural fact but constituted through oppression and domination. This fetishization, moreover, prevents us from taking seriously the concrete realities of underdevelopment and global inequality.

Regarding the first claim, the position responds to the colonialist, bent on dominating nature and those associated most closely with it, by denying that colonized and indigenous peoples that are 'closer to nature,' and have a more harmonious or, at least, less destructive relation to nature. Indeed, some critics claim that the relation of the indigenous to nature is one which could even serve as a model to counter the exploitative and instrumentalized relation to nature. In some cases, the claim also extends to pre-colonial societies. Although the critic in this position ostensibly would deny accusations that they invoke the pernicious motif of the 'noble savage,' we must seriously consider whether such a nominal warding is sufficient to quell suspicion. In 20th century France, the phenomena of 'negrophilia' and the exoticization of 'black culture' was often thought of as an exaltation of people of African descent and an antidote to the sexual repression and alienation of modern French society.[137] Primitivism, as an aesthetic movement, throughout Europe understood its supposed affirmation of the native and African peoples as a critique of modernity, as an alternative to patently unpoetic and disenchanted character of industrial development. The basic logic of apparently liberatory

[137] For a historical introduction to 'negrophilia' in France, See Petrine Archer-Straw. *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London: Hudson & Thames, 2000). For a critical analysis of French 'primitivism,' See Daniel Sherman. *French Primitivism and the Ends of Empire, 1945-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

appeals to the 'natural' qualities of native, indigenous, and enslaved peoples is not new. Its persistence, however, testifies to the obstinacy of, not only the tendency toward fetishization but the need to displace human beings' alienation from nature onto those 'naturalized' through racialization.

Examples of Naturalism in Environmental Philosophy and Nègritude

There is no shortage of appeals to the 'natural order' or 'human nature' to justify the violence of colonial domination. This naturalistic justification, however, beyond its role in colonial rationalizations, has also come to *mediate even critical responses to the colonialist*. Naturalism, here referring to its affirmative (though not less ideological) variations, can be tracked through certain critiques of both colonialism and ecological destruction. This affirmation is sometimes claimed on the basis of a broad 'holism' shared by many, but not all, native and indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. Another variation of this claim relies on the purportedly more 'relational' ways of thinking and knowing that are said to be, broadly speaking, characteristic of native and indigenous thought. In a recent volume, *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability* (including the contributions of both native and non-native scholars), this tendency is well exemplified. In their introduction the editors write:

> ...More than 10,000 years of history testifies that the prevailing standards shaping most Indigenous relationships to the natural world were restraint and reverence – restraint because, as *people close to the land* [my emphasis], they understood and embraced their dependence on Earth's resources; reverence because all was a gift from the Creator, whose animated universe meant animals, trees, and rocks were another "people." The Walpi spoke of snake, lizard, and water people; Diné farmers called maize "corn people," singing to each plant as they might nurture a child; and Lakota hunters blessed and gave thanks to the "buffalo people," who fulfilled their role in the chain of life by offering food, clothing, tools, and ornaments. (12)

Acknowledging that there is no single indigenous/native view or relation to nature (as there is not for Westerners or settlers), the editors reconstruct a broadly shared basis for describing native and indigenous thinking as constituting the category of 'traditional ecological knowledge' (TEK). Furthermore, they claim that the relational and restrained character of native peoples' interactions with their natural environmental should not be confused with "Romantic myths, New Age manifestos, or fables of a pre- historic Noble Savage, as detractors claim; nor do they suggest an idyllic fairytale where Indians and fellow creatures harmoniously

cavorted in a pristine garden before The Fall" (12). However, it is unclear how starkly their account diverges from these narratives.

First, their account relies on an understanding of native and indigenous peoples as 'close to the land,' implicitly contrasted with their Western counterparts who are alienated from nature. This starting point bears a striking resemblance to the antidotal approach taken by numerous 'primitivists' in response to European modernity. This formulation fails to register the ways that Europeans (and, indeed, all human beings) are 'dependent' on nature; all the European attempts to 'overcome' nature cannot eradicate the relation of social metabolism. Second, the account stresses that "10,000 years of history testifies" to the presence of desirable attributes of TEK knowers' relation with the natural world. There is much controversy concerning the ecological practices of native peoples and, speculatively, what the development of native societies may have looked like sans colonial domination. Suffice it to say that native/indigenous interactions with the natural world have not gone unchanged for 10,000 years, as this description implies. Calcified in time, the colonized becomes a fossil record for life before the violence of modernity, rather than living peoples, many still struggling to secure necessities (through traditional means and otherwise), forced to relate more closely with the 'land' for survival (including confinement on reservations).

Third, the characterization of TEK as categorizing crops and animals as 'peoples' does not sufficiently explain the basis of such categorization in terms of differing cosmologies or worldviews and, thus, presents a caricature of native peoples' personification of the natural world. The account given by Nelson and Shilling suggests that TEK knowers take corn and buffalo as *one and the same* as human beings, a claim that makes the consumption of either (as was necessary for the reproduction of life) not only troubling but, furthermore, suggests not holism but monism, as though TEK knowers do not distinguish between various forms of life. This monistic description, though offered with good intention, threatens to affirm the basis of what has been said of the colonized by the colonizer: indistinguishable from animals, the colonized have a natural disposition of anthropophagy.

While there is nothing that should *a priori* prevent one from drawing on the robust and, in fact, heterogeneous resources of native and indigenous thought and practice to respond to the harms of colonial and imperial domination and the present ecological crisis, to take the approach of positioning native or indigenous ways of thinking and being with nature as the *de facto* alternative to 'Western thought' raises at least three broader problems as well which, in

my view, are irresolvable from within such a tendency itself. The first pertains to the formulation of a clear opposition between the categories 'native/indigenous' and 'Western' (which the authors and contributors of the aforementioned nominally avoid, but which is common in much scholarly literature on the subject) with regard to the conception of nature. This is falsely homogenizing, as it assumes a singular 'relation to nature' among native peoples and, moreover, erroneously imputes a single, sweeping conception of 'nature' to the 'Western tradition' (this very chapter is evidence to the contrary).

The second problem is an epistemic one; to *default* to 'non-Western' and native ways of knowing as antidote to the contradictions of Anglo/European thinking about nature replicates the long-held trope of the 'noble savage' in the 'ecological Indian' variant.[138] When 'Western' methods fail us, by this logic, the Westerner or the settler can be humbled by a 'noble tutelage' by their native counterpart.[139] When the settler or colonialist is not 'educating' the native child to cure 'savagery,' the native serves an alternate didactic function, benevolently teaching the settler world the error of its ways. The colonized become a repository of 'wisdom,' a fetishized token of 'pure' and idyllic pre-modern humanity which might redeem Europeans (after having 'sacrificed' their lands and ways of life).

The third and final problem is more empirical and alludes to the material conditions of life for native, indigenous, and formerly colonized peoples under conditions of massive global inequality, including the problem of 'underdevelopment' (to be discussed in the section titled 'Natural History as Critique'). In the case of this third, one simply has to ask whether 'living off the land' is, in fact, the hallowed practice that is maintained by the romanticization of native life and, moreover, whether the 'proximity to nature' is not often an expression of extreme poverty, geographical dispossession/isolation, and the subjection of the colonized to the whims of natural necessity and disaster (amplified by neo-colonial and imperial relations of cultivation, export, import, and disaster 'relief').

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[138] For critical responses to the 'ecological Indian' stereotype, See M. Harken, D. Lewis, *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); J. Rice. "Beyond 'The Ecological Indian' and 'Virgin Soil Epidemics': New Perspectives on Native Americans and the Environment." *History Compass*, 12.9 (2014): 745-757; S. Krech. *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Gina Gilio-Whitaker. "The Problem with the Ecological Indian Stereotype." *KCET*, 2017: https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild/the-problem-with-the-ecological-indian-stereotype.

[139] My use of the term 'noble tutelage' here should not be confused with the phrase 'reverse tutelage' as it is employed by Gopal (*Insurgent Empire*, 24,44). See, Priyamvada Gopal. *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso Books, 2019). Her use of the term points to the ways that anti-colonialists in Europe learned (productively) from anti-colonial resistance in the colonies; the term indicates a positive, reciprocal relation between opponents of imperialism in both spheres.

The tendency to take recourse to indigenous, native, and formerly colonized perspectives as a de facto critical alternative to the purportedly monolithic Western paradigm is neither new nor specific to Europe or North American. One finds another classic example of this in, for example, certain strains of Nègritude. Léopold Sédar Senghor is well known within the Nègritude movement for forwarding the concept of "Africanity." Reiland Rabaka, noting the often under-recognized (contrasting) influence of Nègritude on Amilcar Cabral's thought in his *Concepts of Cabralism*, represents the concept as follows:

> The African has an intense ontological affinity with nature that is apparently absent from European humanity. According to Senghor, the "Negro is the man of Nature." He further explained: "By tradition he [the African] lives off the soil and with the soil, in and by the Cosmos" [...] For Senghor, this is the "black's-being-in-the-world"—an acquiescing, ultra-accommodating immediacy, in tune and in rhythm with nature and the cosmos [...] Senghor suggests that these formerly negative images and assertions about the primitivity of 'black nature' are now somehow, as if with the waving of a magic wand, inverted, positive pejoratives pointing to idealized Africans' pristine primitivisms. This, is a nutshell, then, is Senghor's much-touted and often-mangled concept of Africanity. (Rabaka 2014, 72-73)

Senghor's claim is born of liberatory intentions. But, as Rabaka points out, his value-reversal threatens to collude with the imputed passivity and 'backwardness' which the colonialist employs to justify colonial control as a moral and practical necessity for the 'developent' of Africa. Although Senghor is an especially acute example of this fetishizing naturalism, as Dismas Masolo highlights, other figures of Nègritude and the Harlem Renaissance such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, Countee Cullen, and Sterling Brown "saw Africa, with its rawness and anchorage to bare natural forces, as an essential antithesis to the domineering industrial civilization of the white world," not unlike the 'resistant' primitivist aesthetic of the French avant-garde (Masolo 13). Thus, the appearance of affirmative 'naturalism' cannot be confined to just the European's 'noble tutelage' but, in fact, also to those movements aiming to reclaim and uplift black experience from its colonial and racist degradation.

To varying degrees, the elevation of native Africans as 'close to nature' or 'close to land' is a common theme in Nègritude, a point of criticism articulated by Fanon.[140] But

[140] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 150-157. For further discussion of these critiques, See Azzedine Haddour. "Sartre and Fanon: On Nègritude and Political Participation." *Sartre Studies International*, 11.1 (2005): 286-301; Bennetta Jules-Rosette. Jean-Paul Sartre and the Philosophy of Négritude: Race, Self, and Society." *Theory & Society*, 36.3 (2007): 265-285; David Macey. *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 69, 153.

Senghor's overt and direct formulation throws into relief another problematic aspect of such claims. When Senghor highlights that Africans "[live] off the soil and with the soil" as an *essential* attribute *of Africans*, he functionally accepts the rejection and displacement performed and enforced by the colonialist (i.e., the repudiation or resentment of natural dependency). Senghor implicitly concedes that, by contrast, Europeans do not 'live off or 'with' the land. However alienated the colonizer may appear from the natural conditions which sustain human life, this is, in fact, semblance and not reality. Europeans—like *all* human beings—need to reproduce their lives and such a reproduction necessarily occurs in a metabolic relation with nature (even if such reproductive work is not performed by the colonizer) In contrast, where the historicist would generalize such a vulnerability to cooptation to all such claims about humans and nature, the critical theorist should consider a different response, one which overcomes the opposition rather than remaining within its terms.

Natural History as Critique

The naturalist and historicist approaches share an important feature: none of these critiques tells us how to contend with *real* natural facts or the social necessity that makes these facts politically significant, facts which make formerly colonized regions and lands the targets of colonialism in the first place. Understandably, one might seek to divert energy away from naturalistic arguments in general in order to steer the conversation about colonialism away from dominant assumptions, but the antinomy arises when there is either a complete suspension or uncritical affirmation of 'nature.' To reiterate and clarify, many of the postcolonial and decolonial critiques of the naturalistic justification of colonialism are very necessary. However, subsequently, this has been taken to mean that *virtually all claims about nature* have colonial implications. Instead, I want to suggest that the concept of natural history avoids the limits of both the historicist and naturalist positions, by understanding dialectically what has been construed as an opposition.

We can distinguish two tasks for a critical natural history. The first, already having been well-developed by the aforementioned thinkers of both postcolonial and decolonial thought, is to dereify or to reveal the contingency of supposedly (i.e., falsely naturalized) claims about the colonized and about colonial history. The second, less often discussed and the focal point of this section, is the mapping of how natural resources (made normatively significant by colonization) function in the project of colonization and, therefore, how they should appear in a critique of the colonial project. In order to overcome the traditional opposition of history

and nature, we need both these tasks, though the second has been eschewed for fearing of failing the first. A more dialectical and reciprocally determinative conception of natural history and its tasks is necessary.

Thus far we have discussed how the opposition of nature and history is a false opposition, entailing reified and hypostatized conceptions of both categories. However, as previously mentioned in Chapter 2, this opposition—like ideology more generally—is 'both true and false'. "It is true," Adorno writes, "when it expresses what happens to nature; it is false when it simply reinforces conceptually history's own concealment of its own natural growth".[141] It is the 'moment of truth' of the opposition that gives Adorno's modified conception of natural history its critical purchase. Again, we may worry that acknowledging any natural facts about how colonialism takes shape in historically and geographically specific ways is tantamount to ceding to colonial arguments. However, such a worry seems to itself concede much ground to colonialist arguments, since it presumes that from these arbitrary natural facts could emerge a justification for violent extraction and enslavement, a basic presupposition of the colonialist. Abandoning any account of the configuration of the natural world does not allay the colonialist's credit to natural superiority and, moreover, it surreptitiously lends claim to the capacity to derive political justification immediately from natural facts. Instead, we might make critical use of the concept of natural history to grasp the interrelated modes of the domination of nature, whereby the extension of this logic justifies the domination of those associated with the natural.

Adorno's Concept of Natural History

Natural history in its critical valence grasps the reciprocal mediation of history and nature in several registers. Firstly, the concept attends to Marx's most basic insight about the reproduction of life, the 'metabolic' relation to nature, and its constitutive role in human history. Secondly, as it is formulated in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it tracks the historical trajectory of human beings' domination of nature and the 'overcoming' of natural necessity. Thirdly, it reflects the ways that this natural necessity continues to shape human history's course as a distorted imperative which mediates a transhistorical fact. Fourthly, it helps to historicize reified conceptions of nature. Thus, concept of natural history avoids the pitfalls of either the historicist or naturalist responses highlighted above, offering a

[141] Adorno, *History & Freedom*, 122. See also, *Negative Dialectics*, 358.

more rigorous framework for undertaking criticism of history's extant colonial and imperial course, despite this not being the foremost inspiration for Adorno's re-thinking of the concept.

In his early essay, "The Idea of Natural History," Adorno frames his elaboration of the concept of natural history as intending to "overcome the usual antithesis of history and nature" (111). The aim of this conception is not to collapse the distinction or conflate these categories, but rather to "[push] these concepts to a point where they are mediated in their apparent difference" (111). This means that, in order to grasp the reciprocal mediation between nature and history, we must understand that each category has determinate properties and is therefore not reducible to its 'opposite' but also that each's determinate properties are constituted in relation to that 'opposite.' The larger structure of Adorno's essay is composed both of a criticism of the 'ontologization' of history (represented by Heidegger) and the 'bewitchment' of history, which would naturalize what is contingent into what is strictly necessary (INH 122).[142] The mutual determination of history and nature, for Adorno, must avoid the tired opposition of radical contingency and unqualified 'determinism,' by way of *either* history or nature.

Adorno emphasizes the capacity of 'natural history' to dereify and critique "second nature," drawing on Lukács's formulation of that concept.[143] From "the perspective of philosophy of history," "the problem of natural history presents itself as the question of how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world" (118). The emphasis on the critique of 'second nature' is further bolstered by his references to Benjamin, who airs also on the side of contingency. This critique of second nature resembles the de-naturalizing tendency of much post-/decolonial and anti-colonial critique, wherein the primary focus is to dereify claims about colonial history and the colonized themselves. This emphasis, however, must be understood in the larger context of Adorno's intervention. Adorno concludes the essay as follows:

> I wanted to speak about the relationship of these matters to historical materialism, but I have only time to say the following: it is not a question of completing one theory by another, but of the immanent interpretation of a theory. I submit myself, so to speak, to the authority of the materialist dialectic. It could be demonstrated that what has been said here is only an interpretation of certain fundamental elements of the materialist dialectic. (124)

[142] See also, *History and Freedom,* 123. This 'ontologization' of history is also part of the critique forwarded in Part II, specifically in reference to the work of Ernesto Laclau.
[143] See also, *Negative Dialectics*, 357.

The critique of 'second nature,' then should be understood as not only as a critique of reification, but also as relating to the natural-historical basis of critical theory itself. This other aspect of his concept of natural history becomes more apparent in later formulations.

In the *History and Freedom* lectures he clarifies that: "The concept of a second nature remains the negation of whatever might be thought of as first nature" (120). That is, second nature attempts to supersede or destroy 'first nature.' One could read this as a rejection of the category of first nature, but as Deborah Cook clarifies, "Adopting Marx's critique of capitalism as second nature, Adorno also shares his interest in exploring the role of first nature in human history".[144] Although, Cook writes, "we now inhabit an inverted world where nature has been socialized and the socio-historical world has been naturalized...there is a far less illusory sense in which human history is natural, and nature historical".[145] This 'less illusory sense' revolves around the concept's ability to "[disclose] the damage inflicted on natural things and processes owing to their entwinement with history" and it "not only casts light on the damage we have done to nature but makes visible the unfreedom of individuals whenever they are led blindly [*sic*] and compulsively by instinct" .[146]

To Cook's formulation I would add that natural history, understood critically, casts light on the damage done to nature as fundamentally *entwined* with the damage done to colonized peoples. What the opposition of nature and history does, in the context of the critique of colonialism (as I attempted to broadly describe above in 'Natural History as Ideology') is to sever natural necessity and social necessity at the level of critique. To further and deepen this analysis, we must take seriously the ways that arbitrary natural facts (*both* that human beings depend on nature and that natural resources are concentrated unevenly) are mediated and made morally and politically loaded by the social necessity of the reproduction of colonial and imperial power. Also, a natural-historical analysis must, as Cook's point more directly explains, understand colonial and capitalist social necessity in light of its mediation of what Marx once called the 'metabolic' relation.

It important to note that, although the critique of second nature is inspired by historically specific processes of reification and ideological mystification, the broader function

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[144] Deborah Cook. *Adorno on Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2011). p. 8. See also, *Negative Dialectics*, 358; *History and Freedom*, 122.
[145] Ibid. p. 17.
[146] Ibid. p. 18.

of natural history is transhistorical because it emerges from natural necessity. Indexing the historical status of critique from the standpoint of natural history we might say that the critique of second nature is a historically specific subset (i.e., specific to irrational or contradictory societies, to specifically capitalist processes of obfuscation) of natural-historical critique. Natural historical critique, more generally, is transhistorical because it pertains to human beings' relation to and role in nature which, however altered, cannot be definitively overcome (i.e., human beings cannot be extracted from their part in and relation to nature, regardless of the degree to which human life is determined by 'natural necessity' or the struggle for survival). Thus, like the critique of ideology discussed in Chapter 2, critique from natural history is jointly historically specific and transhistorical. However, if either aspect is isolated (e.g., in anti-naturalism or naturalism), the vantage loses its critical force. To get a clearer sense of what a critical apprehension of nature and history's 'reciprocal mediation' looks like, we can consider the critical role natural history not only *can have* but *has had* in the critique of colonialism, albeit uncodified as such.

Critical Natural History and Anti-Colonial Critique

Although the term 'natural history' is rarely invoked verbatim, there is nonetheless considerable evidence that its critical conception is at work in many critiques of colonial discourse and practice. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon holds together the two dialectically related tasks of denaturalizing the claims of the colonizer and accounting for the natural features of colonial lands and territories in shaping colonial practice.[147] Rather than reject or avoid claims about the natural world out of hand, Fanon instead navigates the classical opposition to meet the needs of his anti-colonial critique. On the one hand, Fanon highlights the manipulation of the category of human nature to dehumanize and 'naturalize' the native. On the other, he acknowledges the expropriation of natural resources as the initiating force which drives dispossession and domination:

> The Algerians, the women dressed in haiks, the palm groves, and the camels form a landscape, the *natural* backdrop for the French presence. A hostile, ungovernable, and fundamentally rebellious Nature is in fact synonymous in the colonies with the bush, the mosquitoes, the natives, and disease. Colonization has succeeded once this untamed Nature has been brought under control. Cutting railroads through the bush, draining swamps, and ignoring the

[147] For many the classification of Fanon as 'anti-colonial' (versus 'decolonial' or 'postcolonial') may be somewhat controversial. However, without necessarily excluding these other categories in his case, I have chosen to identify Fanon with this tradition since he clearly meets the broadest and most common employment of the term (e.g., as it applies to actors in armed struggles for decolonization).

> political and economic existence of the native population are in fact one and the same thing" (182)

Fanon clearly relates colonial practice to the wider framework of the domination of nature, referring to degradation of natural resources and indifference to native life and interests as 'one and the same thing.' Such a claim would not be possible without presupposing the reciprocal determination of nature and history; it would not be possible if we made use of only one of these categories exclusively.

Theorizing the position of postcolonial states, Fanon also demonstrates that the effects of colonial expropriation are an ongoing part of how colonial relations are maintained even after the achievement of formal independence:

> "The country finds itself under new management, but in actual fact everything has to be started over from scratch, everything has to be rethought. The colonial system, in fact, was only interested in certain riches, certain natural resources, to be exact those that fueled its industries. Up till now no reliable survey has been made of the soil or the subsoil. As a result, the young independent nation is obliged to keep the economic channels established by the colonial regime...The colonial regime has hammered its channels into place and the risk of not maintaining them would be catastrophic" (56)

Rather than neglecting the natural fact of the concentration and uneven distribution of specific natural resources, Fanon acknowledges this causal dimension of colonial domination without suggesting that these facts themselves justify that domination. Furthermore, the account Fanon gives of the geopolitical position of the postcolonial state, often still in a dependent relation to the colonizer within the context of global capitalist imperialism, speaks to the 'second nature' or historically (but not naturally) necessary shaping of global relations.[148] The 'second nature' configuration of postcolonial economies entails exploitative extraction, unequal import and export, and the merely instrumental mapping of natural resources in the former colonies. Such a 'second nature' is only necessary because in order to ensure the reproduction of life for the native ('first nature') such needs must be met under coerced conditions in a world still controlled by the colonizer.

In short, this brief example, though it does not explicitly campaign for a re-envisioning of the concept of natural history exemplifies the indispensability both categories, understood

[148] See also, Sean Glen Sean Coulthard. *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). pp. 32-38.

as reciprocally mediating, in giving an account of colonial practice and discourse.[149] Reflections on the natural world are not the primary focus of *The Wretched of the Earth*, or Fanon's thought more generally, but the aspects of critique which I have described here as 'natural history' are part and parcel of the most basic aspects of his critique of colonialism.

These reflections are predated by C.L.R. James, in *The Black Jacobins*, which is another illustrative example of a natural-historical critique of colonialism. James offers a detailed analysis of the role cotton, sugar, and indigo played in the colonization of Hispaniola:

> Cotton grew naturally, even without care, in stony ground and in the crevices of the rocks. Indigo also grew spontaneously. Tobacco has a larger leaf there than in any other part of the Americas and sometimes equaled in quality the produce of Havana. The kernel of San Domingo cocoa was more acidulated than that of Venezuela...If on no earthly spot was so much misery concentrated as on a slave-ship, then on no portion of the globe did its surface in proportion to its dimensions yield so much wealth as the colony of San Domingo. (45-46)

With a fluent, expansive knowledge of colonial industry and export in colonies across the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa, James's recasting of the Haitian Revolution is replete with references to the wealth of natural resources (and their theft and degradation) as crucial features of mapping the history of colonialism. And, although his descriptions of San Domingo cannot help but attest to "the natural exuberance of the tropics," his account never tempts its reader with an idyllic vision (James 1989, 28). Indeed, he is keen to highlight that the initial 'enchantment' with San Domingo's natural beauty had a profound impact on the colonialist: "The traveler from Europe was enchanted at his first glimpse of this paradise, in which the ordered beauty of agriculture and the prodigality of Nature compete equally for his surprise and admiration" (28). James' critical intervention in the historiography of the Haitian Revolution and into dominant representations of European political history avers from both naïve forms of naturalism and the reification of natural facts (i.e., the historicists' worry).

[149] Still speaking of the complex position of the postcolonial state, Fanon writes: "The Third World today is facing Europe as one colossal mass whose project must be to try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding the answers to. But what matters is not the question of profitability, not a question of increased productivity, not a question of production rates. No, it is not a question of back to nature. It is the very basic question of not dragging man [*sic*] in directions which mutilate him [*sic*]...The notion of catching up must not be used as a pretext to brutalize man [*sic*], to tear him from himself and his inner consciousness, to break him, to kill him [*sic*]" (238). Critiquing both narratives of Euro-normative developmentalism and the fetishization of productivity, Fanon *neither* capitulates to these narratives and to the historical conditions which produce them *nor* does he endorse the ideological naturalism mentioned above (e.g., by advocating for a 'back to nature' nativism).

In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Rodney offers an even more clearly natural-historical theoretical account of colonialism as he describes the 'paradox of underdevelopment':

> In a way, underdevelopment is a paradox. Many parts of the world that are naturally rich are actually poor and parts that are not so well off in wealth of soil and sub-soil are enjoying the highest standards of living. When the capitalists from the developed parts of the world try to explain this paradox, they often make it sound as though there is something 'God-given' about the situation (21).

For Rodney, underdevelopment is paradoxical in part because any 'straightforward' account of the correspondence between resources and wealth is blatantly contradicted by the fact of underdevelopment. On his account, colonization is, in large part, traceable to the presence of natural resources lacking in imperial territories and the need for cheap (or enslaved) labor to extract such resources and, more broadly, to process and produce goods to meet market demands in Europe and the settlers of the so-called 'New World'. The global division of labor emergent from the extractive labor assigned to colonies continues into the present, long after the end formal colonization for many colonial territories. Given this, we should not view his explanation as merely an 'origin story.' Retroactively, Rodney argues, colonialists justified this division of labor—a division which has persisted, if transformed, in the present,[150] as a matter of 'natural differences' rather than understanding it as the violent exploitation of arbitrary natural facts and the practical needs of accumulation:

> Those who justify the colonial division of labour suggest that it was 'natural' and respected the relative capacities for specialisation of the metropoles and colonies. Europe, North America and Japan were capable of specialising in industry and Africa in agriculture. Therefore, it was to the 'comparative

[150] Since at least the 1980s theorists across disciplines have attempted to apprehend the shifting structure of the international division of labor. Some of the scholarship is represented by the term 'the new international division of labor' (NIDL). See, for example, Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, Otto Kreye. *The New International Division of Labour: Structural Unemployment in Industrialised Countries and Industrialisation in Developing Countries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Rhys Jenkins. "Divisions over the international division of labour." *Capital and Class*, 22 (1984): 28-57; Fernández Kelly, María Patricia. "Contemporary Production and the New International Division of Labor." *The Americas in the New International Division of Labor*. Ed. Steven E. Sanderson (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985); Balaji Parthasarathy. "Marxist Theories of Development, the New International Division of Labor, and the Third World." *Berkeley Planning Journal*, 9.1 (2012). A distinct but similar formulation for discussing the stratified distribution of production and consumption has been described by David Harvey as the "spatial fix" for capitalist crises and a motor of "the new imperialism." See, David Harvey. *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso Books, 2019).

> advantage' of one part of the world to manufacture machines while another part engaged in simple hoe-culture of the soil (Rodney 234).

Rodney's analysis of the colonial division of labor, *both* denaturalizes those qualities which have been closely associated with essential 'difference' along racial and ethnic lines *and* clearly grasps the division as one which has its origin in the extractive practices of colonial expansion. The two aspects, far from being mutually exclusive, function jointly to undermine false naturalization and take seriously the role of the natural in diagnosing colonial domination.

Rodney's formulation of the paradox of underdevelopment, further, echoes Adorno's claim that "the traditional antithesis of nature and history is both true and false" (HF 122). "It is true when it expresses what happens to nature; it is false when it simply reinforces conceptually history's own concealment of its own natural growth" (HF 122). Adorno's formulation, however, needs to be modified. It is perhaps better expressed, in the context of colonialism, as follows: the antithesis of nature and history is true when it expresses what happens to nature and *what happens to those associated with the 'natural'* (reified into 'second nature') as well as *what happens when colonized peoples are dispossessed of natural resources*, including the expropriation and exploitation of their labor; it is false when it covers over the natural-historical basis of human societies, generally, and, specifically, when it distorts the fact of extraction as constitutive of capital and imperial accumulation.

It is, thus also false, when it covers over these conditions and creates the appearance of colonial domination as natural *and* when it obscures the role of extraction from an account of colonial history. That is, the opposition is also both true and false in that it is *actually* violently imposed. This sense of the opposition's 'truth' is expressed poignantly by Rodney when he writes:

> ...Attention must be drawn to one of the most important consequences of colonialism on African development, and that is the stunting effect on Africans as a physical species. Colonialism created conditions which led not just to periodic famine, but to chronic undernourishment, malnutrition and deterioration in the physique of the African people. If such a statement sounds wildly extravagant, it is only because bourgeois propaganda has conditioned even Africans to believe that malnutrition and starvation were the natural lot of Africans from time immemorial. (236)

Rodney's visceral description of the depreciated bodily life of the colonized adds an important dimension to Adorno's more abstract formulation. The 'truth' of the opposition of nature and history follows, not from the logical fact that nature and history have distinct properties, but

from the fact that the colonized peoples of Africa (and Latin America and Asia and the native peoples of Western-settled territories) not only deny the particular histories of these peoples and places but also deny them a self-determinative, much less globally determinative, role in the organization of global politics, in the shaping of history in that sense. This not the same as Hegel's now infamous claim about the Africa's being 'outside of history'. On the contrary, what Rodney's account tells us is that Africa and other colonized regions are enmeshed in a colonial history which forces some to live at the whims of natural necessity (i.e., famine, natural disaster, epidemics) for entirely *unnatural* reasons and to live under scarcity and environmental precarity which is further amplified by the social necessity of colonial and capital accumulation. Contrary to the Eurocentric account of historical development, the resources begot by colonial extraction and the labor coerced and stolen from colonized peoples are *part and parcel* of 'history' understood as the development of so-called liberal societies, but that has directly correlated to the exclusion of colonized peoples from their rightful place in the determination of history's present and future course.

Rodney also describes the exploitation of other human beings as stemming from but not immediately necessitated by what Marx called the 'metabolic relation' to nature. Without naturalizing the fact of colonialism, Rodney astutely indexes it as a distorted outgrowth of the fact of human beings' dependency on nature:

> Man [*sic*] has always exploited his natural environment in order to make a living. At a certain point in time, there also arose the exploitation of man by man, in that a few people grew rich and lived well through the labour of others. Then a stage was reached by which people in one community called a nation exploited the natural resources and the labour of another nation and its people" (37).[151]

Interestingly, this trajectory resonates with that of Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, wherein the domination of nature and the resentment of natural necessity is increasingly intensified, widening to include not only a reified, 'inert' natural world but 'half-subjects' and 'non-persons' understood in closer proximity to that reified sphere.[152]

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[151] A note on the term 'exploited': Rodney's terminology in this passage would seem to suggest that the extraction and instrumentalization of natural resources (indeed, transhistorical and naturally necessary) always takes the form of a *destructive* relation, a relation which seeks to *dominate* nature. His description, not attuned as acutely to ecological crises as the discourses of our present moment, however, should not be understood as anti-ecological or indifferent to environmental destruction, as the following citation indicates his awareness of, for example, the harm of monoculture.

[152] Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer

For Rodney, as for Adorno and Horkheimer, this trajectory is not a strictly necessary one; that is, tracking the struggle for self-preservation and the instrumentalization of nature in the history of human domination does not amount to accepting that domination as natural. Rather, their attention to the historically specific means of distorting the pursuit of survival and the increasing instrumentalization of nature is a crucial account of historical necessity *qua necessity*, but also of how social forms (e.g., class societies) perpetuate this 'second nature' in their most basic processes of social reproduction. Not to be confused with the anti-humanism of deep ecology, Rodney (as well as Adorno and Horkheimer) are *not repudiating any and all* instrumentalization of nature, but rather its systematic exploitation to the point of self-undermining or even self-annihilating consequences. To this effect, Rodney highlights the artificial and self-defeating character of colonial agriculture:

> There was nothing 'natural' about monoculture. It was a consequence of imperialist requirements and machinations, extending into areas that were politically independent in name. Monoculture was a characteristic of regions falling under imperialist domination. Certain countries in Latin America such as Costa Rica and Guatemala were forced by United States capitalist firms to concentrate so heavily on growing bananas that they were contemptuously known as 'banana republics'. In Africa, this concentration on one or two cash-crops for sale abroad had many harmful effects. Sometimes, cash-crops were grown to the exclusion of staple foods — thus causing famines (Rodney 285).

Rodney's analysis in our present situation is perhaps even more prescient as monoculture and the larger frame of accumulation-oriented agricultural production of which it is apart now threatens to accelerate catastrophic climate change. The implications of the opposition of nature and history in the history of environmental practices culminating in the threat of catastrophic climate change and, moreover, critical natural history's role in clarifying and critiquing these process comes to the fore in Chapter 5.

It is formulations such as those offered by these anti-colonial thinkers cited above that indicate the critical potential of 'natural history' which is *already* operative in the critique of colonialism, including the potential for self-clarification of critique's own embeddedness in dominant ideological frameworks. Glen Sean Coulthard poignantly makes this point in his critique of the liberal paradigm of 'recognition' within the settler-colonial framework. In *Red Skin, White Masks*, he clearly identifies the stakes of moving beyond such a framework and, furthermore, identifies what makes a historicist or anti-naturalist position potentially complicit with colonial assumptions:

> ...Today it appears, much as it did in Fanon's day, that colonial powers will only recognize the collective rights and identities of Indigenous peoples insofar as this recognition does not throw into question the background legal, political, and economic framework of the colonial relationship itself (41).

If our critical formulations are only so under the conditions that the framework of the colonial relationship remains in tact, then it is not only the colonial powers that fail to acknowledge something beyond the recognition of colonized peoples. Even critics of colonial and imperial projects can find their critique ultimately bound by the very terms of colonial rationalization. As the analyses of this chapter demonstrate, one such element of that rationalization—the opposition of history and nature—continues to pervade in the work of even the most adamant of critics, a persistence which has crucial consequences for social critique and its capacity to be adequate to its object. Natural historical critique, however, speaks to the reciprocal mediation of history's course and our dependence on nature (and the distortion of that reciprocity). Adorno's conception only conceptually clarifies what anti-colonial thought has known since at least the 20th century: that a dialectical, natural-historical critique is at the root of any materially grounded critique of colonialism.

V: UNIVERSAL HISTORY AGAINST THE ANTITHESIS OF UNIVERSALITY AND PARTICULARITY

Introduction

In Chapter 3 we examined the role of natural history in the critique of colonialism/imperialism. After surveying the theoretical implications of omitting references to the natural, I reconstructed a critical conception of natural history drawing on the formulation provided by Adorno and through the concrete, historical analyses of Fanon, Rodney, and James. This reconstruction of natural history was performed through a critical examination of the antithesis of nature and history. This chapter follows similar logical contours, even sharing certain central figures, but with an eye to a different aspect of the larger problem structuring this project. This chapter seeks to critically consider the *antithesis of particularity and universality* and to reconstruct a critical universalism in order to ground global social theory.

In this chapter, we will consider the appearance of this categorical antithesis, briefly, through its historical appearance in the justification of colonial and capitalist forms of domination and, more robustly, through its ongoing perpetuation in contemporary forms of critique. The chapter begins by examining post-/decolonial thinking about universality and universalism, through the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee, in the postcolonial vein, and the work of Walter Mignolo and Ramon Grosfoguel in the decolonial vein. These thinkers, I argue, in aiming to critique a Eurocentric or false universalism, fail to overcome this opposition which, as I demonstrate, is constitutive of justificatory and, ultimately, ideological narratives about both colonization and capitalism. In rejecting the category of universality, their critiques fall prey to the limits of particularism. This is true even for decolonial thinkers who seek 'alternative' forms of universality and, in Mignolo's case, attempting to reconstruct a more flexible 'pluriversality.'

First, a word about how this opposition functions *ideologically*—in the previous chapter, we examined how the opposition of nature and history worked to distort even critical analyses of the colonial project by accepting a basic premise socially necessitated by global capitalism and its need to reify and dominate nature: the assumption that human beings and nature are fundamentally autonomous categories. The opposition of history and nature, in that case, was ideological insofar as it a) partially obfuscated crucial elements of the colonial project, even from critics' consideration and, more fundamentally, b) insofar as it obscures the reality of

human beings transhistorical, necessary metabolic relation to nature and, thus, our inescapable dependency upon it. In these cases, ideology prevents critique from being adequate to its object by eclipsing and covering over. In the case of universality and particularity, the register of ideology is somewhat different.

In this context, the problem of ideology appears as one that affects the oppressed, the colonized, and the exploited. This maps on to some distinctions we clarified in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, the problem of ideology—while still epistemic—was registered primarily in *functionalist* terms, examining the operation of concepts, claims, and logics in relation to their role in social reproduction. In this chapter, I rely heavily on a hybrid formulation of the *epistemic-functionalist* conception (as is maintained by Adorno and much of the Western Marxist tradition). Thus, although I examine the operation of the categories in terms of their ideological function, the contours of this chapter also emphasize its *epistemic* dimensions in a way that has, until now, been only latent in my analysis. The foregrounding of this second aspect arrives with the insistence of my hypothetical interlocutors that, in order to combat coloniality at the level of knowledge, we must rely—to varying degrees—upon a geographical, spatial, or 'place-based' mode of critique. As I argue in what follows, such a shift (precisely because it focuses on the location and position of the knower) is especially vulnerable to the very real challenge of ideological mediation among those whose consciousness is developed in the midst of colonialist, racist, sexist, and classist narratives and whose life, out of necessity, is fraught by social contradiction.

In order to overcome the opposition between universality/particularity and take the problem of ideology seriously, we need to develop a reconstructed and critically attuned form of universalism. Though it may seem counterintuitive to suggest that a critical *universal* history can overcome the opposition between universality and particularity, I argue that such a concept does precisely that. In order to expound such a critical universal history, I take a tripartite approach which draws on three traditions but is indexed primarily to two problems: the problem of negativity and the problem of ideology. First, I draw on the critical universalist strain of critical theory, exemplified by Theodor Adorno, Antonio-Vázquez-Arroyo, and Karen Ng. Second, I address the problem of negativity and I draw out the more positive conception of critical universal history in the work of Vivek Chibber. Third, I examine the role of universalism in Afro-Caribbean, anti-colonial critique via the work of C.L.R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon and Jean Paul-Sartre. By examining the operation of

universality in the context of Caribbean decolonization, I demonstrate that a critical reconstruction of universalism *through*, rather than indifferent to or exclusive of, particularity, is not only possible (as an examination of universal history in critical theory suggests) but already operative in the struggle for colonized liberation. Thus, inspired by their work I adapt the notion of universal history specifically to the critique of imperialism and 'rethink' universal history in service of the critique of colonialism as a constitutive practice of global capitalism.

Universal History as Ideology[153]

If, as we saw in the previous chapter, the de-naturalization of colonialist claims has been a staple of critiques of colonial discourse and practice across disciplines and traditions, then the critique of 'universalism' or the rejection of universality is on par as a central feature of this critique. The apparent opposition of universality and particularity appears in many forms in the justification of empire. To name but a few, it is evident in what so many have criticized in the alleged universal 'humanism' of the European Enlightenment and liberalism's abstract, formal disposition toward categories such as 'freedom' and 'equality.' As many (but not all) thinkers of the Western tradition constructed abstract and purportedly universal accounts of human flourishing, political emancipation, and the 'social contract,' their non-white, non-male counterparts both within and outside Western democracies benefited little, if at all. Furthermore, claims that reason and justice had finally come to reign over superstition, religious orthodoxy, and absolute political and social authority appear dubious not only outside continental boundaries but also within those limits, as the working masses, immigrants, and enslaved dwelling in Europe and North America found their lot unimproved and, often, worsened to meet the needs of an 'industrious' Europe.

The appearance of 'humanism' in the European tradition was predicated on a *falsely* universalizing, exclusive conception of the 'human,' one which not only remained indifferent to but, indeed, rationalized the colonial conditions of possibility for the livelihood of the 'Enlightened European.' The category's duplicity, for many, has been enough to condemn not only the *historical* appearance of universal categories but the possibility of liberatory or emancipatory uses of such categories *tout court*. That is, over and above the critique of instances

[153] Ideology, in this instance, does refer to obscuring function of the antinomy of particularity and universality in colonialist thinking. The maintenance of this opposition obscures the particularity of the purportedly universal European; moreover, it devalues particularity in order to rationalize the dominations the colonized in order to extract resources and labor. Thus, as I mentioned previously, the functionalist aspect of ideology has not been suspended, but rather the epistemic dimension added.

of false universalization, universality itself has been the object of varied criticism by critics of colonialism.[154]

Much of the post-/decolonial frameworks' criticism of 'universalism' emphasizes not only its institutional appearance in the European Enlightenment but also in its Hegelian-philosophical variety. When one hears the phrase 'universal history' it is often Hegel's formulation which quickly comes to mind. His infamous 'peoples without history' claim is perhaps the height of universalism's hypocrisy in a philosophical context. For many post-/decolonial thinkers the Hegelian version of 'universal history' demonstrates all that is wrong with the concept more generally. These same critics of Hegel often impute a similar, if not the same, view to Marx. This has deeply shaped these literatures' relation to Marxism and, indeed, to the Left in Europe and North America more broadly.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I insisted on a methodological continuity between Marx and Hegel and clarified some misconceptions pertaining to their philosophies of history. In those chapters, I insisted on avoiding reading them as either reducible to one another or in a simply 'inverse' relation. Regarding the category of universal history specifically, however, Hegel and Marx differ more considerably (though perhaps not in the manner their critics anticipate so readily). Marx never actually employs the term 'universal history.' Although, it is my contention that this is so because he was more interested in explicating the natural-historical as universal. Hegel, on the other hand, penned substantially more on this topic, much of which is reviled (not without reason) and much which is misunderstood. Indeed, a clarification of what is misread would require a project all its own.

Suffice it to say that 'universal history' for Hegel is something, at least analytically, distinct from 'world history.' The former refers to a philosophical-historiographical approach and the latter to the empirical course of history as a totality (albeit, an exclusionary and unequal one). This distinction, in fact, appears in the now-infamous Lectures on the Philosophy of History. In 'Reason in History,' when Hegel refers to 'universal history' as a sub-category of

[154] One conspicuous absence in this chapter concerns what is perhaps the most common appearance of universalism in politics today, namely liberal universalism. Liberal universalism is prominently represented in contemporary political philosophy by John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, and, Anthony Kwame Appiah, harkening in various ways to the tradition of liberal political theory of John Stuart Mill and John Locke. Given that this chapter is concerned with universalism *specifically with reference of critiques of capitalism and colonialism*, I have chosen to forego discussion of this tradition, since the debate that I construct here falls within the larger category of critiques of liberalism. Thus, it neither proves to be the most apt foil nor a valuable alternative, since it is perhaps the single most obvious referent for the 'false universality' characteristic of European modernity for all of the thinkers herein.

what he refers to *reflective* historiography. Reflective history, by definition, is a history "whose presentation goes beyond the present in spirit, and does not refer to the historian's own time" (LPH 6). For universal history, in particular, Hegel claims that "Especially important are the principles the author sets up for himself," which are dependent upon the historical event recounted and partly on their own mode of recounting (LPH 7). The concept does entail a wide scope, but it is not simply a question of scope and, more importantly, it is primarily a *methodological and historiographical* category. Thus, we can distinguish between the bulk of these lectures—wherein some of Hegel's most unacceptable claims are made in the name of 'world history'—and this historiographical category. Whether Hegel's own 'principles' in constructing the narrative of world history are adequate to his method laid out in the same lectures, is an important but distinct question. I do not rely on Hegel's formulation—precisely because it is primarily historiographical and so I am certainly not advocating for some uncomplicated 'return' to the Hegelian philosophy of history in reconstructing the category of universal history.[155]

Rather, the chapter is structured around two central questions: firstly, *what are the consequences of maintaining, explicitly or otherwise, the antithesis of particularity and universality for social critique* (especially of colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism)*?* Secondly, *how can we reconceive of this apparent opposition to meet these critiques' needs and in accordance with our present moment's own historical specificity?* In order to organize a response to this question, I define these theoretical tendencies as follows. **Particularism** denotes a privileging of the local and the specific, as well as the plural and the multiple against the unifying tendency of universal categories. Particularism sometimes grasps the social and historical specificities ignored by false pretensions to universality which function as justificatory discourses in liberalism and colonialism. **Universalism**, on the other hand, marks the prioritization of a shared humanity,

[155] Much in the same vein, I do not make any especially novel claims about the universalism of the Enlightenment, as some critical theorists have recently. As one possible response to anti-Enlightenment thought, thinkers such as John Israel have advocated for a re-imagining of the Enlightenment with attention to its more 'radical' elements (primarily Spinoza, in his view). Israel and other proponents of the 'radical Enlightenment' maintain that, rather than reject its values, we ought to realize what capitalism failed to, make the post-Enlightenment world live up to its explicit values of freedom, equality, etc. In more a still more 'radical' move, others working in this mode have insisted that the concept of 'radical Enlightenment is intended to highlight the ways that capitalist modernity not only has not but cannot live up to such values. See, for example, John Israel. *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Also, in more popular venues, the work of Landon Frim and Harrison Fluss. In a certain sense, Israel's re-imagining of the Enlightenment also anticipates the work of Nick Nesbitt. See, Nick Nesbitt. *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

often rooted in natural-historical claims about human beings. Universalism, in its liberal and colonialist forms, relies primarily on abstract categories which maintain a pretense of universality, even in the face of drastic material inequalities.

There is ample cause to be skeptical concerning 'universalist' claims which have often been portended by practices of enslavement, colonization, domination, and oppression. However, the criticism of *these* universalisms has been conflated with the criticism of universality *in general*. Such a theoretical move while liberatory in intent, maintains the classical opposition between universality and particularity. That is, post-/decolonial critiques of universalism often rely on the same logical antithesis as the rationalization of colonial and capitalist forms of domination; they are mediated by these systems' ideological presuppositions. Such mediation generates self-undermining results as the following critical examination aims to demonstrate.

Examples of Particularism in Decolonial Thought

Though distinct, both postcolonial and decolonial thinking share a tendency to emphasize the epistemic limits of falsely universal pretenses, these pretenses' exclusionary character, and, thus, the need for restoring epistemic dignity, epistemic agency, and a plurality of knowledges and politics. In decolonial thought specifically, thinkers like Mignolo and Grosfoguel have argued for alternatives to 'Western' universalism (and rationalism as a constitutive component of that universalism). We will review these alternatives in the following section of the chapter, but first we need to examine what constitutes the basis of decolonial thought's rejection of universal history and universalism more generally. In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo writes:

> Today, *a* world history or *a* universal history is an impossible task. Or perhaps both are possible but hardly credible. Universal histories in the past five hundred years have been embedded in global designs. Today, local histories are coming to the forefront and, by the same token, revealing the local histories from which global designs emerge in their universal drive. From the project of the *Orbis Universalis Christianum*, through the standards of civilization at the turn of the twentieth century, to the current one of globalization (global market), global designs have been the hegemonic project for managing the planet. (21)

Emphasizing that a *single* 'world' or 'universal history' is impossible, for Mignolo, universal history falls into the category of 'global designs,' whose primary limitation is precisely their scope and breadth of application. Moreover, it is on historically specific grounds that Mignolo insists on the increasing primacy of 'local histories.' It is 'history itself' that is propelling local

histories to the fore.[156] He reiterates this more clearly in his more recent work.[157] In his contribution to *Coloniality at Large*, Mignolo emphasizes that "If epistemology runs parallel to the history of capitalism, epistemology cannot be detached from or untainted by the complicity between universalism, racism, and sexism" (245). On this view, the challenge to universalism is primarily an epistemic one.

The critique of universalism in Mignolo's account needs to be understood in close relation to what he and others of the modernity/coloniality group refer to as "zero point epistemology".[158] It is to this 'zero point' approach that Mignolo attributes the violent subsumption of particularity to the pretense of universality:

> Since the zero point is always in the present of time and the center of space, it hides its own local knowledge universally projected. Its imperiality consists precisely in hiding its locality, its geo-historical body location, and in assuming to be universal and thus managing the universality to which everyone has to submit. (80).

The *singularity* of universal categories and concepts, Mignolo argues, is what makes 'zero point' approaches 'imperial.'[159] This perspective does not allow for the multiplicity of knowledge and experience that constitutes a global perspective, rather than a narrowly Eurocentric or ethnocentric one. For Mignolo, history itself its demonstrating the limits of this way of thinking as it moves from a 'unipolar' to 'multipolar' world. "All of us on the planet," he argues, "have arrived at the end of the era of abstract, disembodied universals—of universal universality".[160]

There is an important slippage in this formulation—the equivocation between universality and a 'disembodied' perspective—that needs to be addressed, but for now suffice it to say that such a view can hardly be attributed to Marxism, which has endured what is now centuries of critique for allegedly 'reducing' politics to the reproduction of bodily life. This relates to a larger problem of creating an equivalence between Christianity, liberalism, and

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156 See, Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 22: "Neoliberalism, with its emphasis on the market and consumption, is not just a question of economy but a new form of civilization. The impossibility or lack of credibility of universal or world histories today is not advanced by some influential postmodern theory, but by the economic and social forces generally referred to as globalization..."

157 Bernd Reiter, Ed. *Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). p. 92, 94, 104.

158 Walter Mignolo. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). p. 80.

159 See also, Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 68.

160 Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concept, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018). p. x.

Marxism on the basis of their apparently shared epistemic framework: Mignolo disregards the *content* of these approaches, which with brief examination are hardly as comparable as they seem. This problem of form and content and the generally formalistic arch of his epistemic intervention prove troublesome in other ways as well.

Rámon Grosfoguel's intervention, with a similar basis, offers a more detailed consideration of the limits of 'Western universalism.' This form of universality is characterized by a 'zero-point' view which results in an "abstract universalism" (89). This abstract universalism is abstract in two senses:

> [1] The first, in the sense of utterances, a knowledge which is detached from all spatio-temporal determination and claims to be eternal. 2) [...] The second in the epistemic sense of a subject of enunciation that is detached, emptied of body and content, and of its location within the cartography of global power from which it produces knowledge. (90)

In Grosfoguel's formulation it is easier to see that the opposition of particularity and universality is a constitutive feature of decolonial thought. Operating with these two components, acknowledge which emerges out of a specific "spatio-temporal determination" cannot, by definition be properly universal. The second component requires that one be conscious of one's particular location as a speaker in an epistemically uneven world, however it is unclear that this would *preclude* the content of the speech as being universal. This would seem to imply that whatever I speak 'from Latin America' cannot be applicable elsewhere, and vice versa. In short, Grosfoguel's characterization of so-called 'Western universalism,' does more than pose a challenge to the false universalization of European and imperial ideals, it prevents the possibility of a *universal utterance from a particular location* and, since *all* locations are particular, it disposes of universality *altogether*. This leaves us with recourse to nothing other than a radical epistemic particularism.

According to Grosfoguel, "any cosmopolitanism or global proposal that is constructed through the abstract universalism of the second type" (i.e., that does not insist on the particularity of the speaker's location) "will not be able to avoid becoming another global imperial/colonial design" (94). And, furthermore, "there can be no abstract universalism without epistemic racism" (95). We could easily concede a qualified version of these points; indeed, if as Grosfoguel claims one maintains that "universal reason and truth can only emerge through a White-European-masculine-heterosexual-subject, and if the only tradition of thought with this capacity for universality [...] is the Western tradition," then certainly

accepting this universalism is tantamount to apologizing and participating in Eurocentrism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, and racism (94). What Grosfoguel does not establish is that universalism *tout court* is necessarily tantamount to accepting this narrow understanding of epistemic legitimacy. Indeed, as I suggested in response to his initial taxonomy of 'abstract universalism,' there is much room to think about the construction of *universality through a particularity* which is neither clandestine nor exclusionary and, most importantly, is attuned precisely to the limits of the false universalism of capitalism and colonization, while nonetheless attentive to its very real and very violent processes of universalization.

Pluriversality, Diversality, and Multiversality as Particularism

As an alternative to universalism, decolonial thinkers have sketched concepts like 'plurversality,' 'multiversality,' and 'diversality' to insist on the need for multiplicity itself as a 'concrete universal' (as opposed to a Western abstraction).[161] Thus, the initial appearance of rejection is, in reality, more ambivalent. This ambivalence is symptomatic of still other tensions in their attempts to challenge 'singular' universalism, on the one hand, and insist on epistemic plurality on the other. The decolonial project's attempt to overcome the opposition between particularity and universality seems to be no overcoming at all, but a mere value-inversion. This reversal of epistemic authority, however, fails to seriously register a crucial problem with 'shifting the geography of reason': *the problem of ideology*. Decolonial thinkers take recourse to the project of epistemic decolonization, of shifting the geography of reason, or of epistemic 'de-linking,' these interventions, however, cannot attend to the problem of ideological consciousness (i.e., Latin American, Caribbean subjects who are complicit with or apologetic for the colonial project and its neo-colonial and neoliberal continuation).

"Pluriversality," Mignolo highlights, "[becomes] key argument for calling into question the concept of universality so dear to Western cosmology" (CTP x). Part and parcel of the pluriversal project, for Mignolo is the displacement of 'Western' or 'Eurocentric' epistemology in favor of a plurality of epistemic frameworks, especially emphasizing those which have been rendered inferior or 'subalternized'. Correcting the mystification of Eurocentric epistemology entails abandoning the 'myth' of detached or disembodied knowledge and embracing the situatedness of the knower. Indeed, writing of his own argument, he claims "It is not the report

[161]The distinction made by Mignolo concerns concrete and abstract universality, but although it nominally resembles the same distinction made by Hegel in the *Logic* or the *Philosophy of Right*, is unrelated to that formulation. Mignolo does not cite or critique Hegel on this score.

of the detached observer but the intervention that of a decolonial project that 'comes' from South America, the Caribbean and Latinidad in the U.S." ("Epistemic Disobedience" 163).[162] Speaking of the social sciences more broadly, but of anthropology in particular, Mignolo's pluriversal project recommends that we "'submit' to the guidance of Maori or Aymara anthropologists and engage with them in the decolonial option" (172). While this certainly represents an important counterpoint to the intellectual hubris of the social scientific research based in the West, to posit this as a rule raises critical questions. Indeed, Mignolo's own example highlights the limits of his position.

There is much reason to be suspicious of Western experts, given their historical tendency to promulgate domination as progress, torture as education, and abuse as spiritual advancement, but to generate an image of fixed spatial-epistemic positions neither undermines that history nor does develop the necessary critical response to its presuppositions. Mignolo's disproportionate emphasis on epistemic location can *neither* account for why a dominant knower might align themselves 'against their interests' *nor*, more importantly, why a marginalized knower may not think or act in her own interest, or for the good of her own people. Mignolo periodically acknowledges the limits of merely shifting the geography of reason *without prioritizing its content*:

> ...The enacting of the logic of coloniality in South America, hidden by the rhetoric of modernity, engenders de-colonial movements [...] And, of course, it may be the case of those [sic] who look for 'integration' and 'assimilation.' Nevertheless, we should not loose [*sic*] sight of the fact that the seed of de-linking and re-directing is there [...] Now, identity in politics means that it is not necessary to be Latino/as or Indigenous to embrace their project; in the same way that, it is not necessary to be white to embrace their project. Condoleezza Rice and Alberto Gonzalez are two clear examples.[163] ("Towards a Decolonial Horizon of Pluriversality," 54)

Although Mignolo acknowledges this (i.e., the problem of ideology among the oppressed), he neither takes seriously its wider implications for his predominantly epistemic framework nor considers takes seriously its scope and breadth. The problem is exemplified by Rice and Gonzalez, but for each of these exemplary cases there are thousands of knowers who—while

[162] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience," 163.
[163] Walter Mignolo, Mónica González García. "Towards A Decolonial Horizon of Pluriversality: A Dialogue with Walter Mignolo on and Around the Idea of Latin America." *Lucero*, 17.1 (2006): 38-55. p. 54.

speaking 'from' Latin America or the African diaspora—speak in favor of U.S. imperialism and of neo-colonial relations.

For Mignolo, the problem is an aberration. "Granted," Mignolo writes, "there are many locals in developing countries who, because of imperial and capitalist cosmology, were led to believe (or pretended they believed) that what is good for developed countries is good for underdeveloped as well" (173).[164] Acknowledging the many marginalized knowers have internalized the assumptions and valuations of modern, colonial capitalism, he nonetheless argues that "there is a good chance that Maoris would know what is good or bad for them better than an expert from Harvard or a white anthropologist from New Zealand" (173). *But what about the Western expert who—for no natural or ontologically fixed reason—arrives at the right conclusion about, following this example, the need to return usurped land to Maori peoples? Or, what about the native or indigenous person who wishes to 'leave the past in the past' and adopt white, Western norms?* To simply restore epistemic agency to marginalized knowers may in some cases be contrary to the very aim of the decolonial project and, moreover, there are occasions when Westerners do speak in the best interest of colonized peoples (though, of course, these occasions warrant greater suspicion).

Rámon Grosfoguel is more clearly attuned to this problem but, nonetheless, offers a somewhat ambivalent response. "The call for epistemic diversity [...] is not an 'epistemic liberal multiculturalism' where every subalternized epistemic identity is represented leaving intact the epistemic racist/sexist privilege of Western males".[165] Anticipating the object raised above, Grosfoguel responds with a much more qualified version of Mignolo's epistemic relocation, rejecting both "epistemic relativism" and "epistemic populism," he argues:

> Since not every "subalternized" subject or thinker from an "inferiorized" epistemology is already a critical thinker, "epistemic populism" must be rejected. The success of the system is precisely to make those who are socially below to think epistemically like those who are socially above. So we cannot use social location as the only criteria. Epistemic location is crucial here. What I am calling for is to take seriously the critical thinking produced by "subalternized" subjects from below as a point of departure to a radical critique of the hegemonic power structures and knowledge structures. (101)

[164] See also, Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 89.
[165] Ramón Grosfoguel. "Decolonizing Western Uni-versalisms: Decolonial Pluri-versalism from Aimé Césaire to the Zapatistas." *Transmodernity: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1.3 (2012): 88-104. p. 100.

Grosfoguel's conclusion is that "The 'pluri' as opposed to the 'uni' is not to support everything said by a subaltern subject from below, but a call to produce critical decolonial knowledge that is rigorous, comprehensive, with a worldly-scope and non-provincial".[166] Grosfoguel's more qualified account, however, reasons the same critical question albeit in a different form: *if we establish the 'production of critical decolonial knowledge' as our aim, then why not simply prioritize the aim rather than location of situatedness of the knower? If* merely *shifting the geography of reason will not achieve this aim—and he acknowledges that it cannot—then why pursue that shift (i.e., epistemic diversality) and not the aim directly, vis-à-vis the* content *of knowledge?*

Thus, Mignolo and Grosfoguel's readers are left with few options. If we abide by Mignolo's more location-based approach, which admits ideological consciousness only as an aberration or aside and not as a normatively significant problem, then we risk affirming even the most reactionary, conservative, and apologetic marginalized knowers. This is clearly not what Mignolo intends when he insists on epistemic diversity (i.e., diversality, pluriversality) as a decolonial imperative. Alternatively, if we accept Grosfoguel's account of what constitutes a 'critical decolonial knowledge' (which we should), then we are left wondering why the location of knowers and epistemic pluralism is central to the project at all, since it could conceivably be produced regardless of the location of the knower or speaker.

Mignolo and Grosfoguel's strongly framed criticisms of 'zero point' or 'God's eye view' epistemology insist on the necessity to displace 'abstract universalism' (though the term is only ever negatively defined as that which would unite what is fundamentally diverse).[167] However, when they describe what constitutes decolonial knowledge it is always predicated on a certain unity: "The decolonial paths have on thing in common: the colonial wound [...]".[168] There is a sense in which decolonial thought aspires to overcome the apparent opposition of universality and particularity, a moment in which it senses the limits of that opposition. Still, it contents itself with inverting the conventional valuation of these categories, privileging particularity over universality, 'local histories' over 'global designs,' and simultaneously hoping to provincialize Eurocentrism while ceding to it the quality of 'universality,' leaving to it a category that has long mobilized the struggle against colonialism and imperialism by and for the colonized.

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[166] Ibid., p. 102.
[167] Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, 234-235.
[168] Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience," 161.

Examples of Particularism in Postcolonial Theory

Without outright rejecting universality as such, Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*; which we briefly addressed in the previous chapter), is a paradigmatic case for considering the persistence of the opposition between universality and particularity in postcolonial critique. In the preface to the book's most recent edition, Chakrabarty introduces a clarification in response to some assessments of the project. He insists that his aim is to "[argue] not against the idea of universals as such but [emphasize] that the universal [is] a highly unstable figure, a necessary placeholder in our attempt to think through questions of modernity" (xiii). Indeed, he makes references to the chapter on Marx as evidence of this more nuanced approach (xiii). However, even as he qualifies his problematization of universality, he nonetheless maintains an opposition between the concrete/abstract, universal/particular:

> We glimpsed [universality's] outlines only as and when a particular usurped its place. Yet nothing concrete and particular could ever be the universal itself, for intertwined with the sound-value of a word like "right" or "democracy" were concept-images that, while (roughly) translatable from one place to another, also contained elements that defied translation [...] To provincialize Europe was then to know how universalistic thought was always and already modified by particular histories, whether or not we could excavate such pasts fully" (xiii)

> To "provincialize" Europe was precisely to find out how and in what sense European ideas that were universal were also, at one and the same time, drawn from very particular intellectual and historical traditions that could not claim any universal validity. It was to ask a question about how thought was related to place (xiii).

These passages seem to indicate a sensitivity to the reciprocal constitution of universal and particular. Yet, there is a key moment in Chakrabarty's retrospective that indicates no such overcoming has really been achieved. In spite of all his qualification, he nonetheless maintains that "nothing concrete and particular could ever be the universal itself," on account of its particularity to a specific location and social/cultural context (xiii). The opposition remains, for Chakrabarty, only at a more local level of his critique.

If *Provincializing Europe* is about destabilizing the false universalization of Europe, it is because Europe is a particular place and its ascendancy and dominance owed to a particular time. Thus, universality is neither stable nor transhistorical but, rather, local and provisional.

His inquiry into "how thought [is] related to place," thus, yields rather conclusive results: thought and places are fundamentally *bounded* to one another and what is 'universal' in European thought is only so by coincidence. Chakrabarty's introduction of apparent nuance is a kind of Motte-and-Bailey, wherein the outright rejection of universality (the bailey, as its scope is considerably harder to defend) is supplanted by the claim that all universals are, ultimately, particulars (the motte, as this is a kind of equivocal move which affects much the same as a rejection).[169] If at first, one encounters *PE* as an ostensible rejection of universalism and universal history, by the end one must temper that impression to read 'universals are really particulars too,' which both serves to bolster Chakrabarty's particularism and muddy the distinction between these categories rather than clearly repudiating one in favor of the other.

The more damaging results of Chakrabarty's denial of universality, however, come at a different register when it concerns the 'universalization' of capitalism, which is a central component of his critique of Marxism:

> No historical form of capital, however global its reach, can ever be a universal. No global (or even local, for that matter) capital can ever represent the universal logic of capital, for any historically available form of capital is a provisional compromise [...] The universal, in that case, can only exist as a place holder, its place always usurped by a historical particular seeking to present itself as the universal (70)

Chakrabarty is intent on distinguishing between capitalism's 'globalization' and its 'universalization.' Without denying that capitalism has, in fact, a global reach, he nonetheless claims that this is not sufficient to argue for its universalization, since for him the latter requires something more than planetary presence. This is the basis of Chakrabarty's claim that there are, in effect, 'two histories.' This distinction, the lynchpin of his critique of 'historicism,' allows us to clarify what precisely the term 'universalization' could mean for Chakrabarty and thus, gives a keener insight into what the concept's limitations ultimately are, in his view.

In Chakrabarty's view, we can describe two histories (History 1 and History 2). These two histories have distinct functions and contents. *History 1 (H1)* is "a past posited by capital itself as its precondition," in other words, it is "the universal and necessary history we associate with capital" (PE 63). In contrast, *History 2 (H2)* includes those things that "do not belong to capital's life process [...] does not contribute to the self-reproduction of capital" (64). *History*

[169] The Motte-and-Bailey logical fallacy consists of, at first, forwarding a broad, sweeping and generally less defensible claim and, upon being challenged, forwarding a weaker, qualified version of the initial claim.

1, according to Chakrabarty endeavors to destroy or obscure *History 2*. Indeed, he argues that even "the disciplinary process in the factory is in part meant to accomplish the subjugation/destruction of History 2" (67). What *H1* aspires to subordinate are features of *H2* which "allow[s] us to make room [...] for the politics of human belonging and diversity. [Which] gives us the ground on which to situate our thoughts about multiple ways of being human and their relationship to the global logic of capital" (67). "Nothing," according to Chakrabarty "is automatically aligned with capital" (66). Thus, the difference and heterogeneity characteristic of *H2* is not only *not* a part of "capital's life process," but, in fact, *H2* is "a category charged with the function of constantly *interrupting* the totalizing elements thrusts of History 1" (66, my emphasis). Chakrabarty is doing far more than introducing a distinction (and certainly not one given by Marx, in any case, as he claims). He is insisting that the opposition of H1 and H2 *logically entails* the claim that H2 is *necessarily* resistant to capitalism. Chakrabarty is this making a move quite comparable to that of Mignolo and Grosfoguel: the 'colonial difference' is *not only a necessary but also sufficient condition* for resisting capitalism.

The stakes of this become clearer if we have a sense of what properly 'counts' as *H2*, for Chakrabarty. *H2*, in his view, is made up of those particular social and cultural elements which are apparently heterogeneous to the logic of capital, i.e. "historical difference." This can refer to religious or cultural traditions that are not associated with secular modernity, communal relations not bound to atomistic individualism, and culturally specific 'ways of being'. Thus, his opposition between *H1* and *H2* is an opposition between the generalizing tendency of capitalism (not least of all, globalization) and the specificity of experience in relation to that tendency (e.g., religious identity, culturally specific ways of relating and belonging, culturally specific ways of understanding interests or individuality). These heterogenous elements, according to Chakrabarty, a) evidence that capitalism is not, in reality, universal and b) the primary sites of global capitalism. Chakrabarty simply does not acknowledge the possibility that capital might integrate these heterogenous elements *differently*, in order to allow for the extraction surplus-value in a variety of circumstances.[170]

These 'two histories' reflect a crucial feature of Chakrabarty's earlier work in *Rethinking Working Class History*. In this case, the opposition of H1 and H2, is portended by a stronger

[170] Chibber's critique of Chakrabarty on this point is, in my view, summary (whatever his characterization's other weaknesses). For this more full-fledged critique of Chakrabarty's allegedly resistant H2 See, Chibber, pp. 211-219.

and more profound claim to the incommensurability between grasping 'interests' in the reproduction of bodily life and their expression in cultural specificity:

> Needs [and] 'utility,' the celebrants of political economy will tell us, is the key to the secrets of consciousness. Yet it empties 'culture' of all specific content. Serving the 'needs of survival' is a function universal to all cultures in all historical settings. This functionalist understanding can never be a guide to the internal logic of a culture, the way it constructs and uses its 'reason' (211).

Not unlike Grosfoguel's critique of 'political economy paradigms,' Chakrabarty's critique presupposes that to describe the 'interests' or motivations of workers in India (to keep with his example) in terms of their basic material needs robs historical reflection on the workers' cultural experiences.[171] That is, political economy cannot give us insight into the "internal logic of a culture" and, thus, necessarily obscures that particularity and subsumes it to universal analytical categories. This begs the question, however: is this *necessarily* the case? Chakrabarty has only asserted that universality and particularity constitute an opposition, but this hardly establishes why, for example, the 'internal logic of a culture' (assuming we accept this idea) *should* be the sole or even primary benchmark for analytical or critical efficacy. In order to avoid the conundrum of 'moral relativism' faced by liberal multiculturalism. Or, more importantly, to avoid a both cultural essentialism and the conservative isolationism that often accompanies it. While it *is* crucial that a critical framework be capable of attending to specificity, Chakrabarty has given us little reason why *inattention to universally shared needs* is a necessary feature of critique.

This view is not unique to Chakrabarty. Indeed, we can read Partha Chatterjee's rejection of universalism and universal history as speaking to an equally important but different aspect of the problem.[172] For Chatterjee (as for Fanon, although to a very different end), the categories of universality and particularity are mapped onto questions of nationalism and internationalism, though such a transposition is hardly a seamless one, as he highlights in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World.*[173] Chatterjee shares Chakrabarty's worry about emphasizing what is universally shared. Moreover, he is skeptical about what he calls the

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[171] See Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," 65-77.

[172] To translate Chakrabarty's vocabulary into another of his colleague's, we might say that *H1* is "universal history" (for postcolonial thought this is tantamount to: Eurocentric, Enlightenment-based, developmentalist) and *H2* is "subaltern history," epitomizing the opposition between universality and particularity in historical thinking.

[173] Partha Chatterjee. *Nationalist Thought and the Postcolonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

'bourgeois-rationalist' presumptions of universal history. Echoing the criticisms of both Mignolo and Grosfoguel, the trouble with such presumptions is fundamentally *epistemic*:

> [...] The problem of nationalist thought becomes the particular manifestation of a much more general problem, namely, the problem of bourgeois-rationalist conception of knowledge, established in the post-Enlightenment period of European intellectual history, as the moral and epistemic foundation for a supposedly universal framework of thought which perpetuates, in a real and not merely metaphorical sense, a colonial domination. It is the framework of knowledge which proclaims its own universality; its validity, it pronounces, is independent of cultures. Nationalist thought, in agreeing to become 'modern,' accepts the claims to universality of this 'modern' framework of knowledge. (11)

Not only is the problem of universality primarily epistemic, for Chatterjee, but this problem presents itself in the arena in the struggle for decolonization (and not decoloniality) in a somewhat counterintuitive way: *nationalism is too universalist*, i.e., too compatible with the universalist discourse of 'bourgeois-rationalism.' Anti-colonial nationalism takes for granted the universality of Europe's development (i.e., progression through phases culminating in the unification of a sovereign nation-state) and, moreover, accepts the basic epistemic features of the colonialist framework.

Following this logic, the aspiration toward national independence tacitly affirms the cartographical carving up of the post-Westphalian world and insists on homogeneity of the world's places and peoples, overriding any extant social and political models which reflect the particularities of a given culture. While one could reasonably object on the basis of a kind of genetic fallacy or even a certain degree of victim-blaming, the critique of this position I would like forward here pertains to the internal logic of Chatterjee's epistemological objections to anti-colonial nationalism. To judge anti-colonial militants operating at a decisive strategic disadvantage as mere shadows of European political concepts it to misleadingly construe the terrain of anti-colonial struggle as an equal one and to reproach that militancy for not reinventing concepts while trying to also defend against the violent expropriation of the soil beneath their feet.

In Chatterjee's understanding, the similarity between the universal claims made by anti-colonial movements and those governing the sovereignty of European nations amounts to a

kind of conformism, or a kind of internalization of European standards by the colonized.[174] Given Chatterjee's privileging of the epistemic aspects of the narrativization of colonialism, this evaluation of anti-colonial universalism is perhaps unsurprising. However, since Chakrabarty's argument for modifying historiography is hinged on this emphasis, it is unexpected that he defaults to an intervention which relies on the purported epistemic and political advantages of writing history from 'the point of view of the peasant,' relying on a kind of standpoint epistemology that would make his first position (i.e., that decolonization appropriate European norms of national sovereignty) untenable:

> [...] The argument of the Subaltern Studies group of historians has been that by studying the history of peasant rebellions from the point of view of the peasant as an active and conscious subject of history, one obtains access into that aspect of his consciousness where is he autonomous, undominated [...] In principle, this is a different project from a history of peasant struggles in India. The semantic difference signifies a quite radical difference in the approach to historiography [...] The framework of this other history does not take as given its appointed place within the order of universal history, but rather submits the supposedly universal categories to a constant process of interrogation and contestation, modifying, transforming, and enriching them" (167-168)

For Chatterjee, universal history is supplanted by this perspectival shift. What is unchanged, however, is that his insight fails to register the possible content of these categories.

When appraising anti-colonial nationalism, Chatterjee implies that this position entails the internalization of a 'European' universalism (which is in fact particularism, though this equivocation is not registered), in spite of his recognition that it "It thus simultaneously rejects and accepts the dominance, both epistemic and moral, of an alien culture".[175] This 'double bind' of anti-colonial nationalism is primarily construed in terms of its supposedly uncritical adoption of Western nationalisms. Inversely, the 'perspective of the peasant' is upheld as a preferable alternative to an instrumental or modified nationalism, but without consideration for how peasants might adopt dominant norms or lack the epistemic resources to challenge 'supposedly universal categories.' Peasants, like any other group—both oppressed and not—are not insulated from ideological consciousness or mystification by virtue of social difference and certainly not by virtue of being severely exploited and dehumanized.[176] The problem of

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[174] Partha Chatterjee. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
[175] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 11.
[176] Here we see that the rejection of universality seems to require some of the basic components of a theory of

ideology is once again quickly deferred.

The basic gesture of these epistemically focused interventions from post-/decolonial thinkers are, to a certain extent, understandable. One can hardly reproach an effort to reclaim and dignify that which has been violently repressed, denied, and discredited by the justificatory discourses and practices of the colonial project. However, as I have tried to show in this section, dismantling assumptions about epistemic, political, and social legitimacy which derive from colonization and imperialism is one thing. The simple affirmation of that which has been repressed, abused, and denied, however, is another. Indeed, much the same concern motivating the desire for critical self-reflection on the part of anti-colonial strategy and practice (subaltern studies thinkers suggest are insufficiently self-conscious or critical of their appropriation of European norms), should motivate us to question whether particularism, especially if it is epistemically ground, can provide a meaningful alternative to the fraught conditions under which the critique of colonialism is formed. The problem of ideology—i.e., the problem of thought's mediation by the imperatives of an antagonistic global whole— is thus neither an epiphenomenon nor an aberration. To simply 'side' with those who have been excluded and harmed and whose understanding is developed in the midst of capitalist and colonialist contradictions. To forego consideration of systematic ideological mediation is to forego the development of a praxis which can wrest free of them. It is the dialectical relation between universality and particularity—characteristic of universal history *as critique*—that can do just that.

Universal History as Critique

In the first part of the chapter, we examined post-/decolonial rejections of universality, all of which were formulated with the intention of critiquing a dominant universal: i.e., colonialism, global capitalism. We also saw that these rejections of universality did not accomplish this critique, insofar as they remain beholden to some of colonial rationalization's most basic assumptions. However, the rejection of universality or, inversely, the acceptance of formal, liberal universalism are not our only options. In fact, critical theory and anti-colonial

ideology but neither explicitly states this nor consistently applies those components to all categories of knowers. We saw this previously in Mignolo's rebuttal to opponents of 'de-linking' from the state and corporations reads as a diagnosis of ideological consciousness, in not so many words: "I would suspect that you are still caught in the spider's web of the rhetoric of modernity and in preserving the disenchantment of the world" (*Local Histories/Global Designs*, 111).

critique have long exhibited an alternative to these options—avoiding both the problem of ideal generalizations in the face of objective contradiction and the retreat into nativism and racial essentialism. These alternative conceptions require clarification and only then provide us with some crucial tools for thinking universal history *critically and concretely*.

The reader may now be wondering: *but, what if not an abstract and unduly homogenizing category of historical analysis is universal history?* History can be understood as 'universal' in at least two senses. On the one hand, there is a transhistorical, descriptive sense in which we can trace the trajectory of human history. This sense of 'universal history' captures what is true of all human societies: the reproduction of life and its constitutive role in human social organization. This history is universal insofar as it grasps what is shared, although not homogenously expressed or organized, by all human societies. It tracks the universal interests of human beings and, thus, grounds the critique of a second 'universal history.' Universal history also registers a historically specific form of universality: capitalist/imperialist totalization, the production of a falsely veiled particularity which has not only globalized but thoroughly mediated and structured society at a global level, including in vastly differential and heterogeneous ways. Together, with the former supporting the critique of the latter, these two aspects constitute a two-pronged approach to the concept of universal history, one which is neither additive nor artificially homogenizing.

On this score, it is important to recall some prior discussion of the category of 'totality'. This category is central for understanding universality both in its transhistorically and historically specific senses. It ought not be confused with a simple philosophical 'holism' which emphasizes an empirical, coherent whole. Indeed, a critical conception of totality is distinct in that the social whole is understood to have *cohesion without coherence*. The social totality, in the form of an antagonistic society, contains (but cannot resolve) social contradictions in order to main its own reproduction as a form of society and a form of life. The category of totality does more than additively or cumulatively describe social phenomena; it interrogates the capacity for the totality to contain heterogeneous and contradictory elements without being torn asunder. This is crucial, too, for a critical conception of universal history, which can only be critical if it holds together these two moments: first, that human beings reproduce their lives materially and socially in ways that constitute a social totality and, second, that in its present, specific form this totality is contradictory (and, in fact, does not serve the aim of the reproduction of human life). It must take stock of the way that capitalist

imperialism's contradictions are a distortion of a transhistorical, universal aspect of human sociality.

Universal history, if it is to be a critical enterprise, must *neither* confine itself to merely describing the varied forms of human beings reproducing their life and relations in a 'positive' sense *nor* can it be exclusively restricted to negatively apprehending the dominant universal. In order to critique the dominant universal and, from that critique, infer alternative forms of life that serve human ends, it is necessary to both admit the universality of social metabolism and critique its current instantiation in its capitalist-imperialist form. Moreover, universality cannot be tantamount to a description of either simple unity or irreducible differentiation. In its ideological form, universal history falsely homogenizes the historical object in an effort to make the socially contradictory world conform to a concept free of contradiction.

This ideological tendency appears not only in crass historical forms of universalism (which is, in reality, only a disguised particularism) but also in liberal universalism and cosmopolitanism, such as that expressed by Rawls or Appiah.[177] These forms of universalism articulate universal ideal values without taking seriously the conditions for those ideals' realization. It is crucial that a critical conception of universal history does not superimpose unity or homogeneity where none exists (including doing so in the formulation of social and political ideals), but it is equally crucial that the unitary condition of global capitalism is not mistaken because of its varied and differential appearance.

Much opposition to universal history has been on the basis of its exclusionary character and much critical theory has been criticized for its failure to address itself to the critique of colonialism. Both problems can be redressed by reformulating universal history *as critique*, one which is not merely 'inclusive' (i.e., just 'adding' previously excluded nations to the framework which is otherwise unchanged) but, rather, one which is actually capable of grasping not only the contradictions of the dominant universal (i.e., capitalist imperialism) but also undermining its pretense to universality in the service of real, universal human interests.

Approaches to Universal History in Critical Social Theory

Following the tradition of Frankfurt school critical theory, there have been a few attempts to rethink the category of universal history. These formulations tend to derive their central inspiration from Adorno's thinking about the category, both as it relates and diverges

[177] Kwame Anthony Appiah. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (London: W.W. Norton, 2010. John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

from the Hegelian paradigm (e.g., Antonio Vazquez-Arroyo, Karen Ng). This cluster of scholarship aligns with the basic methodological commitments of the Frankfurt school although in some cases, it diverges in terms of subject matter. These attempts to reconsider the critical import of universal history tend to emphasize a kind of *negative universality*, one which is largely defined by its opposition to the dominant universal (i.e., global capitalism). Thus, following Marx, the concept is not developed for its own sake, as something merely descriptive, but as an element of critique itself. However, this approach to the category of universal history does not preclude the possibility of a more 'positive' understanding of that concept and, in fact, may implicitly presupposes this more affirmative sense in an effort to critique the dominant universal.

Recently scholars reflecting on the tradition of postcolonial theory aiming to develop a critical conception of universal history have led with a more *positive universality*, invoking a shared human interest and shared material needs to ground a critique of capital's universalization (e.g., Vivek Chibber). Though not without attention to the false, distortive, or violent forms of universalization, this tendency errs on the side of positive universality in response to questions of particularity and cultural essentialism that have often precluded the claim to a universally identified (but not homogenous) 'humanity.'

This recent attempt to envision universal history anew is closer to its appearance in the Afro-Caribbean, anti-colonial tradition, wherein we encounter attempts to overcome the opposition of particularity and universality in response to the dehumanization wrought by racism, colorism, enslavement, and colonization (e.g., Aimé Césaire, Franz Fanon, C.L.R. James), which also broaches universality in a more positive sense. These attempts, as evidenced by debates within the Negritude movement and amongst scholars of the Haitian Revolution, are further subdivided by claims about the coincidence or rupture of non-dominant universality with the purportedly universal ideals of the European Enlightenment. For some scholars, the realization of universality is the fulfillment of a failed promise from the European context and, for others, the claim that non-Europeans might 'realize' ideals modeled on European experience are unduly assimilative and locate the former colonies in a derivative relation to the colonizer.

This chapter is an attempt to perform such a reconstruction to demonstrate the concept's critical import in the critique of capitalist imperialism and the ongoing projects of accumulation and colonization. Thus, I take the explicit—though minimal—account of

'negative universal history' offered by Adorno as a kind of organizing concept to arrange these somewhat heterogeneous elements. Adorno's formulation is helpful insofar as it draws together the various elements of philosophy of history in its critical mode (e.g., natural history, universal history, the critique of ideology) and because, following Marx's lead, its character is not contemplative but rather oriented toward a critique of society.

Universal History in Frankfurt School Critical Theory

In his *History and Freedom* lectures, Adorno sketches a benchmark for how to think universal history as a critical concept, this first and foremost entails overcoming the classical opposition of universality/particularity.[178] Moreover, his remarks gesture toward a critical conception of universal history that is capable of undermining the ideological obfuscation produced by the dominant universal. However, his conceptual articulation is only a preliminary indication of what a critical universal history should look like. Much of Adorno's formulation is shaped by the *rejection* of universal history (especially its Hegelian variant), rather than a reconstitution of the concept. In spite of its minimal explication, this formulation is well-suited to our present historical juncture which is characterized by a tendency to eschew universal claims.[179] Adorno, in contrast insists on the indispensability of the category of universal history, even as he does not develop it fully. In spite of this penchant for the negative, however, Adorno does not align himself with Benjamin's more general rejection of historical materialism.[180]

Adorno's conception of universal history is disproportionately negative in the sense that it is primarily formulated to counteract an intellectual disposition which has too quickly dispensed with the category of universality and, more importantly, as a critique of the dominant universal.[181] This is succinctly expressed when Adorno claims that "universal history exists precisely to the same degree as the principle of particularity [...] the principle of antagonism, persists and perpetuates itself" (*HF* 14). Universality is primarily constituted in its function as a counterweight to the prevailing universal, to the false universalization of capital's particular interest in its own perpetuation. The need for the category of universality in critique

[178] Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 10-19; 34-38; 40-48.
[179] Ibid., 79-89.
[180] Ibid., 90: "'Universal history' (i.e., historicism) 'has no theoretical armoury.' Well, that is not something that can be said of Marxism. Despite Benjamin's strong sympathy for Marxism, particularly in his late phase, it is astonishing to see just how undeveloped his knowledge of Marxist theory is."
[181] Ibid., 91-93.

is primarily (if not exclusively) to match domination's universalization and to make critique adequate to its object. This is most famously articulated in his claim that "No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the atom bomb" (ND 320). Still further emphasis is placed on the negatively derived need for a universal history when Adorno insists on the reciprocal determination of continuity and discontinuity, where both are indexed to the false, historically specific universal.[182]

Clarifying the precise character of Adorno's thinking on universal history is further complicated by its variable appearance within his corpus. As Brian O'Connor points out, "Adorno's conception of the challenge of universal history takes different forms in the course of his career".[183] His disposition toward this challenge in the before the war "might be construed as radical hermeneutics, one which sets out to demonstrate the failure of the philosophical pretension to have achieved a totalistic grasp of the world".[184] In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, his view is similar but distinctly marked with a readiness to embrace the category of totality (in the negative) more fully, in order to "explore the destructive evolution of modernity".[185] The "positions developed before and after the war overlap at important points," notes O'Connor, "leading to some tensions within Adorno's theory of history which become particularly evident in his critique of the idea of universal history".[186]

Although Adorno ostensibly insists on universal history's being conceived in *negative* terms, his account is unintelligible without more affirmative dimensions of universality. This is not in terms of the content of 'progress' or historical optimism but, rather, in that to critique the dominant universal a certain conception of objective continuity (exemplified in his concept of natural history) is required. Thus, when he claims that history consists of a "unity of continuity and discontinuity," this refers not only to continuous modes of domination, since identifying those modes also implies a continuous understanding of human beings as natural-historical beings, capable of social relations not reducible to their distorted form of under capitalism. The concept of natural history preserves the primacy of the metabolic relation that can be traced through a variety of historically specific social formations.

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[182] Ibid., 92.
[183] Brian O'Connor. *Adorno* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2012). p. 2.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Ibid.

Drawing on Adorno, Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo offers us four possible ways to think critically about universal history, some but not all of which abide by Adorno's ostensibly strong negativism and all of which clarify the multidimensional character of the category.[187] Similarly, beginning from vantage of the rejection of the category (as Adorno does in the *History and Freedom* lectures), he parses out the following possible readings:

> (1) universal history can signify the history of the universal, an account of the travails of universality, its changing meanings in the non-European, as well as within the European, world; (2) or as the universal dimension of history, a conceptual elucidation of the centrality of history (*Historie* not *Gechichte*) in the human condition accounting for different variations; (3) a spatially and temporally differentiated narrative of the dialectic of non-identity between universal and particular in singular events with the planet as its primary locus; (4) yet another possibility is that universal history alerts us to the productive intersection between the moment of universality of the structuring imperatives in capitalism, for instance, and the contingency of its particular historical manifestations, an intersection in which the different manifestations of the universal—the real, fictive, and ideal—can be critically apprehended and discerned. The last formulation adumbrates a self-effacing concept of universal history, but whose effacement is the upshot of dialectical mediation (454-455).

These different senses of the term 'universal history' reflect its numerous historical and political uses. It is the third and fourth senses, however, that draw together the descriptive and normative aspects of a historically situated universality. Universal history, in the fourth sense, apprehends the reciprocal determination of historical particularity and universality; it emphasizes the construction of universality in response to the dominant universal. This emphasis allows the critical theorist to view that dominant universal in its varied and differential appearance as well as those contingent, historical incidents of non-coincidence (i.e., sense three). For Vázquez-Arroyo, this universality is thus 'self-effacing,' insofar as it is constructed in response to the dominant universal. His elaboration of the concept is developed as direct response to the Hegelian conception which, in his view, overestimates the identity of particular and universal and which posits a descriptive notion of historical progress.

For Vázquez-Arroyo part of the task of universal history is to "[lend] voice to the suffering of the defeated" in history.[188] That is, the negativity of a concept like negative universal history is an expression of a political attunement to historical suffering. "If there is

[187] Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo. "Universal History Disavowed: On Critical Theory and Postcolonialism." *Postcolonial Studies*, 11.4 (2008): 451-473.
[188] Ibid., p. 459, 461.

any concrete basis to the moment of continuity in Adorno's idea of universal history, it is in the continuation of human suffering," according to Vázquez-Arroyo.[189] This explicit emphasis on negativity as suffering notwithstanding, Vázquez-Arroyo *presupposes* a shared human need and interest in ending this suffering, a claim which already entails a more affirmative sense of universality than what is foregrounded in his work.

When he speculates that continuity could be nothing other than the continuity of historical violence and misery (following Adorno's now famous 'slingshot to atom bomb' formulation), he fails to fully theorize a universal dimension (shared human needs and interests) which normatively grounds his critique of the suffering caused by the dominant universal. This aspect of the account is understandable, if only to avoid the vulgar positivism or the naïve utopianism which can accompany the mere restatement of the fact that all human beings share certain interests (without accounting for how those interests objectively diverge and are divided). However, accounting for universality in this way is not sufficient for a critical account of universal history; it is simply not the whole story.

Understanding Adorno's relation to Hegel quite differently, Karen Ng's explication of (negative) universal history relies on a continuity between these thinkers. Her account comes somewhat closer to a fuller conception of universality (both negative and not). For Ng, Hegel and Adorno share two critical frameworks: "The first is a form of critical naturalism that Adorno discusses under the heading of 'natural history'; the second is an understanding of the relation between the particular and the universal in terms of negativity".[190] Unlike Vázquez-Arroyo, Ng construes this theoretical relation with a strong emphasis on continuity. On her account, "both Hegel and Adorno identify two paradigmatic oppositions in universal history: the opposition between history and nature and the opposition between universal and particular".[191] Although she is careful to qualify that this does not consist of defending Hegel's openly racist remarks, Ng maintains a more direct commitment to 'learning' from Hegel's understanding of universal history. Whereas for Hegel the 'end' (*Endzweck)* of history is "the realization of universal consciousness of freedom for all; for Adorno (surely a more consistent negativist than Hegel), it is the prevention of total catastrophe and self-annihilation—both sides of the conscious development of species-life must be held together, and neither claim

[189] Ibid., p. 461.
[190] Karen Ng. "Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History: The Dialectics of Species-Life" in *Creolizing Hegel*. Ed. Michael Monahan (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017). p. 114.
[191] Ibid., p. 123.

can be concretely grasped without the other" (129).[192] The two critical frameworks which Hegel and Adorno share must be comprehended together in order to maintain the critical, normative force of the concept.

Thus, Ng's account, even as it remains a kind of introduction to re-envisioning universal history, draws together two crucial elements of that category which, in the previous chapter, I have tried to establish was central not only for countering the idealist tendencies characteristic of its classical formulation but, moreover, to demonstrate how many structural critiques of colonialism and capitalism are *already* portended by an understanding of a *universally shared human condition*: the reproduction of bodily life in and through social relations. Thus, what a natural-historical critique (what Ng would call 'critical naturalism') achieves, then, is one moment in a dialectical overcoming of two reified and ideological oppositions: the opposition of history and nature, the opposition of particularity and universality. This is more explicit in her account but, ultimately, is shared by Vázquez-Arroyo. Indeed, like Ng, Vázquez-Arroyo connects Adorno's views on history to *The German Ideology*, specifically to the passage where Marx writes about the inseparable 'two sides' of history (the history of nature and the history of humankind).[193]

In Ng's account she offers some important examples which demonstrate that her negative approach to universality is not entirely negative and, in fact, relies on a more affirmative understanding of how the category of 'human' as a universal has been put to work in the critique of colonialism. In concluding she cites the work of Frantz Fanon to demonstrate what she means when she refers to the necessity of holding together the "dereification thesis" and what she calls the "dialectic of enlightenment thesis," i.e., the tasks of demystifying what has been falsely naturalized and also accounting for a longer trajectory of human beings' relation to nature, which hitherto has been distorted by the domination of nature.[194] Although she ostensibly emphasizes the negative in these examples, what she highlights in them (especially in the case of Fanon) is not reducible to a strictly 'negative' approach to universality. For example, when describing Fanon, she writes: "Fanon decries a particular conception of the human-species in the very name of the human-species, an act whose apparent circularity does not undermine either its political or normative force".[195] Fanon's invocation of humanity

[192] Ibid., p. 129.
[193] Vazquez-Arroyo, "Universal History Disavowed," 463. Ng, "Hegel and Adorno," 398.
[194] Ng, "Hegel and Adorno," 123.
[195] Ibid., p. 128.

as a universal category, against its falsely universal expression by European supremacy, is not merely a negation of *false* universality it is a claim to a *truer* universality. Thus, while his critique is formulated in a negative relation to the dominant universal it nonetheless contains an affirmative dimension. In light of this, we must conclude that Ng's insistence on 'negativity' is primarily a question of emphasis rather than a radical aversion to positive assertion. This is further bolstered by Ng's insistence on the centrality of species-being which, in Marx, is anything but a 'negative' concept.[196]

While the disruption of dominant historical narratives is certainly a crucial step in any critical theory, it cannot be the only step, as I tried to show in Chapters 1 and 2. As Adorno once wrote, "centering theory around reification, a form of consciousness, makes the critical theory idealistically acceptable to the reigning consciousness and to the collective unconscious…We can no more reduce dialectics to reification than we can reduce it to any other isolated category, however polemical" (*ND* 190). While the emphasis on negativity in Adorno, Ng, and Vázquez-Arroyo is a necessary component for thinking universal history as critique, even their 'negativist' accounts entail a certain positive universality (e.g., the universality of material interests).[197] Thus, when Ng writes that "we understand the meaning and significance of the human species when the universal appears in the form of a negative" she emphasizes the historically specific negativity of a critical conception of universality (129). And when Vázquez-Arroyo forwards a "self-effacing concept of universal history" he, following Adorno, stresses the eliminable and contingent character of universal history. Taking after Adorno whose articulation of universality is largely pejorative (i.e., referring to the dominant or 'bad' universal) these thinkers share a tendency to think of universality as

[196] See, Ng "Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History," 129.

[197] In her recent work on the philosophy of history in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Huseyinzadegan claims that "Adorno and Horkheimer do not simply offer a regressive or a negative philosophy of history" (468). Her claim, however, pertains to negativity in its more colloquial sense (i.e., when it refers to pessimism or nihilism). Her reconstruction of Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy of history, like Vazquez-Arroyo's account of universality, strongly emphasizes the role of suffering (469-470). In order to overcome the apparent opposition of necessity and contingency in historical thinking (a necessary and important task), Huseyinzadegan argues that "this can only be achieved through a dialectical re-interpretation of history that is aimed at retrieving what Adorno calls the 'sphere of facticity,' a main example of which I here take to be the actual pain and suffering in history" (470). However, even this 'facticity' of suffering must presuppose a certain universally shared human, metabolic condition for such a facticity to be intelligible. Thus, the 'sphere of facticity' or the material basis of Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy of history is not reducible to fact of suffering but, rather, entails a universal standard for what suffering is and how it is possible. Dilek Huseyinzadegan. Between Necessity and Contingency: A Critical Philosophy of History in Adorno & Horkheimer's Dialectic of Enlightenment." *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22.2 (2018): 469-488.

constructed specifically for the purpose of "the prevention of total catastrophe and self-annihilation" (129).[198]

These accounts aim to counter the classical tendency to construe universality as a purely positive trajectory of progressive development (especially as expressed by Hegel), a task which is necessary for a critical re-conception of this notion and they are quite obviously formulated in a relation of negation to capital's universalization. However, their distinct focus on this negative construal does not articulate the transhistorical and, indeed, naturally-necessary aspect of universality which constitutes the basis of that negation: transhistorical, universal human interest in the reproduction of life and unalienated sociality. This transhistorical sense of universality is, of course, not rejected in the more negativist accounts but neither is it sufficiently foregrounded.

We can anticipate a few motivations for the distinctive emphasis on negativity: firstly, there is a broad tension in the tradition of Frankfurt School (between the so-called 'first' and 'third generations') concerning the normative grounding of social critique, which has historically centered on the apparent opposition of negativity and positivity (see Chapter 5); secondly, there is a wider tendency within critical political theory and political philosophy to eschew substantive claims about universality (especially when they pertain to human characteristics as the basis of politics, hence the wide range of critiques of political 'essentialism'); thirdly, there is a very real danger in merely asserting that human beings, history, nature, or any other category simply has x or y universally (regardless of the historical conditions of the utterance), since the articulation of that positive element risks either reproducing the ideological assumptions of the 'prevailing universal'. It has long been understood by critical theorists that simply stating empirical facts about human beings in the context of a contradictory and antagonistic society does not account for the ways that these tensions mediate even our most well-intentioned utterances about a common humanity.

[198] We cannot conclude this brief survey without alluding the work of Susan Buck-Morss, whose work represents a watershed moment in this modest renaissance of the concept of universal history. "The definition of universal history" which emerges in this text, is that "rather than giving multiple, distinct cultures equal due, whereby people are recognized as part of humanity indirectly through the mediation of collective cultural identities, human universality emerges in the historical event at the point of rupture" (133). This "experience of historical rupture as a *moment* of clarity, temporary by definition" (147). While I am generally sympathetic to her call for a revisiting of the notion of 'universal history,' I am deeply skeptical of her own model for thinking the category. To locate universality in a moment of "historical rupture," without attention to the *content, conditions, or outcome* of that rupture is to *a priori* privilege a politics of contestation which, without these considerations, could very well apply to movements and parties which are anything but liberatory. Susan Buck-Morss. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2009).

However, their emphatic 'negativism' is perhaps not quite what it initially appears to be.

These features of contemporary thought indicate that an emphasis on a strictly 'negative' account of universality is partly a response to these real theoretical problems and also, perhaps, an overcorrection that was intended to account for the mediation of critical thought. That is, in accounting for thought's mediation by social conditions, accounts which disproportionately emphasize a negative universality have not sufficiently attended to the ways that, even through such mediation, a transhistorical universality is objectively extant, if latent. Thus, we need to turn to a complementary case to examine the role that this transhistorical universality plays in the development of a critical universal history.

Universal History in Critiques of Subaltern Studies

Pertaining to the field of postcolonial theory (specifically the domain of subaltern studies), recent scholarship on the concept of universal history is exemplified in Vivek Chibber's recent and controversial text, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. In his critical response to thinkers such as Chakrabarty and Chatterjee, Chibber forwards some critical tools for thinking about universality and particularity and, moreover, about how to undertake historical analysis which does not eschew one for the other. Much criticism has been dedicated to addressing a wide variety of concerns with Chibber's work. The most prominent of these critiques pertains to his historical account of the development of subaltern studies and the larger context of postcolonial theory or, alternatively, critiques of his readings of its major figures. Following scholars like Michael Schwartz, rather than sort through these hermeneutical questions and evaluate his critique of 'postcolonial theory,' I have opted to forego this and instead emphasize what Chibber affirmatively contributes to rethinking the category of universal history.[199] In Schwartz's estimation, "the 'positive' analysis" of *Postcolonial Theory* offers "both [an] original and synthetic portrait of the role of class dynamics and the logic of accumulation in the evolution of the postcolonial world".[200] It is this aspect of his work, though slight by volume, which I consider here in greater detail.[201]

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[199] Michael Schwartz. "Capitalist Development, Structural Constraint, and Human Agency in the Global South: An Appreciation of Vivek Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*" in Vivek Chibber, Ed. *The Debate on Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 2016). p. 149.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Timothy Brennan, although he is among Chibber's more charitable critics, notes that Chibber's work in this area is not necessarily singular. Indeed, echoing the critique of Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus, he writes: "Key precursors were left out of the conversation, even as their ideas were quietly borrowed," citing Jean-Paul Sartre, C.L.R. James, and even Lenin (*Debate PTSC* 190-191). Chibber's silence on these previous critiques of

In the final chapter of *Postcolonial Theory* Chibber, writing in response to Chakrabarty's 'two histories' (discussed above), claims that, rather than insist on a single universal, we can identify two distinct varieties of universalism both of which have a real or objective basis:

> The first is the universalizing drive of capital, which has operated in the East as well as in the West, albeit at different tempos and unevenly. The second is the universal interest of the subaltern classes to defend their well-being against capital's domination, inasmuch as the need for physical well-being is not merely specific to a particular culture or region (203).

Following this formulation, he reiterates: "We therefore have a defense of [the existence of] two universalisms, one pertaining to capital and the other to labor" (208). Chibber, in this sense, states explicitly what is only latent or implied (but necessary for) the more negativistic accounts of universality: there is a universal human interest which is opposed to the dominant universal (whose 'interest' is only its reproduction as a system and not the satisfaction of human need) and functions as the basis upon which a critique of the latter is possible. These two universalisms are indexed to a prevalent tendency in leftist anti-capitalism, i.e., the exploitation critique of capitalism (where the *contradiction between capital and labor* is viewed as the most central or essential component of capitalist domination).[202] For Chibber, the history of working-class struggles and the history of capital's universalization constitute two forms of 'universal history.'

Arguing against the *irreducible* mediation of objective, material needs (and our ability to be cognizant of them) by cultural and historical specificity—i.e., Chakrabarty's central claim in *Rethinking Working-Class History*—he claims that "agents' ability to perceive this need as a motivation to act will be universal, regardless of culture" (203). However, while Chibber is right to point out that one's *ability* to perceive and act on one's material interests is, indeed, universal, this does not mean that such an ability is, in reality, operative or accessible. Thus, Chibber's positing of universal interests, while ultimately not incorrect, misses an important dimension of how universality comes to be recognized and enacted, rather than descriptively

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postcolonial theory and prior formulations of universality and universal history is the subject of some discussion in the following section which is devoted to some of these thinkers and the category of universality in the anti-colonial tradition more broadly.

202 This classic critique informs his account of capitalist relations of production more generally and, thus, represents a narrow understanding of capitalist and colonialist contradictions than, for example, that of Adorno or the Frankfurt School, which emphasizes, instead, the *contradiction between use-value and exchange value*. The latter of these grasps objective social and material tensions which are not almost obviously observable from the standpoint of the the capital-labor relation; this point will become especially important for thinking about how universal history as critique can say about the question of capitalist-driven climate change.

identified as something latent or potential (though no less objectively real). In Chibber's account, however, this distinction between a universally possible and universally realized recognition of shared human interest is simply not registered:

> It is reasonable to assume that social agents typically have the capacity to discern when their basic well-being is being undermined by the authority relations under which they toil [...] Were it not for this interest, the ubiquity of subaltern resistance would be an utter mystery (203).

Without this objective, if latent and unrecognized, material interest the resistance of colonized workers would be virtually inexplicable. However, without taking seriously how the recognition of these interests is impeded, obstructed, and distorted, we are left with an account that—while telling us something crucial at a descriptive level—cannot attend to another historically momentous question: *why, if such an interest is universally shared and 'typically' discernible, has the consciousness of the global working-class been organized around the realization of those interests?* Chibber, though his account of two 'universal histories' is an apt and necessary one, shares a weakness with those he criticizes: an inattention to the problem of ideology.

In sum, Chibber is right to clarify that human beings universally share an interest in the reproduction of their lives and social relations, an interest in bodily well-being as well as social freedom. However, if Adorno's account proves 'too negative,' even if only as a matter of emphasis, then Chibber is ailed by the inverse problem, insofar as his emphasis on the positive dimension of universality is not sufficiently attendant to the mediation of that dimension by the prevailing universal. Thus, Chibber is a productive complement to the adamantly negative accounts of the Frankfurt school and its descendants, but (like the negativist approach) his account ought not to stand on its own.

This more positive conception of universality and universalism is not unique to Chibber. Indeed, as some of his most generous critics points out, one of the most significant shortcomings of *Postcolonial Theory* is its failure to draw on, not only anti-colonial thought, but even to give credit to his predecessors in the postcolonial vein who have tried to trouble dominant trends in that tradition.[203] Neil Lazarus, for example, has long argued—as an aptly

[203] See for example, Timothy Brennan. "Subaltern Stakes" in *The Debate on Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. New York: Verso Books, 2016. Ibid. See also, Benita Parry. "The Constraints of Chibber's Criticism". *Historical Materialism*, 25.1 (2017): 185-206. Also, Neil Lazarus. "Vivek Chibber and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory". *Race & Class*, 57.3 (2016): 88-106.

named collaborative article suggests—for 'The Necessity of Universalism".[204] That formulation, however, is decidedly negative and draws heavily on the tradition of German critical theory and Western Marxism more broadly. Thus, it is not featured prominently here, since its most fundamental features are already represented in the survey of the negativist conception of the Frankfurt School and its inheritors. Benita Parry's critique of the 'discursive turn' in postcolonial theory, however, draws substantially on the tradition of anti-colonial critique to highlight anti-colonial appropriations and transformations of universalism and humanism.[205] Indeed, much of my analysis in the following section is inspired by her preliminary investigations in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*. Though partial to a more 'positive' conception of universality, Aijaz Ahmad has undertaken a critique of postcolonial and poststructuralist rejections of universalism, which like Parry and Lazarus are not mentioned by Chibber.[206]

While Chibber's work is ultimately singular in its specific focus on universal history (it appears only marginally in the work of these other critics), he is certainly not the first to undertake a critique of the basic assumptions of subaltern studies as a specific but widely valued trend in the postcolonial tradition. Still—whatever one makes of the negative or hermeneutical features of Chibber's book—his insistence on the existence of 'two universal histories' contributes something important to the discussion of critical universal history by explicating these two components as mutually reciprocal, a task which makes it easier to see the complex dialectical negotiations of these categories in the practice of decolonization.

Universal History and Anti-Colonial Critique

Anti-colonial critique negotiates questions of universality and particularity on a different terrain: the practical terrain of uneven and unequal geopolitics. Anti-colonial movements and thinkers take for granted—and rightly so—that all human beings share basic human needs, but this does not lead them to ignore cultural specificity. On the contrary, it was *through the particularity of the colonial predicament and through the practical struggle* of negotiating a modicum of self-determination in a colonially organized world-system that was the *basis* for their universalist disposition. Not unlike Marx's negotiation of universal and particular through the universalization of the 'particular' interests of the working-class, anti-colonial critique

[204] Lazarus, Neil, et al. "The Necessity of Universalism." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 7.1 (1995): 75+.
[205] Benita Parry. *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (New York: Routledge, 2004). p. 43-54, 82-87.
[206] Aijaz Ahmad. *In Theory: Nations, Classes, Literatures* (New York: Verso Books, 2008). esp. 238-241.

operates on the assumption that realization of the 'particular' interests of the colonized is an expression of a universal human interest.

C.L.R. James's Universal History

Perhaps one of the earliest and most widely cited examples of explicit anti-colonial universalism is exemplified by C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*. For James, the Haitian Revolution at once demonstrates the parochial character of European discourses of emancipation and concretizes that discourse. When Toussaint invokes the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity, his invocation is not of values which are quintessentially French or European but, rather, values which properly belong to the world, which happen to have been articulated by Europeans. Moreover, Haitians were participating in a larger historical process by "taking their part in the destruction of European feudalism begun by the French Revolution".[207] Most importantly, however, through the experience of enslavement, torture, and degradation, Haitians knew best the true merit of the ostensible values of the French Revolution:

> [...] Liberty and equality, the slogans of the revolution, meant far more to them than to any French- man. That was why in the hour of danger Toussaint, uninstructed as he was, could find the language and accent of Diderot, Rousseau, and Raynal, of Mirabeau, Robespierre, and Danton. And in one respect he excelled them all. For even these masters of the spoken and written word, owing to the class complications of their society, too often had to pause, to hesitate, to qualify [...] The French bourgeoisie could not understand it. Rivers of blood were to flow before they understood that elevated as was his tone Toussaint had written neither bombast nor rhetoric but the simple and sober truth (198).

As this passage demonstrates, James simultaneously describes the appropriation and transformation of the 'slogans' of the French by Haitian revolutionaries and contests the exclusive ownership of those values. That is, James never claims that Haiti is a mere instrument or derivative of an essentially French history, but rather emphasizes the dual quality of constraint and facilitation provided by the context of the Revolution in France. This is why, for James, "it is impossible to understand the San Domingo Revolution unless it is studied in close relationship with the Revolution in France" (76).[208] The two regions are in a reciprocally

[207] C.L.R. James. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). p. 198.

[208] At first blush, the reader may sense some similarities between James's account of the Haitian Revolution and that of Buck-Morss. However, there is a crucial difference between them. For Buck-Morss, "The Haitian

mediating, if unequal, social relation. The Haitian Revolution is both a revolt against the dubious claims of the French Revolution and a transformation of its most salient insight.

Examining the political strategy of Toussaint Louverture, James notes that Louverture's claims for Haitian liberation, freedom from slavery and servitude, and the right to self-determination are made on the assumption that such things are deserved according to "Natural liberty which nature has given to everyone to dispose of himself [*sic*] according to his [*sic*] will" (25). Here the reader should note the grounding role of the category of nature, necessitated by the violent pursuit of resources as in the colonial project, but also as the basis for a positive assertion of liberation and freedom as a natural and *universal* condition of human life. Exposing the duplicity of European invocations of 'natural rights' where the end of slavery and the violence of colonization were not acknowledged, Louverture demands that the antinomies of such invocation be rectified, not by eschewing universalist or naturalist principles, but by demanding their realization in Haiti. Whether one reads this as a strategic maneuvering within European discourses, a radical transformation of them, or somehow a fundamental break with the European tradition—a hermeneutical debate which abounds in scholarship on *The Black Jacobins*—James's account of the Haitian Revolution demonstrates the political significance of natural-historical and universalist claims in the struggle for decolonization.

James's history of the Haitian Revolution has precipitated much scholarship on the world-historical significance of the most successful slave rebellion in the Western hemisphere. Recently, scholars such as Susan Buck-Morss have attempted to establish its philosophical significance. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* does so through an examination of Hegel's though (and a somewhat controversial account of his being inspired by the case of Haiti in the formulation of §Lordship and Bondage in the *Phenomenology*). Buck-Morss's account is emblematic of contemporary thinking about the Haitian Revolution, which often lacks

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Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment" (42). That is, the revolution in Haiti was a *test* of *French* ideals, of *French* political innovation. Her claim about the relation between these two related but nonetheless qualitatively different revolutions seems to suggest that the abolition of slavery and the overthrow of colonial oppressors is a credit to a *European* ideal, one which as James keenly highlights, was not only 'incompletely' realized but *necessarily* so, since it was forged in the racial hierarchy of the French colonies and the class divisions constitutive of French society itself. Buck-Morss implicitly construes the radical successes of the Revolution in Haiti as completing the partial and fraught achievements set forth by the French Revolution. On her account Toussaint successfully "took universal history to the farthest point of progress by extending the principle of Liberty to all residents regardless of race [...] compelling the French Jacobins (at least temporarily) to do the same" (94). Buck-Morss's account simply does not do enough to destabilize a kind of proprietary understanding of values like 'freedom' and 'liberty' and, thus, is vulgarly applicative.

reference to the historical account which established its historical significance in the first place. As scholars like David Scott suggest, the virtual absence of C.L.R. James's pivotal work in Buck-Morss's account, is a conspicuous one, given James's navigation of the complex boundary between universality and particularity:[209]

> [...] The reason *The Black Jacobins* is exemplary has *precisely* to do with the problem—the project—of universal history. The singular genius of *The Black Jacobins* is to be found in the compelling way it tells the story of Toussaint Louverture and the revolutionary slaves in Saint-Domingue *not* as a story of merely local historical or ethnographic composition but as a story of *universality* (160).

Her failure to engage, rather than merely allude, to James is more than a mere oversight however, as Scott further points out. Buck-Morss's sketch of universal history does not attend to the distinctive features of universal history in *The Black Jacobins*, namely that "The story James tells in *The Black Jacobins* is a world-historical story not *just* in the mundane, macro-sociological sense that it is a global story of the interconnections between center and periphery, showing the intimacy between the French and Haitian revolutions [my emphasis]," though it accomplishes this as well.[210] Rather, James's performance of universal history recounts "the self-emancipation of the slaves as a story of universal emancipation and *therefore* of universal history".[211] James provides an account which is neither additive nor contemplative, but rather concretizing and transformative.

Aimé Césaire's Universal History

In recent scholarship on Caribbean thought and its relation to postcolonial theory, Souleymane Bachiri Diagne asks not whether universal history is possible but whether it is "only in a postcolonial world can the question of the universal truly be posed?".[212] Diagne's question foregoes the widespread skepticism about universality among postcolonial thinkers and instead aims, following Césaire, to foreground the particular, differential conditions of articulating universality from the vantage of that which has been excluded and suppressed from the dominant narrative of European universal history. For Diagne, as for Césaire, "true *care for the universal* means *attention to the particular*".[213] Similarly, Doris L. Garraway—tracking

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[209] David Scott. "Antinomies of Slavery, Enlightenment, and Universal History." *Small Axe*, 12.3.4 (2010): 152-162.
[210] Ibid., 161.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Souleymane Bachiri Diagne. "On the Postcolonial and the Universal?" *Rue Descartes*, 78.2 (2013): 7-18. p. 8.
[213] Ibid.

some crucial tensions within the Negritude movement on precisely this point (e.g., the debates between Césaire and Senghor—has tried to explicate an 'alternative' universality in Césaire's work. "The universalism that Césaire espouses is not the universalism of the one, of Western hegemony or of uncritical assimilationism".[214] Instead, she argues, "It is, rather, a paradox of a different kind—that of a universalism of mutually constituted, historically significant differences which, when accorded proper recognition, together signify a shared humanity, even if one can never represent the commonality of which they all partake".[215]

A common theme undergirds both Diagne and Garraway's reconstruction of Césairean universalism, namely that *universality is not mutually exclusive with multiplicity and difference*. This may initially seem to bear some resemblance to concepts such as diversality, multiversality, or pluriversality. However, it is necessary to distinguish those concepts from universalism in this context since Césaire's intervention is neither primarily epistemic nor averse to politics at the level of the state (as evidenced by his spearheading of *départementalisation*). However, if we read Césaire's letter to Maurice Thorez of the (the inspiration of Diagne's account), we nonetheless find that Césaire's 'alternative' universality shares a critical weakness with its decolonial counterparts.

Earlier in the chapter, we considered the limitations of 'epistemic relocation' and of 'shifting the geography of reason' as a solution to the reproduction of normatively Eurocentric, capitalist, and colonialist pretensions. Césaire's conception seems to fall prey to similar problems as he foregrounds formal self-determination as the bulwark against the, rightly identified, chauvinism and assimilationism of the French Communist Party.[216] In his letter he writes:

> For my part, I believe black peoples are rich with energy and passion, that they lack neither vigor nor imagination, but that these strengths can only wilt in organizations that are not their own: made for them, made by them, and adapted to ends that *they alone can determine* (my emphasis). (148)
>
> ...Everything can be salvaged [...] provided that initiative be given over to the peoples that have until now only been subject to it; provided that power descends from on high and becomes *rooted in the people* (my emphasis). (151)

[214] Doris L. Garraway. "'What Is Mine': Césairean Negritude between the Particular and the Universal." *Research in African Literatures*, 41.1 (2010): 71-86. p. 83.
[215] Ibid., p. 84.
[216] Aimé Césaire. "Letter to Maurice Thorez." *Social Text*, 103.2 (2010): 145–152.

Césaire is careful to point out that it is "neither Marxism nor communism that [he is] renouncing," rather it is the administration of the PCF, specifically regarding Thorez's support for Mollet's desertion of his anti-colonialist position and the invitation of French armed forces into Algeria in 1956 (149).[217] It is following this recourse to colonial means by a supposedly socialist French dissenter that prompts Césaire's claim that, "the colonial question [...] cannot be treated as part of a more important whole, a part over which other can negotiate or come to whatever compromise seems appropriate in light of a general situation..." (147). Thus, his emphasis on self-determination and, indeed, on an epistemic priority of the colonized is rooted in this very concrete dilemma. Césaire is right to distinguish (even if he does so too starkly) between the struggles of the Euopean working masses in the metropole and the struggles of non-whites in the colonies against the French colonizer. His corrective for this otherwise necessary response, however, is to seek recourse in a claim about 'self-determination' and a power 'rooted in the people,' a claim which (while strategically often very effective) does not circumvent the problem which is faced by other standpoint-oriented, epistemic approaches: *the problem of ideology*.

There are some important reasons as to why Césaire might not have been especially cognizant of the problem of ideology (especially in the epistolary mode). As a major proponent of *départementalisation*, Césaire's political position enjoyed considerable popular support in Martinique. Thus, although he was averse to the fetishistic racialism of his colleague Senghor, Césaire was not hard-pressed to question the content of 'the people' or their knowledge of their own interests in the colonial situation. Since his political efforts were met with this popular support of non-*béké* Martinician and his proposal was opposed largely by *béké* settlers, the problem may not have registered with the same urgency as in other contexts. However, seeing as scholars aim to adapt Césaire's 'alternative' universalism, this fact cannot be overlooked. In many other parts of the formerly colonized world, even power 'rooted in the people' does not necessarily advance the interests of the colonized (e.g., popular opposition in Cuba to same-sex marriage in spite of the state's constitutional amendment, the popular base of movements like Sí a la Vida which, though financially supported by U.S.-based non-profits, is populated by Salvadorean women, or the far-right populism of Bolsonaro's Aliança pelo Brasil). Thus, as crucial as Césaire's insights were in the historical context of his break with

[217] For a more detailed account of the PCF's role in and relation to the Algerian War, See Irwin W. Mall. "The French Communists and the Algerian War." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12.3 (1977): 521-543.

French communist party, it is difficult to make use of his more populist conception of universality, which relies on self-determination as its primary normative principle.

With these limitations in mind, we can better assess what is most innovative about Césaire's refusal of the classical opposition of universality and particularity. When Césaire clarifies his 'alternative' universalism, he writes:

> Provincialism? Not at all. I am not burying myself in a narrow particularism. But neither do I want to lose myself in an emaciated universalism. There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the "universal." My conception of the universal is that a universal enriched by all that is particular, a universal enriched by every particular: the deepening and coexistence of all particulars. (152)

Césaire concludes that one need neither refrain from claims to universality nor subsume all particularity in such claims is a crucial one, not only because we should not fall prey to this oppositional conception but also because it does not respond to a *false* universalism with a rejection of universality as such. Claiming universality for colonized peoples of color, when Césaire rejects the dubious 'universality' of the French communist party's colonialist concessions, he nonetheless refuses to concede that the category ever properly belonged to the colonizer.

Fanon and Sartre on Universalism

Implicit in Césaire's account of an alternative universality are questions about the status of postcolonial states, the lateral relation between postcolonial and neocolonial states, and the shared basis of anticolonial struggle not only in the Caribbean but among the formerly colonized and diasporic peoples across the world. The historical situation of Césaire's letter is the precipitation of decolonization across the Asian and African continents and the Caribbean. The questions raised by this historical situation come sharply into focus in Fanon's account of universal history, which is largely indexed to the question of anti-colonial nationalism and socialist internationalism, of racial particularism and the category of humanity more generally.[218] These questions structure his inquiry in "On National Culture." Thus, it is no accident that the title of *The Wretched of the Earth* alludes to the The International [L'Internationale].

[218] Cf. Alexander Fyfe. The Specificity of the Literary and its Universalizing Function in Frantz Fanon's 'On National Culture'". *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 19.6 (2017): 764-780. p. 770.

The dialectical relation of the decolonization of particular colonies and the transformation of the world exceeding national boundaries looms large in Fanon's thinking and in his historically situated critique of the colonial project. Consider for example, his remarks about the practice of decolonization and the project of national independence:

> The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former value and shapes; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men [*sic*] cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of the colonized man. This new humanity cannot do otherwise than define a new humanism both for itself and for others. (246)

> If man [*sic*] is known by his acts, then we will say that the most urgent thing today for the [colonized] intellectual is to build up his nation [...] the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values. Far from keeping aloof from other nations, therefore, it is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. (247-248)[219]

Fanon's remarks about the need for universalism and for a revised notion of 'humanism' express not only his overcoming of the traditional antithesis of particularity and universality but, moreover, expresses that this overcoming is itself constitutive of a historically specific project intended to change history's existing course. Without denying or occluding the particularity of national consciousness and culture and, furthermore, without obscuring the particularity of the colonized's social position within imperial geopolitics, Fanon affirms universalism as an imperative which must first move through the "national moment" (i.e., the achieving of a national consciousness, a consciousness of the objective interests and needs of the colonized) toward that moment's supersession (246). Fanon is keen to point out the dubiousness of European 'humanism' and 'universalism,' but this does this not lead Fanon to reject universalism as 'European' or intrinsically colonial (163). On the contrary, he opposes this dialectically derived universality to the patently undialectical and one-sided formulation promulgated by the colonialist. This reading of Fanon has been taken up by scholars such as James Penney and Alexander Fyfe.[220]

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[219] Also Qtd. in Fyfe, 771.

[220] James Penney. "Passing into the Universal: Fanon, Sartre, and the Colonial Dialectic." *Paragraph*, 27.3 (2004): 49-67. Alexander Fyfe "The Specificity of the Literary and its Universalizing Function in Frantz Fanon's "On National Culture." *Interventions*, 19.6 (2017): 764-780.

Both Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus (long-time critics of many aspects of postcolonial theory) have also argued against the postcolonial appropriation of Fanon as bearing primarily on subjectivity or identity.[221] Penney poignantly observes that reading Fanon in his anti-colonial, revolutionary situation requires that we reject the "implicitly presupposed antagonism between its subjective and political dimension" as a "pseudo-problem".[222] On Penney's account, Fanon "decisively come[s] down on the side of Hegelian-Marxist universalism even at the stage of *Black Skin*[,*White Masks*]".[223] However, this universalism is developed in tandem with the view that racially based identity claims on the part of non-European subjects in colonized situations carried an irreducible, cathartic importance," which is one reason that Fanon is critical of Sartre's "Black Orpheus".[224] As Penney's reading highlights, Fanon is returning to and modifying the long tradition of Marxist thinking about class which has sought precisely to negotiate the particular social position of the oppressed as the means by which a truly universal struggle for all of humanity is carried out.[225]

In light of this continuity between Fanon and the Marxist tradition on this score, it is crucial that we consider Fanon's relation to Sartre on the question of universality. According to Penney, Sartre's formulation is not primarily about the need for its supersession:

> The problem, for Fanon, is not that Sartre is wrong about the necessity of negritude's superseding by a more general, post-identitarian and non-culturalist socialist struggle of the kind Fanon would later so memorably and rigorously evoke under the rubric of 'national consciousness.' Rather, due to his own limited specific situation as a European intellectual, there is an aspect of the colonized subject's alienation the significance of which Sartre must necessarily fail to appreciate. (58)

This 'aspect,' he concludes, is for Fanon "an irreducibly particular experiential dimension specific to black or indigenous subjects living under the regime of European colonialism".[226] That is, for Fanon Négritude represents a more crucial *experiential* moment in the dialectical

[221] This is not to say that the reading is uncontroversial, as there exists an expansive literature on situating Fanon in this or other traditions. Most recently, Fanon has been claimed be decolonial thinkers as a progenitor of that approach. Without speaking to these varied 'canon claims' nor asserting their parameters or their purported mutual exclusivity, it is worthwhile to note that this reading diverges significantly from either the postcolonial or decolonial readings of Fanon, which more and less directly reject or demonstrate strong suspicions about the category of the universal.
[222] Penney, 50.
[223] Penney, 56.
[224] Ibid.
[225] Cf. Fyfe, 770.
[226] Penney, 57.

progression from particularity to universality than Sartre explicitly acknowledges. Thus, the development of a 'national consciousness' of the colonized requires the particular self-recognition and constitution of the dignity that Négritude offers. In short, "the racially or ethnically predicated assertions of cultural movements such as Négritude are a psychological and political condition of possibility for the development of a sense of solidarity on the part of combatants in the Third World anti-colonial struggle with respect to agents of global socialist strategizing".[227] While this difference in emphasis and priority is a point well taken, it is unclear whether this supports the claim that "the Sartrean position [is] that the element of race as such is a structural epiphenomenon—an ideological, psychologizing misrecognition" (55). This not only overestimates Fanon's criticism of Sartre (which is itself ambivalent) but also obscures Fanon's rather complex relation to Négritude.

What is crucial in Fanon's account is the navigation of the ambivalence of the experience which motivates Négritude, the question of how to achieve the human dignity which is a precondition for acting in one's own and collective interest. Penney does not mention, as with most critics of Sartre, the ambivalence, which is evident not only between *Black Skin, White Masks* (BSWM) and *The Wretched of the Earth* but even within this earlier work itself.[228] Recall that Fanon writes, specifically addressing Sartre's claim about Négritude:

> Since I realize the black man is the symbol of sin, I start hating the black man. But I realize that I am a black man. I have two ways of escaping the problem. I ask people not to pay attention to the color of my skin; or else, on the contrary, I want people to notice it. I then try to esteem what is bad—since, without thinking, I admitted that the black man was the color of evil. In order to put an end to this neurotic situation where I am forced to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, nurtured with fantasies, that is antagonistic—inhuman, in short—there is but one answer: skim over this absurd drama that others have staged around me; rule out these two elements that are equally unacceptable; and through the particular, reach out for the universal. (BSWM 174)

This passage complicates the narrative that Penney and others have generated about Sartre and Fanon's differences on the question of particularity and universality. Although Fanon does critique Sartre for not sufficiently attending to the humanizing and politicizing functions of negritude, he also does not—as Penney suggests—argue that Sartre does not take race

[227] Penney, 58.
[228] Frantz Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2007).

seriously or considers it a 'secondary' concern. Indeed, there is ample evidence in "Black Orpheus" (and, indeed, its very writing as the preface to *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue français*) to the contrary.

Careful readers of Sartre will note that those moments in "Black Orpheus" where he insists on the universality of class relations or class solidarity are neither exclusive of nor unduly homogenizing regarding racial oppression.[229] Indeed, Sartre navigates the relationships between the dominant universal (i.e., a globalizing capitalism) and its uneven and racially specific iterations in and through racial domination in a surprisingly complex way:

> Like the white worker, the negro is a victim of the capitalist structure of our society. This situation reveals to him his [*sic*] close ties—quite apart from the color of his skin—with certain classes of Europeans who, like him [*sic*], are oppressed; it incites him to imagine a privilege-less society in which skin pigmentation will be considered a mere fluke, the circumstances under which it exists vary according to history and geographic conditions: the black man [*sic*] is a victim of it *because he is a black man* [*sic*] and insofar as he [*sic*] is a colonized native or a deported African. (18)

Though much scholarship on Sartre emphasizes the apparent elision or de-emphasis of race and racial politics in his account, the passage above clearly indicates that he not only understands the particular struggle against racism as constitutive of a larger, universal aspiration for human liberation and, moreover, that racial domination was not reducible to the exploitative and expropriative relations entailed in the accumulation of capital. Certainly, Sartre does not prioritize the experiential dimension of reclaiming or dignifying racial identity (the basis of his differences with Fanon) is certainly accurate and perhaps his appreciation for that reclamation as the conditions of possibility for the universalist organization for which he advocates. This is not tantamount to the claim that race-based struggles are derivative, even if this position does exist in tension with the assumptions of some strains of Negritude.

Reflecting on a poem by Césaire, Sartre clarifies on his own pursuit of universality through particularity (rather than in opposition to it), linking this logical progression to its thematization in the Marxist tradition in the category of 'working-class':

> Previously, the Black man [*sic*] claimed his place in the sun in the name of ethnic qualities; now, he establishes his right to life on his mission; and this mission, like the proletariat's, comes to him from his historic position: because he has suffered from capitalistic exploitation more than all the others, he has

[229] Jean-Paul Sartre. *Black Orpheus*. Trans. John MacCombie. *The Massachusetts Review*, 6.1 (1964): 13-52.

> acquired a sense of revolution and a love of liberty more than all the others. And because he is the most oppressed, he necessarily pursues the liberation of all, when he works for his own deliverance. (BO 47)
>
> The [colored man] [*sic*] is the one who is walking on this ridge between past particularism –which he has just climbed—and future universalism, which will be the twilight of his negritude; he is the one who looks to the end of particularism in order to find the dawn of the universal. Undoubtedly, the white worker also becomes conscious of his class in order to deny it, since he wants the advent of a classless society [...] (BO 51)

It is necessary to take these passages, in all their complexity, as part of a single logical continuity; partial reproduction of these passages (especially concerning the claim that Négritude is a moment in a larger dialectic process) has often led to misinterpretation. These passages are crucial for understanding the relation between Sartre and Fanon in the context of French party politics and its tenuous commitment to anti-imperialism. If we recall the discussion earlier in this section of Césaire's letter to Maurice Thorez, we can see the stakes of understanding the historical context of Sartre and Fanon's apparent divergences. In Césaire's letter he emphasizes the differences between the anti-colonial struggle in the francophone Caribbean and the struggle of the (presumedly, white) French working-class against 'French capitalism'.[230] In his view, the struggle of African and Afro-Caribbean decolonization is 'irreducible' and cannot be 'put in service' of any larger struggle. In contrast, both Fanon and Sartre insist that this apparent singularity is not the endgame of particular struggles, but rather the moment through which their liberation enacts and fosters the liberation of the oppressed *in general*.

This is not to deny that there are often both perceived and objective differences in short-range concrete interests and in the conditions for the realization of those interests. Rather, the anti-colonial stance is one that intends to overcome the *fragmentation through mediation* of universal human interests through solidarity (rather than merely obscuring these particularities through labor chauvinism or protectionism). The struggle against capitalism in the metropole and colonialism/imperialism in the colonies are not simply reducible to one another but neither are they separable, each reciprocally determines the other.

Conclusion

[230] Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez," 147.

This chapter has tried, primarily, to show two things. First, that particularism—specifically as it expresses itself in response to the colonial project and capitalist globalization—maintains the conventional understanding of universality and particularity as antithetical, reproducing not only one of the most basic assumptions of the dominant discourse (i.e., that universality exists only to subsume particularity) but also that it fails to acknowledge the possibility of their reciprocal determination. Second, that universalism—especially as it pertains to anti-colonial and anti-capitalist critique—can overcome this classical opposition since it resists the dominant universal's false universalization and does not require the subsumption or erasure of social and cultural difference in order to express a universal human interest. Throughout the chapter, I have alluded to some of the ways that debates in post-/decolonial thought have focused disproportionately on the epistemic dimensions of the particularity/universality debates. Given the emphasis placed on the apparent epistemic ramifications of colonization and the larger emphasis on the problem ideology in the dissertation as a whole, the chapter addresses these questions in these terms. However, there is a crucial aspect of the problem that, for reasons of scope, can only be alluded to here, but which warrants brief mention.

For many of the post-/decolonial thinkers, particularism (broadly construed) is synonymous with 'critical' or 'resistant'. As mentioned previously, this is often staked on the particularity of knowledge and the location of the knower as a kind of alternative to Western hegemonic consciousness. Though it is important to note that this is not a disposition that is unanimously shared nor necessarily in tune with historical movements toward decolonization. In her recent work, *Insurgent Empire*, Primyamdvada Gopal[231] notes (with explicit mention of Mignolo):

> [...] While the subjects of resistance often drew on cultural resources and social practices of their own that were not derived from the regime of the colonizer or his language, these rarely translated in any simply sense into radical difference, or what the influential theorist of 'decoloniality' Walter Mignolo calls 'other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics'—or 'pluriversality' [...] Claims to radical alterity are, infact, rarely to be heard in the language of resistance, even as there is often a fierce insistence on cultural specificities [...] a disproportionate emphasis on radically different 'categories of thought' obscures the extent to which many 'liberation' struggles were committed to universalism (25).

[231] Primyamdvada Gopal. *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso Books, 2019).

> The notion of the universal—in the sense of ideas and values that might have certain supple applicability across cultures—is itself assumed to be a priori to have only ever been thought of in Europe [...] Such a sweeping repudiation of principles that might be held in common across contexts [...] flies in the face of multiple historical and cultural sites where notions such as universal rights and social justice have been theorized. It is also ignores a global history of human resistance to tyranny and exploitation of various kinds. (14)

I quote Gopal's work at length to highlight a historical dimension that has not been sufficiently emphasized thus far. Although post-/decolonial thinking often frames itself in response to both European political institutions and theory and 20th century anti-colonial praxis (accusing the latter of complicity with the former), it takes that thought to be not only 'incorrect' in one sense or another, but *passé*. When the credit that is due is given to these movements, it is in the form 'historical example,' with the tacit resignation that the conditions for these modes of struggle are bygone. Thus, these thinkers rely on a stricter determination between historical conditions and politics, or social location and knowing, that surpasses any alleged 'determinism' to which Marxism and its abiding universalism—so crucial to the history of decolonization—appears beholden. The historical precedence of actual movements and strategies toward decolonization should be part of the historical context that informs our judgements about the merits of universalism, much less the possibility of a universal history. Without either romanticizing or deeming these obviously obsolete, our judgements about the possibility of a universal history must account for these movements if there is to be any possibility of a universally human future.

It is this possibility of a universally human future that concerns us in the chapter that follows. In this fifth and final chapter, we will consider how historically situated critique and the philosophy of history take shape in the midst of the threat of catastrophic climate change, complete with its uneven and differential causation and impact. This uncertain precipice in human and natural history has significantly shifted debates about universal history; indeed, even shifting the views of some of its former critics. While it may seem to some that a historical inquiry is of secondary importance given the pressing timeline of climate change, it is precisely the climate crisis that prompts us to reconsider the natural-historical trajectory of human societies hitherto.

VI: UNIVERSAL HISTORY AT THE BRINK OF CLIMATE CATASTROPHE

Introduction

The climate crisis has prompted thinkers across disciplines, traditions, and policy platforms to reconsider a host of assumptions, plans, and concepts. In recent years, as climate science has rapidly developed and been made public, there are certain key features of modern thought that have been called into question: the assumption of infinite economic growth, the unqualified advancement of 'development,' the taken for granted fact of an indefinitely habitable planet, and the natural world as an inert and seemingly endless resource for indiscriminate industry. These features of modern political thought, in light of catastrophic predictions, are no longer tenable. The historical revelation of the coming climate catastrophe and the rapidly changing conditions of our physical world are now exerting an undeniable influence upon our social, ethical, and political concepts. Like any good historically situated critical theorist, we are thus inclined to re-name, re-categorize, and re-envision even those notions we were previously content to disparage. For example, in response to the climate crisis, thinkers who once rejected universalism are now embracing it in various forms; on the other hand, debates surrounding the term 'Anthropocene' and 'Capitalocene' reveal that there exist deep tensions in how we understand not only the physical processes of climate change, but how we assign responsibility and priority in an uneven, and fundamentally unequal world. Still others are insisting on the need for particularistic or 'local' approaches to climate crisis.

It may seem that, as our time is characterized by a threatening 'now' and the possibility of a truncated human future, turning to historical analysis is of the lowest priority. *Why look backward when the future cannot be guaranteed and when present conditions are severely eroding? What can retrospection offer us at a time like this?* To such doubt I respond that the present severity of climate change, having been brought about by past actions, requires this historical reflection. Moreover, as critical theorists have insisted for decades, the historical conditions of critique are formative of our critique of society, in this case a society which has borne out potentially catastrophic results and an existential threat. We would do well to explain the importance of historical reflection, even at a time when the present seems all-consuming. What this chapter interrogates are the specific modes of historical thinking that have been precipitated by and structured in response to the climate crisis.

Drawing together the elements of the preceding chapters, it also tracks the critical philosophy of history that grounds a critique of our global society and of those conditions which have led us to the brink of this existential threat. In the course of clarifying this ground, the chapter also considers the limits of other approaches for apprehending the multifaceted but universal logic of this crisis. The chapter revolves around four nexuses: 1) the significance of negativity as a critical mode and as the ideological 'negation' of natural limits, 2) the problem of underdevelopment, the dominant development paradigm, and their relation to mitigating climate change, 3) a critical analysis of the periodization and historicization of climate change, and 4) drawing together crucial insights from Marxist ecology and environmental history and the anti-colonial tradition. Ultimately, the chapter compounds the claims of its predecessors in order to offer a *praxis-oriented* account of the critical potential of universal history.

Negativity, Critique, and the Climate Crisis

To begin, we need to consider the status of 'negativity' in social critique to better clarifying its shifting historical significance. The category of negativity, having had a long, complex, and not uncontroversial history in the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory (FSCT), now idles on uncertain conceptual terrain. The concept has faced criticism from within critical theory (to say nothing of beyond it), mostly notably from Jurgen Habermas. On the one hand, his criticism points to the less than explicit normative foundations of the early Frankfurt School and, on the other, pertains to seemingly 'deterministic' view that is entailed in this lack of normative clarification. Moreover, this critique is explicitly bound up in the claim that these problems emerge from the fact that the social critique of the early Frankfurt School relies on a Marxist philosophy of history (*TCA*$_2$ 397 qtd. *EP* 397).[232] The compounded criticism is as follows:

> At that time, critical theory was still based on a Marxist philosophy of history, that is, on the conviction that the forces of production were developing an objectively explosive power only on this conviction could critique be restricted to 'bringing to consciousness potentialities that have emerged within the maturing historical situation itself (382).

For Habermas, the Marxist philosophy of history concerns the 'conviction that the forces of production were developing an explosive power' which, only in that case, could one be convinced that critique was primarily a question of revealing latent critical and transformative

[232] Jürgen Habermas. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume 2*. Trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

potential already extant, though unrealized. As the reader is, by now familiar, this is also Cohen's reading of Marx's theory of history. On this reading, as we examined in Chapter 1 (and which we will revisit later in this chapter as we revisit the question of development), the inexorable march of technical innovation, the transformation and increase of productive capability, and human knowledge of these technological and practical advancement should result in the transformation and ultimate demise of capitalist societies.[233]

To be clear, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and other early FSCTs *do* rely on a Marxist conception of history, but the account given by Habermas here is but a remote caricature of that philosophy of history. Its logical connection with the practice of immanent critique, described in the latter half of the passage, is tenuous. There is no necessary relation between the former and the latter, such that one can be dismissed by way of the other. The early Frankfurt School theorists had this reading of Marx's philosophy of history which he claims distorted or constrained the method of critique to a question of clarifying existing features of the historical situation. *The reader may ask what*—if not this simultaneously 'determinist' and optimistic view—does *undergird the negativism of the early Frankfurt school?*

A lack of thorough scholarly consensus on the function and status of 'negativity' in the early FSCTs complicates our attempts to answer this question, but we can sketch a few general positions on its status within the work of Adorno, who is often understood as the arche-negativist of the first generation. The status of negativity and its practical-theoretical implications are the subject of much scholarship, but this literature can be summarized as taking one of the following positions: 1) Adorno's negativism is radical, insofar as it is fundamental, expressing a real epistemic limit of our knowledge of any future society (i.e., 'epistemic negativism).[234] 2) Adorno's emphasis on negativity is a move beyond 'foundationalism' or 'metaphysics,' as it grounds critique in radically immanent terms, rather

[233] This is a view that Adorno explicitly rejects in his *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, which he attributes to a specific strain of Marx's thinking: "…He attributes a simply absolute potential to the productive energies of human beings and their extension in technology […] The metaphysical substantiality of these productive forces is presupposed, the latter would assert themselves victoriously in the conflict between the forces of production and the relations of production" (96-97). Thus, Habermas's insistence that the early Frankfurt School relies on a kind of 'productive force determinism' is a mischaracterization. In turn, Adorno's critique of Marx on this point refers to only a certain strain (and an idiosyncratic one at that) of thinking about the productive forces.

[234] See Fabian Freyenhagen. *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). p. 4, 209-231.

than appeal to a transcendental principle.[235] 3) Adorno's negativism is, in reality, a double move which is not merely negative, but a historical response to 'wrong life,' from which no 'right life' can be derived (and, thus, negativity, would disappear with social antagonism) or negativity expresses the critical dimension of the reciprocal mediation of subject and object.[236] 4) Adorno's negativism concerns suffering and its immediate normative implications).[237] Some accounts are better described as hybrid formulations of the above, but these options describe the general shape of how 'negativity' and the commitment to negativism have been understood in the critical theory tradition. How one understands the 'negative' in negative dialectics, has a considerable impact on grasping not only how critique is historical but even what one takes the *aim* of critique to be.

A brief review of these positions will help us clarify what is and is not a necessary entailment of negativism, as well as tell us more about the historical character of this commitment. The first position, 'meta-ethical negativism,' has been popularized by Fabian Freyenhagen who also has tried to describe Adorno's negativism as multi-faceted (though ultimately reaching conclusions 1 and 2). On his account, negativism for Adorno is divisible into kinds: methodological negativism (which may be "merely a methodological procedure to acquire knowledge of the positive element in question"), epistemic negativism (i.e., "we cannot know what the good life is prior to the realization of its social conditions"), and substantive

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[235] For critical accounts of this reading, See: Peter Dews. *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso Books, 1987): esp. 38-44. Ibid. "Adorno, Post-Structuralism, and the Critique of Identity." *New Left Review*, 157 (1986). Terry Eagleton. "Marxism and Deconstruction." *Contemporary Literature*, 22 (1981): 477- 488. John O'Kane. "Marxism, Deconstruction, and Ideology: Notes toward an Articulation." *New German Critique*, 33 (1984): 219-247. Frederic Jameson. *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic*, (New York: Verso Books, 2007). For examples of this reading, See: Drucilla Cornell. *The Philosophy of the Limit* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Michael Ryan. *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984). Fabian Freyehagen. *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): esp. 192. Most recently, this question has been addressed vis-à-vis the recent publication of an Adorno seminar on Marx. See, Aidin Keikhaee. "Adorno, Marx, Dialectic." *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 46.7 (2019): 829-857; Chris O'Kane. "Introduction to 'Theodor W. Adorno on Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory from a Seminar Transcript in the Summer Semester of 1962.'" *Historical Materialism*, 26.1: 137–53.

[236] See, Deborah Cook. *Adorno on Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2011): esp. 16; Ibid. Ed. "Influences and Impact" in *Adorno: Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2008). Brian O'Connor. *Adorno's Negative Dialectic: Philosophy and the Possibility of Critical Rationality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004): esp. 72-98. Simon Jarvis. *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998): esp.16, 148-216; Chris O'Kane. "'Society Maintains Itself Despite All the Catastrophes That May Eventuate': Critical Theory, Negative Totality, and Crisis." *Constellations*, 25.2 (2018): 287-301.

[237] J.M. Bernstein. *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): esp. 343-361, 372-384; Ibid. "Suffering Injustice: Misrecognition as Moral Injury in Critical Theory." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 13.3 (2006): 303-324; Kate Schick. "'To Lend a Voice to Suffering is a Condition for All Truth': Adorno and International Political Thought." *Journal of International Political Theory*, 5.2 (2009): 138-160.

negativism (i.e., "affirming the thesis that the bad is not just knowable but instantiated, realized in the social world").[238] Freyenhagen, who is ultimately committed to a critical theory which is 'anti-foundationalist,' compounds these to constitute his 'meta-ethical' approach. [239] Freyenhagen's taxonomy of negativisms is a helpful clarificatory tool, even if it is not compelling account of Adorno's negativism as a whole.

Two of the 'negativisms' he describes are consistent with Adorno's inheritance of a Hegelian-Marxist materialism: the methodological and the substantive.[240] The epistemic and, by extension the larger 'meta-ethical' framework, however, does not reflect any explicit commitment to Adorno's part, nor does it align with his own reflections on negativism in the *Lectures*.[241] In part, the problem with Freyenhagen's view is that it takes Adorno's thought to be more distinct from the classical Marxist tradition than it is in reality. If one isolates Adorno and abstracts his thought from historical conditions and historical interlocutors (e.g., German positivists), then it is understandable to arrive at Freyenhagen's position (a possibility which is not helped by Adorno's often hyperbolic prose). However, Adorno is clear that negativity as such is *not* a value in itself, but a response to reification, to positivism as ideology:

> Concepts […] are no longer measured against their contents, but instead are taken in isolation, so that people take up attitudes to them without bothering to inquire further into the truth content of what they refer to. For example, if we take 'positive,' which is essentially a concept expressing a relation , we see that it has no validity on its own but only in relation to something that is to be affirmed or negated […] I would take the view that the work of philosophy is concerned not so much with negativity as such […] as that each person should keep his [*sic*] own thinking under surveillance and regard it with a critical eye in order to resist this reified way of thinking. (LND 24)

The merit of negativity, for Adorno, "is its right to resist such habits of thought, even if it does not 'have' a positivity of its own" (LND 25). This is an aspect of Adorno's thought which, for many scholars, does not register as a reflection of 'the positivism dispute' or the general

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[238] Freyenhagen, 4.
[239] Ibid., 211.
[240] For further reading on negativity in Hegel and Marx, See Chris Arthur. "Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Negativity." *Radical Philosophy*, 35 (1983): 10-19. Raya Dunayevskaya. Ed. Peter Hurdis, Kevin B. Anderson. *The Power of Negativity: Selected Writings on the Dialectic in Hegel and Marx* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002). Shannon Brincat. "Negativity and Open-Endedness in the Dialectic of World Politics." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 34.4 (2009): 453-493. Karin de Boer. *On Hegel: The Sway of the Negative* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010).
[241] Theodor Adorno. *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a Lecture Course 1965/1966* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

ascendant status of scientific in logical positivism in Germany, a tendency which has also not dwindled in mainstream analytical philosophy in the Anglo-Atlantic context.

Interestingly, throughout the *Lectures*, we can also counteract the widely accepted idea that Adorno's negativism is simply about immediate suffering. This position is partly correct, Adorno *is* convinced that there are some dimensions of suffering which are immediate, but it is not the whole story. Indeed, it cannot be if we consider the propensity of Adorno's thought to affirm the necessity of ideology critique, to emphasize the severity and pervasiveness of 'socially necessary semblance,' and to foreground the mediation of thought by social contradictions. Without suspending—as would be appropriate if Adorno were an 'epistemic negativist'—the belief that there exists a world which, in spite of mediation, is not reducible to that mediation (and is, in that sense, immediate), Adorno is insisting that experience, while mediated, is not irreducibly so. This is why even those passages which sound as those suffering is the absolute normative generator for the practice of critical theory, are not 'anti-foundationalist' but rooted in Adorno's materialist inheritance. 'Negativism' is, thus, also an affirmation of the need to begin and work from the concrete, historical, material conditions, rather than with ideal principles and utopian abstractions (on this point we should recall both Hegel and Marx's insistence on avoiding utopianism).

From this vantage, we can see the merits of the natural-historical approach to 'negativism' which is characteristic of Deborah Cook's reading:

> Adopting Marx's critique of capitalism as second nature, Adorno also shares his interest in exploring the role of first nature in human history" […] Adopting Marx's idea that society's law of motion now appears as second nature, Adorno also observes that this second nature 'is the negation of any nature that might be conceived as first' (qtd. ND 357). (8-15)

Cook's approach, while relevant for understanding Adorno's critical theory in general, is perhaps more salient now than ever, since it thematically foregrounds that which currently presents an existential threat to humankind: *the negation of first nature*. Negativism, in this register, is not an attempt to 'go beyond' normative foundations, but a desire to avoid the 'empty ratiocination' (as Hegel once called it) of positing alternatives in the midst of pervasive ideological mediation without critical interrogation of that mediation. The normative grounds which Habermas fails to recognize in the early FSCTs is precisely the natural-historical foundations which are carried over from Marx's historical materialism, though the explicit naming of these foundations was not a priority for Adorno, Horkheimer, or Marcuse. This is,

at least in Adorno, clearly reflected in his long-standing (if misunderstood and neglected) invocation of the category of natural history (which we examined in Chapter 3). It would not do, for Adorno, to simply reconstruct the narrative of history to depict an idyllic and harmonious relation with nature, or to simply 'subtract' the destruction wrought by modernity, just as it would not do to insist on the right social ontology under conditions where it is distorted or unrealizable. Hence, Adorno's analysis focuses on the critique of 'second nature' as dominating 'first nature.'

It is all too thematically appropriate that the method here has been to examine what negativity is not in order to delineate what it is. Now we can say, with some certainty, what is intended by the 'negative' in negative universal history. Firstly, it is not a resignation to the unknowability of the world otherwise. Secondly, it is a methodological approach which takes seriously the fact of ideological mediation by social antagonism and contradiction, and thereby begins from the standpoint of negating the existing 'wrong life.' Thirdly, it is not exclusively negative nor negative for its own sake, it is negative so as to avoid the naïve positing of alternatives and ideals which cannot be realized under conditions of fundamental contradiction. Fourthly, it expresses a relation to the dominant universal which, while aiming for negation, does not itself preclude the possibility of any positive claims (but rather emphasizes negation to avoid the reification or ideological manipulation of these 'positives'). Fifthly, the 'negative' in 'negative universal history' reflects the negations performed by the dominant universal, including the attempted negation of 'first nature' (i.e., the domination of nature).

The 'negative' in this phrase is synonymous with a 'critical' universal history (and its position as an alternative to the mere positing of positive historical claims) as well as a reference to the historical specificity of negativity. Thus, (sixthly) the insistence on negativity is a historically conditioned response to the particularity of capitalist modernity's processes of totalization and universalization. This conditioned response, however, is indexed to the natural-historical basis of how we can determine that capitalist societies are 'wrong life' in the first place. The immanent critique of the dominant universal is, thus, grounded in

transhistorical, natural facts about human beings, only these cannot appear as simple positive assertions under the present conditions.[242]

In much literature on Frankfurt School critical theory and Hegelian Marxism more generally, the term 'negative' is often misconstrued and taken too literally or foregrounded *without qualification about the historical conditions under which negativity becomes most crucial.* Indeed, 'negativity' is sometimes understood as synonymous with 'critical,' when in reality it occupies a part of a larger dialectical process. But, as I alluded to in the previous chapter, negativity—understood as the negation of the current social-historical conditions—is the critical bent that negative universal history relies on. However, as Chibber's concept of 'two universalisms' demonstrates, this negation is also grounded in 'positive' aspects of human beings as natural-historical creatures (as Adorno himself emphasizes in his work on natural history). Thus, universal history *should* be negative in sense (but not in every sense)—i.e., it should be a philosophy of history which works in all aspect to negate the present form of social organization and production—but that negativity is rooted in the fact that human beings, we can say with certainty, not only share the same basic needs but also the means of satisfying them, i.e., the reproduction of life undertaken socially in an irrevocable relation with and as part of nature.

It is, for this reason, that I have not emphasized negativity or the commitment to negativism as strongly as, for example, Adorno does (it does not, the reader will note, appear in the title). Moreover, Adorno's 'negativism,' understood as a measured response to positivism and to the impetus to merely posit or assert the progressive historical trajectory common to much 19th century thinking (including Hegel), while not irrelevant, is somewhat less intuitive given the propensity of so much contemporary theory to insist on the priority of negativity. Poststructuralist and post-foundationalist (including the 'linguistic,' 'cultural,' 'epistemic' and other such 'turns') iterations of negativity has been thoroughly absorbed into the contemporary critical consciousness. Disproportional emphasis on the need for negativism only bolsters these tendencies which I have argued are inadequate to our object of critique, an ecologically catastrophic, globalized capitalist imperialism.

Climate Change and the 'Negation' of Natural Limits

[242] This iteration of negativism, then, should be sufficient to allay Habermas's worry (which, in principle, I share) that: "Critique would be delivered up to the reigning standards in any given historical epoch," though it is unlikely that he would accept much less prefer the normative ground I have identified here (*TCA*$_2$ 382).

If the category of negativity is going to serve the urgent need to critique our historical present then it must be adapted to social, material, and intellectual changes that characterize our time, a time which is marked by a crisis of our earth system which has been precipitated by historically specific forms of human activity, it requires a clearly articulated historical foundation. The negation of 'first nature' is of pinnacle importance as we confront the looming climate crisis. As Andreas Malm has succinctly framed it, "Understanding the historical phenomenon" of the climate crisis "appears to require realism about the past *and* about nature".[243]Such realism cannot abide the diffuse, decentralized, and 'groundless' theory that is so commonly associated with the practice of historical contextualization. Situating critique historically, if it is to have any fortitude in the face of the negation of 'first nature' (i.e., the negation of a habitable and sustainable climate future) cannot amount to mere disruption or unsettling but must also be capable of indicating the outline of an alternative to capitalist 'second nature' and the havoc it continues to wreak on our planetary life support. Still, we cannot simply tell a story about generalized and abstract humanity traversing the course of 'empty time' and so the need for negativity is not gone. Rather, its exclusive centrality is replaced by a need to dialectically apprehend the relation between 'positive' and 'negative,' in the present context of 'the warming condition'.[244]

The consensus among those thinking critically about climate change is that the looming threat of climate catastrophe is, indeed, a universal one. The apparent 'negation' of natural limits that capitalism has long represented as a progressive force in human history, as the overcoming of scarcity, and the development of a limitless abundance of consumer comforts with an ever-increasing number of potential markets, raw materials, and labor reserves now threatens the entire planet. Capitalism's telos of infinite accumulation has become the delusion within which no objective limits can be accepted.[245] As many reflecting on climate change recognize, climate change is singular in human history as it threatens not only some of humankind, but its entirety. Climate change, unlike so many catastrophes before

[243] Andreas Malm. *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (New York: Verso Books, 2017). p. 25.
[244] Ibid., p. 11.
[245] See, István Mészáros. *Beyond Capital: Toward a Theory of Transition* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018). p. XVI.

it is threatening the earth's very habitability.[246] Of course, as these same thinkers often acknowledge, it is not threating *everyone equally right now* and perhaps not for some time will it bring its terrible force upon humanity *as a whole*. Still, its ultimate ramifications are of species-scale and that is a singular feature not to be overlooked. Importantly, this uneven but ultimately levelling phenomenon is prompting defensive measures on the part of the ruling classes of the imperial centers. The political ramifications of the climate crisis, from the viewpoint of the ruling elite, is clear: mass migration, class war, mass 'crime waves', and 'racial integration' (i.e., 'white replacement'). Ecofascists represent an extreme crystallization of these discourses, but their more diffuse, near-omnipresence in dominant rhetoric and planning about climate change in the imperial center cannot be ignored.

Ecofascist responses to climate change mediate the very real likelihood that there *will* be a 'migration crisis,' as declining environmental conditions in the North American and Europe are accelerated by the continued negligence regarding climate. If the 2019 'European migrant crisis' is any indication, the imperial centers are neither willing nor prepared to receive the millions that will be fleeing drought, desertification sea level rise, super-storms, fires, and other environmental events—some of which are already taking place. The disparity of timelines as well as differential causation and impact has caused many to question how 'universal' climate change actually is since there is some delay before it reaches species-threat proportions. Still, we can think the particulars of location and context *with* rather than against universality, as the analyses in Chapter 4 indicate.

Still this opposition is at work in much contemporary climate discourse, including the Anthropocene discourse, as it fails to register that existing global vulnerabilities and inequalities will be exacerbated rather than equalized by climate disaster. The ruling class of the imperialist centers, in the meantime, has convinced itself—and works to actively convince millions of others—that it can isolate itself from immediate climate threats. Luxury doomsday bunkers have grown into a cottage industry for the panicked mega-rich. Various forms of 'apocalypse insurance' are becoming more socially acceptable and more widespread among

[246] For a taxonomy of catastrophe, See Nelson Maldonado-Torres. "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality." Website of the Caribbean Philosophical Association, October 2016: http://caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/docs/Maldonado-Torres_Outline_Ten_Theses-10.23.16.pdf

the ruling classes.[247] Not unlike some theoretical accounts of uneven climate impact, they believe they can be insulated from climate disaster (at least several generations). In short, ruling class, colonialists have accepted a prominent capitalist myth: *the earth's natural limits can be exceeded and thereby human activity unfettered from natural dependency*, if only 'for the few'. The fact is, however, even the earth's 'first class passengers' will not be capable of staving off hunger, thirst, and lack of bodily health and safety in the face of systemic climate disaster. Thus, while it is true that capitalists and even many 'middle class' Europeans and North Americans may be able to stave off the most destructive effects of climate change for a time, the view that the ultra-rich can realistically survive in this 'lifeboat' scenario is profoundly unrealistic.

Climate change is a universal, existential, species-threat but also as, Malm insists, "uneven and combined".[248] It is so not only because of the mere fact that we all occupy a single planet with a fixed carrying capacity, but because the world that capitalism has created is not only exceeding the natural limits of the planet but also *created an unstable and precarious set of global social relations*. Before the widespread acknowledgement of the climate crisis, 'globalization' precipitated the same anxieties among ruling class elites: racial integration, loss of cultural 'integrity,' and increased immigration. Indeed, the far-right has used 'anti-globalism' rhetoric since at least the 90s, exemplified in the mainstream of American politics by the campaign of Pat Buchanan. These anxieties have since intensified as capitalist globalization has since lost the need to expand and now only finds itself deepening its global hold. The Right's anxieties are a distorted image of a very real instability of the capitalist order, only this instability is not precipitated by a mythical 'race war' or the alleged erasure of whites. Globalization, as it brought forth a thoroughly integrated global system also extrapolated the intrinsic instabilities of that system and increased their scale. *The very process of expanding capitalism*—of accelerating and expanding the processes of accumulation, of displacing and disciplining the global working class, of offsetting environmental hazards, and of ensuring the maintenance of neo-colonial and imperial relations to sustain accumulation—*has also made it more vulnerable to crisis*.

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[247] See, Gavin Mueller. "Bad and Bourgeois." *Jacobin* (May 2017); Bradley L. Garrett. "Weapons Rooms, Fake Windows and a $3m Price Tag: Inside a Luxury Doomsday Bunker." *The Guardian* (August 2020); Evan Osnos. "Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich." *The New Yorker* (January 2017).

[248] Andreas Malm. "Sea Wall Politics: Uneven and Combined Protection of the Nile Delta Coastline in the Face of Sea-Level Rise." *Critical Sociology*, 39.6 (2012): 803-832.

What is often referred to as the 'global supply chain' or what Marxists have historically called the international division of labor is a 'weak link' in the ability of even those most elite to insulate themselves from the fallout of climate disaster. Even if the ultra-rich can afford luxury bunkers, pervasive ecological disaster in former and neo-colonies will make even bunker life unlivable, as no thickness of lead and steel can inoculate them against shortages in food, water, medical supplies, and other essential items if production—now located predominantly within the former colonies and outside the West—is drastically interrupted or ceases. Though we should not underestimate the ways that climate denialism is fueled by the ruling-class dream of the 'lifeboat,' we must also acknowledge that no amount of privilege can allow one to circumvent the fact of the metabolic relation or of human dependency on the earth's resources. We need *neither* embrace the banner that 'we're all in this together' *nor* accept that climate change represents a particularistic threat, from which anyone can realistically insulate themselves. The phenomenon itself indicates that its universality is not mutually exclusive with particularity, much like globalization—the universalization of capitalism, a particular—did not and has no plans to erase difference or inequality. On the contrary, we can anticipate that responses to the universal threat of a climate catastrophe will be bent on maintaining global inequalities and altogether intensifying them. Thus, the question of inequality has been at the center of debates about not only the impact but the causes of the climate crisis, which is reflected in some of the most fervent debates about the singular ecological period in which we live.

Constructing the History of Climate Change

The reader might anticipate, then, that the debates surrounding the historical periodization of the events leading up to and constituting the climate crisis express important dimensions of how we understand climate change as not only socially mediated, but as differentiated in terms of its relation to genuine human need and the historically specific form of production known as capitalism. Moreover, these debates demonstrate the ways that even critical interventions intended to 'denaturalize' climate change and highlight accumulation can nonetheless function ideologically. Thus, the acknowledgement of the anthropogenic character of climate change has spurred necessary debates about the *anthropos* as divided and unequal.

As I write this in 2021, the term Anthropocene represents the most widely shared vocabulary for describing the historical, transformative power of human activity to radically

alter the biosphere. The term, while still somewhat controversial in the scientific community, has enjoyed a sweeping range of influence and increasing popularity in the humanities and social sciences since its appearance approximately twenty years ago. In recent years, its increasing visibility to audiences in the social sciences and humanities has drawn the attention of critics. Indeed, debates about the Anthropocene versus alternate terms like Capitalocene (as well as Cthulucene, Plantationocene, etc.). Generally, the intervention of these alternate vocabularies is not to deny that we are living under conditions that human beings have generated, but rather that *specific* human beings, relations, and practices are responsible. That is, the most prominent criticism of the term 'Anthropocene concerns its *generality*, its homogenizing of the human species into a single, undifferentiated, socially reconciled, and abstract category: the anthropos. In a sense, we might say that Anthropocene is too positive, in the sense that it constructs a historical narrative that, beginning with human use of fire, does not grasp the negative dimensions of this historical trajectory, it does not grasp constitutive parts of the historical narrative that highlight inequality, exploitation, expropriation, etc. The term tells the story of human history as one might find it in a children's diorama at The Smithsonian, a simplified tale populated by archetypal figures, the reduction and substitution of socially-mediated and sharply differentiated life with what Roland Barthes once criticized under the moniker 'The Great Family of Man'.[249]

This criticism is a certainly a compelling one; the Anthropocene is too general, too broad, and thus functions ideologically to counteract what little merit it may have had early on in debates about our shifting biospheric conditions. If there was ever any advantage to the term, it was its potential to *denaturalize* the phenomenon of climate change. Rather than surmise that changes in climate emerge from natural cycles of heating and cooling, as many once believed, marking the period of these changes as one which is indelibly caused by human beings (as opposed to nature itself, independent of human action), diminished not only the sense of climate change's inevitability, but demanded—albeit vaguely—the need to interrogate *social* causes. Unfortunately, as Malm and Hornborg aptly highlight, it capacity to de-reify is drastically limited:

> Climate change is *denaturalised* in one moment—relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities—only to be *renaturalised* in the next,

[249] Roland Barthes. Trans. Annette Lavers. *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972): 100-103.

> when derived from an innate human trait, such as the ability to control fire. Not nature, but human nature—this is the Anthropocene displacement.[250]

Thus, whatever its partial contribution to moving away from inattention and inaction on climate change, its insistence on species language—in a world which is deeply stratified and unequal—is not only historically inappropriate but outright distortive, covering over what only a very specific kind of human organization seems to have achieved, namely *capitalism*.

The term Capitalocene, then, would seem to be preferable precisely because it refers not to human activity in general, but rather the logic of accumulation, the presumption of infinite economic growth, and inexhaustible natural resources (including raw materials but also human labor). And yet, that term, too, is somewhat fraught. Its most well-known proponent, Jason W. Moore, like many critics of the Anthropocene discourse, insist on the need for greater specificity and precision in our terminological choices.[251] However, his own characterization of the term, falls short of actually grasping either what is historically specific or what is transhistorical (recall Ch. 2). His defense of the term Capitalocene relies on a nebulous account of what capitalism is, as a logical as well as historical system.

Consider two prominent aspects of Moore's account of the Capitalocene:

> Capitalism's governing conceit is that it may do with Nature as it pleases, that Nature is external and may be coded, quantified, and rationalized to serve economic growth, social development, or some other higher good. (CWL 14)

> […] The Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. It is not a radical inflection of Green Arithmetic. Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology (AOC 6)

Moore's contention is that, firstly, capitalism's "governing conceit" is its unbridled cooptation of nature. While it is quite true that capitalism must presuppose nature as an inexhaustible resource and that this presupposition is required for the process of accumulation, to insist that this is *the* governing principle fundamentally misses what capitalism is and how it operates. Capitalism is neither the first nor the only form of society that has taken for granted the endless

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[250] Andrea Malm, Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind?: A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative." *The Anthropocene Review*, 1.1 (2014): 62-69. p. 65.

[251] Jason W. Moore. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso Books, 2015). Ibid. Elmar Altvater, Eileen C. Crist, Donna J. Haraway, Daniel Hartley, Christian Parenti, Justin McBrien. *Anthropocene Or Capitalocene?*
Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

exploitability of the natural world. It has accelerated and refined processes of extraction and generated productive capacities that exceed the earth's carrying capacity. But, capitalism's singularity lay in the logic of accumulation, not only the pretension that growth *can* occur endlessly but that it *must*. Capitalism takes the exploitability of nature as a given fact, as many societies did prior to it, but it is the only system that makes of that pretense *an imperative*, the *telos* of production.

Moore's second contention is that the Capitalocene does not refer to "an economic and social system," but rather "a way of organizing nature" (6).[252] The reader is forced to ask: *what social and economic system is* not *a way of organizing nature?* Is it possible to define a social and economic system without reference to the human reliance on nature? Any rigorous account—including that of Marxist ecologists whom Moore disparages—of what 'society' or 'economics' is requires an understanding of the metabolic relation. To insist on this fact as a defining characteristic of capitalism is akin to saying that what defines capitalism is the fact that it is a social and economic system at all. Counterintuitively, one can only make such a distinction if one first presupposes the distinctiveness of society and nature, a distinction Moore himself rejects (though one that, in fact, should not be altogether dispensed with).[253] Capitalism is most certainly an acceleration of earlier forms of ecological degradation, whether conscious or inadvertent, but Moore seems to insist on the aspect of capitalism which is, in fact, transhistorical (i.e., exceeding this particular mode of production) with that which is historically specific to it, namely *the prioritization of exchange-value over and against use-value*, i.e., the very aim of capitalism as a form of natural-historical organization.

It is precisely the features that Moore misses, however, that are foregrounded and elaborated in the work of Marxists ecologists and environmental historians, including but not limited to John Bellamy Foster et al., István Mészáros, and Malm as well. Ecological Marxism

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[252] Moore, *Capitalism in the Web*, 6.

[253] The reader might be inclined to think that, at least, Moore and the account I offer in Chapter 3 share some basic features because of his insistence on eliminating, for example, the opposition of nature/society. However, the reader should note that, my own suggestions were never to eliminate the discreet categories or treat them as interchangeable, but to think them *dialectically*, a *reciprocally determining* (which, as Moore himself notes, requires that the categories retain their discreetness). Hence, Moore's view, while superficially similar, is in fact a failure to think dialectically, instead opting less precise categories rather than more specific ones. For a critical response to Moore's apparent dissolution of categorical binaries, See Malm, *The Progress of This Storm*, 178-183; 190-196. Also, Malm's critique of 'hybridism' is relevant on this point, See Ibid., 61-65. The same criticism is applicable to Chakrabarty's intervention in "The Climate of History," wherein he suggests that the distinction between 'natural history' and 'human history' collapses as a consequence of the climate crisis pp. 201-207.

also offers us something that, in spite of frequent reference, is woefully undertheorized in Moore's framework: the relation between the climate crisis and the history of colonialism and imperialism, as I discuss in the following section. However, if Moore's position is inadequate for the way it insists on capitalist (as he loosely defines it) as a driving force of ecological crisis, we would be remiss not to also acknowledge the more profound inadequacies of Dipesh Chakrabarty's recent turn toward the 'universalism' of the Anthropocene discourse, especially as it pertains to the question of colonialism. Indeed, Chakrabarty is perhaps singularly responsible for explicitly positing an opposition between discourses about the anthropos and the critique of capitalism, as is evident by his response to Malm and Hornborg's criticism titled "The Politics of Climate Change is More Than the Politics of Capitalism".[254] This essay, however, is but a consolidation of suspicions that Chakrabarty has long voiced (and not only about climate change, but about colonialism as well). Indeed, one can easily mark out a distinct shift in Chakrabarty's thought since *Provincializing Europe*. Although Chakrabarty insists that his work has never been an outright rejection of universality (a claim I dispute in the previous chapter), at the very least one can see that his once ambivalent and generally critical stance on universals has been supplanted by an endorsement of the most generalist and 'planetary' aspects of the Anthropocene discourse.

This shift in Chakrabarty's thought is perhaps most easily identifiable in his 2008 essay, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" wherein, among many other things, goes so far as to cite the work of Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo in elaborating on Adorno's 'negative universal history'.[255] In spite of this (Vázquez-Arroyo's work prominently foregrounds a critique of capitalism), he insists that "the whole crisis cannot be reduced to a story of capitalism".[256] This is a marked change from his rather ambivalent remarks in the introduction to *Provincializing Europe*.[257] However, such a change is undergirded by a deeper continuity between Chakrabarty's earlier work and his present alignment with the supposed 'universalism' of the Anthropocene camp: *a rejection of the priority of capitalist production and relations as the historically specific driver of human and ecological destruction*. From his earliest work to his latest interventions,

[254] Dipesh Chakrabarty. "The Politics of Climate Change is More Than the Politics of Capitalism." *Theory, Culture & Society*, 34.2-3 (2017): 25-37.
[255] Vázquez-Arroyo, 222.
[256] Ibid., 221.
[257] Chakrabarty, 4-6.

Chakrabarty has taken the position that 'merely' the critique of capitalism is not sufficient to address either the problems of European colonialism or of climate change.

This position—which I refer to as a 'the merely argument'—presupposes, firstly, that everyone already consents to this genealogy of the climate crisis. The assertion of 'reduction' or 'reductivism' imagines an imaginative terrain which is rife with systemic critiques of capitalism and flush with anti-capitalist organizations, namely a terrain which *does not yet exist*. The majority of popular discourse and, more importantly, policy on climate change—when it is not taken as 'a debate' in the denialist North—contains little to no criticism of capitalism as a system of production and maintains the basic compatibility of capitalism and sustainability. If the UN's Sustainable Development Goals tell us anything, it is that capitalism remains firmly beyond the bounds of what is perceived to be alterable, much less eliminable.[258] International policymakers, politicians, and the general public of the imperial centers are doing everything possible to avoid attributing climate change to the logic of accumulation, to production for the sake of exchange-value.

As Chakrabarty embraces the existential species-threat that climate change poses and as he admits that this requires a less ambivalent stance on the question of universality, he reverses his insistence on the impossibility of universally applicable social descriptions and material explanations that was character of his earlier analyses. He apparently alters his position on the possibility of such explanations only to maintain the basic opposition of universality and particularity that we examined in Chapter 4. That is, the shift represents not an attempt to think the two categories in a dialectical relation, but once again as autonomous. Above all, his position on the role of capitalist production remains consistent. Having said that, Chakrabarty's re-positioning does mark a substantive shift in the content his thought. That shift, however, overcorrects for his previously particularist affinities by a near-complete elision of global inequalities in the history of climate change. "The poor," Chakrabarty claims, "participate in that shared history of human evolution just as much as the rich do".[259] He argues that "The lurch into the Anthropocene has also been globally the story of some long-anticipated social justice, at least in the sphere of consumption. This justice among humans,

[258] UN Sustainable Development Goals: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/ (Accessed August 31, 2020).
[259] Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Climate and Capital: On Conjoined Histories." *Critical Inquiry*, 40.1 (2014): 1-23. p. 14.

however, comes at a price".[260] It is to claims such as these that Malm as well as Hornborg respond.

"A major argument for this view," Malm notes, "is the fires of China and India, which, Chakrabarty claims, are fueled by population growth and the eradication of poverty".[261] He also notes, however, that "Between 1981 and 2011, improvement in household electricity—the chief indicator of poverty alleviation—contributed 3-4 percent of the increase in Indian CO_2 emissions. Some 650 million people connected to the grid made an impact on the atmosphere that can only be deemed trifling".[262] The poorest of India accounted for less than 10% of the increase, "whereas the richest quintile took around a half".[263] Malm is disputing both the claim that the poor contribute to climate change equally and the claim that fossil fuel consumption and emissions have increased due to efforts to eradicate poverty. "However measured and however defined, justice among humans is hardly the fuel of this fire".[264] Alongside Hornborg, Malm challenges these claims from another vantage, that of colonial extraction.

The development of the fossil economy, in the first place, was hardly a decision undertaken collectively or by consent, especially from those lands which contained large deposits of coal and whose labor extracted it, under threat of starvation or British repression. The origins of the fossil economy, Malm and Hornborg note, lay with "a tiny minority even in Britain":[265]

> This class of people comprised an infinitesimal fraction of the population of *Homo sapiens* in the early 19th century. Indeed, a clique of white British men literally pointed steam-power as a weapon—on sea and land, boats and rails—against the best part of humankind from the Niger delta to the Yanzi delta, the Levant to Latin America […] Capitalists in a small corner of the Western world invested in steam, laying the foundation stone for the fossil economy: at no moment did the species vote for it either with feet or ballots, or march in mechanical unison, or exercise any sort of shared authority of over its own destiny and that of the Earth System. (64)

[260] Ibid., 16.
[261] Malm, "Who Lit This Fire? Approaching the History of the Fossil Economy." *Critical Historical Studies*, 3.2 (2016): 215-248. p. 244.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid., 245,
[264] Ibid.
[265] Malm and Hornborg, 64.

Unlike Chakrabarty's emphasis on a 'shared' human history, Malm and Hornborg emphasize the violent and coercive course by which fossil fuels became the dominant energy source for humans on Earth. While British colonialism is conspicuously absent from Chakrabarty's account of India's fossil economy, Malm and Hornborg do not refrain from establishing the history of this economy as having its roots in capitalist imperialism and not an abstract historical narrative which imagines an undifferentiated, equally benefiting and equally agential 'humankind'.[266] It is perhaps a striking irony that Chakrabarty—one of if not *the* most well-known postcolonial historian—is not the thinker who offers this account. Instead, Chakrabarty opts for the view from 'geological time,' aspiring to a political thought which is no longer "human-centric" but nonetheless can be referred to as "Anthropocene Time".[267]

Chakrabarty's position against the term 'Capitalocene' (as Moore understands it and beyond) is not a question of rejecting the fact that capitalism is an important feature in the making of the Anthropocene, but rather a deflationary technique where it is made *merely one feature among others*. This is exemplified in his categorization of, in his view, "two approaches to the problem of climate change".[268] The first, he claims, "is to look on the phenomenon simply as a one-dimensional challenge".[269] The 'one-dimensional' category includes everything from green capitalism's renewable energy markets to mainstream conceptions of 'sustainable development' to the degrowth movement to, finally, Marxist ecology.[270] As I hope to demonstrate in the following section, Chakrabarty's characterization of Marxist ecology as 'one-dimensional' fails to register the complexity of its critique of the dominant social totality and relies on a narrow conception of what counts as a critique of capitalism.[271] "Against all

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[266] In this article, Malm and Hornborg are skeptical of the term 'universal,' in relation to its potential to obscure the unequal relations alluded to in the account cited here. Indeed, they write "For the foreseeable future—indeed as long as there is life on Earth—there will be lifeboats for the rich and privileged. If climate change represents a form of apocalypse, it is not universal, but uneven and combined: the species is as much an abstraction at the end of the line as at the source" (67). However, Malm seems to have altered his position on its strictly obstructive status and often foregrounds the need to think universality, if only negatively. See, for example, *The Progress of This Storm*, 174: "The warming condition is as universal as any can be, no matter how parochial its origins."

[267] Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Anthropocene Time." *History and Theory*, 57.1 (2018): 5-32. pp. 6-9.

[268] Chakrabarty, "The Politics of Climate Change," 26.

[269] Ibid.

[270] Ibid., 26-27.

[271] Chakrabarty understands the critique of capitalism only in terms of what is sometimes referred to as the 'exploitation critique,' or what Jaeggi calls the "moral" critique of capitalism. See, Rahel Jaeggi. "What (If Anything) is Wrong with Capitalism: Dysfunctionality, Exploitation and Alienation: Three Approaches to the Critique of Capitalism." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 54.1 (2016): 44-65. However, the exploitation critique represents but one critique among others which comprise Marx's and Marxists' critique of capitalism. The *critique of the contradiction between use-value and exchange-value* characteristic of capitalism as a mode of production (emphasized

this," he argues, one can view climate change "as part of a complex family of interconnected problems, all adding up to the larger issue of a growing human footprint on the planet, that has […] seen a definite ecological overshoot on the part of humanity".[272] Such an approach begins the story of climate change with "the invention of agriculture" and includes "the inanimate world" and human population growth. To this grand generalization, Malm gives the following response:

> Mastery of fire is compatible with a whole range of economies (including post fossil ones) and so cannot be the source of origin or sustenance for that peculiar type: it is a trivial condition, alongside bipedal locomotion, excavation tools, written alphabets, and quite a few more […] invoking it is, to quote John Lewis Gaddis, "like explaining the success of the Japanese fighter pilots in terms of the fact that prehumans evolved binocular vision and opposable thumbs. We expect the causes we cite to connect rather more directly to consequences" or else we disregard them ("Who Lit This Fire?" 234)

This insight offers us a telling index for the debates surrounding the historical characterization of the climate crisis. Malm's analogy insists that, while transhistorical features of human life do make possible certain activities or events, the present crisis is more directly precipitated by something historically specific: *the extraction and consumption of fossil fuels for the purposes of capital accumulation*. In a sense, Moore inadvertently points to a fact about capitalist social metabolism: it operates precisely because human beings depend on nature and because it re-organizes that dependency, appearing to eliminate it whilst, in reality it degrades the very thing upon which we depend.

Accounts like Moore and Chakrabarty's fall short precisely in their failure to think dialectically about universal and particular, and about nature and history. Moore, on the one hand, manages to lapse into a generality that cannot grasp the historically specific dimensions of capitalist relations of production, in spite of his explicit attempts to specify them. Chakrabarty, on the other, fails to offer an adequately concrete account of the global unevenness of both ecological responsibility and vulnerability because he, too, fails to grasp the socially necessitated contradictions wrought by the historical specificity of capitalism and not the generalized ills of a greedy and reckless species-abstraction. The most visible interlocutors in the debate between the Anthropocene and Capitalocene discourses

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by Adorno, Mészáros, numerous Marxist ecologists and myself), for example, does not register in his understanding of what counts as a critique of capitalism, a critique which is not vulnerable to critiques he poses in response to the apparently classed character of climate change.

[272] Chakrabarty, "The Politics of Climate Change," 27.

demonstrate the outermost limits of a historical framework which, eschewing dialectical thought and failing to register reciprocal mediation, ultimately maintaining the opposition of transhistoricity and historical specificity which we examined in Chapter 2.

The Anthropocene Debate and the Problem of Underdevelopment

If the capitalism-driven 'warming condition' threatens to intensify and further militate global inequalities, we can safely assume it will not wait until the species-threat point is reached; the catastrophe will not happen all at once. Indeed, climate disaster is *already* affecting environmental crises and 'natural' disasters in the formerly colonized world. These disasters are *exacerbated by the persistent condition of underdevelopment*, the long durée of colonial and imperial domination. The condition of underdevelopment, while it has, for the most part, receded from the humanities' and social sciences' scholarly imaginary (except in fields such as International Relations, International Studies, and Political Science, where it conforms to the mainstream use of the concept) in response to colonialism, nonetheless persists and, in light of the climate crisis, presents new challenges to both the project of undermining imperial global hegemony and combatting the already felt impact of climate change in the formerly colonized world.

Questions of ecology and sustainability have been part of socialist and decolonization movements and the struggle for genuinely human development long before the popular imaginary caught up with the earth's rapidly changing climate. Contrary to much popular opinion on the 'anti-ecological' character of Marx's thought (a notable consequence of emphasizing productive forces, I might add), John Bellamy Foster's *Marx's Ecology* demonstrates that ecological concern is at the heart of Marx's thought and method. Before this, in Burkina-Faso, Thomas Sankara's movement worked to combat the dual ecological crisis faced by the Burkinabè people: deforestation and desertification. Indeed, in 1986 he delivered a speech that "Imperialism is the Arsonist of our Forests and Savannas" which was meant to publicize and encourage support for popular reforestation efforts, including cultural campaigns to encourage tree-planting as a celebratory act on special occasions.[273] Sankara clearly identified—again, in 1986 two years before the establishment of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—that "The struggle for the trees and the forest is the anti-imperialist struggle. Imperialism is the arsonist of our forests and our savannahs" (156). And his was not a strictly nationally bounded worry, but rather a preliminary recognition of the capitalist threat

[273] Thomas Sankara. "Imperialism is the Arsonist of our Forests and Savannas" in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution, 1983-1987* (Atlanta: Pathfinder Press, 2007).

to the earth system: "We do not turn away from the suffering of others, for the spread of the desert no longer knows any borders" (156). Burkina-Faso, today, faces the same crisis but intensified by export-oriented extraction and production and agricultural overdraft to compensate for extreme poverty, poverty long-sedimented by neo-/colonial exploitation.[274] Increasing storm activity in the Caribbean is reaching unprecedented scope and scale.[275]

Thus, ecological imperialism, now more than ever is at the forefront of global politics outside the Europe and North America (where, not incidentally, climate denialism stubbornly persists at the highest rates in the world). However, questions of unequal global relations and ecological practices occur in a social and political context where combatting climate change *and* meeting the needs of those in former (and present) colonies are understood in tension, requiring careful navigation of not only questions of origin and responsibility but of concrete policy for sustainable and equitable action. Reducing carbon emissions and eliminating reliance on fossil fuels is often challenged by the claim that doing so would adversely affect the 'third world' and 'human well-being'.[276] Conversely, this is also exemplified by the Bush-era opposition to the Kyoto Protocols, wherein a primary objection was that the protocols absolved the 'developing countries' of any responsibility for climate change. Never mind that the 'developed world' is disproportionately responsible for GHG emissions and fossil fuel consumption. Even critiques of theory and policy in the imperial centers often traverse this apparent tension. For example, when Chakrabarty argues against the 'one-dimensional' framework of greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, which stems from a worry about how GHG reductions might impact the post-colonial world, as noted above. These 'poles' of opinion conflate the universality of the threat with the supposed homogeneity of responsibility and impact.

In the previous section, I alluded to the potential weaknesses of Chakrabarty's refutation of the so-called 'one-dimensional approach' to climate change—one which actually

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[274] See Sven Lindqvist, Anna Tengberg. "New Evidence of Desertification from Case Studies in Northern Burkina Faso." *Geografiska Annaler: Series A, Physical Geography*, 75:3 (2017): 127-135; Nakia Pearson, Camille Niaufre. "Desertification and Drought Related Migrations in the Sahel—The Cases of Mali and Burkina Faso." in Gemenne, François; Brücker, Pauline; Ionesco, Dina, *The State of Environmental Migration 2013: A Review of 2012*, pp. 79–100.

[275] See, Michael Taylor. "Climate change in the Caribbean – Learning Lessons from Irma and Maria," *The Guardian* (October 2017). James P. Kossin, Kenneth R. Knapp, Timothy L. Olander, Christopher S. Velden. "Global Increase in Major Tropical Cyclone Exceedance Probability Over the Past Four Decades." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 117.22 (June 2020): 11975-11980.

[276] See, for example, Jesse Reynolds. "We Can't Count on Cutting Greenhouse Gas Emissions to Prevent Dangerous Climate Change." *Legal Planet*, (January 2020).

includes a wide and heterogenous range of positions that emphasize GHG reduction, decreasing or eliminating the use fossil fuels, and transitions to sustainable practices (some superficial and others targeted at the system of production itself). One criticism, in particular is of interest, namely his critique of Marxist ecology and, more generally, to political-economic analyses of the climate crisis. It is important to note that, as I highlighted in Chapter 3, the extraction of natural resources and environmental degradation play virtually no role of Chakrabarty's analysis of European colonialism in *Provincializing Europe* and a sharply limited and passive role in his earlier *Rethinking Working-Class History*. Thus, his continued aversion to materialism is to be expected. However, as Chakrabarty's position has pivoted toward increasingly abstract 'geological time' and 'human activity,' his approach also taken up to the question of development in an unexpected way.

As Malm and Hornborg point out, Chakrabarty is mistaken in assuming that fossil fuel consumption has been driven by social justice or the 'democratization' and inclusivity of consumption or that, somehow, the production of these consumer products was intended to serve human needs at all. Chakrabarty's emphasis on colonial difference pertains as much to a diagnosis of the problem as to proposed solutions:

> The climate problem is seen in this approach as a challenge of how to source the energy needed for the human pursuit of some universally accepted ends of economic development, so that billions of humans are pulled out of poverty. The main solution proposed here is for humanity to make a transition to renewable energy as quickly as technology and market signals permit. The accompanying issues of justice concern relations between poor and rich nations and between present and future generations: Given the constraints of a given carbon budget, what would be a fair distribution of the 'right to emit GHGs […]" ("The Climate of History" 26)

Chakrabarty is describing an incredibly large swathe of approaches to the climate crisis, indeed most excluding his own. This presents certainly difficulties in ascertaining which criticism applies to which approach in the remainder of the article. Still, even from this preliminary definition we can infer that, in spite of his insistence that he does not reject universalism, a pivotal aspect of his claim relies on the dubiousness of "universally accepted ends" (27). Chakrabarty equivocates between all universal ends, as though one were indistinguishable from the next. By implication, then, we can infer that aspiring to any universal end is an indication of an approach's one-dimensionality. We should also note, however, that Chakrabarty correlates this generalized universality to the practice of "transition[ing] to

renewable energy as quickly as technology and market signals permit". This applies to virtually all positions Chakrabarty classifies as one dimensional *except* Marxist ecology and radical degrowth approaches, which neither accepts the boundaries of 'market signals' nor relies primarily on technological optimism to overcome the climate crisis.

Chakrabarty's recent work also raises important questions about how to contend with the problem of development, though his response to such questions is largely inconclusive and outweighed by his insistence on a planetary and geological focus. Even as he argues that the climate crisis "requires us to both zoom into details of intra-human injustice […] and to zoom out of that history" to include the suffering of human beings as well as other species and the planet itself, his alignment with the Anthropocene position has been explicitly predicated upon emphasizing the big picture beyond capitalism and insisting on the need to focus on 'geological time' (34). While Chakrabarty often alludes to colonial difference as posing a challenge to the emissions-reduction paradigm, he never responds to the questions that he raises. Indeed, he never meaningfully integrates any analysis of colonial history into his macro-scale model of planetary history. Still, these questions urgently demand a response, even if he himself does not provide it.

"At the heart of the climate problem," writes Chakrabarty, "the justice question introduces the matter of 'uneven development'".[277] This 'uneven development' also proves to be a complicating factor for claims "about the inequalities of the impact of climate change," i.e. "the widespread desire for growth, modernization, development whatever you call it, in the less developed nations of the world".[278] Chakrabarty takes the question of development to be of paramount importance, especially regarding the reduction of GHG emissions. He introduces a concrete case to demonstrate the complexity of this apparent conundrum. He takes the example of cheap air conditioning equipment—which relies on hydro-fluorocarbons (HFCs). He highlights the disparity between access to affordable cooling equipment in the U.S. (where a majority of people have at least one) and India (where a small fraction of Indians have access to cooling). This example is intended to highlight not only the current disequilibrium of access, but also to highlight that remedying that disequilibrium seems to complicate the imperative of severely reducing GHGs (HFCs are synthetically manufactured

[277] Dipesh Chakrabarty. "Planetary Crises and the Difficulty of Being Modern." *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 46.3 (2018): 259-282. p. 266.
[278] Ibid.

GHGs), which if taken literally, would perpetuate inequalities induced by the colonial past and imperial present. Such cases alert eco-fascists such as Garrett Hardin to seeming need for a 'lifeboat ethics' which would accept that this inequality cannot be altered without threatening the 'first world'.[279]

For Chakrabarty, this is paradoxical since it pits the particular needs of some humans against the collective, species-scale need to divert from the course that could lead us to planetary catastrophe. Other than to challenge what he considers the 'one-dimensional' approach to climate change—i.e., policy geared toward GHG emission reduction and divestment from fossil fuels—which cannot accommodate the different conditions of development between the imperial centers and the former colonies. Malm and Hornborg, as previously mentioned, already challenge the degree to which any claim about increased GHG emissions is, in reality, attributable to surges in air conditioning purchases. However, the case raises other questions about the limits of Chakrabarty's thinking in response to the tension between the 'right to development' and sustainability.

Firstly, the *affordability and availability of HFC-based cooling mechanisms is itself a product of capitalist markets*. The cost of production for these units, as opposed to that of units which do not rely on hydrocarbon refrigerants does not reflect the natural properties of either mechanism, but of the existing cost reductions made by the HFC industries (often begotten through subsidies or exploitation at extraction and production points) to ensure wide marketability. Cooling and refrigeration could be provided without relying on HFCs and, while not without their challenges, these alternatives could close the gap between India and the U.S. Secondly, the case presented by Chakrabarty, if it is to serve as a model for dealing with 'uneven development' (or what is more precisely called underdevelopment), must overcome the *latent assumption that the rest of the world must or could be like the U.S., Japan, and Western Europe*. Chakrabarty is right to question the tendencies of 'modernization' which prescribe matching conditions in the colonies to those in the imperial centers, which is not only epistemologically and political questionable, but *physically impossible*. His presentation of the air conditioning example demonstrates that even he himself continues to imagine that all forms of 'development' must take the same form as they have in the imperial, capitalist societies. Rather than consider other means for meeting dire cooling needs in India, he presents HFC-based

[279] See Garrett Hardin. "Lifeboat Ethics: The Case Against Helping the Poor." *Psychology Today* (September 1974).

technologies as a fixed condition of cooling, projecting current market conditions into the foreseeable future. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, Chakrabarty's foray into the challenges posed by colonial difference *focuses primarily on distribution and consumption patterns*, with no attempt to consider the transformation of production itself, much less to rethink 'development' as part of that transformation. By focusing on distribution of consumption, this vantage occludes more profound contradictions and antagonisms at the heart of capitalism as a mode of production.

For Chakrabarty, cases such as these raises larger questions about the project of sustainability and climate justice: "How does one account for the desire for modernity or so-called development […] among many if not most humans everywhere? What is the relationship between the projects of modernisation that were initiated in the third world by anti-colonial modernisers […] and the desire for capitalist growth and progress in populous notions like India and China, and the climate crisis today?".[280] These are questions that harken to debates in the 1970s and 80s during and following a fervent period of decolonization. Debates between various schools of thought—e.g., dependency theory, world-systems theory—grappled with the question of how to critically comprehend the entanglement of European and North American imperialism, capitalist global hegemony, and the internalized imperative of 'modernization.' This complex nexus, for Chakrabarty, seemingly becomes an opportunity to critique Marxist proponents of the Capitalocene discourse, on the basis that:

> […] they are silent on the question of how or why visions of modernised futures came to seize the imagination of the middle and other classes of nations that were once colonies of European powers. If there is any agency in of concrete humans in the Marxist literature on Capitalocene in excess of what may be attributed to the abstract logic of capital—it belongs to the industrial captains and elites in boardrooms and governments who make economic decisions, and not to the elite, middle or subaltern classes of Asia and Africa. ("Planetary Crises"271)

If Chakrabarty's analysis of Marxist critics were accurate, then he would be correct in saying that this view is inadequate. One cannot simply attribute all harms to foreign powers and proclaim the passive innocence of the colonized. However, this is not the view that any Marxist theory of imperialism would take, even in its older and less nuanced forms. Even if this claim does not actually belong to those critics, however, we must still contend with the problem to

[280] Chakrabarty, "Planetary Crises," 271.

which the passage points: the internalization of imperial and capitalist imperatives of development.

Without evaluating the claim that Marxists have or have not been 'silent' on the internalized imperative of imperialist modernization (since that claim does not to refer to whether Marxists *could speak* to this question), we can identify a poignant irony in Chakrabarty's accusation that the Marxist critic cannot explain "the history of these third-world desires" (271). This irony twofold. On the one hand, even *if* Marxists had been silent on the motor of the 'modernization' paradigm being propelled by middle and upper classes in the former colonies,[281] the tools to diagnose this are not only present but specific to the Marxist tradition: namely, the critique of ideology.[282] On the other hand, Chakrabarty has already foreclosed the possibility of answering his own question, by rejecting the political economy paradigm as a legitimate analysis of expropriation and exploitation outside the West (as in his earlier work) or as a tool for diagnosing the climate crisis (in his most recent work). The cause of the wide acceptance of the modernization imperative is attributable to the social mediation of production by capitalist imperialism which, while gruesomely underdeveloping the former colonies, still served as the primary means of satisfying *some* needs, needs shared by all human beings, European or not, as fulfillment became increasingly dependent on the market.

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[281] While it is true that dependency theorists do not often foreground the role of the 'national bourgeoisie' or the ruling classes in the colonies in imperial administration and the perpetuation of neo-colonial social and economic practices, it is not the case that Marxists in general have overlooked this problem (prompting others to conclude that class is either unimportant or even absent from their accounts). Indeed, this is one point of tension between the history of dependency and world-systems theories and more classical Marxists theories of imperialism, as is evidenced by many of the reservations expressed by Robert Brenner (whatever his faults otherwise) in the 'Brenner-Wallerstein Debate.' However, even Wallerstein himself was not whole ignorant of nor indifferent to the problem of exploitative 'national bourgeoisies, a question which preoccupies his work in "Fanon and the Revolutionary Class" in *The Essential Wallerstein* (New York: The New Press, 2000). In the case of Gunder Frank, his work in *Lumpenbourgeoisie: Lumpendevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972) also exemplifies an awareness of internal divisions in the 'periphery'. Samir Amin has also been attentive to the limits of national liberation as a framework for attenuating underdevelopment. See, for example, Amin, "The Social Movements in the Periphery: An End to National Liberation?" in A.G. Frank, G. Arrighi, S. Amin and I. Wallerstein, Eds. *Transforming the Revolution: Social Movements and the World System* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990). This is to say nothing of debates within the Third International, wherein the question of national liberation was pivotal. See, John Riddell, Ed. *Workers of the World and Oppressed Peoples Unite!: The Communist International in Lenin's Time* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1991). In short, the claim that Marxists have been indifferent to the manner in which modernization ideology has taken root in the post/colonial world is without evidence when we consider the considerable attention given to mechanisms of internalization and social reproduction of the imperialist project through the 'national bourgeoisie' question.

[282] For an example of the efficacy of the critique of ideology vis-à-vis 'modernization', See Jorge Larraín. *Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994). esp. 6-11, 134, 142-143, 157.

If global politics was (and continues to be) dominated by capitalist imperialist powers, it should not come as a surprise to any critical theorist—especially one who has a clear sense of ideology and its function—that the 'third world' would adopt the model promulgated, funded, and foisted upon it by imperial power (to what degree this was avoidable or is presently alterable requires another inquiry). Chakrabarty's earlier claim to capitalism's 'failed' universalization (examined in the previous chapter) returns to foreclose an answer to his own question. Nationalists and certain ruling class interests in the third world adopted modernization as their model simultaneously because of this internalization and because the satisfaction of material needs was already structured by another imperative, that of capital accumulation, with all instruments and resources subordinated to that aim.

Chakrabarty's own response to these questions takes recourse to a certain strain of 'anti-colonial modernizers' and to more radical movements which adopted the modernization model. Focusing on figures such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Mao, and Gamal Abdel Nasser. Many of which he argues shared "a simple and naïve faith in technocratic solutions," as a logical extension of modernization imperative (a diagnosis which is certainly credible). Other anti-colonial thought and practice, such as that of Walter Rodney, Thomas Sankara or Amilcar Cabral, which were more (ecologically conscious are not foregrounded in his account, and, moreover, Marxist ecological perspectives are also excluded from the discussion. In sum, Chakrabarty's analysis does not account for the ways that these approaches respond to the problem of underdevelopment without succumbing to the tendency to merely reproduce European, North American, and capitalist models of so-called 'modernization'.

Marxist Ecology, Underdevelopment, and Ecological Imperialism

To many mainstream, nationalist interests, these problems present themselves as challenges to the 'right to development,' understood as the right to develop along major capitalist, industrial lines. This claim is oriented toward inclusion into the current global system of production, distribution, and consumption. It is not a call for any serious alteration to that system, purporting to be concerned more with the seemingly 'immediate needs' of the nation's people (as if these were mutually exclusive). It is often promulgated as a kind of 'realpolitik' vis-à-vis the problem of 'poverty.' To some critics of the dominant development paradigm (e.g., the 'post-development' camp) the category of 'development' should be rejected altogether.

This rejection has a distinct meaning for different thinkers, but all share the same basic impetus: to reject not simply the content of development, but its very form. Perhaps most famously in the work of Arturo Escobar, even the starting point of development as a concept—the mere fact of underdevelopment—is *merely* (i.e., reducible) a discourse which has been promulgated by European colonialists to cultivate self-doubt and to secure the European trajectory development as a universalizable and exportable model.[283] Of course, Escobar is right to indicate the ways that European supremacy and capitalist ideology have generated the dominant, ideological conception of what constitutes both human development and 'developed' production. But Escobar goes further than this, to question the reality of 'underdevelopment.' More than rejecting racist and colonialist pretensions to the inherent 'backwardness' of the colonies. His suspicions extend as far as the very fact of development, questioning the practice of "governments designing and implementing ambitious development plans, institutions carrying out development programs in city and countryside alike".[284] Against any critique of a particular content or aim of development, for Escobar, the very fact of state or social planning is itself suspect.

The slew of 'development debates' during the 20th century (which has only been alluded to above) has resulted in a somewhat muddled and often equivocal vocabulary. This problem has made the terrain for discussing development somewhat uncertain. In order to avoid some of these discursive difficulties. I would like to highlight a distinction, one that was once perhaps more easily discernible. In order to distinguish between the transhistorical (again, not to be read as ahistorical) and historically specific and socially necessitated dimensions of development, I want to insist on the *distinction between modernization theories and theories of (under)development*. This distinction, I hope will help sharpen the historical-philosophical implications of the modernization imperative (i.e., the socially necessitated practice of coercive subordination of all development practices to that of capitalist accumulation and Euro-Atlantic supremacy).

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[283] See, Arturo Escobar. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). esp. 23-24: "Almost by fiat, two-thirds of the world's peoples were transformed into poor subjects in 1948 when the World Bank defined as poor those countries with an annual per capita income below $100. And if the problem was one of insufficient income, the solution was clearly economic growth." While Escobar is right to highlight the ways that 'poverty' discourse has been mobilized as part of the imperial project and moreover that 'economic growth' has proven all but a solution, but his claim entails more than such a critique, also eschewing any objective basis or metric for poverty or underdevelopment.

[284] Ibid., 5.

Modernization theory is a fundamentally reifying and, indeed, Euronormative framework. Thinkers such as Talcott Parsons, informed by Max Weber, and Walt Rostow are emblematic of this approach to global stratification. The same basic presuppositions of the modernization paradigm were popularized in policy and in the public imagination by figures like Samuel Huntington. It is characterized by the tendency to apprehend 'differences' in global development as a consequence of 'internal' cultural differences, the conflict between traditionalism and technological advancement, and other such essentializing criteria. Furthermore, the framework presupposes the possibility of the universal realization of 'developed' conditions in Western Europe and the U.S. throughout the world and assumes this process corresponds to the increasing 'rationalization' of society.[285] It valorizes the exceptional status of 'modernity,' without any consideration of its historical emergence, material conditions of possibility, and moralizes with epochal terminology a Euronormative historical trajectory. This description also matches what mainstream pro-capitalist, neo-colonialists simply call 'development,' but this is neither exclusive nor endemic to that term. Indeed, the term development—in many of its critical uses—expresses on *opposition* to the modernization paradigm.

In contrast, the use of the term 'development' by thinkers of dependency and world-systems theory. The term 'development' in this context, does *not* share the presuppositions of the modernization paradigm. Instead, these frameworks begin from the assumption that persistent and patterned underdevelopment does not emerge simply from 'internal' factors but from expropriative, exploitative, and predatory transnational relations. These thinkers begin from the assumption that external relations primarily (though not exclusively) have generated the conditions of underdevelopment in the former and neo-colonies. Moreover, there solution to this problem—as opposed to that of the modernization theorists, which supports the foreign aid industry and imperialist intervention—the more Marxist strain of dependency

[285] The facet of this framework which pertains to universal realizability is often attributed to Marx himself, based on a passage from the preface to the German first edition of *Capital, Vol. 1*. In that preface, Marx writes: "The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future". This has often been misunderstood as a generalized statement about the future of European modernity. However, as Foster points out, the passage is much more likely informed by the differing statuses of Germany and England (since Capital is primarily a study of Britain) and his intent to communicate to his German readers the applicability of his analyses beyond the English context. See, Foster "The Imperialist World System: Paul Baran's Political Economy of Growth After Fifty Years" (2007): https://monthlyreview.org/2007/05/01/the-imperialist-world-system/.

theory proposed a transformation of global politics to not only mitigate the distributive pattern of underdevelopment but the relations of production which makes possible the pattern in the first place. Of course, the dependency school is not a homogenous theoretical milieu. Indeed, thinkers were often divided on some of these same prescriptions and measures. But, generally, speaking the use of the term development—while used in a dereifying and negatively critical way, to challenge the capitalist appropriation of the term—nonetheless maintained that its historically specific form, i.e., capitalist development, was not exhaustive of thinking human development in general.[286]

Sustainable human development—i.e., the project of improving at a societal level the means and relations by which humans reproduce themselves—is not reducible to its dominant denotation. In the same way that, as Marx once wrote, 'freedom' and 'equality' are not, in reality, most at home in capitalism which he ironically referred to as 'the Eden' of these values. By the same logic, the development of material and social practices of the reproduction of life and its improvement need not be tethered perennially to its historically specific significance under capitalism. An immanent critique of the category requires us to confront the relation between the form and content of the concept of 'development,' rather than allowing the present content (which is subordinate to the capitalist form) to fix its meaning. Once again, the historical modes of transhistoricity and historical specificity prove to have rather high stakes in the critical analysis of 'development.'

The two most visible positions on the question of development—either to accept it 'as is' or to reject it in its entirety—do not exhaust the options and, more importantly, they do not and cannot attend to the increasingly complex process of attenuating not only imperial control but climate disaster. We can *both* a) reject the claim that development, as it presently is and how it has historically operated is a 'necessary evil' or an indication that capitalism does produce 'good outcomes,' if at a high cost *and* b) reject the claim of 'post-development' which reduces all possible meanings of the term to its Euronormative use and eschews the possibility of any non-Eurocentric, objective standard for determining the adequacy of infrastructure, sustainable resource use, economic stability, and conditions and relations of labor. More importantly, if we idle in the existing oppositional framework of *either* uncritical submission to capitalist, imperialist development *or* repudiation of any and all possible revision of the content

[286] Jorge Larraín. *Theories of Development: Capitalism, Colonialism and Dependency* (New York: Wiley, 2013).

of development, then we are without recourse to address the most pressing, concrete problems of the formerly colonized world. Both of these approaches misdiagnose the drivers of continued imperial domination and the displacement of ecological crises: they both leave the dominant mode of production's basic telos, i.e., capital accumulation, uninterrogated either by acceptance or by failure to specify it as historically distinct content of the term 'development,' or to understand it as a distortion of human development, which is, in fact, universally necessary and realizable.

There have been numerous attempts to re-think development, to push that category beyond its mainstream, Euronormative, neo-colonial, and capitalist aims. Some attempts have been coopted and subordinated to the ends of capitalist development. Take, for example, the term "sustainable development." It is now a staple of UN discourse and of the recent Paris Accords proposal which has nominally set goals for 'eliminating poverty' and 'protecting the planet'. [287] The policies forwarded by the Paris Accords are anything but a radical transformation of global society. In fact, current pledges aren't significant enough to keep global temperatures from rising beyond the threshold of 2 degrees Celsius (above preindustrial levels).[288] They are not even sufficient to reach the most conservative ecological benchmarks for mitigating, much less reversing climate change. Further, all of its goals presuppose the perennial existence of capitalist 'economic growth'. The program's responsiveness to the climate crisis primarily takes the form of encouraging only mitigating and 'adaptive' practices, accepting that the crisis is already irreversible. Never is the goal of production (i.e., profit, surplus, exchange-value) or its coercive export and replication in the 'developing world' (e.g., via the aid industry's parasitic practices) called into question. The term 'sustainable development' has come to signify a paradigm which seeks to reconcile sustainability and profit-driven growth, two fundamentally incompatibility categories. Used in this way, to reflect an irrational and dangerously complacent climate agenda, the adjective *sustainable* should be read

[287] Most emblematic of this UN Goal #13: Climate Action. See, https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/climate-change/. The UN goal is "sustainable and inclusive growth," which translates largely to continued capitalist economic growth with more equitable distribution. 'Adaptation' in combination with the maintenance of 'economic growth' betray a fundamentally resigned position, one which accepts both the inevitability of climate change and of capitalism as a mode of production.
[288] See, Clive L. Spash. "This Changes Nothing: The Paris Agreement to Ignore Reality." *Globalizations*, 13.6 (2016): 928-933. See also, Michael Greshko. "Current Climate Pledges Aren't Enough to Stop Severe Warming." *National Geographic* (October 2017).

as concerning the sustaining of *capitalism*, since it is more bent on preserving the profit motive than on a habitable climate future, something which is *impossible from within capitalism*.[289]

We must ask whether concepts—once appropriated and mediated by the dominant ideology, once captured by the extant historical present—are irrecoverable, if the immanently developed norms of a category necessarily exhaust its critical potential to resist those norms. This question draws us into debates within the critical theory tradition and which have very recently returned to the fore, in what is now known as the 'normative turn' in critical theory. Rather, than pose the question in this way, however, I have opted instead to demonstrate how others have already demonstrated the possibility and necessity of recuperating the concept of development, not for capitalist imperialist or ecocidal ends, but for human ones. One thinker which especially exemplifies the potential of a natural-historical, materialist, and dialectical analysis of not only social metabolism but its mediation by capitalist imperialism is István Mészáros.

Though himself not a Marxist *ecologist* per se, Mészáros's analysis of capitalist social metabolism is a crucial reflection on ecology in the Marxist tradition. In *Beyond Capital*, Mészáros is sharply critical of not only capitalism as "an ultimately uncontrollable mode of social metabolic control" but of the 'modernization' myth promulgated by proponents of that mode of control (41, XV). Mészáros's analysis requires that we question whether the so-called dream of 'modernization' *should* be realized outside the imperial center, but whether such realization is, in fact, *possible*. The climate crisis, as it points to the hard physical limits of capitalist production and consumption, also highlights "The fact that the rapacious exploitation of the human and material resources of our planet for the benefit of a few capitalist countries happens to be a non-generalizable condition […]", to which we can add that such benefits are disproportionately concentrated among the ruling classes of those countries. (XV). Mészáros's preliminary reflections on the question of 'modernization,' then, argue precisely against the apparent universality of the European model of development and thus challenge the Euronormative imperial project carried out by mainstream 'development'

[289] Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 73: "The universalizing tendency of capital which had brought us to the point where we stand today emanated from its 'endless and limitless drive to go beyond its limiting barrier,' whatever the latter may have been, from natural obstacles to cultural and national boundaries. […] It is in the nature of capital that it cannot recognize any measure by which it could be restrained, no matter how weighty the encountered obstacles might be in their material implications, no matter how urgent—even to the point of extreme 'emergency'—with regard to their time scale."

agencies and policy institutions. Through its rejection of the possibility of this universal realization, it challenges the assumptions of the development industry, which seeks to maintain an illusory equilibrium between profit and an as yet unrealized global equality.

Mészáros's account also avoids the tendency toward value reversal that has been characteristic of so much contemporary critical thought, a tendency which seems only to reverse the de-valorization of marginalized categories or to simply invert historical power relations.[290] "Even if the history of imperialism could be re-written", he argues, "in a sense diametrically opposed to the way it actually unfolded […] the general adoption of the rapacious utilization of our planet's limited resources […] would make the whole system instantly collapse" (XV). Taking seriously the contigent nature of Europe's imperial ascendance, Mészáros carefully avoids ontologizing the problem as a feature which is quintessentially 'European'. Without falling prey to nativism or bourgeois nationalism, Mészáros takes seriously the limits of vying for substantive equality within a strictly nationalist framework. "The defence of national sovereignty and the right of self-determination cannot be the last word in these matters," i.e. matters of development and sustainability, "although it most certainly happens to be a first step" (168). Thus, while acknowledging that decolonization requires certain prerequisite conditions (i.e., national independence), Mészáros also avoids hypostatizing this moment of national partisanship as a permanent feature of the politics of decolonization, socialism, and sustainability.

Interestingly, like many postcolonial and decolonial thinkers, Mészáros highlights the problematic character of persistent bourgeois nationalism in former colonies post-independence. Indeed, his assessment of these movements and states echoes many of the same concerns expressed by Chatterjee.[291]However, without discounting this 'first step,' Mészáros takes into serious consideration the limits of nationalist liberation as a defensive response to global capitalism, precisely to avoid the decree that "the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity" (Chatterjee NIF 5).[292] And yet, this does not amount to dismissing experiences of lived decolonization due to their alleged 'Eurocentrism', a tendency

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[290] Ibid., XV.

[291] Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*, 168: "The fate of the great majority of post-Second World War liberation struggles against colonial rule under the leadership of the national bourgeoisie […] only succeeded in replacing the rule of capital formerly exercised under direct colonial/imperial administration by one or another of its 'neo-colonial' and 'neo-capitalist' versions of structural dependency."

[292] Ibid., 5.

which is somewhat common in decolonial and postcolonial scholarship.[293] Without ignoring the need for even radical movements to operate within a constrained and capitalist-determined world, we need not accept that the value of such movements are *reducible* to the fact that the world was not already theirs. We have to understand the struggle for decolonization as mediated, both practically and ideologically, by existing conditions while also being resistant to these conditions.

Mészáros's intervention provides a useful vantage for tracking the coextensive problems of imperial expansion and ecological degradation. His critique of ecological imperialism is grounded in a view of the long history of capitalism's tendency to displace localized or regional physical limitations and respond to underconsumption.[294] He focuses on the aim of capitalist production—production for exchange-value rather than use-value, for surplus and profit rather than human need—to identify capital's necessary hostility to the earth system:

> Potentially fatal overreaching is itself the hallmark of capital's relationship […] to the elementary conditions of social metabolic reproduction, in the absolutely inescapable interchange of humankind with nature. Neither the fantasies about the 'post-industrial society'—in which informatica is supposed to replace 'smoke stack industries' […]—nor the various strategies conceived and commended from the vantage point of capital as the proper way of 'limiting growth' can alleviate this grave condition. (BC 171)

Foregrounding the *form of production*, rather than the distribution or consumption—as in Chakrabarty's air conditioning example—Mészáros emphasizes the ecological overreaching is an unavoidable consequence of capitalist production itself. The tendency to ecological overreach has a rather long history, but as capital began globalizing, i.e. integrating the majority of societies on earth, the environmental cost could be offset by shifting extraction and production geographically, in an attempt to negate environmental limits in the imperial centers. "Under the conditions of its ascendancy," writes Mészáros, "capital could manage the internal

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[293] See, Anibal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America." *International Sociology*, 15.2 (2000): 215-232. esp. 231: So far there has been only a Eurocentric mirage of 'socialist' revolutions since the salaried industrial working class has never been the majority. Nor has the revolution been simply anti- bourgeois, because it has been forced to contend with the whole alliance of power around the axis of capitalism and under the basic, uneven control of the bourgeois sectors of heterogenous social conditions." See also, Ibid. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification" in Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, Carlos A. Jáuregui, Eds. *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[294] For a concise articulation of the concept of 'ecological imperialism,' See Foster et al., *The Ecological Rift*, 345-374.

antagonisms of its mode of control through the dynamics of *expansionary displacement*. Now we have to face not only the age-old antagonisms of the system but also the aggravating condition that the expansionary dynamic of traditional displacement itself has become problematical and ultimately untenable" (BC 252).

The phenomenon we commonly refer to as 'globalization,' a geopolitical configuration carved out by imperialism, initiated what Mészáros calls "the activation of capital's absolute limits".[295] The 'spatial fix', to use David Harvey's term, temporarily offset more localized crises of both environmental limitation, overproduction/underconsumption, and the constraints of organized labor but at the exorbitantly high price of attempting to negate the earth's natural limits only to produce the potentially existential threat of climate catastrophe.[296] But long before such a threat presented itself as existential, existing strategies of deferral and displacement already destabilized local and regional ecological conditions, temporally displacing environmental impacts and accelerating the timeline of ecological disaster in the former colonies. "At the same time," Mészáros notes, "when the champions of capital-apologetics were talking about the 'post-industrial' paradise, they were also talking about transferring the smokestack industries to India, or to China, to the Philippines, or to Latin America" (CBHT 90). They were transferred to places like Bhopal, where they "[killed] fifteen thousand and blind[ed] and injur[ed] thousands more" (referring to what is now called the Bhopal Disaster). The 'deindustrialization' of the Rust Belt and the seeming disappearance of industrial production in the former industrial centers directly corresponds to the export-oriented industrialization and extraction that produced the *maquiladora*. The international division of labor offset high labor costs and satisfied the increased need for raw materials, all the while shifting the burdens of pollutants and resource depletion to the already underdeveloped world.

The early history of ecological imperialism as form of expansionary displacement extends much earlier into the history of industrial capitalism, before its global integration. As Foster, highlights in *Marx's Ecology* and in numerous collaborative works as well, as early as the nineteenth century capitalism could not be called "self-sustaining" and was thereby driven to global expansion (156).[297] However, as John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, Richard York

[295] Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 142-280.
[296] David Harvey. *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Ibid. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (New York: Verso Books, 2019).
[297] See Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 151-163; Foster et al., *The Ecological Rift*, 345-372.

(henceforth referred to as Foster et al.) highlight in *The Ecological Rift*, this is only one way that that resource depletion and other environmental limits are temporarily circumvented in capitalist production. "There is a qualitative dimension as well," they write, "whereby one environmental crisis is 'solved' (typically only in the short term) by changing the type of production process and generating a different crisis" (e.g., the shift from wood to plastic in the production of consumer goods) (ER 74). "Technological innovations", in these conditions, "serve as an additional means to enlarge and expand the social metabolic order of capital" (80). It is for this reason that Marxist ecologists and environmental historians harbor a deep suspicion of the 'technological fix' response to the climate crisis.

Anti-Colonial and Marxist Ecology Against the 'Technological Fix'

At our present historical juncture, technological innovation would seem to hold the only promise of livable future. Indeed, some might refer to our time as the 'technological age' or the 'digital' or 'information age'. In all these narrative arcs, our time is characterized by the advancement, mediation, and increasingly total integration of technology. In the formerly industrial Western world, this narrative is a constitutive component of the popular imagination. It forms the core of many claims about the transformation of our world and the theoretical interventions which aim to reflect it, e.g. 'post-Fordism,' 'post-industrial society,' and 'immaterial labor,' among others. In the midst of the climate crisis, this narrative has been altered to highlight the redemptive possibilities of technological innovation to circumvent the instability of the earth system. Geoengineering and the aspirations of CEOs like Elon Musk have come to dominate the popular imagination's understanding of how to respond to climate change in the U.S. and much of Europe. This imaginative landscape is populated by devices and instruments that purport to defer the need for lasting social transformation. This framework, though it may seem quintessentially 21st century, is not as novel as it appears. This same framework has functioned as a lynchpin of the dominant, ideological paradigm of 'development' in reference to the 'Third World' for decades.

As early as the 1960s and even the post-1979 financial crisis, proponents of technologically focused 'development' have emphasized the need for increased industrialization and expanded production capacity in the former colonies. The solution to world hunger and global poverty, this approach argues, is the advancement of technological innovation, the introduction of new productive technologies, and the exigencies of efficient

production. This approach has only increased in popularity. One need only think of organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation or the large network of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and non-profits which are represented by the moniker ICT4Dev (Information and Communication Technologies for Development).[298] These organizations have placed significant emphasis on 'green' technology startups, sustainability focused micro-loans, and many have tried to recreate tech hubs across the underdeveloped world using the Silicon Valley mold. All of these efforts are geared toward accelerating, expediting, and increasing production capabilities with the hopes of incrementally nudging upward the widely accepted indexes of development: national GDP and per capita income. As we examined in Chapter 1, the focus on production technologies is often attributed to a Marxist framework (largely as a consequence of analytical Marxism's former prominence in the anglophone world), but the position is much more prevalent among pro-capitalist development discourse.

In the previous section, we considered the phenomena of expansionary displacement and spatial fixes in order to consider some of the basic logical components of ecological imperialism and underdevelopment. Our focus in this section, echoing some aspects of the discussion of underdevelopment in Chapter 1, is another strategy to manage crises, ensure the continuation of accumulation, and reconfigure the international division of labor: *the technological fix* prioritizes the *form* of technological 'development' without alteration of society's fundamental social relations or the aims of production. The technological fix as a response to both environmental crisis and persistent underdevelopment, at first, appears to offer as neutral, transhistorical solution (i.e., to meet needs through increasing utility and efficiency) to the historically specific problem of underdevelopment. It fails to register the mediation of instruments and technological artifacts by the aim of the capitalist mode of production (exchange-value rather than use-value).

Echoing Marx's observations in Chapter 15 of *Capital*, Mészáros highlights that "the advancement of powers of agricultural production did not bring with it the eradication of famine and malnutrition. For doing so would […] contradict the imperative of 'rational' capital expansion" (BC 175). He reiterates Marx's analysis when he highlights the failure of mechanization and industrialization to free workers from toil, which instead further

[298] See Center for Information and Communication Technology for Development ICT for Empowerment and Development, https://www.infocomtech4dev.org

instrumentalizing the laborer and integrating new workers into an exploitative system of production. He insists, "nobody should be surprised […] that under such determinations the role of science and technology must be degraded to 'positively' enhancing global pollution and the accumulation of destructiveness on the scale prescribed by capital's perverse logic, instead of acting in the opposite direction" (BC 175). This contradiction has been further examined by Marxist ecologists who also foreground the mediation of technology by social relations.

Foster et al. highlight two 'paradoxes' of production under capitalism: the Jevons Paradox and, a contemporary adaption of the paradox called the Paperless Office Paradox. What these 'paradoxes' indicate is the nexus at which social relations (including the telos of production) and technical improvement are reciprocally mediating. Jevons, an English economist and logician, observed that "as the efficiency of coal us by industry improved, thereby allowing for the production of more goods per unit of coal, total coal consumption *increased*" (ER 184). This is paradoxical since one would expect efficiency to require *fewer* of the resources and thereby to be indexed to *lower* consumption. Foster et al. note that this is also clearly exemplified by the development of eco-efficient and green technologies on the consumer market. Based on the greatly improved fuel efficiency of cars, "It would seem reasonable to expect that improvements in the efficiency of engines and refinements […] would help curb motor fuel consumption. However, recent trends […] [suggest] a paradoxical situation where improvements in efficiency are associated with increases in fuel consumption" (ER 186). The technological advances that were intended to improve efficiency have, in reality, lead to expanded demand for resources. The same can be said of the concept of the Paperless Office Paradox' which is expressed in the "failure of computers and electronic storage mediums to bring about," for example, "a decline in paper consumption," and therefore help mitigate deforestation. What these 'paradoxes' demonstrate is that, much like the generality of the Anthropocene discourse, the ahistorical affirmation of technological development cannot register the historically specific social relations (including our species' relation to production as a whole) and therefore, cannot mitigate the ecological disaster that is promised by the status quo.

These 'paradoxes' (i.e., objective social contradictions) "raise the prospect that the expansion of renewable energy production technologies, such as wind turbines and photovoltaic cells, may not displace fossil fuel or other energy sources, but merely add a new source on top of them, and potentially foster conditions that expand the demand for energy"

(ER 190). If these technological innovations are not accompanied by the modification of the social and economic system (ER 191). In Chapter 1, we considered some of the ramifications of productive force or technological determinism precisely as it fails to grasp the social mediated character of technical 'improvement.' The apprehension of this reciprocal mediation is what the materialist conception of history, as conceived by Marx and Engels, has to offer a historically situated analysis of capitalist and imperialist underdevelopment. "Just as [they] viewed the materialist conception of history as inseparably bound to the materialist conception of nature, they viewed the dialectics of society as inseparably bound to the dialectics of nature" (ER 237-8). This dialectical movement tracks the vacillation between two poles of social contradiction, the domination of nature by society and the domination of human beings by natural necessity, exacerbated rather than alleviated by the reification and domination of nature.

This same insight is translated into other ecologically oriented (if not properly ecological) thought in the Marxist tradition. In Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, we encounter a similar expression of the above contradictions, expressed more abstractly as the increased domination of human beings by nature, precisely as a consequence of the attempt to unfetter ourselves from natural dependency. And, we might add, as a consequence of the historically contingent (and only later socially necessitated) forms that the attempt to free ourselves from natural dependency has taken hitherto. More recently, Malm describes a paradox of his own, "the paradox of historical nature" (76). "The more profoundly humans have shaped nature over their history," he writes, "the more intensely nature comes to affect their lives. The more the sphere of social relations has determined that of natural ones, the more the reverse, toward the point of some breakdown" (76). The dialectical mode of thought capable of overcoming this contradiction is best exemplified in these thinkers who, in not so many words, abide by the first tenet of "socialist climate realism," namely acknowledgement that "Social relations have real causal primacy" and, for Malm, especially "in the development of fossil energy and technologies based on it" (149).

If we accept this, then there is one set of social relations which cannot be ignored: the social relations of colonial and imperial domination. Foster et al. have here also productively intervened into the problem of ecological imperialism. Their example of an early 'technological fix' is constitutive of their study of the case of 'guano imperialism.' As soil erosion and nutrient deficiency emerged as a local ecological crisis in the industrial agricultural sectors of the U.S.

and Europe, the drive to acquire artificial fertilizers (a seemingly primitive but no less technological fix) in the form of guano, especially from South America. In their historical analysis, they argue that "imperial annexation" and partisanship in regional wars (e.g., the U.S. and Britain in the War of the Pacific) was driven by the ecological overdrafts of industrial agriculture. Subsequently, the introduction of "artificial nitrogen fertilizer has created additional ecological rifts and other environmental problems," displacing the initial soil-nutrient crisis through, first, expansionary displacement and, then, through the development of a hybrid expansionary-technological fix, through the production of the artificial fertilizers using nitrogen fixation with Chilean saltpeter. The result of imperial interventions, Foster et al. point out, "was not development, but rather, as explained by critics from Mariátegui in the 1920s to Frank in the 1960s, constituted the 'development of underdevelopment'" (ER 370). In the contemporary moment, overdraft-underdevelopment relation persists, only with the added dimension of former colonies becoming "more and more caught in the debt trap that characterizes extractive economies" (ER 370).

This particular example is demonstrative of how capitalist imperialist relations not only cause and necessitate persistent underdevelopment, but how even partial developments in the instruments and processes of production replicate existing relations of exploitation. Returning once more to Rodney's classic text, we must also consider the *historical* role of underdevelopment in technological development *itself*, in order to further problematize the apparently 'positive' or neutral disposition toward the technological fix. "The colonial system," after all, "permitted the rapid development of technology and skills within the metropolitan sectors of imperialism" (207). As a consequence of capitalism's tendency to endlessly 'revolutionize' the means of production in order to extract greater profits, exchange-oriented industrialization was a logical trajectory for capitalism in Europe. Europe, however, lacked many of the raw materials (or had reserves of inferior quality, smaller quantity, or too near human settlement) to carry out its seemingly miraculous industrial explosion. Rodney's account begins with the origins of industrial development in Europe, but it most certainly does not end there. In fact, his historically account of the development of nuclear power represents an innovative and telling paradigm shift in historical approaches to the 'atomic era.'

Rodney highlights that the macro-scale division of labor between the imperial centers and colonies was replicated on a smaller scale, within each of these poles, producing yet another division of labor. This time, "the development of capitalism in the imperialist epoch

continued the division of labor inside the capitalist metropoles to the point where scientific research was a branch of the division of labor" (209). Thus, accelerating the research process for still further technological developments, compounding into research which was "given priority by governments, armies, and private capitalists" (209). "African minerals played a decisive role both with regard to conventional weapons and with regard to the breakthrough to atomic and nuclear weapons," through the extraction of copper, iron, manganese (214-215). Indeed, "It was from Belgian Congo during the Second World War that the United States began getting the uranium that was a prerequisite to the making of the first atomic bomb" (215). Between Rodney's anti-colonial account of the global development of nuclear power and Adorno's conception of universal history there is, therefore, a surprising affinity one that converges with the possibility of a total existential threat.

"No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism," writes Adorno in the now-famous passage, "but there is one leading from the slingshot to the atom bomb" (ND 320). Adorno did not set out to describe the global threat of catastrophe in terms of the colonial/imperial project. This concise expression of the critical potential of universal history logically demands that we attend to the historical development of potential existential threats. Universal history as a critical category, in this way (even as it is developed by a European and with a focus on Europe) necessitates not only a global scope but a systematic apprehension of capitalist imperialism as a global system which threatens our very existence, this time threatening the whole of the earth system upon which we depend.

In order to prioritize, as historical conditions require, the mediation of technological development and of production in general by capitalist social relations, we need both the Euro-focused analyses of Western Marxism and Frankfurt School critical theory—which lend their attention primarily to the specificities of social relations and changes in production within the imperial centers—and the anti-colonial critique of imperialist underdevelopment and colonial exploitation in order to grasp the reciprocally constituting dynamic between the two spheres and to grasp the heterogeneous and uneven appearance of the dominant social totality. A critical universal history precisely requires that the analysis of the 'consumer society' understand itself as a condition produced by underdevelopment and as dependent upon those relations. Its universality stems precisely from its capacity to grasp the global system as a whole, without flattening the extreme stratification and hierarchical conditions by which the whole is produced. The goal of this universal but differential mode of critique is to grasp the reciprocal

mediation and systematic integration of these distinct conditions as they are subordinated to a single, universal logic and, simultaneously, to understand a shared, universal human condition as the ground for refusing that logic.

Universal History and the Challenge of Sustainable Development

A critical universal history, then, demands that we re-negotiate the boundaries of debates about climate change, climate justice, and global inequality. The term "sustainable development" has been so thoroughly coopted to signify the sustenance of capital accumulation that it requires redefinition beyond the terms of the dominant ideology.[299] Toward this end, we can draw on Mészáros's analysis. "Sustainability," he writes, "means being really in control of the vital social, economic, and cultural processes through which human beings cannot merely survive but can also find fulfillment, in accordance with the designs they set for themselves".[300] That is, the term sustainability—in addition to marking out the need to heed the earth's carrying capacity, as transgressing it would be self-undermining—entails the rational, collective organization of human social metabolism and production. Rather than continually being "at the mercy of unpredictable natural forces and quasi-natural socioeconomic determinations" (provoked, counterintuitively by the incessant drive to dominate and reify nature), Mészáros's conception of sustainability is tied closely to what he refers to as "social control." Social control refers to the rational and collective management of human society by and for the interests of human beings, including the sustenance of the social metabolism upon which they depend. Sustainability is both defined by and enacted through this principled 'social control.'

The ideological appropriation of sustainability, much like that of 'development,' requires us to *both* interrogate the ideological presentation of the category, wherever it reifies or naturalizes something historical specific and contradictory *and* to clarify a non-antagonistic, non-contradictory formulation of those same categories. Indeed, it is in response to the failure of the "modernization and development" paradigm that Mészáros defines his own formulation of development to reflect truly human, truly universal ends.[301] Thus, "sustainability equals the conscious control of the social metabolic process of reproduction by

[299] Foster et al., *The Ecological Rift*, 41.
[300] István Mészáros. *The Challenge and Burden of Historical Time: Socialism in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2008). p. 211.
[301] Mészáros, *The Challenge and Burden*, 208.

the freely associated producers," in relations of substantive (not just formal or legal) equality.[302] Sustainable development, for Mészáros, entails what used to be called 'rational planning' with the participation of the producers themselves, acting in accordance with production for use-value. The question of substantive equality—i.e., the elimination of classes, the end of neo-colonial, imperialist relations—is an integral part of his account.

This robust conception of 'sustainability' is possible precisely because of his insistence on the rationality—in this case referring to the internal, logical consistency—of these categories. Sustainability must be about "social control" because to violate natural limits and degrade the earth-system (e.g., as the logic of accumulation requires) is *fundamentally anti-social and unsustainable for the species*, as it threatens our very existence. Substantive equality is also entailed in the sense that we cannot consistently and rationally accept the safety, provision, and freedom of *some* human beings and properly call such a system 'designed for human ends' (since it only serves some of those ends and only incidentally). This approach to sustainable development is a logical extension of his emphasis on social relations of production (including our relation *to* production and the relation of production to nature), a feature which we emphasized in Chapter 1 and in the previous section. Without rejecting the liberatory potential of some technological developments, Mészáros emphasizes the need to transform the form of social mediation that determines the ends of technology and the use of natural resources. All this rests on another central feature of the materialist philosophy of history that was laid out in Chapter 1—rational intelligibility—only with a *prescriptive* rather than descriptive bent. Each methodological component and dialectical move (represented by the preceding chapters) is compounded to form the basis of Mészáros's robust account of a sustainable, socialist program.

For reasons which are ostensibly 'historically specific' in nature, critical theory and social-political philosophy, more generally, have grown suspicious categories such as universality and rationality (especially in the form of 'rational planning') and have grown averse to objective claims about the natural world and about human beings as natural creatures. It was once thought that the dawn of the 'information age,' of 'post-industrial society' and the end of the Cold War necessitated these theoretical tendencies. Historical conditions have 'changed,' on this view, such that the old categories no longer speak to present modes of

[302] Ibid., 245.

oppression, domination, or our resistance to them. As the threat of the climate crisis looms over a world sharply stratified by capitalist imperialism, we are compelled to rethink the apparent 'historical' basis for these theoretical trends which now have returned with a vengeance. Indeed, contrary to dominant trends in contemporary critical political theory, "More than ever," writes Mészáros, "the world needs what early socialist thinkers, including Marx, called for: the rational organization of the human metabolism with nature buy a society (or societies) of freely associated producers, in order to establish a social metabolic order no longer predicated on capital accumulation, ecological imperialism, and the degradation of the earth" (BC 372).

In Chapter 1, we considered the role of rational intelligibility as a *precondition* of social critique. What we did not examine in that chapter was the necessity for a rational social metabolism as the *aim* of critique, as the goal of its transformative arc. If rational *intelligibility* is the precursor to the critique of the irrational rationality of capitalist and imperialist production, then the organization of human social activity and the reproduction of life should be the goal of critical theory. This speaks to the stakes of centering 'negativity' in our critical accounts (as discussed in Chapter 4 and the present chapter), as has become commonplace in critical theory. Often, critical theorists today operate in an intellectual climate wherein a defense of the most basic concepts and methods of social critique has produced primarily defensive scholarship in critical theory. Exceeding the understandable 'negativity' entails in the avoidance of positivism and crude empiricism, the 'normative turn' in critical theory has *overcorrected*, in response to the criticism of later generations (e.g., Habermas, Honneth). Thus, it is rare that the analyses of critical theory venture into the domain of actively advocating for one form of social organization over another, except by implication (i.e., the current form of life is *not* the correct one). Mészáros and, indeed, Marxist ecologists in general are exceptional in this regard. The need for a dialectical apprehension of positivity and negativity has been drawn into focus as the conditions of our historical conjuncture grow undeniably more severe.

The irrationality of history's course and our critical responses to it are not merely abstract or disembodied. On the contrary, the rationality (or irrationality) of these processes is in reality (and thus in theory) indexed to the reproduction of life. In order to alter the conditions of life we must not only uncover logical contradictions but develop practices and institutions whose logic is first and foremost the satisfaction of human needs from within relations of substantive equality. This does not require that we establish a rigid separation

between capitalism's logic and its historical form and content. Much theory poses the question of how the abolition of capitalism can possibly impact forms of oppression and domination which are 'incidental,' rather than endemic, to it. Indeed, fervent debates about the historical origins of capitalism (e.g., the 'transition debates') begin from the assumption that capital's logical and historical dimensions are more than analytically distinct.

As the previous chapters have tried to show, however, no such separation can meaningfully contribute to an analysis of global capitalism or capitalist imperialism *as a logical-historical system*. That is, as a system whose logic is totalizing and integrative, appropriating a heterogenous and wide range of historical forms, practices, and relations. Although colonial annexation and usurpation technically predate other forms and logics that are endemic to capital, we would be remiss to thereby conclude that the two projects—colonial and imperial control and capital accumulation—were independent of one another. It is capital's totalizing rationality (i.e., its joint capacity for formal and real subsumption, the process of 'originary' accumulation) that brings us to the need for a *global* social critique, but the ground of that critique is transhistorical and social-metabolic. Once again, a dialectical account of these modes of history, as we considered in Chapter 2, seems the only rigorous avenue for a critical theory adequate to a world which has a long durée of social domination and is now facing the possibility of an abbreviated future.

There are practical models which have the potential to meet all conditions stipulated thus far. One exemplary approach has been suggested by Tom Athanasiou and Paul Baer which recommends a simultaneous "process of contraction and convergence. The rich nations of the North would be required to reduce (contract) their emissions of greenhouse gases to appropriate levels as determined by the atmosphere carbon target. Given global inequalities, the nations of the South would be allowed to increase their emissions rate below the acceptable level established by the target. This would create a world converging toward 'equal and low, per capita allotments'".[303]

[303] Foster et al., 117. Prior to the 'contraction and convergence' approach, earlier scholars analyzing the unequal conditions for sustainable development, Anil Argwhal and Sunita Narain proposed that "carbon emissions be determined on an equal per capita basis, rooted in what is allowable within the shared atmosphere" (Ibid. 117). While this early approach may have a certain perspectival appeal—i.e., it 'originates' from the global South—it is, I think, effectively challenged by Rodney's critical analysis of the 'per capita' category, which summarily obscures class disparities within the former colonies. See, Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, 17-29.

Of course, such an approach requires further calculation, policy and tactical programs, etc. However, even this simple sketch suggests a powerful alternative to the tendency to think emissions-reduction and other sustainability practices as a homogenous and undifferentiated process. It highlights the uneven procedures necessary for combatting climate change as a global phenomenon, without sacrificing the possibility of *simultaneously attenuating the problem of underdevelopment*.

What the 'contraction and convergence' approach suggests is that although climate change ultimately presents us with a universal, existential threat to the human species and the biosphere, its timeline (though narrowly and precariously) still permits us to circumvent the apparent zero-sum game of 'lifeboat ethics.' The universal needs of the entire species should be the metric by which we measure the success of sustainability practices, but the manner in which those needs are met is neither obvious nor given in a world which is radically and violently divided. We need not pit the particular ecological, cultural, and economic conditions of the global South against an abstracted universal interest (which, by implication excludes it). Rather, this kind of approach expresses the need for a dialectical understanding of universality and particularity, in a very real and concrete sense, taking care not to conflate the particular, historically specific content of 'development' (read: economic growth) with the transhistorical, nature-dependent fulfillment of human needs.

For many in the imperial centers, thinking sustainability leaves no room for the universality and political status of such needs, already immense inequalities and relations of exploitation must temporarily be suspended under the auspices of the immediacy of the universal climate threat. Such an opposition, however, is an artificial and, indeed, *ideological* one: it opposes sustainability (not climate justice) against substantive equality. As Mészáros points out, "those who are beneficiaries of the now prevailing system, with its gross inequality between the 'developed' and the 'underdeveloped' parts of the world, do not hesitate to impose, with utmost cynicism, the impact of their self-serving irresponsibility—as they have done recently in the arbitrary dismissal of the Kyoto protocols and other environmental imperatives—by insisting that the countries of the 'South' should remain stuck at their present level of development".[304] Such an argument is not confined to the earlier Kyoto protocols in

[304] Mészáros, *The Challenge and Burden*, 208.

2001 but is also exemplified in the U.S.'s withdrawal from the Paris Accords in 2017 by the Trump administration:

> The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers — who I love — and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production […] Not only does this deal subject our citizens to harsh economic restrictions, it fails to live up to our environmental ideals. As someone who cares deeply about the environment, which I do, I cannot in good conscience support a deal that punishes the United States — which is what it does -– the world's leader in environmental protection, while imposing no meaningful obligations on the world's leading polluters. (White House Press Release 2017)

Trump and his administration, thus, are drawing on a long line of conservative policymakers' tendency toward economic protectionism in response to environmental crisis—a tendency shared by both traditional conservatives like Bush and by his seemingly heterodox successor. The Trump administration insists on the "exclusive benefit of other countries" and "disadvantages" that could plague the most powerful country on earth, an empire which appears here as both David *and* Goliath.

Ostensibly retreating from the interventionism of previous administrations (though retaining their characteristic jingoism and xenophobia), the merely symbolic 'love of workers' evokes classic tensions in the North American labor movement as it explicitly touts the benefits to North American workers at the expense of workers beyond U.S. borders.[305] Setting aside the supreme irony of the reference to "the world's leading polluters," Trump's statement on the Paris Accords exemplifies a perverse reversal of the logic of the 'white man's burden' characteristic of neo-colonialism, where self-determination is weaponized to justify imperial control even after formal decolonization. Thus the ramifications of the opposition of particularity and universality are made clear *in practice*. In mainstream discourse, *either* substantive equality is possible (though such a promise has as of yet remained unrealized) *or* sustainability is possible, but never both and certainly never globally. It is these very conditions that compel us to develop the notion of universal history, in its dialectical complexity, with the aim of a *transformative praxis* instead.

[305] For a detailed history of the stratification of labor struggles in the U.S., See Melvyn Dubofsky, Foster Rhea Dulles. *Labor in America: A History* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

If at first the theoretical recuperation of the notion of universal history seemed abstract or only tenuously related to the concrete facts of global inequality and the climate crisis, the ongoing maintenance of the capitalist imperial project at the expense of potentially the entire species (though, again, not all at once), my hope is that this and the preceding chapters have begun to establish the political and strategic import of these questions. It is my view that this theoretical endeavor is only as worthwhile as its ability to encourage its practical realization. Universal history, then, is but an analytical extrapolation, adapted to contemporary historical conditions, of the most basic insights of the materialist philosophy of history which transgresses the boundary between description and normativity. At the outset of this chapter, I ventured to ask whether the urgency of the present global crisis did not seem to outweigh the need to clarify the meaning of 'historical critique' or to take time to develop a thorough historical approach to social criticism. If the apparent resuscitation of universal history seems too lofty a gesture, it is only because its practical implications are yet to be enacted. For that reason, such an investigation is—concretely and materially—as pressing now as ever.

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