

**Echoing Demystified Aspirations:
Human Flourishing and the Dialectic of Happiness**

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Table of Contents

	Page
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Constructing the Royal Road to Happiness: The Case of Hobbes.....	24
The Physics of Happiness	
Hobbesian Individual and Displacements of Power	
Passions and the Science of Politics	
The Construction of the Commonwealth	
The Paradoxes of Hobbesian Happiness	
III. Spinoza’s Happiness: Beatitude and the Economy of Affect.....	90
<i>Beatitudo</i> as the Greatest Happiness	
Happiness, Joy, and the Power of the Affects	
Constructing the Politics of Happiness: Multitude, Transindividuality, and State Power	
The Free State and the Economy of Affect	
The Most “Natural” State, or the Most Absolute Power	
IV. Marx’s Critical Relation to Happiness: Ambivalence, Sacrifice, and Revolutionary Possibilities.....	148
Marxian Practice and the Poetics of Production	
The Science of Emancipation	
The Myth of Origins and the Commodification of Labor	
Revolutionary Chasm and the Materiality of Time	
Conjunctures of Unhappiness	
Revolutionary Constellations and Happiness	
V. Decayed Bodies, Redeemed Past: Adorno, Benjamin, and the Deformation of Happiness.....	224
Costly Flights	
A Tiger’s Leap	
Kafka’s Cough	
Hunchback’s Perspective	

VI.	Epilogue.....	253
	REFERENCES.....	262

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Chapter One

Introduction

The question of the possibility or even the concern for human happiness has proven to be a point of contention for political thinkers confronting the ideological injunction to “be happy” in the face of material conditions that stifle the capacity for human flourishing. It can be argued that the appeal to human happiness as a political norm occludes as much as it may reveal, and that the cult of happiness is the domain of the internalized oppressor, severing the avenues of self-reflection, social critique, or political praxis. Simone de Beauvoir, in her defense of addressing the issue of liberty over happiness, expresses such a concern when she writes, “It is not clear what the word *happy* really means and still less what true values it may mask. There is no measuring the happiness of others, and it is always easy to describe as happy the situation in which one wishes to place them.”¹ Out of a concern for the struggle of women’s liberation, de Beauvoir views the topic of happiness as regressive, giving itself over to un-reflexive and positivistic impulses, thus reinforcing the authority of oppressive power structures. These concerns are well founded, especially in light of the most predominant iterations of happiness in the form of utilitarian ethics and the ‘cult of happiness’ founded within fetishized consumer culture. The deceptive character of the evaluation of the concept of happiness as a feeling, particularly amongst subjects immersed and interpellated within an ideological field that reinforces the interests of the ruling powers, bears

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: First Vintage Books, 2009), 16.

the dangers of masking the conditions that prevent the flourishing of human beings in their active relations.² What may appear as 'self-evident' to the empirical observer, the fulfilled experience of subjective activity, turns out to be that which the concept of happiness in such instances serves to occlude.

The struggle for human flourishing guided de Beauvoir's admonition of the explicit concern for human happiness, and the gain of resisting cooptation into all consuming ideological forces moves to the fore instead. However, might not the decisiveness and enthusiasm of incorporation of the norm of happiness into dominant ideology perhaps give pause to those opposing the forces that stifle human flourishing? Rather than resigning to the fate of the loss of happiness as a mode of expressing or experiencing the aspirations for human flourishing, might not a resuscitation of the demand for human flourishing call for a reevaluation of happiness in opposition to the forces that deploy the deflated notion toward ideological ends? While Theodor Adorno sympathizes with the reluctance to address happiness in a direct manner because of the ideological menace that haunts the naïve notion of happiness, he also acknowledges the critical importance of a

² A similar concern against a positivist, subjectivist account of happiness is expressed by Sigmund Freud, though emerging from decidedly different interests, when he writes, "We shall always tend to consider people's distress objectively – that is, to place ourselves, with our own wants and sensibilities, in *their* conditions, and then to examine on what occasions we should find in them for experiencing happiness or unhappiness. This method of looking at things, which seems objective because it ignores the variations in subjective sensibility, is, of course, the most subjective possible, since it puts one's own mental states in the place of any others, unknown though they may be. Happiness, however, is something essentially subjective. No matter how much we may shrink with horror from certain situations – of a galley-slave in antiquity, of a peasant during the Thirty Years' War, of a victim of the Holy Inquisition, of a Jew awaiting a pogrom—it is nevertheless impossible for us to feel our way into such people – to divine the changes which original obtuseness of mind, a gradual stupefying process, the cessation of expectations, and cruder or more refined methods of narcotization have produced upon their receptivity to sensations of pleasure and unpleasure. Moreover, in the case of the most extreme possibility of suffering, special mental protective devices are brought into operation." Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1961) 41.

dialectical account when defining happiness as, “the only part of the metaphysical experience that is more than impotent longing,” that “gives us the inside of objects as something removed from objects.” The cost of conceding the idea of happiness to the powers that thwart the possibility of human flourishing becomes evident, despite the precariousness of the resistance to cooptation, when he continues, “Yet the man who enjoys this kind of experience naively, as though putting his hands on what the experience suggests, is acceding to the terms of the empirical world – terms he wants to transcend, though they alone give him the chance of transcending.”³ According to Adorno, happiness bears a close affinity to the capacity for embodied, historical experience that enables the possibility to resist rather than submit to either the collective delusions or resignation that accompanies “naïvely” experienced happiness. However, in a twist of irony, the failure to harness the critical power that a dialectical conception of happiness can provide undermines the capacity to transcend the conditions that foster the force of ideological or idolatrous notions. In the passage above, Adorno touches upon a paradoxical relation to the idea of happiness, both as the ruse to keep human beings under the thumb of the forces that prolong their demise, and as the source of liberation from those very same forces. I will claim that the dialectic of happiness, in its affinity with embodied and historical experience, forms the negative relief upon which the demand for human happiness can find expression. The challenge of sustaining this dialectical play has impeded historical attempts to conceive of a constructive politics in resistance to the forces that stifle human flourishing. It will be the task of this

³ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1973), 374.

dissertation to elaborate the manner in which historical attempts to construct a politics in the service of human flourishing have succeeded or failed in light of the dialectic of happiness, and how this dialectic reveals the possibility of happiness remaining in the present.

It would seem counterintuitive that a concern for human flourishing could rely upon what Adorno refers to as a “metaphysical experience” without regressing into the futility of escapist flight from the conditions that are the source of misery. The critical strength of a dialectical conception of happiness emerges from an understanding of the experience that dissolves the claims of empirical experience while providing the possibility of material transformation. Adorno locates the possibility of illuminating what is deformed in empirical experience in both aesthetic and theoretical terms. Both, however, only have the capacity to express these experiences in the manifestations of failure or loss, for it is in the loss or failure that the deformation of “naïve” happiness emerges in its deformity. The work of Walter Benjamin is largely dedicated to taking on this challenge of expressing the “metaphysical experience” in which the domination of either the subjective or objective elements of living are dissolved. The ‘method,’ if one is to speak loosely, of Benjamin’s work is to delve into the depths of experiential life from the profane minutiae of daily life to the seemingly lofty heights of messianic possibility. The guiding thread of Benjamin’s writings is the desire and possibility for happiness, and even to the extent that the philosophical relationship between Adorno and Benjamin became strained at various points of their lives, one could fairly note that their

differences arose from a divergence in the appropriate representations of the dialectic of happiness; that is, a shared commitment to the “promise of happiness.”⁴

In the “Theologico-Political Fragment,” Benjamin deploys the theological concept of the messianic in order to express the possibility of happiness in the secular world. In setting up a peculiar alliance of the messianic and the secular, Benjamin gestures toward the manner in which the idea of happiness resonates with both secular and messianic intensity. He writes,

“The secular order should be erected on the idea of happiness. The relation of this order to the messianic is one of the essential teachings of the philosophy of history. It is the precondition of a mystical conception of history, encompassing a problem that can be represented figuratively. If one arrow points to the goal toward which the secular dynamic acts, and another marks the direction of messianic intensity, then certainly the quest of free humanity runs counter to the messianic direction. But just as a force, by virtue of the path it is moving along, can augment another force on the opposite path, so the secular order – because of its nature as secular – promotes the coming of the Messianic kingdom. The secular, therefore, though not itself a category of this kingdom, is a decisive category of its most inobtrusive approach.”⁵

The relation of the secular and the messianic arrives in the form of a problem and a possibility, one that engenders all of the risks of a ‘mystical’ conception of history (i.e. one that stymies the possibility for happiness), as well as the reward of the potentiality of the happiness in the category of the secular. Benjamin encounters the relation of the messianic and the secular as most significant for the realization of happiness, and the ordering of this relationship will be decisive in the struggle for human flourishing.

⁴ Adorno notes that the movement, or “digressiveness,” of Benjamin’s writings, “stems from a quality which intellectual departmentalization otherwise reserves for art, but which sheds all semblance when transposed into the realm of theory and assumes incomparable dignity –the promise of happiness.” Theodor Adorno, “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1967), 230.

⁵ Walter Benjamin, “Theological-Political Fragment,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 305.

In the above passage, Benjamin dialectically plays upon the relation of the messianic and the secular, indicating the perils of a disordered relationship. If the two orders are folded upon one another, the result is an increasing force of myth in the order of the secular. The model of just such a condition can be found in the sway of ideals and teleological conceptions of history that weigh down the possibility for secular emancipation. However, if the order of the secular works toward the realization of human happiness, it becomes allied with the order of the messianic, despite, or rather because of the fact that they act in opposite directions. Rather than serving as a static utopia toward “theocratic” ends, the messianic and the secular orders intersect in their eternal passing. Benjamin elaborates upon this intersection when he writes,

“To the spiritual *restitutio in integrum*, which introduces immortality, corresponds to a worldly restitution that leads to the eternity of downfall, and the rhythm of this eternally transient worldly existence, transient in its totality, in its spatial but also in its temporal totality, the rhythm of Messianic nature, is happiness. For nature is Messianic by reason of its eternal and total passing away.”⁶

Rather than the source of a static, utopian image, the messianic in Benjamin’s conception only unites with the profane in the eternal passing away of the order of the secular. However, the orders of the secular and the messianic must always act along “opposite paths,” for if the order of the secular attempts to reproduce the messianic passing, the result is self-defeating nihilism. Benjamin concludes by emphasizing the political significance of the relation that he had fleshed out in the fragment when he writes, “To strive after such passing, even in those stages of man that are nature, is the task of world politics, whose method must be called

⁶ Benjamin, “Theological-Political Fragment,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*.

nihilism.”⁷ The attempt to raise the secular to the order of the messianic proves to be catastrophic, the consequences of which could be felt in the drive toward self-destruction that marked the struggle for political power in the interstices between two world wars. The fragment, esoteric as any of Benjamin’s writings, provokes the reader to conceive the inconceivable thought of the possible realization of human happiness without the idolatrous crutch of utopian ideals. How could an idea of happiness that calls for “restitution” with “nature” not regress into romantic flight? The answer may lie in turning to some of the further indications that Benjamin offers for understanding how happiness has been, or could be experienced in his time, which in crucial ways still apply to this day.

In the “Theses On the Concept of History,” Benjamin indicates the manner in which happiness could even now be experienced. He situates the reflection upon happiness in contextualized, Marxist terms when he writes, “The image of happiness we cherish is thoroughly colored by the time to which the course of our own existence has assigned us.”⁸ The beginning of a discussion of happiness could not therefore start from the perspective of an allegedly trans-historical experience, but rather must arise out of the extent and manner in which contemporary human beings could relate to such an experience. In other words, what access could we possibly have to happiness in the sense that exceeds the naïve conception that traps us, as Adorno noted, within the boundaries of the given? Happiness, according to

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Micheal W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 389.

Benjamin, can no longer have meaning outside of the melancholic experience of envy. He continues, “There is happiness – such as could arouse envy in us – only in the air we could have breathed, among people we could have talked to, women who could have given themselves to us. In other words, the idea of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption.”⁹ Happiness only appears to us in the missed opportunity of the actualization of happiness. This envy is not in the futile bourgeois attempt to “keep up with the Joneses,” but rather it can be found in the possibility that the happiness that was available was not seized. In this missed possibility, the capacity to conceive of happiness can be realized, to the extent that it can be for us. Benjamin therefore speaks of a “weak Messianic power” that is conferred in our capacity to recognize the missed possibilities that lie within our relation to history. For example, by looking to the history of the failure of cultural products, political ideals, and social and governmental organization in their connection to modes of production and consumption, the historical materialist, in Benjamin’s view, will be armed with the most devastating, and yet promising, tools to contest the fetishized relation to the world in which these failures are lost. And the catastrophic element of a ‘historicized’ (i.e., fetishized) relation to history is that it undermines any possible experience of this loss. What is decisive therefore, is the loss of loss, and the end of the possibility of happiness would be settled through the incapacity to mourn what is lost.

One such loss that Benjamin addresses is the loss of storytelling, or the “capacity to exchange experiences.” In his essay “The Storyteller: Reflections On the

⁹.

Works of Nikolai Leskov,” Benjamin traces the loss of embodied, historical experience through the cultural lens of the loss of storytelling and the rise of the novel. Happiness is once again allied with the experience of “complicity” with nature, as found in child’s play. He identifies such an experience as arising within the history of storytelling as manifested in fairy tales, an art that has been lost to contemporary human beings.

“The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man,” writes Benjamin, “A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally, that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.”¹⁰

The distinction between the happiness that refers here to complicity with nature and a romanticized or the religious “oceanic” feeling that Freud diagnoses as a manifestation of “infantile” longing, depends upon its ties to historical experience and the productive aspect of the art of storytelling.¹¹ Providing for the account of the loss of experience entails situating the storyteller historically and in dissolving the notion of the isolated subject as constructor *ex nihilo*.

The loss of historical experience reduces the capacity for thinking to a strictly instrumental activity that is merely reactive to the conditions that consume the individual human being, and stifle the capacity for happiness. The overwhelming force of material conditions in which the individual has lost all authorship of their productive activity, and therefore become a passive receptacle of “destructive torrents,” inhibits the ability to experience the world beyond the immediacy of a futural projection. Benjamin writes, “For never has experience been contradicted

¹⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935-1938*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Howard Eiland and Micheal W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 157.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 20.

more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power.”¹² The loss of experience arrives with the emergence of a world that overwhelms individuals whose only outlet for survival is to find strategies of accommodation. Of course, these are strategies only in the most vacuous sense, deepening their immersion in the order that is causing their despair. The attempt to assimilate to the status quo is all that seems to remain for those living after the loss of experience. These reactive responses can take two fundamentally similar forms. One wallows in the given conditions and the other seeks to float above those conditions, but both are symptomatic of the loss of experience. Adorno remarks on the futility of the search for happiness that seeks to find happiness by floating at the surface of disembodied experience:

“We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize rather, out of these things. But if we surrender to the specific object we are suspected of lacking an unequivocal position. What differs from the existent will strike the existent as witchcraft, while thought figures such as proximity, home, security hold the faulty world under their spell. Men are afraid that in losing this magic they would lose everything, because the only happiness they know, even in thought, is to be able to hold on to something – the perpetuation of unfreedom.”¹³

The loss of historical experience condemns the search for happiness to two ends of undialectical confusion, either the totalizing immersion in or the flight from the material conditions that overwhelm this experience. Both, however, amount to the perpetuation of the conditions that stifle the possibility of happiness.

The strength of the historical materialist’s method is that it uncovers not only that there is a fetishized relation to history that draws naïve conceptions of

¹² Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov” *Selected Writings: Volume 3: 1935-1938*, 144.

¹³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 33.

happiness back under the sway of the ruling class, but that it also exposes the conditions under which this fetishization was able to take place, thus revealing the possibilities of happiness that are present.¹⁴ Fetishized history impedes not through the force of armaments, but rather by twisting desires in a direction that is complicit with the status quo.¹⁵ With the conceivable notion of human flourishing trapped under the thumb of fetishized history, the desire for happiness could no longer conceive of a different order that would upend the status quo in any substantial way. It becomes the task of the historical materialist, according to Benjamin, to reveal those moments of “danger” in which the shell of the fetish begins to show its cracks. In other words, the task is to uncover those moments that expose the historical possibility of a world that is different, where the possibility of happiness had been missed. Benjamin describes this method in the *Sixth Thesis* of his essay “On the Philosophy of History,”

“Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it “the way it really was.” It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling class.”¹⁶

Rather than submitting to and serving the status quo, the method that seizes upon the memory of lost possibility, enables the possibility of a different world. Benjamin describes the recognition of the nexus of past and present in the “now-time” as “shot

¹⁴ As Adorno comments, “What dissolves the fetish is the insight that things are not simply so and not otherwise, that they have come to be under certain conditions.” Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52.

¹⁵ Rebecca Comay describes the fetish as “providing the consoling image of totality it pacifies any desire for a different world, and this precisely by freezing time at the moment before the catastrophic insight.” Rebecca Comay, “The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism,” *Walter Benjamin and History*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 97.

¹⁶ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 391.

through with splinters of Messianic time.”¹⁷ Both Adorno and Benjamin take as their cue the task of identifying the failures that inhere in the moment of possibility within the manifestations of philosophical, cultural, and political production. As Adorno points out, philosophy lives on because “the moment to realize it was missed.”¹⁸ In diagnosing and accounting for the missed opportunities that are inherent in these failures, the mourning of lost possibility makes possible the conceptualization of a different world. However, this different world could not be experienced as a hope for future salvation, but rather as the envy of what could have been, which is what Benjamin left for the possibility of happiness today.

The elaboration of the embodied individual follows the same dialectic as has been indicated for happiness as a whole. The only way that the individual human being can be understood is in a dialectical relation of the individuality of corporeal substance. Following closely upon Spinoza’s conception of individuality, understood in terms both of both singular beings and in terms of all that is, Benjamin indicates how individuality is understood as simultaneously singular and whole. He writes,

“The body is the function of the historical present in man, expands into the body of mankind. “Individuality” as the principle of the body is on a higher plane than that of the single embodied individuals. Humanity as an individual is both the

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 395. While offering a sympathetic reading to Benjamin, Terry Eagleton takes issue with the conclusion of the *Theses* where Benjamin writes, “Every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter.” To this claim Eagleton objects, “For the historical materialist, the final proposition of this thesis is simply false. Not every moment is the strait gate through which the Messiah may enter; socialist revolution occurs only in particular material conditions, not in some transcendental gift or voluntarist seizing of the time.” This interpretation of Benjamin’s messianism as either ‘transcendental’ in the manner of arriving from a gift of a deity or as ‘voluntarist’ fails to recognize the nature of the seizing that Benjamin identifies with the historical materialist. His work of seizing “moments of danger” in the literary tradition stands as evidence to the connection to what is material in history. It does not entail appealing to a detached abstraction, but rather in locating the failures that are evident in a materialist engagement with history. Benjamin does not fantasize the emergent possibilities in the failures of the *Trauerspiel* and Kafka, but rather in identifying the failure and mourning the loss, unleashes the envy of possibilities lost, which is what happiness entails for him.

¹⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* 3.

consummation and the annihilation of bodily life. "Annihilation" because with it the historical existence, whose function the body is, reaches its end. In addition to the totality of all its bodily members, humanity is able partly to draw nature, the nonliving, plant, and animal, into this life of the body of mankind, and thereby into this annihilation and fulfillment. It can do this by virtue of the technology in which the unity of its life is formed. Ultimately, everything that subserves humanity's happiness may be counted part of its life, its limb."¹⁹

The notion of individuality expressed in this passage sets up a relation between singular and whole that dissolves the notion of the isolated individual while sustaining the singular human body as "consummated" in its relation to the whole. This notion of individuality and its relationship to happiness echoes the Spinozistic model, one that Etienne Balibar would later describe in terms of "transindividuality."²⁰ The "transindividual" defies the notion of the isolated individual subjectivity that is the mark of modern ideology, situating the singular body within the multiplicity of contexts and conceptual orientations. Such an individual serves as both the product and the producer of the social and historical context in which they act, while at the same time not being reducible to an intersubjectivity that does not also account for the dialectical relation between singular individual and the whole. By drawing the definition of embodied individuals within the dialectical relation of the intuition of the individual whole, Benjamin introduces a notion of happiness that resounds with Spinoza's "*beatitudo*," or happiness as the "intellectual love of God."

The "complicity" with nature ties human beings to the material world in their productive activity, requiring a generative rather than constructive model for

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem," *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock & Michael W. Jennings, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 395.

²⁰ Etienne Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality" (Delft: Eburon, 1997).

forming a world in which human happiness is possible. The capacity to produce a world that fosters human flourishing entails holding on to emergent possibilities that arrive in our relation to history. For it is only in thinking historically that the “revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” could even be conceived.²¹ This generative model of the conceptualizing revolutionary possibilities contrasts with what Amos Funkenstein identifies with the theological conception of knowledge as construction that resonates in early Modern philosophical systems of Descartes, and as will be shown, Hobbes as well.²² The model of constructive production mimics divine creation and looks to ‘start from scratch,’ imagining the possibility of turning away from history in the formation of knowledge and the (technological, political, cultural, etc.) creation of the world. “Among the creative spirits,” writes Benjamin, “there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing a tabula rasa. They need a drawing table; they were constructors. Such a constructor was Descartes, who required nothing more than the single certitude, “I think therefore I am.” And he went from there.”²³ On the one hand, this model of thinking as construction promotes a hierarchically idealized subject, while on the other hand it sets in motion the objective model of scientific knowledge in which the thinker is eminently replaceable because such knowledge is not dependent upon the capacity for historical experience.²⁴ If the striving for human flourishing is to guide

²¹ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 396.

²² Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).

²³ Walter Benjamin, “Experience and Poverty,” *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 732.

²⁴ Adorno contrasts the dialectical ‘philosopher’ from the ideal of the scientific subject when he writes, “compared with the subjectless rationality of a scientific ideal that regards all men as

political theorizing regarding the order and organization of society without submitting to an oppressive social order, then the production of a new order must be emergent out of the experience of the historical present. With regard to production as it relates to political theorizing, Benjaminian production is resistant to the hyper-realist ideals of reductive versions of materialism, such as found in Stalinism, as well as the aestheticization of politics promoted by fascism.

In developing the method of historical materialism, Marx allied the notion of revolutionary change, or the production of a new social order, with the notion of the present as a manifestation of a constellation of historical forces. To the extent that Marx understood that this emergent social order was not a product of a teleological projection (either in the form of a rational or evolutionary theodicy), he was capable of illuminating the revolutionary possibilities that inhere within a given moment. The genetic model of production is a manifestation of what is understood by the dialectical understanding of happiness in two respects. Rather than looking at 'nature' as the objective matter for construction, genetic production reflects its imbrication with the matter upon which it produces. This entails, in one respect, the embedded historical aspect of the productive transformation of society, and in another respect, the complicity with nature in the realization of productive activity. Only under such a model of production is both complicity with nature and the oppressed past realizable as the idea of happiness that is left for active human beings.

interchangeable, the subjective share in philosophy retains an irrational adjunct." Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 41.

The social-political order that emerges from the genetic or procreative model of production must arise out of the material from which that order is formed. In the context of human social organization, this will require a careful understanding of the dynamics of power and the role of affect in directing desire in order to allow for the sustenance of a given social-political order. The complexities of the order of affections pose the greatest of challenges to political theorizing, as well as some of the greatest dangers confronting the possibility of human happiness. Both Hobbes and Spinoza base their theories of politics upon an underlying physics of affection, and Marx's critique of capitalist social order is grounded in the critique of fetishism and ideology that provide conceptual understanding of the manipulation of desire. The historical nature of human affect and desire confounds stagnant theorizing about the organization of society in a manner that serves human flourishing. Responding to the present material conditions in which the spectacle of the fetish can direct desire in accordance with the needs of the ruling class becomes central to the possibility of envisioning a different world. While the ordering of affect takes on the most severe significance, the danger that lurks with the susceptibility of affective manipulation holds the greatest of impediments to human happiness. Adorno diagnoses this condition in post-WWII Germany, in which the desire to turn away from the past becomes manifest in swings of affect that are the mark of the neurosis concomitant with the loss of historical experience. He writes,

"Undoubtedly there is much that is neurotic in the relation to the past: defensive postures where one is not attacked, intense affects where they are hardly warranted by the situation, an absence of affect in the face of the gravest matters, not seldom simply a repression of what is known or half-known."²⁵

²⁵ Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 90.

The consequences of a disordered affective order are as devastating to the well-being of the collective as it is to individual human being. The task of political theorizing, if it is to be guided by a dialectical notion of happiness, is to account for the affective dynamics of power that operate at the level of singular human beings as well as the collective singular that constitutes the whole.

In light of the understanding of the dynamics of power that emerge from the material understanding of the play and force of affects, the political form of human happiness for active human beings turns to the question of democracy. The critique of liberal democracy, as outlined by both Spinoza and Marx, demands an understanding of the dialectics of singular and collective in the power of the multitude. The failure of theories that hang on either a liberal individualist or collectivist orientation arise from a stunted, undialectical understanding of the elements that compose the constellation of collective power. Even Hobbes, who ultimately defends the rule of monarchical authority, recognizes that a materialist theory of politics must emerge from the economy of affects in which sovereign authority entails a reflection of the collective power of the multitude.²⁶ Ultimately, the fear that guides Hobbesian rationality overtakes the underlying democratic insights that surface in his affective understanding of the physics of desire, leading him back to the safety of the undialectical image of the leviathan as the representation of sovereign authority. Democracy, rather than being the realization of the interpenetration of the expression of power between individual and

²⁶ The dynamics of power as Hobbes expresses it belies the traditional interpretation of Hobbes as a defender of liberal individualism. This topic will be addressed in the first chapter that follows.

collective, has devolved into the compartmentalized concern of bourgeois politics. Democracy is expressed in terms of a “choice” between ideological positions, and not in terms of the realization of collective power. In other words, democratic rule loses its emancipatory power when it is no longer understood in terms of the “union of the individual and collective interests,” but instead is the arena for an idolatrous expression of power ‘over-arching’ the multitude.²⁷ The dialectics of happiness confronts the claims of democracy built upon an idolatrous relation between sovereign authority and multitude, and challenges political thinking to test the possibility for revolutionary, rather than merely ‘political’ change.

What is left for the critical idea of happiness, therefore, is to provide an accounting of the manner in which attempts to realize human happiness have failed. There are models of critical accounts of just such failures in the writings of Adorno and Benjamin. The inherent inadequacy of concepts in relation to their objects is the fundamental insight that drives Adorno’s “Negative Dialectics.” When one speaks of the task of political theorizing regarding the realization of human happiness, the inherent impediments toward such theorizing proliferate in the obstacles that have confronted various trajectories of emancipatory politics within the historical process. Adorno outlines the place for philosophy in seeking out the symptoms, or manifestations of such failures. “If Hegel’s dialectics constituted the unsuccessful attempt to use philosophical concepts for coping with all that is heterogeneous to those concepts, the relationship to dialectics is due for an accounting insofar as his

²⁷ Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” *Critical Models* 93.

attempt failed.”²⁸ Not all failures, of course, are of equal value, but rather those that illuminate missed possibilities are of greatest value, and this is precisely the “genius” that Benjamin identified in “the figure of Kafka in its purity, and in its peculiar beauty, one should never lose sight of one thing: it is the figure of a failure.”²⁹ The following chapters will retrace the (failed) attempts to elaborate a political theory insofar as they serve as expressions of human happiness. In these failures, the possibilities and obstacles confronting a materialist politics that is informed by the dialectic of happiness can be revealed.³⁰

Part of the challenge is thinking that the idea of happiness dialectically lies within the inherent limitations of language and conceptualization. Happiness, when understood statically, bears the threat of reification and therefore cooptation by the interests that prevent human flourishing. The aim of the present account is not to provide a settled definition or doctrine of the idea since, when happiness is understood dialectically it defies the restrictions of such limitation. However, the possibility of happiness requires the capacity to find expression for the striving that reveals the manner in which the realization of happiness has been deformed by the status quo. Or as Adorno writes, “Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness, by enunciating it. By this alone happiness reaches into the universal unhappiness.”³¹ The enunciation of unhappiness carries the risk of reducing the ineffable excess of human experience and activity into a reified *telos*, but despite this

²⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 4.

²⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Letter to Gershom Sholem,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 145.

³⁰ It is worth noting that “failure” in this instance does not necessarily bear a normative admonition. For it is often in their so-called “failures” that political theories can be of most benefit to the possibility of happiness.

³¹ Adorno, “On Resignation,” *Critical Models*, 293.

hazard, the challenge of thinking and speaking of dialectical happiness requires elaboration. One cannot sit within the lofty precipice of unexpressed intellectualism without serving the interests of the powers that prevent happiness.³² The challenge of enunciating a dialectics of happiness is to discursively elucidate the deformations that prevent happiness while not regressing to happiness as a static doctrine. In the effort of enunciation, it will still be imperative to take the risk of failure in order to insist upon the seizing of missed opportunities to realize happiness.

The reticence to speak of happiness has rhetorically arisen because of the belief that either the vagueness of meaning and variegation of intentional aim can lead to strife (Hobbes) or, in the Marxist tradition, from the concern for its cooptation by the ruling powers and its ameliorating effects upon revolutionary fervor (for example, in Marx and de Beauvoir). To be sure, this reticence is warranted in contexts where it cannot be distinguished from the ideological expression of the term. De Beauvoir suggests speaking in terms of “liberty” rather than “happiness,” but this does not keep the force of the ideological concept of liberty at bay any more than that of happiness. To be sure, the rhetorician will be wise to gauge the audience who may ally happiness with a feeling of pleasure that pacifies a revolutionary spirit, but this demand of rhetoric applies everywhere and at all times. What is most significant, in term of conceptualizing the dialectical idea

³² In Kafka, Benjamin found a brilliant example of the immanent ‘failure’ that comes with speaking of possibilities that are excessive of any static conceptualization. He writes, “Kafka’s genius lay in the fact that he tried something altogether new: he gave up truth so that he could hold on to its transmissibility, the haggadic element.” Kafka sacrifices truth for transmissibility, Benjamin explains, while at the same time not submitting to the authority of doctrine. The failure entailed in Kafka’s attempt reveals the possibility of expressing the deformation of happiness at the hands of doctrine while not relinquishing the capacity to speak to that deformation. Walter Benjamin, “Letter to Gershom Sholem,” *Selected Works: Volume 3 1935-1938*, 326.

of happiness, is that it does not stagnate as a reification of the poles of the suffering of the past (through the valorization of the oppressed), or as is more common, as a utopian projection into the future. Benjamin indicts the Social Democrats for relying upon just such a utopian projection when he writes,

“The Social Democrats preferred to cast the working class in the role of a redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This indoctrination made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than the ideal of liberated grandchildren.”³³

The idea of happiness that is presented by Benjamin arises from the allegiance to an oppressed past rather than the image of coming happiness. The insight that the idea of happiness is possible only as an experience of envy of missed possibility resists the pacifying, idolatrous image of the happiness as futural salvation.

The stakes of the critique of the pervasive ideological notion of happiness cannot be overstated. As the commandment to be happy drives the consumerism that allows the conditions that stifle human flourishing to persist, the urgency for a critical notion of happiness becomes stronger. It is not uncommon to encounter talk of happiness in all forms of popular media and psychology, as well as among ideologues that can envision only instrumental ends to intellectual activity. More often than not, these amount to strategies of assimilation to a world that confronts the individual with overwhelming forces of despair. The depth of this despair is manifested in economic exploitation, institutional discrimination along lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality, as well as in the feverish attempts to devastate the environment. The vacuous notion of happiness that offers the satisfaction of limited

³³ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 394.

pleasure in lieu of emancipation is advanced as a cure. Adorno describes the anatomy of this so-called 'cure' that is ubiquitous in advertising, as also finding expression in the atrophied version of psychoanalysis when he writes,

"Prescribed happiness looks exactly what it is; to have a part in it the neurotic thus made happy must forfeit the last vestige of reason left to him by repression and regression, and to oblige the analyst, display indiscriminate enthusiasm for the trashy film, the expensive but bad meal in the French restaurant, the serious drink and the love-making taken like medicine as 'sex.'"³⁴

The stakes of the deflated notion of happiness are not felt at a merely individual level, for it not only deepens the despair of the individual, but it also constructs a firewall against experiencing the devastation that it protects. When unchecked, the cult of happiness ensures not only the misery of those under its ideological sway, but also includes all those who are victimized by the ruling powers. Adorno continues,

"Only when sated with false pleasure, disgusted with the goods offered, dimly aware of the inadequacy of happiness even when it is that – to say nothing of cases where it is bought by abandoning allegedly morbid resistance to its positive surrogate – can men gain an idea of what experience might be. The admonitions to be happy, voiced in concert by the scientifically epicurean sanatorium-director and the highly-strung propaganda chiefs of the entertainment-industry, have about them the fury of the father berating his children for not rushing joyously downstairs when he comes home irritable from his office. It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces, and there is a straight line of development between the gospel of happiness and the construction of camps of extermination so far off in Poland that each of our own countrymen can convince himself that he cannot hear the screams of pain. That is the model of an unhampered capacity for happiness."³⁵

The stakes could not be higher in reclaiming the idea of happiness from its ideological and idolatrous distortion. While speaking of happiness in the midst of despair is certainly a proposition rife with danger, the submission to the predominant and "naïve" notion of happiness fortifies the authority of those who

³⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (New York: Verso, 1978), 62.

³⁵ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 38-39.

sever the possibility of the realization of happiness in the emancipation from those forces.

The following chapters trace the role that the idea of happiness plays in the political theories of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Marx, and evaluate the ways in which their attempts to construct social orders in service of the possibility of happiness have succeeded and failed. When critically viewed under the dialectical model of happiness, the challenges to developing a theory that does not either escape into the lofty realm of abstraction or teleological orientations or dissolve theory into a positivistic ordering of the given come to the fore. How is the economy of affect that fosters human flourishing produced and what are the conditions of its reproduction? How does one theorize regarding the organization of a society that unites the power of the individual and the collective that does not isolate individual power while at the same time not subsume it under the force of the collective? How to think of the representation of political authority without resorting to an idolatrous or ideological image of that authority? While taking a textual approach, the stakes of touching upon the success or failures of these attempts to politically theorize the possibility of human happiness extends beyond textual interest. Broadly speaking, the dialectic of happiness provides a critical concept from which to shed light upon the distorted idea of happiness that prevails. Specifically, the engagement with these particular attempts at theorizing a politics to serve human flourishing in the light of the dialectic of happiness will offer a critical conceptual foil toward the possibility of realizing human happiness in the resuscitation of the loss of what could have been.

Chapter Two

Constructing the 'Royal Road' to Happiness: The Case of Hobbes

An investigation into the role of human happiness in Hobbes's political philosophy illuminates, perhaps surprisingly, many of the moments of seeming contradiction or paradox within his theory of man and politics. The drive for human happiness appears to pose a challenge to the call for peace, which ultimately, is the primary ethical mandate out of which Hobbes develops his notion of justice and the most effective state. Hobbes defines happiness as "a continuall progresse of the desire, from one object to another; the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later."³⁶ This notion of happiness then calls for the endless fulfillment of desire, or rather, "a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth only in death."³⁷ A possible and common reading of Hobbes's moral psychology indicates that most importantly, it is our desire to outdo our neighbor that represents the pursuit of happiness, and therefore, happiness is often aligned with the forces that further weaken and divide a commonwealth composed of solitary and competing individuals.³⁸ Leo Strauss describes the status of human happiness in Hobbes's moral and political theory bleakly when he describes the human search for happiness as,

"The ever-greater triumph over others – this, and not the ever increasing, but rationally increasing power – is the aim and happiness of natural man...Absorbed in

³⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996) 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ In the *Elements of Law*, Hobbes also gives the definition of misery and felicity in these simple terms, "Continually to be out-gone is misery; Continually to out-go the next before is felicity." Thomas Hobbes, *The Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994), 60.

the race after happiness of triumph, man cannot be aware of his dependence on the insignificant primary good, the preservation of life and limb; failing to recognize his bodily needs, man experiences only joys and sorrows of the mind, i.e. imaginary joys and sorrows.”³⁹

Strauss is careful to point out that this is the pursuit of happiness for the “natural man” prior to the establishment of the covenant that founds civil authority. This state of conflict that marks the absence of civil authority, referred to by Hobbes as the “state of nature” arouses the individual’s fear of “the life of a man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁴⁰ A common interpretation of Hobbes’s story of the constitution of the commonwealth tells the tale of this fear of the horrific state of nature leading to the suppression of human happiness in the name of the emerging influence of reason. Fear, aided by the guidance of reason, overcomes the allure of the ‘happiness’ that would prove to be self-destructive. As Michael Oakeshott puts it, “Fear is allayed, but at the cost of Felicity.”⁴¹ Hobbes views reason as the child, born of the fear of the brutal conditions of the state of nature, allowing for the establishment of the commonwealth. If this were the end of the story, happiness would be in a zero-sum battle with reason, never to reappear except, ironically, at the cost of peace.

At this point, it seems obvious why there would be a dearth of inquiry into the role of happiness for Hobbes, and why his inclusion within a genealogy of materialist conceptions of human happiness would seem out of place. However, this characterization of Hobbes as turning away from human happiness fails to account for the centrality of human flourishing and happiness in his development of a

³⁹ Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1952) 18-19.

⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

⁴¹ Michael Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, IN, 1975), 93.

science of human action and politics. In *De Cive*, while still contesting the value that Aristotle places on the happiness of the contemplative philosopher, Hobbes claims that the end of philosophy is nothing less than human happiness. "If the moral philosophers had done their job with equal success [as compared to the physicists and geometers], I do not know what greater contribution human industry could have made to human happiness."⁴² It appears that Hobbes's concern for human happiness is central to his understanding of what a philosopher does, not in the sense that a philosopher enjoys the satisfaction of truth finding, but that the purpose of philosophy is to discover the best conditions for human beings to construct a society that could persist upon a strong foundation of peace. In *De Corpore*, Hobbes defines philosophy as the knowledge of causes and effects: "Philosophy is such knowledge of effects or appearances, as we acquire by true ratiocination from the knowledge we have first of their causes or generation: And again, of such causes or generations as may be from knowing first their effects."⁴³ The benefit that comes with the knowledge of causes and effects is not primarily in the enjoyment of knowing the truth, but rather in the benefit that this knowledge bestows upon human beings as they live. For Hobbes, the pleasure that accompanies knowledge of the truth arrives only through its instrumental advantage. "The *end or scope* of philosophy is, that we may make use to our benefit of effects formerly seen; or that, by application of bodies to one another, we may produce the like effects of those we conceive in our mind, as far forth as matter, strength, and industry, will permit, for

⁴² Thomas Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, ed. by Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998), 5.

⁴³ Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore* 1,2. incomplete note

the commodity of human life.”⁴⁴ And if that account of the aim of philosophy is not clear enough, he continues by emphasizing his departure from the Ancient view of philosophical knowledge as inherently valuable in its truthfulness. In fact, for Hobbes, the value of philosophical knowledge can often lead to a departure from the unbending demand for truthfulness. That is, truth can justifiably be obscured, or even hidden, if it has the possibility of provoking social strife.⁴⁵

“For the inward glory and triumph of mind that a man may have for the mastering of some difficult and doubtful matter, or for the discovery of some hidden truth, is not worth so much pains as the study of Philosophy requires; nor need any man care much to teach another what he knows himself, if he think that will be the only benefit of his labour. The end of knowledge is power; and the use of theorems (which, among geometricians, serve for finding out of properties) is for the construction of problems; and, lastly, the scope of all speculation is the performing of some action, or thing to be done.”⁴⁶

In this passage, Hobbes clarifies the primary importance of providing a benefit to human beings and the guidance that philosophy can offer in the instruction of how to best live. The primary value of knowledge in general and philosophy in particular, arises from its constructive capacity. The most important object of philosophy for Hobbes, as it turns out, is the ordering of society and guiding of best actions that can allow for human flourishing. Philosophy (and knowledge in general) is up to this task only because Hobbes views the power of knowledge as based upon the human power for construction. Since human social organization and structures of political authority, like geometry, are a product of human construction, the knowledge of causes and effects will better arm us with the ability to construct the best political

⁴⁴ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, ch. 1, 6.

⁴⁵ Kinch Hoekstra offers a compelling inquiry into Hobbes’s primacy of the irenic over the alethic value of philosophy in his essay “The End of Philosophy (The Case of Hobbes). Kinch Hoekstra, “The End of Philosophy (The Case of Hobbes),” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. 106 (2006), pp. 25-62.

⁴⁶ Hobbes, *De Corpore*, Ch. 1,6.

order for the benefit of human flourishing.⁴⁷ This, for Hobbes, is therefore the overarching end toward which his writings are directed.

The uniqueness of Hobbes's contribution to political theory was not in what he believed, but rather in the reasons he offered for holding those beliefs. The methodology of a science of politics holds within it an epistemology that is founded upon the principles of human constructive power. The question of political legitimacy does not appeal to the orders of divine authority or its affinity to a 'natural order,' but rather it is founded upon the particular needs of human beings. As Quentin Skinner writes, "[Hobbes alone] managed to 'eliminate all invocations of god's providence, and to predicate a de facto theory of political obligation entirely on an account of the political nature of man."⁴⁸ Hobbes utilized insights from modern science using as his model geometry and the mechanization of nature to develop a science of politics. This science of politics sets its course in consideration of the end of the sovereign power: that is, the *salus populi*. Hobbes writes, "The office of the sovereign,...consisteth in the end, for which he was trusted with the Sovereign Power, namely the procuration of *the safety of the people* [*salus populi*]; to which he is obliged by the Law of Nature, and to render an account thereof to God, the author of that law, and to none but him." Hobbes does not take this task of seeking the health or safety of the people as a call for bare self-preservation, as he is often interpreted to be engaged in, but rather as a more complete demand for

⁴⁷ "Best Political order" in this instance is not to be confused with the Ancients search for an ideal "best regime" that, according to Hobbes, was mere fantasy and not deductive science.

⁴⁸ Quentin Skinner, "Conquest and Consent: Thomas Hobbes and the Engagement Controversy," *The Interregnum: The Quest for Settlement, 1646-1660*, ed. G.E. Aylmer (London, 1972) 80. Written here as quoted in Weiner, Jonathan M., "Quentin Skinner's Hobbes," *Political Theory*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Sage Publications, August 1974), 251-260.

human flourishing. Hobbes continues, “But by safety here, is not bare Preservation, but also all other contentments of life, which every man by lawful industry, without danger, or hurt to the Common-wealth, shall acquire to himselfe.”⁴⁹ But this call for human flourishing as the end of political order must be legitimized not from an external divine or even an eternal ‘natural’ order, but rather it can only be legitimated on its own terms. Insofar as the sovereign is the greatest earthly authority they are answerable only to God, but insofar as that authority is entrusted in the name of human flourishing, the legitimacy of a social and political order can be judged in accordance with its capacity to fulfill this end. Reason thus becomes, for Hobbes, decisive in the legitimacy of a constructed social and political order. In other words, the legitimacy of political authority and the validity of political theory will be decided upon the grounds established by the understanding of knowledge as construction.

The implications of this source of knowledge has a two-fold effect; one that moves away from traditional authority while contesting Cartesian metaphysics, but another in which Hobbes unwittingly and un-dialectically reinstates a dualism between the constructing human intellect and natural order. Hobbes’s materialism views the world as “matter in motion” and that human activity and desire emerge from that basic understanding of the universe. His natural and political theory does not leave room for the influence of divine providence, nor even the power of human free will. Rather, Hobbes sets the course of human political organization in the hands of constructing human beings born out of a desire that is ultimately

⁴⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 231.

determined by the forces of matter in motion. In this regard, the method that Hobbes employs would mark a significant break from traditional justifications for authority. Hobbes shifts the justification for creating a political order that will serve human flourishing from the will of god, or the force of history, to the creating human intellect. Hobbes does away with providential claims and even does away with the notion of man as a naturally social animal, thus opening up the creative power of the Hobbesian model.⁵⁰ Hobbes's 'modern' desire to look away from any divine authority of knowledge, which stands as the model of constructive intellect, while escaping traditional arguments for the divine providence, still relies upon the theological model of a creating intellect, only instead of that intellect being divine, it is rather human. "*Verum et factum convertuntur;*" writes Amos Funkenstein regarding the understanding of knowledge as construction, "the identity of truth with doing, or of knowledge with construction – had been seen, in the Middle Ages, at best as the character of divine knowledge."⁵¹ In other words, while Hobbes was the most ardent advocate in the development of the 'new science,' the root of that thought gets its bearings in a theological principle that reverts to a form of dualism that Hobbes, it would seem, believed he had avoided through the deployment of the insights of materialist physics upon a new science of politics. "It becomes clear that the conception of nature which Hobbes's political philosophy *presupposes* is

⁵⁰ Amos Funkenstein emphasizes the significance of Hobbes's elimination of divine or natural forces that lead to the construction of society when he writes, "Hobbes stressed more than anyone before him that "man maketh his commonwealth himself," just as Marx would later do by eliminating the natural desire to barter by reducing all economic relations to human, historical conditions. The transition from the old to the new theory was a case of the radicalization of already present possibilities." Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, 18.

⁵¹ Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, 12.

dualistic,” write Strauss, “the idea of civilization presupposes that man, by virtue of his intelligence, can place himself outside nature, can rebel against nature. This dualism is transparent all the way through Hobbes’s philosophy, not the least in the antithesis between *status naturalis* and *status civilis*.”⁵² While the extent to which the distinction between the state of nature and civil society should be interpreted dualistically is suspect in light of Hobbes’s overall theory of politics, the suggestion that he fails to sustain a dialectical connection between his science of politics and the matter and object of that science, living human beings, ultimately poses a significant challenge to Hobbes’s politics of science as it lays claim to being built upon a thoroughgoing materialist foundation. Hobbes’s rejection of dualistic metaphysics and divine providence paved the way for a new method of political theorizing while retaining some of the underlying theological thrust that is held within the model of knowledge as construction. The task at hand will be to examine the implications that these aspects of Hobbes’s theory play in constructing a political theory that will serve toward the end of human flourishing, or happiness.

Hobbes’ notion of happiness as well as his science is distinctly un-teleological in its orientation. Hobbes rejects the belief in divine providence but he also rejects the notion of there being a *summum bonum* for human beings. Since felicity is tied to the ceaselessness of human desire, or as Hobbes puts it, “the continuall progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former, being still on

⁵² Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 18. Leo Strauss famously argues in his book *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* against the position that Hobbes’s political theory was a product of his materialism but rather an outgrowth of his moral theory of right. While this argument bears fruitful insights into any reading of Hobbes, it also has the pitfalls of failing to appreciate the influence of Hobbes’s materialism. I will further discuss these difficulties below.

the way to the latter," it can never be considered as a final state or condition. Rather, it can only be thought of as the activity that entails the successful fulfillment of particular desires, desires that never cease during the course of life. "The Felicity of this life," writes Hobbes, "consisteth not in the repose of a mind satisfied. For there is no such *Finis ultimus*, (utmost ayme,) nor *Summum Bonum*, (greatest Good), as is spoken of in the Books of the old Morall Philosophers."⁵³ In other words, human happiness could never be guided or satisfied in the fulfillment of some final end, as long as human sensation and imagination leads to the attraction of desire. Just as the mechanized materialism of his physics does not allow for the external impetus of divine will or eternal essences, his notion of human happiness does not allow for justification apart from human desire that arises out of the attraction and repulsion that follows from matter-in-motion. Hobbes takes exception to notions of human happiness that would tie human activity to a teleology directed toward final causes, as such causes are fictions or absurdities. Human happiness depends upon human activity and the fulfillment of desires, and because of this, happiness cannot have one pre-ordained form or state. The hedonism of Hobbes's theory of happiness creates a simple equation of happiness and the fulfillment of desires. The situation gets considerably more complex and challenging when one recognizes that happiness is not only tied to the immediate fulfillment of desire but also to the capacity of fulfilling desires in the future. Happiness, as will become evident, is as reliant upon the social and historical contexts as human desire and therefore what counts as happiness at any given time for any human being will be in a constant

⁵³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 11, 70.

state of change. It is in this capacity for change within human desire that happiness can be shifted from the self-defeating force in the state of nature to a more predictable and perhaps even productive force (albeit of secondary importance for Hobbes) in civil society.

It is admittedly strange to find Hobbes as a central figure in a genealogy of materialist conceptions of human happiness, since happiness was not Hobbes's primary concern. If anything, most references to human happiness are followed by a warning of its dangerous implications for the creation of the commonwealth. It has oft been noted by commentators that Hobbes in fact distinguishes himself with the Aristotelian tradition in his relegating human happiness to a position within his moral and ethical theory that is, if not detrimental, then at least, of secondary importance.⁵⁴ Hobbes does concern himself with peace and the conditions for the preservation of life as the foremost ethical principal that should guide any science of morals or politics. As Samantha Frost puts it, "Hobbes is not concerned that people be happy, but rather that their relationships with one another be peaceful. In fact, for him, peace is the primary ethical value."⁵⁵ While this is true, a further examination of human desire in Hobbes's science of man will reveal that the detrimental role of human happiness can be subdued, but only within the context of living within the security of a commonwealth strong enough to allow its citizens to live in peace. A powerful sovereign provides a context in which human desire, in

⁵⁴ For example, See Strauss, *The Philosophy of Hobbes* 132: "The change in the estimate of fear is shown by the fact that Hobbes in his enumeration of good things mentions life as the first good in the first place, whereas Aristotle mentions happiness in the first place and life only in the penultimate place."

⁵⁵ Samantha Frost, *Lessons from Materialist Thinker: Hobbesian Reflections on Ethics and Politics* (Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2008), 109.

Hobbes's view, can more fully be guided by reason, and therefore the desire for human happiness, while not the primary ethical value, either logically or temporally, can become realized without implying the dissolution of the commonwealth.

Whereas in the state of nature the desire to outdo one's neighbor (i.e. the desire for happiness) leads to the continuance of a self-defeating struggle, within the commonwealth the context that determines human desire can lead to the shifting of the detrimental effects of the desire for happiness.

Hobbes's innovation in political and ethical theory was to employ the methodology of the "new science" of the seventeenth century into a science of politics and ethics. This science of politics is to provide an argument for the construction of the commonwealth with the strength of deductive proof. The possibility of this deduction, for Hobbes, is dependent upon the constructive nature of the commonwealth; that is, the understanding that the commonwealth is not an outgrowth of divine will or even of any 'nature' of human sociality, but rather, is wholly a product of human artifice. In the methodological deconstruction of the laws of human design, also known as the state of nature, human happiness is not only not possible, but, as has already been observed, it is a self-defeating force working against human flourishing. On the other hand, with the construction of the commonwealth and the creation of sovereign authority that is absolute in its power to maintain peace, the capacity for human happiness becomes, for the first time, a real possibility. In *De Cive*, Hobbes clarifies in no uncertain terms wherein lies the duty of the sovereign, i.e. that "*the safety of the people is the supreme law.*" Here we see the primary importance of peace and security that is often remarked about

Hobbes's theory of political authority. However, that is not the end of the story. The commonwealth is an artifice built not only for mere survival but also for the capacity of human flourishing:

“By safety [*salus*],” Hobbes clarifies, “one should understand not mere survival in any condition, but a happy life so far as that is possible. For men willingly entered commonwealths *which they had formed by design [institutus]* in order to live as pleasantly as the human condition allows. Those who have taken it upon themselves to exercise power in this kind of commonwealth, would be acting contrary to the law of nature (because in contravention of the trust of those who put the sovereign power in their hands) if they did not do whatever can be done by laws to ensure that the citizens are abundantly provided with all the good things necessary not just for life but for the enjoyment of life.”⁵⁶

Hobbes makes the interests of constructing the best commonwealth clear in this passage. No longer is happiness the impetus for social division in the struggle to outdo the next, but it has transformed into a desired end of the commonwealth itself. While happiness cannot be the primary motivation or requirement of the commonwealth, Hobbes is clear in his stated goal of providing a deductive argument for the construction of the best commonwealth; that is, the condition in which human beings can possibly live a happy life.

In order to understand the uniqueness of Hobbes's application of the methods of seventeenth century natural science to his political and ethical theories, it is important to note that Hobbes's 'science of politics' rejects not only the providential or teleological justification for moral authority, but also repudiates any attempt to employ historical justification. For Hobbes, this is a matter of epistemology: because matters of fact do not bear the deductive force necessary to have knowledge regarding causes and effects, as well as the unreliability of memory that founds historical awareness, they cannot provide political justification. Hobbes

⁵⁶ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 143-144.

writes in the *Leviathan*, “And whereas Sense and Memory are but knowledge of Fact, which is a thing past, and irrevocable; *Science* is the knowledge of consequences, and dependence of one fact upon another.”⁵⁷ He contrasts the knowledge from deductive science from mere prudence or “wisdom.” “Which kinds of thoughts, is called *Foresight*, and *Prudence*, or *Providence*; and sometimes *Wisdom*; though such conjecture, through the difficulty of observing all circumstances, be very fallacious.”⁵⁸ While prudence is certainly invaluable to a sovereign, the knowledge gained strictly from memory will not serve his need for a deductive science that will prevent the dissolution of the commonwealth. The epistemological concern about the use of history in a science of politics is not the only, nor even the primary concern for Hobbes. As discussed earlier, the primary concern for Hobbes’s theory of politics is not epistemological, but rather how the *salus populi* is impacted by the use of history as a justification for political authority or rebellion. Therefore, the use of history in producing ideological myths that serve as an impetus for insurrection and division within a commonwealth is of primary concern to Hobbes. His science of politics is designed to cease the endless disputes regarding the best political order, yet because they are subject to the limitations of the capacity of memory, stories of origin and historical justifications could never sustain the peace that a political order grounded upon a deductive science of politics could provide. One of the hallmarks of seventeenth century science is the capacity to look upon knowledge as

⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 35.

⁵⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 22. For a further discussion of the epistemological concerns that cautioned Hobbes treatment of history, see Borot, Luc, “History in Hobbes Thought,” *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hobbes*, ed. by Tom Sorell (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), 305-328.

construction in a manner that is homogeneous,⁵⁹ yet as Walter Benjamin points out in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, proper historical understanding is tied to experience in a manner that is inherently resistant to the homogeneous knowledge to which Hobbesian science aspires.⁶⁰ For Hobbes, History and experience can never give us more than the simple statement of fact, and thus cannot give us the guidance in the form of deductive knowledge that he seeks in constructing his science of politics. However, history can serve to sharpen the focus of our endeavor [*conatus*] and can assist our scientific or philosophical knowledge as a laboratory of “verification or application of scientific truth and can thus become a necessary auxiliary of the science of sovereignty and obedience.”⁶¹ While there is much to be said regarding the role of history in Hobbes’s science of man and politics, what is unique about Hobbes’s concern for the *salus populi* is that the justification for the order that will best produce such an order is squarely in the hands of its maker rather than derived from sources divine, traditional, or historical.

Hobbes’s natural and political science provides fertile ground for an understanding of a complex, if at times troubled, attempt to offer counsel for those concerned and endowed with the authority in creating the possibility for human flourishing. While, for reasons that have been elaborated upon, he does not place happiness at as the stated goal of his writings, it does turn out to be goal toward which he seeks. Happiness, Hobbes would caution, cannot be the primary goal of

⁵⁹ See Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*, 17-22.

⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” (Schocken Books, New York, 1968), 253-264.

⁶¹ Borot, *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hobbes*, 325.

any science of politics because that would fail to account for the necessary condition of peace that only subsequently makes the realization of human happiness possible. The philosopher serves as a counselor to guide the legislation of political authority as well as linguistic clarity that is required for ending the disputes that had (and have) consistently troubled the organization of society. The philosopher can be of service to society, in Hobbes mind, in providing counsel as to what must be the guiding principles of a commonwealth and of its citizens, as well as in deciding upon the linguistic terms upon which that discussion can take place. Kinch Hoekstra seizes upon this aspect of Hobbesian thinking when he writes, "The philosopher can... serve as a linguistic legislator, or at least as a kind of counselor."⁶² As a counselor who sets the terms for the guiding principles of the commonwealth, the philosopher's role in preserving peace has led Hobbes to relegate happiness to a secondary role in his political theory. The paucity of commentary on the role of happiness is understandable to the extent that Hobbes was clearly concerned about the potentially injurious effects that an emphasis upon the pursuit of happiness can have before the conditions of peace are secured. However, looking to the role of happiness for Hobbes can illuminate a unique attempt to apply a materialist physics to the motions of human desire and the construction of a science of politics.

Placing the notion of happiness for Hobbes under greater and more careful scrutiny reveals how his materialism and his commitment to importing the insights of seventeenth century science into the fields of moral and political theory manifested into a complex theory that has confounded and misled many of his

⁶² Hoekstra, "The End of Philosophy (The Case of Hobbes)," 37.

readers. What emerges is neither the reductive materialism and liberal individualism that is often attributed to Hobbes,⁶³ nor a moral theory that has abandoned (or was never really committed to) materialist physics,⁶⁴ but rather a more nuanced politics that attempts to incorporate a materialistic understanding of desire and human society while adhering to the constructive aspirations of the 'new science.' Whether or not Hobbes is successful, or even if that is possible, should rightly be placed under scrutiny. However, a reading of Hobbes's political theory that does not take heed of the ways in which the failure of his attempt at constructing a science of politics unfolds, risks promoting a political theory that turns a fetishized notion of individual and collective power and relying upon an undialectical image of sovereign authority impeding the possibility of human flourishing. And a reading of Hobbes that does not take seriously the debt of Hobbes's materialism to his attempts at a science of politics fails to draw from his writings all that he offers to inform a politics that accounts for the concrete manner in which human beings are social, passionate and desirous beings.

Although Hobbes, in his writings, prioritized his ethical and political theory, it will serve us to first turn to his theory of man. For in Hobbes's materialistic understanding of human desire, passion, and rationality lies the conditions under which the aspirations of his science of politics can be achieved. Those aspirations always turn back to the richer sense of the "*salus populi*" in which the political philosopher can serve as the counselor, if not legislator, toward making the "happy

⁶³ See Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*.

⁶⁴ See Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*.

life” possible (to the extent, of course, that his hedonistic conception of happiness can be realized).

The Physics of Happiness

In defining felicity as “a continuall progress of the desire, from one object to another,” Hobbes incorporates happiness within the physics of human appetite.⁶⁵ Happiness is not tied to a universal or teleological end but rather is found in the fulfillment of desire. One might think that this somewhat Epicurean notion of happiness is tied to the ephemerality of fleeting desires. However, Hobbes’s theory of man reveals a notion of happiness that eludes such designations. In part one of *The Elements of Law* (on “Human Nature”), Hobbes takes aim at the notion of happiness that entails either a teleological end or a static condition when he writes, “But for an utmost end, in which the ancient philosophers have placed felicity, and have disputed much concerning the way thereto, there is no such thing in this world, nor way to it, more than to Utopia: for while we live, we have desires, and desire presupposeth a further end.”⁶⁶ Happiness, therefore, could never be thought of as a static or completed goal because it is tied to human desire which does not cease as long as one is alive; that is, as long as one senses. In other words, the physics of human happiness are the same as the physics of human desire, which cannot be completed absolutely for a living, sensing human being. This insight leads Hobbes to point out that “Felicity... (by which we mean continuall delight), consisteth not in having prospered but in prospering.”⁶⁷ While happiness is not something that can

⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 70.

⁶⁶ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 44.

⁶⁷ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 45.

be achieved absolutely in the same way the end of desiring is not achievable, Hobbes still does understand happiness as something that is more or less attainable in this world. Hobbes's equation of happiness as equaling the fulfillment of desire, however, marks a fundamental break from a Christian tradition that views the fulfillment of desires as fleeting and therefore happiness as situated elsewhere (i.e. in God's grace) and not possible in this world. For Hobbes, while happiness is never attained in terms of a complete or static condition, it can be realized more or less for human beings. What constitutes the conditions under which human happiness can be attained as much as possible becomes central to his moral and political philosophy. In order to understand how human desire does not lead to fleeting pleasures in the form of a crude hedonism, it is necessary to examine Hobbes's physics of desire.

The materialism of Hobbes views the world as constituted of "matter-in-motion" and nothing else, which applies not only to what in the Cartesian tradition is referred to as 'corporeal bodies' but also to all modes of sensation, perception, imagination, thought, and desire. "There can be no cause of motion," Hobbes writes, "except in a body contiguous and moved."⁶⁸ In order to understand the workings of human desire, one must bear in mind his materialist perspective. There is no separation for Hobbes, between sensation and the initial impulses of attraction and repulsion. The sensation of an object makes an impression upon the sense organ and nerve centers of the brain that result in 'motions in the heart' that attract or repel us. Hobbes explains the source of desire in pain and pleasure when he writes,

⁶⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury: Volume 1*, ed. Sir William Molesworth (London: Bohn, 1839), 124.

“conceptions or apparitions are nothing really, but motion in some internal substance of the head; which motion not stopping there, but proceeding to the heart, of necessity must either help or hinder that motion which is called vital.”⁶⁹ “Vital” motions are those motions that preserve the organism in question. One experiences “delight, contentment, or pleasure” at the sensation of those things that are beneficial to the vital motions and pain at the sensation of that which hinders or weakens such motion. Such sensations of pain or pleasure will lead to an attraction toward or aversion from the source of that respective pleasure or pain. “This motion, in which consisteth pleasure or pain,” Hobbes explains, “is also a solicitation or provocation either to draw near to the thing that pleaseth, or to retire from the thing that displeaseth.”⁷⁰ The appetite and aversion that accompanies a sensation is the source of human desire, experienced in their extremes they are referred to as love and fear. What is beneficial or attractive becomes what the individual will refer to as ‘good’ and what is detrimental or aversive to the individual will become ‘evil’. Hobbes’s fuller account of the physics of human desire will emerge from this insight. However, the factors that make a thing desirable is dependent upon the constitution of the body and, in the case of human beings especially, the social and historical context in which one acts.

Hobbes materialist physics of desire (and ultimately, human activity) is thoroughly deterministic, though the nature of that which determines any given desire or action is not always immediately evident to the spectator of an action. Hobbes rejects the dualistic perspective that somehow severs human will from

⁶⁹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 43.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

desire. Rather, the need for an account that depends upon “free will” arises out of a failure to consider the complex nature of the causality of human desire and action. Deliberation is the “whole summe of [alternating and/ or successive] Desires, Aversions, Hopes and Fears, continued till the thing either be done, or thought impossible.”⁷¹ Rather than a distinctly human faculty that lies outside of the determination of desire, the will is merely the final appetite or aversion that completes the process of deliberation through action. Hobbes defines will as “the last Appetite in deliberating.”⁷² Human happiness is bound to the conditions in which desires are combined with the capacity to achieve their continual fulfillment, dependent upon the multitude of factors that both determine those desires as well as the possibility of their successful fulfillment. Since the will does not stand outside of the deterministic confluence of factors that guide human desires and actions, the causal factors that guide human desire are of the greatest importance.

The physics of desire begins with sensation and the concomitant aversion or appetite as a body experiences the sensation as beneficial or hindering to the ‘vital motions’ of that body. This predilection to attraction or repulsion toward a given sensation is not the same in all bodies. On the contrary, whether a sensation is attractive or aversive is wholly dependent upon the sensing body. “But we see by experience,” Hobbes writes, “that joy and grief proceed not in all men from the same causes, and that men differ much in the constitution of the body, whereby, that which helpeth and furthereth vital constitution in one, and is therefore delightful,

⁷¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 44.

⁷² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 45.

hindereth and crosseth in another, and causeth grief.”⁷³ In this passage, it becomes clear that one must be mindful, first of all, of the constitution of a given body when considering the causal determinations of human desire. Hobbes, however, in his account of human desire in *De Homine*, reveals the causes of desire to be more complex and numerous than it may initially appear from its origins in the appetitions and aversions concurrent with sensation. Hobbes explains that “men’s inclinations toward certain things, arise from a six-fold source: namely, from the constitution of the body, from experience, from habit, from the goods of fortune, from the opinion one have of oneself, and from authorities.”⁷⁴ These multiple factors converge upon any situation in determining the experience of desire. The confluence of these factors indicates the significance of the material, social and historical context that determines human desire. The material conditions in which someone lives play a significant determining causal role in the direction of human desire. Desire is what serves as a guide to human action, and that desire becomes informed by the calculative evaluation of future success gained from past experience. The randomness of sensed phantasms becomes honed into directed desire depending on the context in which an action is to be performed. Samantha Frost, in her evaluation of the temporality of Hobbes’s theory of desire, describes the causes that exceed any particular desire when she writes that “an individual’s personal history, along with his or her assessment of it, transforms the social and

⁷³ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 60-61.

⁷⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Man and Citizen: De Homine and De Cive*, trans. Charles T. Wood, T.S.K. Scott Craig, and Bernard Gert, ed. Bernard Gert (Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis, IN, 1991),63. While it would be informative to carefully delve into each factor and show how they causally impact human desire, such an account goes beyond the scope of the point here being made. What is of utmost importance is to show how there is in fact a confluence of factors that draw upon not only the constitution of the body but also the historical and social contexts that determine the direction of human desire.

material context of desire, a transformation that affects expectations, available objects, capacities for action—and consequently desire.”⁷⁵ The causal factors that concur to determine desire, therefore, are highly dependent upon the social and political organization of any given society. These factors, in determining the expectations and available objects, fashion the manifestation and direction of desire. For Hobbes, therefore, desire is determined by factors that, while unique to the individual’s history, are materially, socially, and historically larger than the temporal and spatial immediacy of any individual desire. These factors that are excessive of a given desire are determinative to the point of changing what is desired.

Since happiness, or felicity, is defined in terms of the fulfillment of desire, the significance of material, social, and historical contexts to the determination of desire reveals that the possibility of human happiness will be dependent upon the conditions in which the fulfillment of those desires can be realized. The political and ethical implications of the attempt to provide for the conditions that will make subjects as happy as “is possible in this life” become evident to Hobbes. The science of politics will be based upon knowledge of how passion and desire is experienced by subjects living in a commonwealth. In the introduction of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes clarifies his interest in studying the passions and desires of human beings in general rather than individual objects of desire: “I say similitude of Passions, which are the same in all men, *desire, feare, hope, &c*; not the similitude of *objects* of the Passions,

⁷⁵ Frost, *Lessons From A Materialist Thinker*, 98.

which are the things *desired, feared, hoped, &c.*"⁷⁶ It is true that, as Hobbes suggests, it would be a fruitless endeavor to make sense of the infinite ways in which individual's desire leads them to particular objects, and it would be equally absurd to attempt such an endeavor in a 'science of politics.' However, there is more at stake in the investigation of human desire and passions than simply an epistemological concern. For while the nature of human passion and desire is knowable because of its constancy, knowledge about the causes and nature of human desire and passions is the only way in which Hobbes can fulfill his ultimate end of creating a commonwealth based upon demonstrable science that best provides the conditions under which its subjects have the greatest capacity for living a happy life.

Hobbes's materialism does away with the traditionally Christian separation of perception and volition. Hobbes, rather dangerously, dissolves the separation upon which Christian morality is predicated. Susan James recognizes the challenge that Hobbes's theory of passion and desire posed in claiming, "It took a good deal of intellectual courage to challenge the distinction between perceptions and volitions, not only because this division had strong phenomenological backing, but also because it provided the basis for the conceptions of voluntary action on which Christian salvation was held to depend."⁷⁷ For Hobbes, perception, passions and desire are aspectively related to the whole of human experience. Phantasms are the experience of matters-in-motion that are directed toward the experiencing self from external sources and passions are the movements of the experiencing self that

⁷⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Intro, 10.

⁷⁷ James, *Passion and Action*, 125.

are directed from within as a result of factors such as the constitution and history of a given body (or, in the case of human beings, self). Desire is simply the attractive or aversive impulses that are tied to those phantasms and passions and thus there is no separation of desire from the passions, nor any possibility for the imposition of a “free will.” Passions and desires, therefore are directed toward the perceived benefit to the “vital motions” of the body. Hobbes does not, however, therefore believe that the passions are inherently good, but only the “*Apparent, or Seeming Good.*”⁷⁸ Ethics, as the science of the passions, is the study of what guides the passions toward the good that will empower the embodied subject, rather than toward the apparent good, which can also be self-destructive.

Hobbes describes passions as the “motions of the heart” that are experienced as pleasure, pain, etc., in the same manner as “motions within the head” are manifest in the thinking body as conceptions.⁷⁹ Passions are those motions that draw us toward or away from the source of a given agitation. Although passions are seemingly directed toward the strengthening of the body and its “vital motion,” Hobbes follows tradition in being wary of unguided passions. Passions that are unguided have the capacity to be excessive or weak, and in either case, they can turn against the body that they seemingly serve to protect. “For to have no desire is to be dead,” writes Hobbes, “so to have weak Passions, is Dulnesse; and to have Passions indifferently for every thing, Giddiness, and *Distraction*; and to have stronger, and more vehement Passions for any thing, than is normally seen in others, is that which

⁷⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 46.

⁷⁹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*. 43.

men call Madnesse.”⁸⁰ Not only the quantity of passion, but also the direction of passion is the grounds upon which human beings are led into self-destruction. The guidance of the passions must rely upon the motivating factors of human desire and the striving for power. In fact, the very impetus for the guidance of passions in the striving for power can be found in desire. Reason therefore can be understood in a two-fold manner for Hobbes. On the one hand, reason is instrumental mode of fulfilling one’s desires. On the other hand, reason is the expression of appetite that is properly ordered toward one’s striving for power. Reason thus does not stand apart from desire, but rather is a form of desire, i.e. appetite, itself.

At the moment that human beings have an appetite or aversion, they think of the means of attaining or fleeing from the causes of that appetite or aversion.⁸¹ For Hobbes, reason is instrumental and entails the reckoning of consequences that will allow for the attainment of that which is desired. Reason is a form of desire and therefore cannot be thought of as some faculty external to the materialist physics of desire. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines reason as “nothing but *Reckoning* (that is, Adding and Subtracting) of the Consequences of generall names agreed upon, for the marking and signifying of our thoughts; I say marking them, when we reckon by ourselves; and signifying, when we demonstrate, or approve our reckonings to other men.”⁸² Reason, therefore, is wholly instrumental for Hobbes; an expression of the desire to organize our thoughts in a way that will lead to the fulfillment of desires

⁸⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 54.

⁸¹ Hobbes defines this as “sagacity.” “And this the latins call *sagacitas*, SAGACITY, and we may call it hunting or tracing, as dogs trace the beast by smell, and men hunt them by their footsteps; or as men hunt after riches, place, or knowledge.” Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 32.

⁸² Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 32.

that will realize their aim of striving for power. Frost addresses Hobbes's distinctly materialistic understanding of reason that is tied to the passions when she writes, "The relationship between reason and desire is not one in which reason must rein in or control the passions nor one in which the passions master reason for the purposes of their satisfaction. Rather, and strangely to our habits of theoretical understanding, desire is what makes reasoning possible in the first place."⁸³ Reason, therefore, must be understood for Hobbes not in contrast to passions but rather as a means to the realization of passionate desire.

Reason finds its expression in two manners, one that is defined by Hobbes as "scientific" and the other that is prudential. Reason is typically understood as scientific, and it is scientific reasoning that arises out of the proper use of language. Words stand as markers that allow us to order the phantasms and passions that we perceive into a coherent and reliable world in which we are thus more capable of thinking and acting according to our intended desires, or in Hobbes's terminology, our "endeavor." As we become clear about definitions, i.e. the meaning of words, our thoughts can be trained in such a way that we can have the most success in moving our train of thoughts to knowledge from cause to effect. Hobbes offers a clear and concise account of the role of this 'scientific' reason when he writes, "The Light of humane minds is Perspicuous Words, but by exact definitions first snuffed, and purged from ambiguity; *Reason* is the *pace*; Encrease of *Science*, the *way*; and the

⁸³ Frost, *Lessons from Materialist Thinker*, 56.

Benefit of man-kind, the *end*.”⁸⁴ Words serve as markers that order the randomness of phantasms and passions; reason deductively draws the consequences and guides our thinking in a manner that Hobbes defines as scientific knowledge. In organizing our thoughts in the proper order toward the proper consequences, human beings achieve the increase in our power toward that which we strive. In other words, scientific reason becomes the manner by which we become empowered through knowledge.

Prudence, or practical reason, also entails the instrumental capacity to follow a given cause to its consequence. Whereas scientific reason draws from the ordering of our train of thoughts through language, practical reason discovers the likelihood of future consequences from experience. While practical reason does not grant the “infallibility” that Hobbes touts for scientific reason, it provides the necessary means to fulfill our future ends.⁸⁵ Hobbes characteristically offers a clear definition for the two forms of knowledge that aid human beings in their striving for power. “There be but two sorts of knowledge, whereof the one is nothing else but sense, or knowledge original..., and remembrance of the same; the other is called science or knowledge of the truth of propositions.”⁸⁶ While this clarifies what

⁸⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 36. The importance of definitions and Hobbes’s aspiration for unequivocation in language, while a matter of significance and much debate, lies outside of the scope of the present discussion.

⁸⁵ Hobbes’s greatest emphasis upon the power of reason can be found in the Epistle Dedicatory of *The Elements of Law* in which he contrasted unmitigated passion that leads to dogmatic thinking and rational thinking which does not leave open room for dispute. In fact, his stated goal in the *Elements of Law* is “to reduce this doctrine to the rules and infallibility of reason.” Hobbes’s belief in the power of reason to compel has been the subject of much scholarship. It seems that he moved somewhat away from this hard line in the *Elements*, when his thought moved farthest from humanism as compared to his earlier and later text. The most extensive treatment of Hobbes’s shifting belief in the power of reason to compel can be found in Quintin Skinner’s *Visions of Politics III (Chapter 4)* as well as his text *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*.

⁸⁶ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 40.

prudential knowledge entails, it does not explain the manner in which it serves human beings to reach the ends we seek. The strength of practical reason reveals itself with the increasing ease by which we can discern the means to our desired ends. Rather than haphazardly attempting to project future consequences, we become more and more adept at achieving those consequences the more we experience. The key to increasing one's practical reason, therefore, can be found in the depth and amount of one's experience. The subjects in want of experience are scattered in their thoughts and actions and thus often frustrated in their aims. Hobbes defines prudence as "a *Praesumption* of the *Future*, contracted from the *Experience* of time past."⁸⁷ And while there cannot be "indisputable" knowledge about the future, the more one has experience, the more successful one will be in their endeavor toward that which they desire. Hobbes's 'science of politics' attempts to distinguish itself in providing the conditions within which our striving for power can be best realized, yet as it turns out, the need for practical reason in organizing our thoughts and actions towards that which we desire does not diminish if one is to realize the possibility of human happiness as much as is possible.

Since both forms of knowledge, scientific and prudential, have their origin in remembrance, experience takes a central role in increasing one's capacity to achieve one's ends. Hobbes emphasizes the importance of experience when he writes:

"Forasmuch as all knowledge beginneth from experience, therefore also new experience is the beginning of new knowledge, and the increase of experience the beginning of new knowledge; whatsoever therefore happeneth new to a man, giveth

⁸⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 23.

him hope and matter of knowing somewhat that he knew not before.”⁸⁸ While the experience that is entailed in scientific thinking does not constitute the historical, embodied experience that is the concern of Frankfurt School thinkers such as Adorno and Benjamin, Hobbes does share with these thinkers a high value on counsel which is dependent upon such embodied, historical experience. Such experience has the two-fold impact upon our capacity to achieve that which we desire; first by opening up the avenues for new knowledge, and secondly by making our judgment more refined. With more experience, one is able to discern the seeming or apparent good or evil from that which will be most beneficial and least detrimental to our striving for power, “so that he who hath by Experience, or Reason, the greatest and surest prospect of Consequences, Deliberates best himself; and is able when he will, to give the best counsel to others.”⁸⁹ It should come as no surprise that following this passage Hobbes begins his discussion of felicity. For the capacity to fulfill our desires requires that one’s thoughts and passions be guided by both scientific and practical reason.

In the context of the commonwealth, reason must be used to properly order the conditions to strengthen the commonwealth, and practical reason in the form of counselors serve to know how best to achieve the ends we seek. Reason provides the tools to construct the framework of a healthy commonwealth. Hobbes employs the literal and metaphoric language of construction in explaining,

⁸⁸ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 37. The increase in knowledge also opens up the curiosity and openness to new knowledge that not only is empowering itself, it also has the additional benefit of resisting falling into the debilitating trap of dogmatism, indocility and prejudice (cf. *Elements of Law*, Ch. 10, p. 63).

⁸⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 46.

“And as the art of well building, is derived from Principles of Reason, observed by industrious men, that had long studied the nature of materials, and the divers effects of figure, and proportion, long after mankind began (although poorly) to build: So, long time after men have begun to constitute Common-wealths, imperfect, and apt to relapse into disorder, there may be Principles of Reason be found out, by industrious meditation, to make their constitution (excepting external violence) everlasting.”⁹⁰

Right reason can serve, for Hobbes, as the guide by which a strong and ‘everlasting’ commonwealth can be built. While scientific reason lays the framework for the conditions that are conducive to the strength of the commonwealth, practical reason in the form of counsel serves to guide the actions of the particular sovereign or subject living within that commonwealth. A good counselor (i.e. one who serves “*the Ends and Interest of him he counselleth*”) serves the commonwealth as the bearer of collective memory born of experience to guide according to the wisdom of practical reason. Hobbes writes,

“For Experience, being but memory of the consequences of like actions formerly observed, and Counsell but the Speech whereby that experience is made known to another; the Vertues, and Defects of Counsell, are the same with the Vertues, and Defects Intellectuall: and to the Person of a Common-wealth, his counselors serve him in the place of Memory, and Mentall Discourse.”⁹¹

Just as the individual subject must rely upon both scientific and practical reason in order to best achieve that toward which they endeavor, the commonwealth also is dependent upon the vigilant employment of both kinds of reason for its flourishing.

Reason, for Hobbes, is not a faculty that operates externally or in contrast with the natural world, but is rather the outgrowth of the human striving for power. “Reason is no less of the nature of man than passion,” writes Hobbes, “and is the same in all men, because all men agree in the will to be directed and governed

⁹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 232.

⁹¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 179.

in the way to that which they desire to attain, namely their own good, which is the work of reason.”⁹² From this Hobbes deduces the first law of nature drawn from reason. “There can therefore be no other law of nature than reason,” Hobbes continues, “nor no other precepts of NATURAL LAW, than those which declare unto us the ways of peace, where the same may be obtained, and of defence where it may not.”⁹³ It is this first precept of reason that guides rational beings to attain that which is required to best achieve that which they desire; that is, the first law of nature is to “seek peace.” This first precept of reason guides human desire in a manner that does not have the self-destructive consequences of the striving for power in the ‘state of nature’ but rather it directs human desire toward the possibility of best fulfilling our desires embodied in the striving for power. While this entails that “every man divest himself of the right he hath to all things by nature,” following the guidance of reason does not therefore involve setting up reason in opposition to natural desire.⁹⁴ Rather, reason provides the direction by which our natural power is increased. Hobbes writes, “the whole nature of man, consisteth in the powers natural of his body and mind, and may all be comprehended in these four: strength of body, experience, reason, and passion.”⁹⁵ Reason is merely one of the ways Hobbes understands the power of human beings, alongside rather than apart from strength of body, experience, and passion. And just as strength of body, experience, and passion, reason has its origin in the social and historical contexts in which one lives.

⁹² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 82.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 77.

Hobbesian Individual and Displacements of Power

The point of departure for many commentators on Hobbes's political theory is the supposedly isolated individual. Because of this, and in spite of the anti-liberal conclusions that he draws, Hobbes is thought of as presenting an early account of the liberal individual. This understanding of the Hobbesian individual is drawn from influential writers as diverse in their views as C.B. Macpherson to Michael Oakeshott, and has therefore provided the framework for a great majority of the commentary on Hobbes's political theory.⁹⁶ Understanding the relation of individual power to that of the multitude will prove to be central in understanding the nature of power, and therefore, the ways in which the striving for power either individually, collectively, and/or both can be fulfilled. Human desire ultimately, for Hobbes, is the various expressions by which human beings perceive as the increase in power. The balance by which the striving for power can be understood as collective or individual, therefore, will be central to the realization of human happiness to the extent that it is possible.

The reading of Hobbes that views society as an amalgamation of isolated individuals finds its source in his description of the life of human beings in the state of nature as "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."⁹⁷ The reading of Hobbes as a proto-liberal demands that one discard the materialist physics of desire and wholly rely upon a moral position as that upon which Hobbes's notions of

⁹⁶ While they reiterate their reading of the Hobbesian individual throughout their writings, the most well-known and most complete accounts of Macpherson's and Oakeshott's reading of the Hobbesian individual can be found in the texts: Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962). Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association* (Liberty Fund, Indianapolis, IN, 1975).

⁹⁷ *Leviathan*, 89.

individuality and power is founded.⁹⁸ Hobbes's determinative structure of human will is discarded by writers such as Oakeshott and Alan Ryan who view Hobbes's ethics and politics as the precursor to liberal individualism. Oakeshott describes society as a collection of solitary individuals coming together in Hobbes's theory as a proponent of the "morality of individuality":

"In the morality of individuality...human beings are recognized...as separate and sovereign individuals, associated with one another, not in the pursuit of a single common enterprise, but in an enterprise of give and take, and accommodating themselves to one another as best they can: it is the morality of selves and other selves. Here individual choice is preeminent and a great part of happiness is connected with its exercise. Moral conduct is recognized as consisting in determinate relationships between these individuals, and the conduct approved is that which reflects the independent individuality understood to be characteristic of human beings. Morality is the art of mutual accommodation."⁹⁹

Oakeshott describes the traditional notion of the liberal individual and finds in Hobbes a champion of liberal individualism and freedom. While it is true that Hobbes expresses the interests of the British upper-class of the Seventeenth Century in his political conclusions and aspirations, to simply state, however, that his notion of the individual aligns itself to a classically liberal notion demands not only that one sever his materialist physics from the scope of human political activity, but it would also entail that one believe that the individual is the sole cause of their activity and that this individual agent acts according to a will that is not fully enmeshed within the social and historical conditions in which it acts.¹⁰⁰ In other words, Hobbes's

⁹⁸ This position is most famously and compellingly stated by Leo Strauss, but it is also the guiding principle upon which several readings of Hobbes that views the Hobbesian individual as "bourgeois" (for example, C.B. Macpherson) or as a champion of liberal individualism (for example, Michael Oakeshott and Alan Ryan).

⁹⁹ Oakeshott, *Hobbes on Civil Association*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Macpherson's analysis come from a different position than Oakeshott, yet as it relates to the account of isolated individuals (if not liberal), he comes to a similar (albeit more plausible) conclusion, when he writes, "Although his conclusions can scarcely be called liberal, his postulates were highly individualistic. Discarding traditional concepts of society, justice, and natural law, he deduced political rights and obligation from the interest and will of dissociated individuals."

materialistic account of desire and activity would have to be completely irrelevant to his account of individuality and power.

In the context of an inquiry into the possibility of the realization of human happiness, the question of the nature of human individuality is a question regarding the source and prospect of attaining power. If one believes in an atomistic conception of individuality, then power is defined and originates in the free agency of the isolated individual. Hobbes's materialist account of human will and desire (in which desire is socially and historically determined), however, does not allow for such an isolated and free agent. Frost follows the consequences of Hobbes materialist physics of desire in what she refers to as Hobbes's "double displacement of the individual." The first displacement occurs when one considers power in both its active and passive elements. All actions are a combination of active 'agents' and the passive conditions (material, social, historical) that make such agency possible. "The Power of a Man," according to Hobbes, "is his present means, to obtain some future good."¹⁰¹ These "present means" can come from both the natural power that a person is endowed with, but it is also largely a product of one's surroundings; in other words, the material conditions in which one finds oneself. This aspect of Hobbes's notion of power accounts for the first "displacement" of individuals as the source of the expression of power. The power of the people (i.e. the commonwealth) is found in creating the proper inter-relations between subjects that allows for the

Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism*, p. 1. At this point in the discussion, what is germane is whether the reading of Hobbes as a champion of a society of "dissociated individuals" is the most helpful way of understanding Hobbes's political theory.

¹⁰¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 62.

realization of human desire. Frost finds in this interdependence the second “displacement” of the individual. She writes,

“First, when Hobbes proposes that we conceive of power as the condition for action, he displaces the individual as the single source of action. Arguing that an individual can act only to the degree that the extant passive powers or social conditions allow, he points to individuals’ fundamental interdependence: any individuals success in acting – or in realizing a particular desire – is the product of a complex of material and social factors...The pursuit of power both rests upon and reconfigures this interdependence. Second, and correspondingly, in portraying people power as relations of subordination and superordination that constitute the conditions for realizing desires, Hobbes displaces the individual as the unit of analysis in thinking about action and politics. In arguing that the power to act is the product of relations of interdependence, Hobbes suggests that any analysis of power, of political action, or of politics must take as its focus of analysis those very relationships.”¹⁰²

Frost, in contradistinction to those commentators who view Hobbes’s individual as isolated or atomistic, finds that a careful reading of Hobbes’s notion of power re-emphasizes the significance of the social, material conditions in which the power to act is made possible. The interpretation of Hobbesian power of the individual as identical with liberal notion of power fails to give an adequate account of the ‘passive’ power that provides the conditions for acting and the deterministic structure of human desire that motivates the agent to act.

Hobbes’s notion of power and individuality does express the concerns and aspirations of the times in which he lived; this does not therefore mean that one should disregard the materialist physics of desire when understanding power and individuality. What is perceived as powerful is a significant cause of what one desires, and therefore it should not come as a surprise that Hobbes echoes many of the notions that are reflective of perceived power in the nascent bourgeois

¹⁰² Frost, *Lessons from a Materialist Thinker*, 155-156.

conditions of seventeenth-century Britain.¹⁰³ However, that Hobbes's individual can be considered the liberal individual who, for some reason, enters into a covenant thereby giving up that liberty, fails to recognize that human desire is determined for Hobbes out of our social interdependence. For many commentators today as well as in his own time, one repellent aspect of Hobbes conception of human beings appears to be that he perceives human beings as motivated by self-interest and not inherently or naturally sociable. However, while human beings may not necessarily be sociable for Hobbes, this does not mean that human beings are not imbued in an interdependent world in which social, historical, and material factors play a fundamental role in determining the direction of our desires. In fact, the recognition of this interdependence is requisite, according to Hobbes, for the fulfillment of those desires.

In Hobbes's theoretical construct of the "state of nature," man is presented as "solitary, poore, nasty brutish, and short." This depiction could lead one to believe that Hobbes thinks that this is the 'natural' condition of man. Hobbes is not, however, offering a historical, or even a naturalistic account of human beings. Rather, he is providing the theoretical trope upon which he is able to show that life within a commonwealth under the absolute authority of a sovereign provides the greatest possibility for fulfilling both present and future desires. In the *Leviathan*, Hobbes explicitly reduces all human desire back to the desire for power, and not

¹⁰³ A thorough examination of the historical period in which Hobbes is writing, and how it impacts the desires and perception of power that guides Hobbes's writings is invaluable to the study of Hobbes's theory of politics, though its elaboration is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Specifically, the writings and research of Richard Tuck, Quintin Skinner, and C.B. Macpherson have proven especially helpful in informing this historical context for the present study.

only that but for “perpetuall and restless desire of Power after power.”¹⁰⁴ On the one hand, this striving for power raises the specter of the horrors concomitant with the ‘state of nature,’ on the other hand, Hobbes clarifies that our striving for power entails not only the myopic concerns of immediate gratification, but also the concern for the capacity of achieving the fulfillment of our desires in the future. In fact, the solitary and miserable figure presented in Hobbes’s ‘state of nature’ is the product of Hobbes’s imagination reflecting upon the consequences of those who view our agency and our interests as autonomous. In transferring one’s rights to the commonwealth, one enters into the greatest possibility for achieving the fulfillment of present and future desires. The sociality, if not necessarily sociability, of Hobbes’s individual entails that the fulfillment of one’s present and future desires is reliant upon the capacity to estimate the nature of one’s present and future social interdependence. To enter into the covenant with the commonwealth is to limit one’s rights while at the same time increasing one’s power and freedom to achieve what one desires.

The power of the individual becomes formally united with the power of the people through the covenant with the sovereign power of the commonwealth. The power of the individual as well as the power of the people does not become impotent with the construction of the commonwealth; rather, the expression of power must be transferred to the unified authority of the sovereign for that power to not devolve into faction and self-destruction. In other words, the multitude does not properly become a ‘people’ and the individual does not become a ‘person’

¹⁰⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 53,-70.

without the transfer of authority in the construction of the commonwealth. Hobbes's conception of the "unified multitude" stands in contrast with the Spinozistic multitude in which the collective power of the people need not be constructed in order to exert its power. In *The Elements of Law*, Hobbes delineates the conception of an aggregate of individuals from a "people" in the sense of a unified or civil multitude. One definition of a "people" is simply the individuals who live in a particular area or region (i.e. the people of England). The other definition of a "people" refers to the multitude that is unified in a commonwealth under the authority of a sovereign; for Hobbes, this second definition is the proper use of the term people or multitude when in political discussion.¹⁰⁵ Hobbes quantifies power always in relative terms to the external forces that impose upon either an individual or a multitude. The first law of reason is to "seek peace" and therefore the power of a multitude is gauged by its capacity to ensure security from external forces that threaten peaceful living. "The Multitude sufficient to confide in for our Security," writes Hobbes, "is not determined by any certain number, but by comparison with the Enemy we fear."¹⁰⁶ The power of an individual is determined by its capacity to fulfill present and future desires without external impediment, and the power of a multitude is also measured by its capacity to resist the external impediment of outside forces; that is, its ability to secure peace. With the covenant and construction of the commonwealth, the 'natural' individual becomes transformed into the political person who is obligated to the sovereign authority (to the extent

¹⁰⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, ch. 21, 124-125.

¹⁰⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 118.

that the sovereign authority is capable of maintaining the conditions for peace).¹⁰⁷

This transformation is felt in not merely the obligations that one owes to the sovereign authority, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the increased capacity to realize the fulfillment of one's desires. The success of a commonwealth, as will become evident, does not ultimately vitiate its subject's individual power, but rather a commonwealth is deemed successful to the extent that it empowers its subjects to fulfill their desires to the extent that it is possible while maintaining peace. While the individual does become subordinate to the authority of the sovereign according to law, this does not therefore mean that individual power in the form of the fulfillment of desires becomes necessarily quashed under the force of the collective.

Hobbes's individual must be considered, as with all elements of his political theory, according to two aspects. One aspect is that of the "natural" human being as one would be in the state of nature apart from and logically (though not temporally) before the construction of the political. The Hobbesian individual is socially interdependent, that is heteronomous through and through, and the constitution of the covenant is dependent upon the recognition of the need for security that comes by participating in a unified multitude. For the purposes of construction, the "artificial" human being must be thought of, for Hobbes, only in the relation of the collective desire symbolically embodied by the sovereign authority. The creation of the "artificial" human being tied to the "artificial chains" of the commonwealth

¹⁰⁷ Hobbes, in contradistinction to Aristotle, does not believe that human beings are naturally 'political animals,' but rather that we become political persons with the covenant and construction of the commonwealth.

suggests the dangers of reification of living individuals under the force of a theoretical, yet politically very real abstraction. And even if Hobbes can therefore demonstrate that the constitution of the commonwealth that he proposes is ideally best, this could condemn subjects of such a commonwealth to the thumb of an undialectical abstraction. Such a danger lurks within Hobbes's advocacy of a "science of politics," yet Hobbes's political philosophy resists this evident urge to wholly construct a politics from a constructed individual.¹⁰⁸ Rather, Hobbes provides a politics that is guided by an analysis of human passions where the successful construction of the commonwealth depends upon the coordination of collective desire.¹⁰⁹ In other words, while the "artificial" person is the actor in the political arena, the embodied passions of the individuals that make up the unified multitude are the ground upon which the construction of the successful commonwealth must respond.

Passions and the Science of Politics

The utmost possibility for human happiness emerges only in a society that is organized in such a way that the human passions and desires are coordinated toward the preservation of peace. The science of politics in Hobbes's view, therefore, emerges from the knowledge of the workings of human passions that are either beneficial or detrimental to the stability of the sovereign authority. The knowledge of the passions allows for the political theorist to minimize the risk of

¹⁰⁸ The extent to which Hobbes successfully or unsuccessfully resists the urge to fall into the fantasy of an abstraction offers contemporary political theorists with lessons that reveal the strengths and weaknesses of Hobbes's construction of a science of politics.

¹⁰⁹ Strauss concurs with this point when writing that, for Hobbes, "a thorough knowledge of the passions is the indispensable condition for the answering of the question as to the right ordering of social life, and particularly to the best form of State." Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 110.

sedition and therefore maximize the power and stability of the commonwealth. At the level of the individual, happiness manifests as an increase in power, and to call someone happy is to deem that person powerful. Hobbes departs from the teachings of the Ancients in that he finds a significant and real source of power to be found in not only the actuality of such power (for example, that someone or some authority be so strong) but can also be found importantly in the perception of power.

Collective happiness, as will be shown in the construction of a commonwealth, is manifested in the reverence and obedience that the subjects and commonwealth show to the sovereign authority, as well as the fear or respect displayed by its external enemies. For individuals, power is shown not only through specific actions but also through the honors (i.e. recognitions) of one's power. One's happiness, therefore, depends upon receiving honors from others, or as Hobbes refers to honor, to receive the "worship" of others. Such power is expressed through the passions of love, fear, and hope, and through the "external worship" of praise, magnifying, and blessing. Hobbes writes, "The subject of Praise, being Goodnesse; the subject of Magnifying, and Blessing, being Power, and the effect thereof of Felicity."¹¹⁰ The realization of happiness occurs with the fulfillment of our desires, which arises and is grounded for Hobbes in our striving for power, and to be considered happy is to be estimated as powerful. The strength of a commonwealth and the happiness of the individual are therefore bound to reputation and perception.

The satisfaction that is experienced in the perception of our own power is what Hobbes refers to as "glory." "Glory, or the internal gloriation or triumph of the

¹¹⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 248-249.

mind,” Hobbes defines, “is that passion that proceedeth from the imagination or conception of our own power, above the power of him that contendeth with us.”¹¹¹ The passion of glory amplifies and emboldens ones capacity to act and express ones power. So long as the increase in this passion is aligned with the actual increase in our capacity to act, it will have the very positive effect of increasing ones power as one aspires to greater power. “This imagination of our power and worth, may be an assured and certain experience of our own actions, and then is that glorying just and well grounded, and begetteth an opinion of increasing the same by other actions to follow; in which consisteth the appetite which we call aspiring, or proceeding from one degree of power to another.”¹¹² This increase in power that comes from the passion of glory emerges from the reputation and self-reflection of one’s own power; the more success that one experiences in fulfilling one’s desires, the more one experiences the glory of one’s own power, and thus one’s happiness. Since reputation and honor hold a central role in the social expression of power, an individual or commonwealth’s capacity to attain such power is dependent upon knowledge of what others perceive to be powerful. In other words, the science of politics must account not only for the complex social arrangements that order a society, but also the modes of expression and interpretation by which that power is perceived.

The pursuit of “power after power” in a world where power is gauged in not only relative but comparative terms can have the deleterious effect of turning individuals against one another and toward sedition, thus leading to the dissolution

¹¹¹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 50.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

of the commonwealth. The passion that poses the greatest threat to the peace and security of the commonwealth and to the demise of the individual's pursuit of happiness lies in the perils of vanity, or vain-glory. Hobbes identifies vain-glory as the passion that accompanies the false imagination of one's own power because that perception of power is "grounded on the flattery of others; or only supposed by himself, for delight in the consequences of it."¹¹³ The pursuit of vain-glory becomes the greatest enemy for the commonwealth because one does not stand in awe of the power of the authority of the sovereign and therefore becomes a rash threat to the common peace.¹¹⁴ Hobbes's greatest evident task in his writings is to diminish the influence of the illusory, imaginative world of vain-glory which places the authority of the sovereign in peril, shaking the foundation upon which a healthy society must stand. Macpherson attributes this concern with vain-glory (despite the fact that it has been present in human beings to some, lesser degree all along) as an outgrowth of the emergence of bourgeois society:

"With the development of capitalist relationships, with the freeing of more classes of men from the old social bonds, this ambition or striving for vain glory has become a widespread characteristic. So Hobbes's picture may be called and unpleasantly accurate analysis not of man as such, but of man since the rise of bourgeois society."¹¹⁵

Hobbes's primary task in his writings is to promote human flourishing, and he identifies the crisis of his times as the threat posed by vain-glory that has arisen with the loss of traditional forms of authority. The loss of traditional forms of

¹¹³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 43.

¹¹⁴ For a discussion of the transformation from appropriate glory to vain-glory, see James, *Passion and Action*, 177-178.

¹¹⁵ C.B. MacPherson, "Hobbes Today," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Nov. 1945); 526. One could certainly argue that vanity, or pride, has been the concern of writers since antiquity broadly speaking (most notably in the dramas of the tragic playwrights), but the concern as it is addressed by Hobbes does appear to be unique to the historical moment he finds himself with the dissolution of the monarchy and the rise of early capitalist structures of authority.

authority, coupled with bourgeois society's inherent competitiveness to out-do one's neighbor, inspires Hobbes to face vain-glory as the dark ghost that haunts the possibility of human flourishing. Vain-glory offers a false estimate of one's power and understanding and therefore locks the individual into the imaginative prejudices that stunt further knowledge or understanding. Because of this, Strauss describes Hobbes's account of vain-glory as "the final reason of incapacity to learn, of prejudice and superstition, as well as of injustice."¹¹⁶ By turning productive and empowering aspiration into imaginative and self-destructive flights, vain-glory not only poses the general threat to the security of the commonwealth but also can cement an illusion that holds the individual under its grip, thus negating the possibility of felicity.

In fear, Hobbes reveals the passion that serves as the antidote to the plague unfurled upon humanity through the perils of vain-glory. Fear, not understood simply as the raw emotion of being frightened, but as the "anticipation of future evil."¹¹⁷ This anticipation of future evil counteracts the illusions of power that, by definition, entail not only power in the present but also the persistence of that power in the future. Fear is the passion that drives human being from the madness of unguided passion toward the stability of reason. While unchecked vain-glory leads to the delusions of seditious grandeur, fear checks one's power in relation to the sovereign authority in which one displays respect through obedience and proper reverence to that authority. Hobbes explains, "Of all Passions, that which enclineth men least to break the Lawes, is fear. Nay, (excepting some generous

¹¹⁶ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 26.

¹¹⁷ Hobbes, *De Cive*, 25.

natures,) it is the only thing, (when there is appearance of profit, or pleasure by breaking the Lawes,) that makes men keep them.”¹¹⁸ Hobbes continues by explaining that fear is not a good in-itself since many crimes are committed out of fear; however, it is the passion of fear that has the capacity of directing the desire of subjects toward the peace and stability of the commonwealth.¹¹⁹ Strauss is perhaps the clearest commentator regarding the opposing natures of the passions of vain-glory and fear, writing that “as vanity is the power which dazzles, the diametrically opposed power, fear, is the power which enlightens man.”¹²⁰ Fear, as “the anticipation of future evil,” becomes the passion that moves our desire toward the passion of reason.

While Hobbes’s task is to promote human flourishing, the means by which he believes that this is possible is by developing the appropriate fears and proper estimations of power to guide our desires. His most famous method of promoting this productive fear is the theoretical construction of the brutal “state of nature” that awaits those who think they would prefer a world without a sovereign authority. The state of nature is the archetypical state of war, and the appropriate fear of such a condition leads to the first law of nature, “to seek peace.” Reason becomes not merely the instrument by which solitary individuals pursue their separate, and thus frustrated interests, but the harbinger of sociable living. Francois Tricaud describes the emergence of sociable living through the persistent application of reason born of

¹¹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 206.

¹¹⁹ Hobbes insists that one of the failings of Aristotelian politics is that it does not posit equality or even recognize the way in which we are actually equal (i.e. in the capacity to bring about each others death) and therefore does not lead subjects to the appropriate level of fear that brings about the rise of a rational, that is peaceful state.

¹²⁰ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, 111.

fear when he writes, “Men are in a situation that, the more they reason (each of them solitarily), the more they will be menaced and unhappy. This will last until they light on, and put into application, the difficult idea of reasoning *together*, entering into mutual covenants, and setting up a power to make them good.”¹²¹ The passion of fear inspires the desire to seek peace and to live sociably, and such a desire is the impetus by which the commonwealth is formed. And one of the fundamental functions of the sovereign authority is to be able to coordinate the desires of their subjects towards the end of peace and security. Hobbes takes as his task to demonstrate the need for strong sovereign authority by instilling the appropriate counteracting fear in opposition to the dangers of the passion of vain-glory.

The combination of the striving for power and the fear of shameful and solitary death induces human beings, according to Hobbes, to the drive toward the rational passion to seek peace and to live in the community of a commonwealth under sovereign authority. The impetus toward the construction of the state entails a change in the nature of manifest authority, but it does not entail the transformation of the anthropological conditions of society. On the contrary, it is human being’s fundamental striving for power that provides the stimulus toward rational communal living in which we recognize our social interdependence and therefore seek peace. Hobbes identifies the success (i.e. strength) of a commonwealth in its capacity to keep the deleterious influence of vain-glory, or undue pride, at bay. In response to this concern, Hobbes posits the proposition that

¹²¹ Francois Tricaud, “Hobbes’s Conception of the State of Nature,” *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed. G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988), 122.

since human beings are equal in that we are capable of killing one another, for the sake of peace a politics must be founded upon the injunction that we treat each other as equals. Hobbes writes in the *Elements*,

“And when there was any contention between the finer and the courser wits, (as there hath been often in times of sedition and civil war) for the most part these latter carried away the victory and as long as men arrogate to themselves more honour than they give to others, it cannot be imagined how they can possibly live in peace: and consequently we are to suppose, that for peace sake, nature hath ordained this law, *That every man acknowledge other for his equal*. And the breach of this law, is that we call pride.”¹²²

The aim of the sovereign authority is to consistently direct the passions of the subjects toward the goal of peace, which first of all entails finding the means by which the self-defeating effects of human vanity can be thwarted. Hobbes refers to the Leviathan as the “King of the Proud” because it is only through the sovereign authority that human beings can escape the perils of reckless human passion. The sovereign authority serves as the formalization of the social relations that reflect the rational awareness of our social interdependence. Through the formalization of our social relations, human beings are finally in a position by which they can best fulfill their desire for power. In other words, for Hobbes the ‘Leviathan’ is the engine that makes human flourishing possible.

The Construction of the Commonwealth

While the natural striving for power is the impetus that ultimately sends human beings in a trajectory that supports socially commodious living, the construction of the commonwealth should not be considered an organically developed outgrowth of that natural desire. Hobbes distinguishes himself from the ancient and even medieval political thinkers before him by establishing the clear

¹²² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 93.

demarcation between natural production and the artifice of human political life.

Amos Funkenstein seizes upon this point when he writes:

“the core of [Hobbes’s] political theory lies in the novel insight that neither a social instinct (*inclination ad societatem*) nor indeed an urge for perfection, social or otherwise, is part of the basic endowment of human nature. Social organization of human beings – unlike some beasts – is not a natural product, but rather altogether and artifact.”¹²³

In the introduction of the *Leviathan*, Hobbes endorses the analogy of the human construction of civil science (as modeled after geometry) to that of divine creation.¹²⁴ The “art” of the “great leviathan,” the commonwealth, is born out of imitation with the natural creation of man, yet cannot be therefore confused with the products of divine or natural creation. Hobbes famously distinguished human social relations from those complex social organizations that follow from natural or divine order such as societies of bees or ants. Hobbes provides a full listing of the differences but the two that are most notable are that such species of animals are not driven toward the striving for power or dominion and secondly, that “natural concord, such as is amongst those creatures, is the work of God by the way of nature; but concord among men is artificial.”¹²⁵ The constructive power of human beings opens up the possibility of a science of politics that can deductively demonstrate the path to the construction of the secure and powerful commonwealth by following the “royal road to peace.”¹²⁶

The formation of the “state of nature” does not offer an account of origin but rather lays the theoretical groundwork from which the commonwealth could be

¹²³ Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 327.

¹²⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Introduction, 9-11.

¹²⁵ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 107.

¹²⁶ Hobbes, *On the Citizen*, 10.

constructed. The state of nature is proposed to offer an analysis of the needs and means for the construction of the commonwealth. The rational capacity of human beings does not necessarily lead to the political organization of society in Hobbes's view. Rather, the fear that is induced from the image of a society that lacks the structure of the sovereign authority (i.e. one in which the human passions of vanity and ambition hold sway) most effectively incites the impetus to obedience to that authority in the form of a covenant.¹²⁷ In the chapter entitled "Of the Natural Condition of Mankind, as concerning their Felicity, and Misery," Hobbes lays out the implications of the state of war that would ensue without the security provided by sovereign authority:

"In such a condition, there is no place for Industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no Culture of the Earth; no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society; and which is worst of all, continuall feare, and the danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short."¹²⁸

The formulation of the state of nature supplies Hobbes with the rhetorical and theoretical tool with which he will be able to advance his theory of sovereign authority. On the one hand, the image that Hobbes offers in the state of nature induces the fear that will prevent the active expression of seditious passions, and on the other hand, the state of nature clears the theoretical space upon which human society can be constructed through art.

¹²⁷ Tom Sorrell locates the importance of the rhetorical "device" of the state of nature when placed within the historical context in which Hobbes was writing: "[The 'state of nature' as Hobbes constructed it] contributes to a venture in rhetoric broadly conceived. Hobbes wants to persuade an audience of malcontents that remaining obedient to a *de facto* protective power was for the best. In order to win his readers over he thought he had to overcome the operations of strong passions, notably avarice and ambition, which inclined them to opportunistic rebellion." Tom Sorrell, "Science in Hobbes's Politics," *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, ed G.A.J. Rogers and Alan Ryan, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988) 69.

¹²⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

Hobbes has outlined the constructive, or artistic, nature of human political organization and, in so doing, has established the groundwork upon which the commonwealth can be founded. In keeping with Hobbes's commitment that his work bring a benefit to human beings, he first explains how, in the state of nature, there is a grim existence. However, he goes further in clarifying that position when he writes that, "men have no pleasure, (but on the contrary a great deale of grieffe) in keeping company, where there is no power able to over-awe them all."¹²⁹ The wisdom that Hobbes finds in this insight propels his belief that sovereign authority is not only necessary, but also that it is best achieved through a covenant between sovereign authority and subjects. The commonwealth "by institution" secures, for the subjects of such a sovereign authority, the peace that paves the way to the maximal realization of human flourishing. The covenant with sovereign authority entails the abdication of the natural right to all things.¹³⁰ Yet this abdication of right also entails the increase in power that comes with the increase in the liberty to act according to one's desires within the confines of civil obligation. Outside of such an obligation, the state of war thwarts the human capacity to act in such a way that human beings in the state of nature are condemned to misery, while the recognition of social interdependence that is performed through the transfer of right to a sovereign authority formalizes the rational aim of securing the fulfillment of desires not only in the present but also in the future. And for those who merely obey the sovereign authority (and thereby, in Hobbes's view respect, honor, and covenant with that authority) without the guidance of rational wisdom, the benefits of

¹²⁹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 88.

¹³⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 100.

sovereign authority are enjoyed just as well. With the covenant between sovereign and subject, the transformation from the natural state of war to the artificial state of civil society is initiated.¹³¹ The transformation of the natural individuals and people into artificial persons and multitude of civil society ensures the benefits that are only possible when living within a commonwealth. Hobbes writes, “This union so made, is that which men call now-a-days a BODY POLITIC or CIVIL SOCIETY; and the Greeks call it *polis*, that is to say, a city; which may be defined to be a multitude of men, united as one person by a common power, for their common peace, defence, and benefit.”¹³² The establishment of the sovereign authority and the construction of civil society frees the subjects that make up the united multitude to live according to the peaceful and rational sociability that best advances the fulfillment of particular as well as collective desires.

While there is some debate about the strength that Hobbes attributes to reason in regards to its power to persuade, his high estimation of the constructive capacity of human reason deployed toward the creation of civil society is unmistakable.¹³³ Hobbes notably states that human rational construction has the power to constitute a commonwealth that is “everlasting,” and that the failure of civil society to prevent faction to date has merely been the failure of the proper

¹³¹ How this covenant is enacted is a matter of extensive analysis and speculation amongst Hobbesian scholars. While instructive to the present analysis, a full account lies outside of the scope of the present study. What is relevant, at minimum is that such a covenant can seem to be enacted in a variety of ways that involve primarily obedience, but can also include explicit acknowledgement and even participation in civil practices.

¹³² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 107.

¹³³ It was noted earlier that Hobbes viewed his political theory as an exercise in employing rational principles to demonstrate “indisputable” truths. While he found that reason is the greatest source of persuasion, especially in his earlier explicitly political writings such as *The Elements of Law*, there is evidence that he backed off while not abandoning his fervent rejection of the humanistic value of rhetoric as required in order to persuade in his later writings. Quintin Skinner offers several extensive examinations of the transforming role of rhetoric in Hobbes’s writings.

application of reason in constructing sovereign authority and the institutions that sustain civil society. Hobbes writes of the dissolution of commonwealths that, “when they come to be dissolved, not by external violence, but intestine disorder, the fault is not in men as they are the *Matter*, but as they are the *Makers*, and orderers of them.”¹³⁴ In other words, there is nothing in human nature that would prevent the possibility of constructing institutions that can follow the first law of nature that preserves their own existence, and therefore the peace and security of their subjects.¹³⁵

The first order of civil society is to protect the peaceful living of its subjects, but this can only be done if the specter of the state of war is not hanging over the established commonwealth. While the fear of the perils of the state of nature induces the individuals of a society to transfer their rights by sovereign authority, the maintenance of this sovereign authority can only be sustained by the fear of the sovereign authority, external to the multitude of subjects, reinforcing its own hold on power. Otherwise, the malignant passions will reassert themselves in an effective number of individuals, dissolving the peace of civil society. “For seeing the wills of most men are governed only by fear, and where there is no power of coercion, there is no fear; the lust, anger, and the like, to the breaking of those covenants, whereby the rest, also, who otherwise would keep them, are set at liberty, and have no law

¹³⁴ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 221.

¹³⁵ Francois Tricaud identifies civil institutions as the artifact that is missing for human beings in Hobbes’s state of nature when he writes, “Hobbes’s natural men seem to have clothes and houses, and certainly they have weapons. The artefact they are chiefly bereft of is *institution*: either the bare contract, or the social pact with its political consequences; of course, in this situation, no other technique can reach a high level of development, but this is a consequence rather than an essential part of the state of nature.” Francois Tricaud, “Hobbes’s Conception of the State of Nature,” *Perspectives on Thomas Hobbes*, 108.

but from themselves.”¹³⁶ Even after the establishment of sovereign authority by means of covenant, there is still the necessity for the power of coercion to maintain obedience and peace among the populace. For Hobbes does not presume a society of enlightened rational agents for whom there is the inherent and undying recognition of their interests in the will of the sovereign. Rather, the fear of coercion serves as the antidote to seditious ambition and directs unenlightened reason toward obedience.

In the constructive power of human beings as creators of civil society, Hobbes finds the capacity to transform not only the form of authority, but also how we can understand social causality. With the creation of the obligations and responsibilities that come with the formation of civil society, Hobbes reconstructs social relations in a mold that adheres to the dictates of reason. Both artificial person and sovereign authority can only be acknowledged to act in accord with the fictional roles they embody. Specific individuals are no longer the authors of their own actions, but rather they act as subjects responsible to the obligations that come with the covenant with sovereign authority. The causal relations between subjects become formalized in a structure that no longer entails the anarchic struggle of the state of nature but rather reflects an organized structure of power that identifies the causal authority (cause being the same as power for Hobbes) of any social activity. James H. Read identifies this normalization of social power relations as the primary accomplishment of overcoming the state of nature, where “unidirectional causal

¹³⁶ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 113.

relations are lacking, which is precisely the problem.”¹³⁷ The construction of civil society formalizes the rational organization of social power relations, providing the security that comes with the transparency of authority and responsibility in any given social context. And because this reformulation of power follows the rational order of a human artifact, politics therefore is conducive to explication by means of a demonstrative science.

The construction of the institutions of civil society, while wholly the product of human artifice, must be formed in such a manner that the institutions are receptive and responsive to the transforming desires and passions of the populace. While Hobbes’s sovereign is often depicted as tyrannical and detached from the lives of its subjects, the authority of the sovereign in Hobbes’s account is bound to the beliefs of the subjects that are ruled. Because of this, the science of politics must not simply be an exercise in abstraction but must account for the perceptions and beliefs that are holding the commonwealth together. Since the subjects maintain their right to defend themselves from death, the duty of the sovereign is to provide the assurance of peaceful living. In order to assure peace, the sovereign must be able to resist the dissolution of civil law, and this is only possible when the people believe in the magnitude of the sovereign’s power. This belief can be fostered either through fear or through non-coercive persuasion, because for Hobbes the method by which a sovereign acquires the belief in its authority (i.e. obedience) is a distinction of style more than substance. However, the strength of a commonwealth is sustained by the active obedience and affirmations of the sovereign authority, to

¹³⁷ James H. Read, “Power in the State of Nature, Power in Civil Society,” *Polity*, vol. 23, no. 4, (Summer, 1991) 507.

which a tyrannical ruler, by failing to ensure the “safety of the people,” often proves inept when it comes to keeping the divisive passions at bay. The civil institutions that direct the beliefs and passions of the subjects toward the collective interests (as manifested in the sovereign will) are far more effective in assuring the stability of the commonwealth than those institutions that incite the seditious passions of the populace. By formalizing the structures of social interdependence, these civil institutions also engender the best conditions in which the capacity to empower individuals in their endeavor can be realized. In many ways, the question of whether the Hobbesian theory of politics can manifest itself in the embodied happiness of living human beings hinges upon its capacity to not only construct civil society, but to construct civil society in such a way that it is responsive to the passions and desires of the subjects of the commonwealth both as artificial persons and as natural individuals, all the while fulfilling the first law of reason, to seek peace.¹³⁸

Hobbes believes that the only way that sovereign authority can perform its mandated function is if the authority is absolute. Hobbes understands sovereign power dynamically in that, on the one hand, he understands the power of the sovereign as constituted by the collective power of the subjects that have transferred their power via covenant. Hobbes writes,

“In all cities or bodies politic not subordinate, but independent, that one man or one council, to whom the particular members have given that common power, is called

¹³⁸ It can be argued that Hobbes’s defense of absolute monarchy as the best form of sovereign authority stands in opposition to this responsiveness, and secondly, there are many who read Hobbes as suggesting that civil society must be understood as a fundamental, perhaps even ontological, break from the natural society where the two shall not intersect. While there is certainly grounds by which Hobbes’s conclusions (for the limit of free speech, for example) can be challenged as leading to despotic rule and lacking the responsiveness he deems prudent and even necessary to maintain rule, the second conclusion fails to understand the materialist framework out of which Hobbes develops his theory of civil society.

their sovereign, and his power the sovereign power; which consisteth in the power and the strength that every of the members have transferred to him from themselves by covenant."¹³⁹

On the other hand, the sovereign authority must stand apart from the collective of subjects in matters of authority and law. The sovereign power cannot perform the mandate of securing peace if they do not stand above the subjects in the order of power. Practically this means that sovereign power must stand with impunity above the law that obliges the subjects of the commonwealth. Hobbes explains,

"The sum of these rights of sovereignty, namely the absolute use of the sword in peace and war, the making and abrogating of laws, supreme judicature and decision in all debates judicial and deliberative, the nomination of all magistrates and ministers, with other rights contained in the same, make the sovereign power no less absolute in the commonwealth, than before commonwealth every man was absolute in himself to do, or not to do, what he thought good; which men have not had the experience of that miserable estate, to which men are reduced by long war, think so hard a condition that they cannot easily acknowledge, such covenants and subjection, on their parts, as are here set down, to have been ever necessary to their peace."¹⁴⁰

These rights of the sovereign authority are reserved so that they can perform the duty that befalls such leadership. The first law of nature, to secure the peace, is of utmost importance for Hobbes, but that does not exhaust the duties that he lays at the hands of the sovereign. He encapsulates the variable duties of the ruling sovereign with the phrase, "*Salus poluli suprema lex*; by which must be understood not the mere preservation of their lives, but generally their benefit and good. So that this is the general law for sovereigns: that they procure, to the uttermost of their endeavor, the good of the people."¹⁴¹ This broad edict is broken down into four points that are to stand for the "good of the people." They are: multitude (increase in numbers), commodity of living (primarily wealth and liberty), peace amongst

¹³⁹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 107.

¹⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 114.

¹⁴¹ Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 172.

ourselves, and defense against foreign power.¹⁴² The right of the sovereign are designed so that the sovereign has not only the power, but also the means, to secure the good of the people. The duties of the sovereign lay out the typical form by which Hobbes envisions, with the constitution of the commonwealth, the benefits brought to the lives of the people.

Hobbes's emphasis upon the first law of nature leads him to the conclusion that monarchy is the best form of government. In Hobbes's view, monarchy allows for the most direct and secure line of causal power and therefore the least risk of faction. The different forms of commonwealth are the same regarding the nature of power. Their rule must in all cases be absolute. The differences among the different forms of government can be seen "in the difference of Convenience, or Aptitude to produce the Peace, and Security of the people; for which they were instituted."¹⁴³ The fundamental difference between the different forms of commonwealth for Hobbes hinges upon their capacity to keep the peace by keeping the seditious passions at bay while coordinating the interests of ruler and ruled. "The Passions of men, are commonly more potent than their Reason. From whence it follows, that where the publique and private interest are most closely united, there is the publique most advanced."¹⁴⁴ Contemporary political theorists would normally think that this would lead to the support of a democratic form of government where the will of the people would seem to be most identical with the will of the sovereign. Hobbes draws the opposite conclusion, suggesting that in a democracy the influence

¹⁴² Hobbes, *Elements of Law*, 173.

¹⁴³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 131.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

of seditious passions, most notably vanity, is allowed to hold sway increasing the dangerous effects of internal faction, and that democratic rule is therefore the weakest and most treacherous form of commonwealth. Hobbes draws the conclusion that,

“in Monarchy, the private interest is the same with the publique. The riches, power, and honour of a Monarch arise onely from the riches, strength and reputation of his Subjects. For no King can be rich, nor glorious, nor secure; whose Subjects are either poor, or contemptible, or too weak through want, or dissention, to maintain a war against their enemies: Whereas in a Democracy, or Aristocracy, the publique prosperity conferres not so much to the private fortune of one that is corrupt, or ambitious, as doth many times a perfidious advice, a treacherous action, or a Civill warre.”¹⁴⁵

For the purposes of the present study, it is not terribly important that Hobbes champions the monarchical form of government so much as how he comes to that conclusion and what were the pertinent factors that weighed in on his resolve.¹⁴⁶ What contemporary readers can glean from Hobbes’s position is that the factors that must be at the center of a well-constructed sovereign authority is the capacity to secure peace and reduce faction, not merely by brute force, but by aligning the interests of the ruler and the ruled. The commonwealth that is organized in such a manner that the interests of sovereign and subject can not only be allied, but also be recognized as coalescing, has the greatest capacity to ensure human flourishing.

Hobbes’s formulation of the state of nature and the construction of the commonwealth by way of covenant opens the way by which Hobbes is then capable of developing a demonstrative science of politics. Hobbes’s belief in the constructive power of human beings in constituting civil institutions means that he cannot then

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ Of course the mitigating factors of the historical and political turmoil permeates Hobbes’s political thinking, and is insightful and informative, but a careful examination of those factors falls outside of the scope of the present study.

rely upon an appeal to 'nature' as the means by which one can evaluate or even demonstrate the functions and merits of those institutions. The innovation that marks Hobbes's science of politics is in the identification of human institutions as nothing more than human artifacts. Because they are human artifacts, these institutions reveal themselves, like the human constructive power at work in geometry, as susceptible to the demonstrative power of the human intellect. The constructive power of human beings in the creation of civil society brings with it both the enticing prospect of an apparent increase in human creative power, but also the foreboding indication that this creative power can fly off into abstraction only to then to be imposed upon unwitting or powerless subjects. Hobbes curbs the utopian impulse by generating his insights from human beings as they are, in their passionate and desirous natures, and the social organization that best account for these natures can best serve their function. While human passions and desires, per se, are not the objects of demonstrative science, the formulation of civil institutions that are constructed wholly by man to coordinate those passions and desires are, because of their origin in human beings, subject to demonstrative science in the same manner as geometry. The fact that the commonwealth and its institutions are constructed from human ingenuity also opens up, perhaps to Hobbes's chagrin, the ability to negate, affirm, or transform that commonwealth in the service of the "good of the people." Amos Funkenstein pairs Hobbes with Spinoza in illuminating this insight when he writes,

"Maintaining society must be, for Hobbes, a continuous effort of all society; the making of a state is a *creation continua*. Or, if we regard a polity, with Spinoza, as a complex body or a self-correcting balance of adverse forces, then the sovereign is hardly a demiurge, but he should certainly be a decent mechanic. The determining

force of society is not nature (as instinct or climate) but a man-made constitution. Certainly constitutions, since only of functional value, might be changed when appropriate."¹⁴⁷

Hobbes summons the constructive power of human beings in creating civil society by means of the conceptual annihilation of that society in the state of nature. Out of the horrors of that condition, Hobbes is able to show the designed birth of the commonwealth by means of social contract. Since, at its inception, the commonwealth and civil society that emerge from it are a creation of human design, they also become objects of human manipulation as well as scientific demonstration. The innovation of Hobbes's demonstrative science of politics revealed not only an epistemological ground upon which to study social relations, but more importantly for Hobbes, the means by which the constructive power of human beings can be summoned to the benefit of mankind.

The Paradoxes of Hobbesian Happiness

The expressed aim of Hobbes's writings is for the benefit of human living, yet it is often noted that Hobbes has a suspicious if not downright antagonistic view toward philosophical thinkers who place happiness at the center of their moral and political theory. This seeming paradox requires that one focus upon those moments where he is disparaging of the pursuit of happiness as well as a wider view of the political and philosophical times in which he wrote. The seeming disregard for human happiness that comes to the fore in certain passages of Hobbes's writing generally takes on the form of two contentions. The first arises out of a deep political concern with the need for creating a crisis born of fear that he believes will

¹⁴⁷ Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination*, 344.

lead to the path of peace and sociability. Amidst the fractious times of civil war, Hobbes treats it as his duty to endorse the conditions that will promote peace. And while happiness is a noble end for the enlightened, to promote the basely hedonistic fulfillment of irrational and seditious desires ensures the continuance of the state of war. In other words, the pursuit of happiness, but only such as follows from right desire, may be read as the ultimate aim of his writing. However, the desires that he finds to be 'right' or most beneficial to humankind must first of all be directed toward peace, and peaceful (i.e. rational) desires have their origin, for Hobbes, in the passion of fear. While the innovation of Hobbes's political science is found in the application of scientific principles to matters of human social organization, there also lies at the heart of his writings the urgency of rhetorically exacerbating the fear of civil unrest on the one hand, with the sober attempt at a demonstrative civil science on the other hand. Though Hobbes does not want to align himself with the misguided pursuit of happiness, he is guided surreptitiously to the goal of realizing human happiness through his this-worldly and practical attempt at demonstrating the conditions that will promote human benefit. The second, connected contention lies in his opposition to the prevailing Aristotelian focus upon happiness as the first and foremost concern for the political and ethical philosopher. Hobbes's critique of the Aristotelian (read Scholastic) philosophers provides the launching point from which he believes a constructive science of politics proves to be a great improvement from a naturalistic and hierarchical political philosophy. While Hobbes had a political and philosophical reason for turning away from an explicit concern for the realization of human happiness, this recoil from an interest in this

pursuit proves to be largely rhetorical (or in some cases, an argument of semantics) when his writings are taken as a whole.

The extent to which Hobbes's notion of human happiness could be understood as embodied depends upon the question of the extent and role of his materialist commitments upon his political theory. Leo Strauss stands as the most influential voice for rejecting Hobbes's materialist metaphysics as the basis of his political theory.¹⁴⁸ Rather, Strauss argues that Hobbes's political theory is dependent upon his notion of right; in other words, upon a moral proposition. Strauss's insights open up the means for understanding many of the conclusions of Hobbes' political theory, and explain many of the seeming inconsistencies and paradoxes that arise out of a reductively materialistic reading of Hobbes's arguments. However, discarding the materialist perspective that guides Hobbes's political theory wholesale comes at a great cost. While Strauss's interpretation explains away many contradictions, it also does away with the insights that emerge out of Hobbes's physics of desire and his moral psychology. Strauss seizes upon a central problem that Hobbes could not resolve, opposing idealistic political theory while at the same time championing a demonstrative and therefore thoroughly constructive science of politics. Such an interpretation does well to fend off a confused and reductively materialist reading of Hobbes's political theory, but it comes at the risk of losing the wisdom of Hobbes's attempt at providing a materialist basis for constructing a society that benefits the social and historical beings that we are.

¹⁴⁸ Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*.

Hobbes's claim to offering a demonstrative science of politics did come at the cost of offering a theory of human flourishing that is responsive to living human beings in their social activity. Hobbes's belief in the possibility of the development of a demonstrative science of politics cordons off his capacity to treat human beings in their social activity in his political theory. Hobbes denies that experience can have a role in scientific thinking and relegates experience, and therefore history, to a secondary role of offering exemplary (though not demonstrative) evidence and primarily as a means to prudence. Those who find that Hobbes is a thoroughgoing materialist must reckon with the fact that he believed that his capacity to constructive knowledge depended upon his thinking human beings and society in their artificiality. In itself, this would not pose a devastating problem for Hobbes the materialist if it were not for the fact that he argues that his claim of developing a demonstrative science hinges upon the fact that human beings and society can *only* be thought of in their artificiality, as if human beings were identical to geometric objects in their functional organization; essentially committing to an early form of commodity fetishism. That Hobbes's own political theory on this account would have to be considered a failure leads his readers to what is insightful about his understanding of society and what proves problematic about his scientific ambitions. Hobbes's belief in the constructive power of human beings in creating their society harkens the beginning of modern political thought and opens up a means by which one can think deterministically and materially without being reductive. The failure of his demonstrative science of politics to maintain its autonomy from his physics of desire and moral psychology reveals the fate of a

materialist politics that attempts to maintain the aspiration of an un-dialectical model of science.

The concern of a Hobbesian conception of human happiness would also have to consider whose interests are being expressed in Hobbes's political theory. C.B. Macpherson's interpretation of Hobbes's political theory claims that Hobbes's theory of human interaction and the state is both the product of and a champion for the bourgeois interests in an early capitalist society. According to Macpherson, Hobbes's depiction of society, beginning with the state of nature, is actually an account of bourgeois society and bourgeois man. Macpherson recognizes in the state of nature not some idyllic state, but the state of human beings in a capitalist society when plunged into stateless anarchy:

"The anarchy of the market, which tends to be the form (though not the substance) of all social relations in capitalist society, is only possible, as the classical economists from Adam Smith to Marx pointed out, if there is an authority, the State, to maintain the bourgeois freedoms (contract, labour, exchange, and accumulation) against the demands of those who are dispossessed and against other national societies."¹⁴⁹

The conclusions that Hobbes reaches in his construction of the commonwealth did not arise from an *annihilatio mundi*, properly speaking, but rather followed from an assumption of the capitalist market society and demonstrated, from that assumption, how the best state would be constituted. The notion of liberty as "absence of external impediment" leads to the notion of a state that is in defense of the negative liberties that allow for the 'market forces' to exert themselves upon the disempowered populace.¹⁵⁰ Such an interpretation finds much support within

¹⁴⁹ Macpherson, "Hobbes Today," 527-528.

¹⁵⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 91. Many critics of Macpherson (such as Alan Ryan) argue that Hobbes's argument is not, strictly speaking, bourgeois because his concept of society is drawn from a broader ethical or intellectual position (often classically liberal).

Hobbes's writing and can offer an explanation for how Hobbes ends up with some of his conclusions about the legislation of law and the role of the state.

However, if one considers carefully the Hobbesian individual not simply as isolated but rather, as his physics of desire and his moral psychology suggests, as a thoroughly social and historical being, then it is not so easy to dismiss his political theory. Samantha Frost challenges Macpherson on his account of Hobbes's notion of both the individual and society. To adhere to Macpherson's description of the Hobbesian individual engaged in a struggle of competing monads, according to Frost, "is to subscribe to a conception of the subject as the origin of her action; the notion that a subject is an agent who might "use" power to compel others to do what she wishes is tied up implicitly with the conception of free will that is part of the dualist framework that Hobbes rejects with his materialism."¹⁵¹ And as far as the conception of the state, Frost emphasizes not the state's role as arbiter of negative rights but rather in terms of our material sociality:

"Since the collective has a real interest in fostering an orientation toward peace rather than conflict, the commonwealth must attend actively to the material and social conditions within which people's dispositions are formed, which is to say that it is responsible for ensuring that each individual's need for "food, or other thing necessary for life" is somehow met."¹⁵²

This takes seriously Hobbes's materialism and draws upon the passages that emphasize sociality and a state that is not merely the arbiter ensuring the function of the marketplace, but is concerned for the benefit of mankind in a manner that is not disembodied in its formation and its goals like the depiction of Macpherson's bourgeois state.

¹⁵¹ Frost, *Lessons from Materialist Thinker*, 135-136.

¹⁵² Frost, *Lessons from Materialist Thinker*, 129.

The truth lies somewhere between these positions. The materialism that informs Hobbes's physics of desire provides the critical model from which to analyze where Hobbes's political theory denies or benefits the possible realization of human happiness. On the one hand, there is Hobbes the petty aristocrat and scientist, and on the other hand, there is Hobbes the materialist philosopher and counselor. Hobbes's aspirations for a demonstrative science and for the capacity to think of human beings both individually and socially in completely abstracted terms was doomed to fail in the face of his detailed and nuanced physics of desire and moral psychology. His attempt to escape from embodied experience was thwarted by his insistence upon his capacity as a counselor who is aware that his ability to 'benefit mankind' is contingent upon prudential knowledge. The expression of early bourgeois conceptions of the state confronted his conception of the state that, in the same texts, exists in service of the needs of embodied and social human beings. The paradoxical and complex nature of Hobbes's materialism and his flights into a constructive ideal offer his readers theoretical strategies and insights into human social interaction and what it might mean for human beings to be the makers and content of their own social reality. He also provides a cautionary tale about what can happen to a political theory when it devolves into commodity fetishism, reifying the abstract constructions of thought. And in this regard, Hobbes does succeed as a philosopher and counselor whose primary goal is for the "benefit of mankind."

Chapter 3

Spinoza's Happiness: Beatitude and the Economy of Affect

In contrast to the Hobbesian conception of happiness, or *felicitas*, which is tied to the Epicurean fulfillment of desires, Spinoza defines happiness in terms of *Beatitudo*, and constituted by the “intellectual love of God.” From the Hobbesian perspective, a claim to beatific happiness could only be a question of blind faith and religious commitment rather than a matter of philosophical, ethical or political insight. In fact, Hobbes goes further in claiming that felicity is the only form of happiness that is either possible or even conceivable for human beings. In defense of his concern for only the “continuall prospering” of “felicity of this life,” Hobbes explains,

“For there is no such thing as perpetuall Tranquility of mind, while we live here; because Life it selfe is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Feare, no more than without Sense. What kind of Felicity God hath ordained to them that devoutly honor him, a man shall no sooner know, than enjoy; being joys that now are as incomprehensible, as the word of the Schoole-men *Beatificall Vision* is unintelligible.”¹⁵³

In Hobbesian terms, *beatitudo* would require the departure from the physics of desire that defines human life, and entail a fantastical imposition upon any conceivable notion of happiness for living human beings. From a Spinozian perspective, however, the beatific happiness that is possible through the intellectual love of God reveals, by means of the ‘natural light’ of reason, the forms in which life can be lived happily. While the conditions that organize our lives ethically, socially, or politically could not serve to guarantee ‘eternal’ happiness, they can to a great

¹⁵³ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), 46.

extent increase the happiness of living an empowered life, as well as make it possible to allow for the power, or freedom, to prevent the influence of passionate affects that are detrimental to our happiness. As paradoxical as it may seem, from the 'intellectual love of God,' Spinoza develops a notion of beatific happiness that arises out of the freedom concomitant with the powerful expression of a political praxis. The movement from the unfreedom of the sad passions and imagination is a social process, an "emendation," in which human activity is increasingly guided by reason and the power of the intellect. The task of this chapter will be to trace that development from the ordering of the intellect to human happiness as it is lived in ethical, social, and political practices, as well as to defend Spinoza from the charge of claiming a beatific happiness that is either incomprehensible or merely a fantasy.

The traditional aporias that trouble philosophers and theologians, from a Spinozistic perspective, arise from the prejudicial ordering of thought. While Spinoza offers polemic arguments against the prejudices and superstitions that undermine the capacity to think and act, he is not required to engage in the partisanship that has defined many of the disputes between philosophers and theologians, rationalists and empiricists, and materialists and idealists, but rather is capable of showing the failure of these partisans in identifying the dialectical or aspectual nature of the distinctions which are under dispute. The philosophical quarrels of Spinoza's intellectual milieu became defined in being critically situated in the historical moment in which Cartesianism and modern liberalism were gaining influence over the shape of philosophy, science, and politics. The framework and premise of the prevailing modes of thinking pitted mind and body, theory and

practice, and individual and state in dualistic contrasts that defied resolution, except by the most fantastical means, as found in the reification of ideological poles (in the division of the 'public' and 'private' spheres, for example) or in Descartes' pineal gland.¹⁵⁴ Spinoza weaves together his epistemological, ethical, and political insights in a manner that dissolves these aporiae by undermining the prejudices from which these fictional aporiae emerge. In his notion of happiness as arising with the "intellectual love of God" the epistemological concern of discovering a path for increasing one's power to think and to act takes on ethical significance.

A central tenet of Spinoza's writings, and one that guides the practical expression of human happiness, is that human beings are a part of nature and therefore subject to the order and principles that determine the natural world. To claim that human beings are outside of the order of nature would be to claim that they are a "dominion within a dominion," an impossibility that Spinoza takes great pains to elucidate, to the extent that he deduces the impossibility of human exceptionalism when it comes to nature by way of the geometric convention in his *Ethics*. A guiding principle of the nature of individual things, which for Spinoza are finite modes of God's infinite attributes, is that, "Each thing, as far as it can, strives to persevere in its being."¹⁵⁵ This principle applies to all individuals in nature, whether they be a stone, a dog, a person, etc. The 'essence' of a thing is defined in this striving so that, to the extent that any individual is capable of striving, that thing attains a greater perfection, or put otherwise, the greater is that thing's power. As for the

¹⁵⁴ Spinoza specifically admonishes Descartes' unification of the body and soul in the pineal gland in the preface to Book IV of the *Ethics*.

¹⁵⁵ Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985) *Ethics*, IIP6.

individuals that are human beings, our happiness, which is equated for Spinoza with virtue or power, is also by our very nature identical with this preservation. Spinoza states, "That the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one's own being, and that happiness consists in a man's being able to preserve his being."¹⁵⁶ Just as with all individuals that are in nature, human beings find their happiness in their virtue, or power to act in accordance with their nature. Because human beings are not apart from nature, and cannot be considered exempt from the order of nature, Spinoza believes that the conditions that are most conducive to an increase in power or virtue can be deduced through the proper ordering of the intellect and the use of reason. These rather sweeping claims open up a number of questions that must be reckoned with, such as, how does one identify happiness in term of power without either expanding the conception of power or limiting the parameters of happiness? How can Spinoza's notion of reason and intellect be understood as a form of praxis? And how does the emphasis upon the 'ordering' of the intellect not lead to an abstract conception of ethics or a utopian expression of politics? Such questions, Spinoza believed, arise from a position of prejudice that he took as his life's aim to contest, and it will be the aim of this chapter to begin to examine the ways in which Spinoza addresses such critical questions. It will be instructive for the present purposes to lay out the path that Spinoza sets for himself in attaining the greatest happiness that comes with the "intellectual love of God" and to parse out such a beatific happiness from the affect of joy and the fulfillment of desires that the more common notion of happiness as felicity entails. Finally, this chapter will

¹⁵⁶ Curley, *Ethics* IVP18S.

evaluate the ways in which Spinoza's conception of happiness can be instructive to the organization of social and political structures that serve the needs of and aspiration for human flourishing.

Beatitudo as the "Greatest Happiness"

The concern for human happiness comes to the fore in one of Spinoza's earliest, though incomplete, writings, "The Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect and on the way by which it is best directed toward the true knowledge of things" (TDIE). While the text could be considered primarily as an epistemological essay, providing the path that best leads to truth, it is also a decidedly ethical treatise, treating the intellect as a human activity that is fostered by best practices to serve its aim of discovering truth and living in accordance with reason. Spinoza recounts the experience that turned him toward the question of the improvement of the intellect in terms of *ethos* as much as *episteme* when he writes,

"After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all others being rejected – whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity."¹⁵⁷

This resolution comes at a cost, however, when Spinoza recognizes that he must give up the sources of pleasure or enjoyment that he has known in his daily life, all the while recognizing that it is not possible to turn away from the things that do not provide eternal joy such as "greed, desire for sensual pleasure and love of esteem." While it is evident to Spinoza that these things hinder his capacity to attain such a

¹⁵⁷ Curley, TDIE, 7.

disposition, he is also aware that it is part of his nature to be drawn toward such desires. What will become most important in the search for happiness is to disable such desires that steer one from the pursuit of the “greatest happiness.” Since “all happiness or unhappiness was placed in the quality of the object to which we cling with love,” Spinoza’s central focus becomes directed toward discovering what this object could be that would grant such happiness, while not being subject to the sadness that accompanies fleeting objects of desire. Spinoza identifies the characteristics of such an object when he writes, “But love toward the eternal and infinite thing feeds the mind with a joy entirely exempt from sadness. This is greatly to be desired, and to be sought with all our strength.”¹⁵⁸ However, just because he has come to a conclusion that is most desirable does not, to this point, mean that it is either attainable or actual.

The structure of Spinoza’s initial argument for eternal joy is by no means novel, and from what we know only from the passages above, Spinoza could be following in the footsteps of Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas More who also believed that the greatest happiness came with the love of that which is eternal and infinite. There is also a tradition of both Christians and heretics, including Hobbes, who believe it to be fruitless to speak of eternal happiness for ephemeral creatures such as human beings. Thus, it is often claimed that beatific happiness is not for us, and that either we should direct our efforts at achieving happiness toward the greatest possibility of fulfilling our fleeting joys, or that we should give up the pursuit of happiness altogether. The most common Christian

¹⁵⁸ Curley, TDIE, 9-10.

resolution to the possibility of human happiness can be found in the hope of God's grace, or in the salvation of an afterlife. In such an account, the path to happiness does not lie in the emendation of the intellect but rather in the submission to religious faith. Spinoza redefines blessedness in a manner that wholly aligns it with the adequate ideas of the intellect, even if the greatest of those ideas is in the "intellectual love of God."¹⁵⁹

The connection to eternal love does not, on the face of it, appear radical or even novel, except that for Spinoza the road to blessedness is paved by human reason and intellection and not by faith. To be blessed, according to Spinoza, is to be most empowered and active while increasing our preservation. To have biblical faith requires the obedience to the teachings of scripture, which Spinoza reinterprets, offers the same guidance as that of reason: to always abide by justice and charity. However, the fundamental distinction between those who abide by reason's commands and the power of the intellect that has achieved the greatest power in the "intellectual love of god" hinges upon the distinction of activity and passivity. In the context of the contrast between faith and intellection, this distinction becomes manifested between the expression of active power or passive obedience. Since obedience reflects a relative lack of power to a commanding external force, it could not entail the greatest happiness or perfection that comes with the intellectual love of God. This is not to say that he finds that scripture lacks

¹⁵⁹ Spinoza does not dismiss the importance of such a submission to the wisdom of "revealed" scripture, in that it can guide one to the teachings of justice and charity that are the true wisdom of scripture. However, while obedience to such teachings will increase joyful affections, it will not ensure the 'greatest happiness' and power of acting that Spinoza is pursuing in his search for happiness.

instruction, “since true salvation and blessedness consist in the true contentment of mind and we find our true peace only in what we clearly understand, it most evidently follows that we can discover the meaning of Scripture with confidence in matters relating to salvation and necessary to blessedness.”¹⁶⁰ This instruction, as it relates to blessedness, is still dependent upon the “historical” reading of scripture that is able to glean its message through the rational analysis of the text in its proper historical context. The guidance of scripture teaches that obedience to the main tenets of justice and charity can provide the ‘salvation’ from a doomed life of torment, but it will not necessarily lead to blessedness. Douglas Den Uyl describes the comparative roles of the philosopher, or those who follow the guidance of reason, and the person of faith, who obeys the dictates of scripture, in pointing out the unique role that reason has for beatific happiness when he writes, “Blessedness by means of faith...seems on this reading to be quite impossible. The blessed could not be obedient. Philosophy is the road to blessedness, religion to salvation.”¹⁶¹ It should be noted that Den Uyl is referring to what he describes as a “lower,” moral sense of salvation (*salus*) that can be attained by following the guidance of the teachings of scripture to be just and charitable. It becomes significant that especially in the *Ethics*, salvation in either a ‘higher’ sense of being tied to eternal joy, and in the ‘lower’ sense of moral guidance, is possible through reason even without the guidance of scripture. While in the fullest sense of the term that connotes eternal joy, blessedness requires having adequate ideas that are only accessible to the

¹⁶⁰Benedictus de Spinoza, *Complete Works*, trans. and ed. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002) *Theological Political Treatise* (TTP), 467.

¹⁶¹ Douglas Den Uyl, “Power, Politics, and Religion in Spinoza’s Political Thought,” *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*, ed. P.J. Bagley (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), 152.

reason or intellect. It is a fairly controversial, and even radical, claim to both the Christian and materialist traditions that reason could bring the eternal happiness of *Beatitudo*. For Spinoza, however, the emendation of the intellect could herald such happiness for living human beings.

According to Spinoza, there are two main ways in which human perception grasps nature, and comes to know anything; imagination and reason. These, along with intellectual intuition, constitute the modes by which the attribute of thought can be said to think. Spinoza defines imagination in terms of the affections of the body under the attribute of thought, “to retain the customary words, the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us, we shall call images of things, though they do not reproduce the figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.”¹⁶² The imagination regards bodies in a manner that is tied to bodily experience which, when unchecked by an affect that denies the existence of a thing, can often lead to error, or worse, to superstition and prejudice. Spinoza does not set up a simple contrast of imagination as a hindrance and the intellect as a savior in the play of human thought. Rather, he describes a situation that is far more complex, emerging from the sameness of body and mind, or as expressions of extension and thought as distinct attributes of one substance. Imagination, by itself, does not lead the mind astray but rather it is the paucity of embodied experience that leads to errors, prejudices, or superstitions. Spinoza continues,

“The imaginations of the mind, considered in themselves contain no error, or that the mind does not error from the fact that it imagines, but only insofar as it is

¹⁶² Curley, *Ethics* IIP, 17S.

considered to lack an idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines to be present to it. For if the mind, while it imagined nonexistent things as present to it, at the same time know that those things did not exist, it would, of course, attribute this power of imagining a virtue of its nature, not to a vice – especially if this faculty of imagining depended only on its own nature, that is (by ID7), if the mind's faculty of imagining were free.”¹⁶³

Unlike imagination, which is the affection of the body in thought, reason is not prone to the same manner of confusion. Reason is communicable in a community of thinkers because it expresses ‘common notions’ that “[perceive] the necessity of things truly (by P41), that is (by IA6), as it is in itself. But (by IP16) this necessity of things is the very necessity of God’s eternal nature. Therefore, it is of the nature of reason to regard things under this species of eternity.”¹⁶⁴ Reason is not subject to the vagrant and inadequate ideas of imagination, but rather perceives things in relation to their necessity as infinite attributes of God. Reason is not a stable set of eternal truths but rather arises from the process of developing ‘common notions,’ first from recognizing what is shared by other finite beings in a specific, localized sense and moving out to increasingly more general understanding of what is shared between all individual bodies. As we increase our affirmation of what is held in common, we increasingly become the active cause of our ideas rather than passive subjects to the images that arise out of the vagrant nature of ‘random’ experience.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Curley, *Ethics* IIP17S.

¹⁶⁴ Curley, *Ethics* IIP44C2

¹⁶⁵ Gilles Deleuze describes the account of ‘common notions’ as a process when he writes, “Having come into our true activity in some cases, we become capable of forming common notions even in less favourable cases. There is a whole learning process involved in common notions, in our becoming active: we should not overlook the importance in Spinozism of this formative process; we have to start from the least universal common notions, from the first we have a chance to form.” Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. by Martin Joughn (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 288. Experience is not “random,” properly speaking, but is determinate (i.e., each body undergoes differently).

The highest form (“third order”) of knowledge for human beings is found in the activity of the intellect. The intellect is the ‘intuition’ of the individual things as they manifest themselves under the infinite attribute of God, and the more true or adequate ideas that are thought, the more it could be said that the mind is greater in power.¹⁶⁶ Knowledge that arises from intellection is most perfect because it understands individual things as modes of the infinite attributes of God under the species of eternity, and such knowledge attains the greatest power conceivable for thinking. Thus, it also entails the greatest perfection or happiness possible for human beings. Spinoza’s ordering of the forms of perception illuminates why the eternal joy and greatest happiness can be conjoined in the ‘intellectual love of god,’ and distinguishes this beatific happiness from the joy experienced in the satisfaction of desires.

The search for truth by way of the “emendation of the intellect” is not merely an epistemological exercise, but also a practice that takes on ethical and political significance. Moreover, it becomes the path by which the ‘greatest happiness’ becomes possible. The power of self-preservation is increased as thought is guided by ‘adequate ideas,’ and to the extent that one has knowledge of things through their proximate causes, to that extent can one be said to have adequate ideas. Reason, rather than being ontologically distinct from human desire, is the expression of the desire that leads one to adequate ideas regarding the *ideatum* of thought. Spinoza divides the ways in which human beings perceive individual things according to three kinds of knowledge:

¹⁶⁶ Curley, *Ethics*, IP20.

I. from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way which is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect (see P29C); for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from random experience;

II. from signs, for example, from the fact that having heard or read those words we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, like those through which we imagine the things (P18S); these two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination;

III. finally, from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see P38C, P39, P39C, and P40). This I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge.

[IV.] In addition to these two kinds of knowledge, there is...another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge. And this kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”¹⁶⁷

“First order” knowledge, or knowledge that follows from sensation (or vagrant experience) or through signs, is always inadequate. Both of these modes of perception entail the bodily affect of the images of individual, finite bodies. Thus these perceptions are not merely inadequate, but are “mutilated” and “confused” because they are perceptions that indicate more about the affected body than about the thing perceived. This condition is established in IIP16, when Spinoza writes, “The idea of any mode in which the human body is affected by external bodies must involve the nature of the human body and at the same time the nature of the external body.”¹⁶⁸ The modes of thinking that depend upon images are therefore, by definition, inadequate, and such modes of thinking reflect a lack of power in thought, to the extent that they are inadequate. “Second order” knowledge, or reason, is considered adequate to the extent that such knowledge follows from “common notions” that indicate a shared nature between the affected and affecting bodies, which moves from one’s understanding of what is shared in local bodies to the increased power to understand the ideas of bodies with greater generality, thus

¹⁶⁷ Curley, *Ethics*, IIP40.

¹⁶⁸ Curley, *Ethics*, IIP16.

increasing one's power to think. The third order of knowledge, or understanding, is the highest form of knowledge that provides the "eternal joy" for which he expresses his desire in the *TDIE*, and upon which the greatest human happiness depends. Such knowledge, or intellection, entails knowing finite individuals accompanied by the idea of God as their cause, or put otherwise, viewing things as necessary "under the species of eternity." Since human beings seek to increase their power, and happiness can be defined in terms of one's capacity to act, the more one thinks from second and third order knowledge, the more one could be said to enjoy the "greatest happiness" that Spinoza believes is possible. Moreover, the greater one's capacity to reason, the more one is freed from the sway of the sad affects of the first order of knowledge and the more one becomes capable of attaining the third order of knowledge that understands what is shared between all things, and understands their eternal necessity.

As it has been presented thus far, it is not evident how Spinoza's beatific happiness is resistant to the accusation that such an endeavor for human happiness could be an exercise of an isolated individual engaged in intellectual abstraction or redemptive flight. The leap to such an understanding of beatitude in Spinoza fails to take into account the concurrence of thinking and corporeality in Spinoza's account. Such a redemptive account would also, in contradistinction to Spinoza's demonstrations, reinstate a dualistic relation between finite individuals within the totality of one substance, i.e. God or nature. Spinoza famously subverts the dilemma of the interaction between mind and body that confronted Cartesian philosophers at the time by rejecting the thesis that mind (or soul) and body are distinct substances

that interact causally, in most cases with the mind directing the motions of the body. The resolution that Descartes proposes, that the mind impacts the motions of the body through the pineal gland, becomes a source of ridicule for Spinoza. Apart from the fact that Descartes' belief in the interaction of substantially distinct mind and body displays confusion between the concepts of mind and brain, the very notion of a causal predominance of the mind over body is a manifestation of the superstition that we are conscious of our appetites and ignorant of the causes. Spinoza, however, debunks this superstition by demonstrating that extension and thought are distinct attributes of one substance, and not two substances. Finite bodies or ideas of those bodies are simply modes expressing the attributes of the one substance. In fact, "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways."¹⁶⁹ Thus, there is not and could not be a causal relationship between mind and body. Mind cannot initiate bodily motion any more than the motion of extended bodies could be said to 'cause' the activity of thinking because they are manifestations of the one substance, simply expressed in two different ways. There are a number of relevant consequences that follow from such a unity of mind and body: Firstly, the concern for the emendation of the intellect does not merely bolster an isolated mind, but the capacity of the mind to think is connected to the capacity of the body to act in a relationship of identity rather than causality. The desire for increasing the power of the intellect, and the capacity for human activity in thinking or corporeal terms, is immediately understood by Spinoza as an ethical (and, as we shall see, political) concern. Secondly, it follows from this unity

¹⁶⁹ Curley, *Ethics*, IIP7S.

that “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”¹⁷⁰ This allows Spinoza to employ the geometric convention to the motions of bodies as well as the ideas of those bodily motions in thinking. From this insight, Spinoza seeks to deduce a science of human psychology and passions that can provide the framework for developing a political science that is built upon an adequate understanding of the nature of the individual entities, qua human individuals, and individual entities, qua human collective individuals (i.e. society). The increased power of reason provides the capacity for generating a political order that forms the conditions in which individual entities can best flourish.

Thus far, Spinoza’s conception of happiness has been addressed in terms of the intellect and the empowerment of the conatus (understood as the power of striving to exist understood both mentally and corporally) to preserve. While individual entities are determined with respect to the larger order of nature, as modes of the infinite attributes of God, they become empowered by increasing what is common to both other finite beings and nature as a whole. Thus, it follows that this striving for happiness is not merely an intellectual pursuit in the traditional sense, but is rather determined by the social and political environment in which one acts or preserves. Virtue, as defined by Spinoza in terms of power of self-preservation, is identified with happiness: “The foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in a man’s being able to preserve his being.”¹⁷¹ And the capacity to preserve one’s being is increased the more a finite body has a shared relation of commonality to other bodies around

¹⁷⁰ Curley, *Ethics*, IIP7.

¹⁷¹ Curley, *Ethics*, IVP18S.

it. In terms of thinking, the more one is capable of thinking body that is shared, in the form of 'common notions,' the more one is able to think as the proximate cause of this idea. Through the formation of common notions, reason empowers the individual human being to increase the capacity for thinking and bodily activity. Human happiness thus will require that the constituent relations that make up this shared existence coalesce toward the self-preservation of the existing body or bodies. Thus, Spinoza clarifies what is evoked in the happiness he seeks when he writes,

"This, then, is the end I aim at: to acquire such a nature, and to strive that many acquire it with me. That is, it is part of my happiness to take pains that many others may understand as I understand, so that their intellect and desire agree entirely with my intellect and desire. To do this it is necessary, *first* to understand as much of Nature as suffices for acquiring such a nature; *next*, to form a society of the kind that is desirable, so that as many as possible."¹⁷²

The attainment of happiness will require not only a redefinition and refinement of one's thinking and ethical priorities, but also what is common for proximate entities to coalesce in order to increase their power of self-preservation. In other words, happiness for Spinoza is nothing less than a political praxis.

While attempting to define happiness in Spinozian terms, it is important to bear in mind that Spinoza offers a warning to his readers to avoid squabbles over definitions, and to be guided by understanding the nature of that which one wishes to know. He explicitly states this when he writes, "My purpose is to explain the nature of things, not the meaning of words."¹⁷³ Spinoza's conception of happiness arises out of his definition of human beings as striving or desiring beings in terms of the conatus in the preservation of self. Such preservation is made possible to the

¹⁷² Curley, *TDIE*, 11.

¹⁷³ Curley, *Ethics* IIIDef.XX(exp.)

extent that a finite individual can be said to act rather than be acted upon. Since thinking is merely the “idea of body,” reason, or ‘second order’ knowledge, entails the increasing capacity to know what is shared between the idea of body and other bodies. Because this knowledge is derived from the idea of body as the cause, it can be considered an active, or “adequate” form of knowledge. The intellection, or ‘third order’ of knowledge, is made possible only in the conditions where reason entails the ‘greatest part’ of one’s thinking. Otherwise, rather than being able to experience the “greatest happiness” that Spinoza describes as the “intellectual love of God,” human beings will continue to be trapped in the passive relation to the affect of other finite beings. The third order of knowledge is most powerful because it understands the idea of body in an active and adequate way “under a species of eternity,” understanding the necessary determinations of individual entities as expressions of infinite substance. Happiness is defined in terms of one’s power to act, and this power is increased the more one is able to share more in common with other bodies, and thus to act rather than be acted upon. An ‘isolated’ individual would be the most susceptible to passionate affects from external bodies or ideas and therefore would have the least freedom to act. Thus, happiness is a social and political praxis in which communal power has the capacity to increase the power of both the individual and the collective. The possibility of happiness for living human beings becomes directly related to the structure of society via political organization and the psychic economy of affects.

Happiness, Joy, and the Power of the Affects

The beatific happiness that comes with the intellectual love of God is described as the “greatest happiness” or “eternal joy” because it is the form of knowledge that most expresses an adequate, active knowledge of individual things “under a species of eternity.” Hobbes was understandably resistant to a definition of happiness that amounted to the greatest form of *felicitas* for desiring human beings, or the passing joy that accompanies the fulfillment of desire. Such joys are dependent upon the affective experience of the finite individual. And Spinoza divides affect into passive (passions) and active (actions) expressions. He writes, “The mind is more liable to passions the more it has inadequate ideas, and conversely, is more active the more it has adequate ideas.”¹⁷⁴ Affects impact the mind’s capacity to think in the same way they impact the body’s capacity to act. Since our happiness is dependent upon our power of self-preservation, or to act, it follows that our happiness is largely due to our capacity to order our affects in such a way that our capacity to act and/or think is increased rather than decreased. Spinoza holds the belief that we have access to happiness that is more constant than the satisfaction of fleeting desires but that the satisfaction of such desires could not be denied to the person who is happy. For Spinoza’s conception of happiness is one that depends upon virtue or power, but the attainment of such happiness does not necessarily preclude the joyful affections that come with the satisfaction of fleeting desires. Spinoza’s *beatitudo* offers a notion of happiness, as an expression of adequate and active knowledge of things “under the species of eternity,” that differs qualitatively from the passing joys of Hobbes’s *felicitas*. However, Spinoza’s

¹⁷⁴ Curley, *Ethics*, III, P1C.

conception of happiness reflects the importance of joyful affects, even if as affections they arise out of the finitude of human power.

Particularly in the *Ethics*, where Spinoza employs the geometric convention to deduce the nature of affect, his deductive account of human affect seems odd, as if he is drawing a 'soft' science inappropriately into the rigors of the 'hard' standards of geometric proof. Spinoza sought to model his account of human affects according to the most certain order of knowledge provided by the convention of geometric demonstration. The prejudice that human beings, in their thoughts and actions, are somehow outside of nature (as a "dominion within a dominion") had stifled inquiry into human passions and actions. Spinoza debunks the theory of "free will" that makes an assumption of the prejudice of men's supposedly 'extra-natural' power, and instead focuses his attention of human thought and action according to the order that determines any individual, finite being in nature. Spinoza's inquiry into the role of human affects and desire, such as joy and sadness or love and hate, treats them "just as if they were a Question of lines, planes, and bodies."¹⁷⁵

Happiness is most commonly affiliated with the affect of joy often considered as a feeling of bliss or euphoria. For Hobbes's Epicurean conception of happiness, the joy of the fulfillment of desires provides the framework for establishing the social and political conditions that are conducive to happiness. Spinoza develops a more complex understanding of the conflicting ways in which joy can impact individual and collective happiness, which leads him away from the simple equation

¹⁷⁵ Curley, *Ethics* III, (Preface).

of joy (or pleasure) equals happiness. Spinoza defines joy and sadness in terms of “perfection”; that is, according to the increased power to think and act:

*“By joy, therefore, I shall understand in what follows that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection. And by sadness, that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection. The affect of joy which is related to the mind and body at once I call pleasure or cheerfulness, and that of sadness, pain or melancholy.”*¹⁷⁶

In other words, one is affected with joy when one’s power is increased, and with sadness when that power is diminished. The affect of increasing one’s power would seem to align perfectly with Spinoza’s definition of happiness and equated with the increase in virtue, or the power of self-preservation. However, as a passion, joy can often arise from inadequate or mutilated thoughts or motions and therefore also has the capacity to impede one’s power or happiness.

The affect of joy as defined by Spinoza would be a benefit to the individual’s self-preservation (in contrast with an infinite being), at least to the extent that finite beings are by necessity affected by other finite beings. After all, joy is an affect connected to the passage to a greater capacity for acting, i.e. a greater perfection. However, this is not to confuse the affect of joy with pleasures that are detrimental to or diminish one’s power of self-preservation. Though it is hardly difficult to imagine pleasures that could be detrimental to our health, etc., Spinoza has placed the burden upon his demonstrative expression to deduce the precise manner in which some pleasures can prove to be inimical to those who are striving for self-preservation, and thus pleasures, and even joy, can be affiliated with a decrease in power just as much as they can be affiliated with an increase.

¹⁷⁶ Curley, *Ethics*, P11S (author’s italics).

Joyful affects have the capacity to undermine the body as a whole while at the same time affecting a part of the body with the joy that accompanies an increase in power. The relations that are interwoven between finite modes, or beings, accounts for the nature of the manner in which joyful affects are expressed. Body or mind, insofar as it is expressed in finite modes, is affected by other finite modes. As with knowledge from 'vagrant experience,' all such affected bodies are understood in a partial or mutilated way. Spinoza explains the consequences of the inadequate nature of such affects in writing, "Since joy is generally (by P44S) related to one part of the body, for the most part we desire to preserve our being without regard to our health as a whole. To this we may add that the desires by which we are most bound (by P9C) have regard only to the present and not to the future."¹⁷⁷ Unlike the intellect's understanding of the nature of individual beings "under a species of eternity," joy is most commonly an affect that is partial and fragmented, both in terms of concern for the body as a whole and in terms of understanding the joy in terms of a specific temporal satisfaction. Spinoza is thus able to deductively explain the confusion that arises from the affect of joy in which it can turn against the freedom and power of individuals.

This account of how the affects have the force to turn against one's advantage provides a critical framework for challenging the presumptions of free will and 'consent' that ground liberal capitalist ideology. The power of the affects in Spinoza's ethics dovetails with Marxist critiques of consumerism in which the dominated become complicit in their own domination because of the dual impact of

¹⁷⁷ Curley, *Ethics*, IVP60S.

the sad affects of fear that accompany the loss of employment and the increase in debt along with the joyful affects that are provided by consumption of goods and the enjoyment of promotion. There are two aspects of human thinking that are universal and lead to both the failure of individuals to understand the causes of their desire as well as the necessarily advantageous direction that these desires should take, as presented in the "Appendix" to *Book I* of the *Ethics*:

"All men are born ignorant of the causes of things, and that they all want to seek their own advantage, and are conscious of this appetite. From these...it follows, *first*, that men think themselves free, because they are conscious of their volitions and their appetite, and do not think, even in their dreams, of the causes by which they are disposed to wanting and willing, because they are ignorant of [those causes]. It follows, *second*, that men act always on account of an end, namely, on account of their advantage, which they want."¹⁷⁸

In other words, individuals experience joy, for example in the affects that accompany the purchase of a new car or computer as the satisfaction of a desire. The conatus is experienced as originary from the individual and thus perceived as 'one's own.' This becomes a very powerful tool for instilling obedience and even enthusiasm for conditions that prove to be oppressive and/ or exploitative. Capitalist societies have proven capable of withstanding transitions in social organization and labor structures largely because the populace is susceptible to manipulation through desires for joyful affects that appear as advantageous to one's capacity to act but have the opposite effect in practice (for example, the joy of perceived social benefits that arise with the acquisition of designer goods often leads to an indebtedness and the necessity to submit to the conditions present in the

¹⁷⁸ Curley, *Ethics I* (Appendix).

capitalist division of labor).¹⁷⁹ The joyful affects of consumerism and social advancement are the carrot that is contrasted with the stick of the fear of social exclusion and hunger.

The power of the deployment of affect in modern capitalist society does not merely depend upon the joyful and sad affects that are experienced by the populace, but gains its ideological force because of the sustained belief in oneself as the author of one's desire. Frederic Lorden employs the Spinozian theory of affect to critique the notion of individual 'consent' that supposedly decides and legitimates the claims to freedom in liberal capitalist theory:

“Because it is *our* energy, the energy of our conatus, which occupies itself in the desiring mobilization, we may say that it is *our* action, and that in that – weak – sense, we act *of our own accord*, we are auto-mobile. But this '*of our own accord*' merely an actantial indication; it has nothing to say about everything that preceded it. And although we are auto-mobiles, we are irredeemably hetero-determined. No doubt our force of desire, our power of acting, fully belongs to us. But it owes everything to the interpellations of things, namely, to the external encounters, when the issue is knowing the path and the direction it takes.”¹⁸⁰

The belief that we are the authors of our desires and that our freedom is decided by the direction of our consent creates the illusion of the liberation of one's activity and decisions regarding interests. Spinoza's critique of 'free will' reorients our understanding of what it means to desire and what is entailed in 'giving consent.' No longer does the question of our 'consent' regarding the direction of our desires decide whether we are free, whether that question is in regard to matters that are of aesthetic, material, or political interests. The fact that we are aware of our appetites

¹⁷⁹ Another salient example is the affect of love that is inspired by a boss who appears as magnificent to the worker who has fully been co-opted by the interests of the firm. Freud's analysis points out that the ties that bind civilization could not merely rest upon usefulness, but that these ties must also have the libidinal charge of the possibility of attaining and losing the love of the authority figure.

¹⁸⁰ Frederic Lorden, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza & Marx on Desire*, Trans. Gabriel Ash (New York: Verso, 2014), 57.

is only the beginning of knowledge about the nature of our desires. One of the most profound and emphatic insights that Spinoza repeats throughout his writings is that human beings are not a “dominion within a dominion,” and that human affect and desire follow the same causal order as other natural things. Thus, knowledge about human affect and desire has as much to do with knowledge of the external, heterogeneous forces that determine our actions and desires as it regards knowledge about the individual whose action or desire is an expression of their conatus.

The extent to which an affect is either a passion or action is determined by whether that affect promotes the capacity to act rather than be acted upon by ‘external’ forces. Any limitation of the capacity for affect impacts the ability for individual human beings to preserve amidst the affections of other bodies. The more one is capable of being affected in a more diverse and heterogeneous manner, the less any particular affect can hold sway over that individual. Thus, the more power an individual (or body) has to be affected, the more it becomes capable of resisting external forces and sustaining their power in existing. In *Book IV P38*, Spinoza demonstrates the importance of the capacity for affect when he writes,

“Whatever so disposes the human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways, is useful to man; the more it renders the body capable of being affected in a great many ways, or of affecting other bodies, the more useful it is; on the other hand, what renders the body less capable of these things is harmful.”¹⁸¹

The increase in the capacity to be affected in many ways bolsters the power of self-preservation by lowering the influence of any single affect. The more heterogeneous and numerous ways in which a body is capable of being affected or

¹⁸¹ Curley, *Ethics*, IVP38.

affecting while preserving its integrity as a body, the more powerful that body becomes empowered in relation to surrounding and affecting bodies.¹⁸² Under the attribute of thought, this insight marks a departure from the contrast between reason and affect when Spinoza demonstrates how these joyful affects increase the active power of thinking, and increases the capacity to be determined toward the activity that is advantageous.

The lesson that is born out of Spinoza's insight regarding ordering and capacity for affect and the relation between either our subjection or empowerment, instructs human beings to seek their advantage along two lines; either by way of the increasing power of rational activity and intellection or, to the extent that we do not have adequate knowledge of our affects, to guide our imagination through ethical principles that are in accordance with reason. The path to happiness is made possible by disposing oneself toward the preservation of one's body, and this becomes more possible, the more that a finite body shares in common with external bodies. That which is most common with the infinite attributes of God or nature is eternal, and the power of intellection determines one's thoughts in accordance with these eternal truths about the modes and attributes of nature. Reason, in identifying what is common between itself and other finite bodies to an increasing degree, intensifies the active power of that finite body (i.e. human being). In the Scholium 2, *Book V, Proposition 39*, Spinoza clarifies how happiness is

¹⁸² In *IVP5*, Spinoza establishes the structure of the passions when he writes, "The force and growth of any passion, and its perseverance in existing, are not defined by the power by which we strive to persevere in existing, but by the power of an external cause compared with our own." This means that the greater the impact an external source has upon another finite body, the more power that external body will have over the finite body. In the case of human beings, their capacity to moderate the force of an external body can be accomplished either by an increase in its own power of acting or through the confluence of contrasting affects that will resist the force of that external body.

identified with this capacity to do a great many things and to have a more in common with as well as power in comparison to other finite bodies, when he writes:

“Because human bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt but what they can be of such a nature that they are related to minds which have a great knowledge of themselves and of God, and of which the greatest part, or chief, part is eternal. So they hardly fear death.

But for a clearer understanding of these things, we must note here that we live in continuous change, and as we change for the better or for the worse, we are called happy or unhappy. For he who has passed from being an infant or a child to being a corpse is called unhappy. On the other hand, if we pass the whole length of our life with a sound mind in a sound body, that is considered happiness. And really, he who, like an infant or a child, has a body capable of very few things, and very heavily dependent on external causes, has a mind which considered solely in itself is conscious of almost nothing of itself, or of God, or of things. On the other hand, he who has a body capable of a great many things, has a mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things.

In this life, then, we strive especially that the infant’s body may change (as much as its nature allows and assists) into another, capable of a great many things and related to a mind very much conscious of itself, of God, and of things. We strive, that is, that whatever is related to its memory or imagination is of hardly any moment in relation to the intellect.”¹⁸³

The increased power of intellect enables one to be more capable of knowing the nature of human affect and therefore reduces the power of the sad affects derived from imagination or memory that impede the power to act. This is not to say that the mere fact that an affect is known makes it necessarily more forceful, but rather that as the intellect is more capable of knowing the nature of the affects, the more one is capable of ordering the affects in accordance with one’s advantage, or happiness.

While intellectual knowledge involves knowing things “under the species of eternity,” reason entails knowing things from their “common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things.” In the context of human affects, we become less susceptible to passionate affects as we come to know the causes and nature of that

¹⁸³ Curley, *Ethics*, VP39S.

affect. Reason does not overcome affects simply by being right, but by empowering body and mind from being acted upon. As Spinoza writes, “The more an affect is known to us, then the more is it in our power and the less the mind is acted on by it.”¹⁸⁴ As long as one is not overcome by affects contrary to their nature, Spinoza argues, one is capable of “rightly ordering and connecting the affections of the body” so that we can not be so easily affected by sad affects, since affects ordered and connected in accordance with the intellect or reason have a greater force than those that are not. However, Spinoza recognizes that it is rare for human beings to have an adequate knowledge of many of the affects that impact our thinking and acting. In the case of affects of which we have an inadequate knowledge it proves advantageous to follow rational principles that can guide us to sharing in common with other individual minds and bodies. “The best thing...that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects,” writes Spinoza, “is to conceive a correct principle of living, or sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life.”¹⁸⁵ Spinoza here takes on a rather Aristotelian approach to living the happy and ethical life. While it would be extremely rare to have a fully adequate understanding of our affects, we are still capable of directing our imagination to follow rational principles by developing a ‘happy’ or advantageous disposition through practical habituation. These maxims follow the rational principle that human beings have a greater power to act the more they affect and are affected by joyful rather than sad affects, by

¹⁸⁴ Curley, *Ethics*, VP3C.

¹⁸⁵ Curley, *Ethics*, VP10S.

following the rational insights of the teachings of justice and charity, such as “love conquers hate.”

The actions that foster unity in the diversity of individual human beings are the most virtuous. Since “the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in a man’s being able to preserve his being,” happiness is understood along with the social relations and political conditions that allow for the preservation of the body not afforded in isolation. Spinoza situates human happiness and virtue in social terms when he writes,

“Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being, and that all together should seek for themselves the common advantage of all.”¹⁸⁶

Intellect and reason guide virtuous activity by understanding the advantage of common and collective motions for the preservation of finite bodies. The rational maxims that teach love over hate are designed to give us the virtue that preserves our being. The power of one’s virtue is thus tantamount to the capacity to overcome ‘evil’ affects that restrict our freedom to act and inhibit our power of self-preservation. Thus, Spinoza reverses the traditional Christian understanding that to be blessed is a product of our virtuous activity or that we can become blessed by resisting ‘evil’ temptation, rather he claims that “blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them.”¹⁸⁷ Put otherwise, to be

¹⁸⁶ Curley, *Ethics*, IVP18S.

¹⁸⁷ Curley, *Ethics*, VP42.

happy or blessed or virtuous means to have the power to order the affects of our body toward our advantage, i.e. our power of self-preservation.

The power of self-preservation, or happiness as flourishing, is increased when our affections and desires are in line with other human beings. It is important to note that strength of such a unity is not a result of the narrowing of diversity, but rather is founded upon the heterogeneity of a community. The unification into “one mind and body” only gains its strength from an increased capacity for affecting and being affected and not through the fixations of dogmatic ideology. The vibrancy of a community, and the individual human beings who make up that community is determined by the diverse coordination of a multiplicity of bodies. The unity is found in this coordination amidst sustained difference. In other words, it is not enough to identify a ‘unity’ that dominates difference, for such an alignment of desires is merely the reflection of an oppressive social order that is the mark of a weak society and a dominated populace. Frederic Lordon draws upon insights from both Pierre Bourdieu’s critique of subjectivist consent and Spinoza’s theory of affect in critiquing the narrowing of desire through the joyful affects of ‘soft domination’ and the sad affects of ‘hard domination’ to align with the ‘master-desire’ of the ruling class. Lordon writes,

“Breaking with the subjectivist aporiae of consent, one can therefore say that Bourdieu’s symbolic violence, a soft domination that the dominated themselves ‘consent’ to, is a domination through joyful affects. One can also connect the ethical-political implications of this concept to Spinoza’s insistence that the complexity of the human body renders it capable of a large variety of expressions of its power of acting, and consequently, that it is very much in each person’s interest to escape the fixations of the conatus and put this variety into effect: ‘Whatever so disposes a human body that it can be affected in a great many ways, or renders it capable of affecting external bodies in a great many ways is useful to man’ [*Ethics*, IV, 38]. It is precisely the deployment of this variety that life under the master desire precludes,

as the condition of the dominated produces the contraction of the domain of desire and its opportunities for joy.”¹⁸⁸

Lordon seizes upon two insights arising from Spinoza’s theory of the affects. Firstly, that joyful affects have the capacity to be deleterious to the individual whose conatus is disordered and guided by passions, even if those affects are joyful. And secondly, if one’s capacity for affect is limited or fixed to align with a master-desire, joyful affects just as well as sad affects can be the source of domination. The manner in which modern capitalist culture aligns desire within society through a process Lordon describes as “co-linearization” enforces a unity by way of both a directed and limited scope of opportunities for joy. Rather than empowering these supposedly ‘unified’ individuals, the limitation of the strength that comes with a conatus that is variegated in its aims and possible fulfillments leads to a condition of unfreedom and domination. Happy social relations are founded, therefore, not merely on the unification of desire, but upon a unity that arises within a multiplicity that is informed by diverse expressions of desire. For it is in that variety that a community and individuals harness their power of self-preservation.

The question of human affect is not only an ethical dilemma, but it also serves as fundamental to orienting Spinoza politically as a champion of radical democracy and free speech. Human happiness is dependent upon the freedom and the power to act, and such a power is only made possible in a community in which human affects are guided collectively. The human being who lives in a society that is guided by irrational passions of the collective authority is most susceptible to external forces,

¹⁸⁸ Frederic Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire* (New York: Verso Books, 2014), 108.

whereas the human being who lives in a society that is guided by reason has an increased power of self-preservation. Spinoza writes, “A man who is guided by reason is more free in a state, where he lives according to a common decision, than in solitude, where he obeys only himself.”¹⁸⁹ The possibility of happiness, or blessedness, hinges not merely upon an individual ethos but also upon the social and political organization of the community in which one lives. Political organization involves developing an economy of affects in which individual human being, the multitude, and state power sustain a dynamic relationship that increases the power of the collective without squashing the individual. While this may appear as a recapitulation of the traditional antagonism between individual and state power, Spinoza dissolves this antagonism through the redefinition of the dialectical terms that constitute a social and political order.

Constructing the Politics of Happiness: Multitude, Transindividuality, and State Power

Spinoza follows in the vein of Machiavelli and away from pre-Modern political theory when he declares the importance of treating human beings “as they are.” His political thought is guided by both the dynamic relationship between individuals and the collective, and the theory of affect that determines the activity of finite beings. At the outset of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza derides the tradition of political thinking that fantasizes of a ‘best regime’, paying no mind to the sort of creatures that human beings are. “The fact is that they conceive men not as they are, but as they would like them to be,” writes Spinoza in response to theory that is divorced from the affective and relational causes that lead human beings to act or be

¹⁸⁹ Curley, *Ethics* IVP73.

acted upon. “As a result, for the most part it is not ethics that they have written, but satire; and they have never worked out a political theory that can have practical application, only one that borders on fantasy or could be put into effect in Utopia or in that golden age of the poets where there would naturally be no need of such.”¹⁹⁰ On Spinoza’s view, there is no possibility of generating political theory if we fail to form that theory out of our nature as finite beings immersed within relations of affect between each other and the rest of nature.

So exactly what kind of creatures are human beings from Spinoza’s perspective? When Spinoza remarks that desire is the “very essence of man,” he seems to be offering a glimpse into what he had in mind. He also views self-interest and the drive toward self-preservation as a defining characteristic of human beings, though to understand what these terms encompass requires an understanding of Spinoza’s definition of the “self” in terms of the striving finite individual.¹⁹¹ While it is true that he uses the term ‘essence’ and makes a claim about human activity, this does not imply a static or overarching definition for human beings. To speak of an essence to things is not to suggest anything more for Spinoza than what differentiates finite beings, whether they are stones, horses, or humans. For the striving to preserve one’s being as it is initially presented in the *Ethics* is not exclusive to the beings that are human.¹⁹² When Spinoza speaks of “human nature” he is addressing the aspects of similitude in the constitution of human beings, not presenting a doctrine of universal essences. In order to write his ethical or political

¹⁹⁰ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 680 Incomplete?

¹⁹¹ Curley, *Ethics* III P9S.

¹⁹² See Curley, *Ethics* III P6.

theory, Spinoza must attend to those beings that are most similar and therefore have the greatest capacity to be affected by or to affect our actions.

Insofar as Spinoza is interested in human happiness, he must address the ethical and political nature of human beings, and simply stating that the essence of any given thing is in its striving for self-preservation gets us little closer to understanding the sort of being that human beings are. Traditional discussions of human nature would revolve around questions of whether human beings are by nature altruistic, selfish, kind or wicked. If one is to frame in this manner the question about the kind of beings that humans are, Spinoza's notion of human beings would appear rife with contradiction. For insofar as human beings are said to be rational, they must "always agree in nature."¹⁹³ And this agreement in nature means that human beings are the most friendly, not to mention, most useful creatures to other human beings. However, Spinoza also notes that, insofar as human beings are torn by "anger, envy, or any emotion derived from hatred," we are "by nature enemies."¹⁹⁴ Spinoza offers a presentation of the similitude that exists amongst the beings called human that defies the pigeon-holing of an essentialist or moralist view of humanity that could offer a definitive response to questions such as our sociability or unsociability devoid of the specificity of context.

What is it that Spinoza has in mind when he admonishes so-called political theories as "fantasy" and "poetry"? More than anything else, human beings are finite, individuals, albeit highly complex. All individual and finite beings, with human beings as no exception, are imbued within a causal network of affect. Both the

¹⁹³ Curley, *Ethics* IVP35.

¹⁹⁴ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 2,14.

existence and persistence of a finite thing owes its existence to an infinite multiplicity of factors that determine its power of self-preservation. Spinoza clarifies this point when he writes, "Every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determinate existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which is also finite and has a determinate existence," and so on to infinity. As such finite, individual things (or modes), human beings are situated within a constellation of causal influences that determine us in specific ways to come into being and to continue in existence. Because there is no vacuum in infinite substance, human beings affect and are affected by other finite modes, under the attributes of thought or extension. Spinoza demonstrates the manner in which we affect or are affected by applying the geometric convention to the passionate life of human beings. To understand human passionate life is the beginning of opening the possibility of forming a political theory, because it will explain the way in which finite bodies (or thoughts) interact, and show what sort of determinations will most benefit human flourishing. Since there is "nothing except substance and its modes," Spinoza is not only able to deduce a theory of the affects in the *Ethics*, but he is also able to deduce a political theory that emerges from an understanding of the necessary causal relations that determine human activity and thinking. A political theory is possible because of the causal necessity that determines the order and connection of bodies and thoughts. Otherwise, all that would be left is fantastic conjecture. For example, if one were to argue the absurdity that there is a vacuum, then there could be no way to have an adequate understanding of the relation between finite bodies, and

certainly were one to consider human beings atomistically, there would be no way to have any adequate knowledge from proximate causes, but only fictive speculation from imaginative fantasy. Stated otherwise, the possibility of political theory is entirely dependent upon an understanding of the causal relation between individuals within the infinite order of nature, and the theory of passionate life that follows from that order.

Developing a political theory that accounts for the passions and provides for the greatest flourishing of human beings both as individuals and as a collective is presented in the *Ethics* as the demonstrable theory of the affects. In both of his more explicitly political treatises, Spinoza sets as his task the political articulation of the insights regarding the order and connection of both bodies and thinking to form a politics of empowered striving. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza acknowledges the challenges that are posed to the organization of a peaceful and flourishing society by the divisive affects, mostly derived from hatred. Spinoza sets out his assignment when he writes, "To guard against all these dangers [posed by divisive affects], to frame such a constitution that every man, whatever be his character, will set public right before private advantage, this is the task, this is the toil."¹⁹⁵ On the face of it, such an aspiration is not noteworthy in the history of political theory, except when one draws into this task the insights of Spinoza's deterministic view of nature and his theory of the affects that emerges out of his physics. The common criticism of determinism in general and specifically Spinoza's determinism is that it is victim to a fatalistic perspective in which political or social

¹⁹⁵ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 538.

organization becomes an exercise that can only be reflected upon *post festum*. In contrast to this perspective, Spinoza rather sets it as his task to construct a politics that accounts for the passionate and determined aspects of existence. In fact, it is the determined order of all that is that affords Spinoza the capacity to think politically and develop a political theory out of the condition in which specific individual bodies (i.e. human beings) live.¹⁹⁶ Spinoza defies the accusations of fatalism and opens the possibility for constructing a social and political organization of the collective by attending to the causal play of forces and power between and amongst individual human beings, the collective, and nature as a whole.

The discussion of political power in Spinoza's writings hinges upon his account of right as coextensive with power. He does not distinguish between a "natural" or "civil" right, to the extent that he does not assign any special status to human beings in terms of right. Right does not involve a status that is necessarily inherited or granted, nor obligations expected, as found in the liberal tradition. For Spinoza, right does not express a desire of how things ought to be or be treated, but rather a statement of how things are. Spinoza explains,

"Nature's right is co-extensive with her power. For Nature's power is the very power of God, who has sovereign power over all things. But since the universal power of Nature as a whole is nothing but the power of all individual things taken together, it follows that each individual thing has the sovereign right to do all it can do; i.e. the right of the individual is co-extensive with its determinate power."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ The variations of the forms of organization reflect the specificity in Spinoza's political writings. The specificity of the "best" political order is reflected in his varied analyses of, for example, the social organization at the time of Moses and 17th century Dutch politics.

¹⁹⁷ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 527. It is worth noting that, in the above quote lies Spinoza's conception of the totality of Nature. What is significant here is that this totality is not a static whole that stands outside or above the total expression of power of all that "individual things taken together."

Commentators on Spinoza have been keen to seize upon the subversive ramifications of such a doctrine of right.¹⁹⁸ To say that all right is co-extensive with power is to say that the right of all finite individuals can be measured according to their respective power to act. The state, as a collective of finite individuals, attains its right from the power of the individuals that make up that collective and only has as much right as it is endowed with by those finite individuals that together constitute the highly complex individual of the state. Just as with the individual human being, the state is limited in its power and cannot be endowed with a power exceeding the real power of the collective of individuals that form the state. In order to develop a political theory that best promotes the possibility of human happiness, or flourishing, one must first understand the dynamic relationship between the increasingly complex individuals that constitute the state (that Spinoza recognizes as a finite individual all the same, only on a more complex level than the human individuals). In other words, Spinoza's task is to deduce political forms that endow the greatest power to a passionate people. Since all finite things share in that they are 'individuals' set in a causal network of relations of varying degrees of complexity of power, this notion of individuality transforms liberal theory's contrast between individual and state in light of the various relations of ever more complex individuals and their right, or power.

The liberal political theorizing of this dynamic takes the abstractions of 'state' and 'individual' as the two main poles forming political power, with the power of the whole being reduced to an indifferent mass. Spinoza, in affinity with

¹⁹⁸ See Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly*, Warren Montag, *Bodies, Masses, Power* and Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*.

his earlier warning about political theorizing in fantastical or utopian terms, rejects using such abstracted terms as the starting point of his inquiry. While Spinoza does employ the term 'individual' as the starting point of his political writings, this term takes on a radically different meaning than that found in the traditionally liberal formulations of the isolated individual as the locus and source of all agency and political freedom.¹⁹⁹ Such questions are traditionally framed in such a way that interrogates political theories as either individualist or collectivist, depending upon a matter of emphasis or partisanship. Spinoza undermines such contrasts as owing to a debate that merely moves at the level of abstraction and not accounting for political life 'as it is.'

Individuality is the starting point for Spinoza's political theory, but what is his conception of these 'individuals' that does not rely on a fantastical relation to the world his theory attempts to address? He gives us an insight into his line of thinking when he writes, "But surely nature creates individuals, not nations."²⁰⁰ Spinoza offers his account of these 'natural' individuals in the second book of the *Ethics* where, in the midst of his account of *mens*, he inquires into the nature of bodies. He writes,

"When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies."²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Spinoza is often thought of as a founder of modern liberalism, and is presented as a herald of traditional 'individualist' or libertarian values. I will argue against this tradition. An example of such an interpretation can be found in Stephen B. Smith, *Spinoza, Liberalism, and the Question of Jewish Identity*.

²⁰⁰ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 548.

²⁰¹ Curley, *Ethics* IIL3A2"Definition.

Such individuals are still subject to the causal network and are defined by their shared motion and rest, and with increased complexity a body maintains its coherence through the communication of its parts. Spinoza writes, “The individual so composed retains its nature, whether it, as a whole, moves or is at rest, or whether it moves in this or that direction, so long as each part retains its motion, and communicates it, as before, to the others.”²⁰² And moving toward greater complexity, Spinoza notes, “if we proceed in this way to infinity, we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, that is, all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change of the whole individual.”²⁰³ The coordination and communication of the motions of finite bodies is what holds them together, it is also what makes possible Spinoza’s claim to understand political organization ‘geometrically’ on the basis of his physics. Just as human beings are complex individuals, made up of a variety of cells, organs, and matter that enters and leaves the body, human society is a composition of an even more complex body that must have the proper ratio of coordination and communication for self-preservation. Rather than an abstracted mass, Spinoza presents the power or right of the state as well as individuals to be constituted by the composition of this coordination of (human) bodies, which he refers to as the “multitude.”

Spinoza theorizes about the manner in which power is actually manifested by individual bodies, whether they are finite human bodies or the complex individual of a human community. The central concept for understanding the individual qua community is the multitude. The multitude is constituted of the united power of

²⁰² Curley, *Ethics* IIL7.

²⁰³ Curley, *Ethics* IIL7.

each individual in a manner that should, or rather could, not be understood as a quantitative amalgam of the isolated human beings that make up the whole of the community. Spinoza critiques the prejudice toward the abstractions of isolated individuality and the over-arching state that have limited the conversation of human right to the level of the liberal individual, and have failed to address the way power coalesces and is distributed in actual social and political formations. He undermines the idea that power is being either individuated or abstractly combined in his account of the power of the embodied multitude, when he writes,

“As long as human natural right is determined by the power of each single individual and is possessed by each alone, it is of no account and is notional rather than factual, since there is no assurance that it can be made good. And there is no doubt that the more cause for fear that a man has, the less power, and consequently the less right, he possesses. Furthermore, it is scarcely possible for men to support, live and cultivate their minds without mutual assistance.”²⁰⁴

The emphasis here on the collective power of the multitude extends from Spinoza’s theory of power in general. The communication of individual human beings within a body politic provides for the expansion of freedom and increase in power. Etienne Balibar emphasizes the importance of the concept of the multitude in Spinoza’s political theory, when he writes, “the multitude as such, not only in its quantitative sense (the “majority” of citizens) but also in its qualitative sense (the collective behavior of individuals who are brought together in *masse*), has become the decisive concept in the analysis of the state.” Spinoza’s discussion of the power of the finite individual known as the multitude emerges directly out of his discussions of the physics of bodies and human individuals in the *Ethics*. The ‘order and connection’ that constitute bodies and thinking in general also apply to the more

²⁰⁴ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 687.

complex body of the multitude. In order to resist devolving political theory into fantasy, discussion of political power must begin with the analysis of the power of the multitude, and only then turn to an understanding of the relationship between the abstractions of “individual” and “state,” and then only in light of their integration as a multitude. “The political problem no longer has two terms but three.” Balibar continues, “‘Individual’ and ‘state’ are in fact abstractions, which only have meaning in relation to one another. In the final analysis, each of them serves merely to express one modality through which the *power of the multitude* can be realized as such.”²⁰⁵ Spinoza reframes the question of political power away from the ‘notional’ abstractions of the isolated individual and the detached power of the state and places social authority, of which the state is but one expression, under the analysis of the multitude, in which he locates the expression of living or ‘real’ power.

In light of the primacy of the analysis of the power of the multitude, what are we to make of human individuals within this framework, and how does the analysis of the power of the multitude relate to the possibility of freedom or happiness? Spinoza, in treating “human actions and appetites just as if they were a question of lines, planes, and bodies,” treats human individuals as other finite individuals that are composed of smaller individuals and must maintain a ratio and communication between parts and whole to ensure sustenance of the individual. The human ‘individual’ is neither an ordinary entity nor self-sustained, or as we have already seen in relation to desire, a self-motivated creature. Etienne Balibar and, more recently, Hasana Sharp have employed the concept “transindividual” in reference to

²⁰⁵ Etienne Balibar, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowden (New York: Verso, 2008) 69.

Spinoza's notion of human individuality.²⁰⁶ The concept of "transindividuality" is drawn from the work of Gilbert Simondon and presents the individual in a way that resists the theoretical pitfalls of thinking of human individuals as either isolated and autonomous, or as wholly consumed by the collective or historical forces, and thus lacking any form of agency. Individuality is reconceived in terms of the causal and relational circumstances that formed the individual and as a process that requires regeneration in order to have the capacity of self-preserve. If the ratio and cycles of motion and rest both within and without the immediate body that makes up the individual are critically disrupted, then the individual ceases to exist. Thus, the very constitution as an individual (in the "real" rather than "notional" sense) is dependent upon the individual's maintaining the communication and ratios between both parts and whole, as well as with the influencing bodies that surround that individual. The coming to be of an individual is a process, but so is its preservation. Balibar explains,

"In causal terms, the [individual's] conservation is nothing but [a] regulated process of 'continuous regeneration.' To say that an individual keeps existing is tantamount to saying that it is regenerated or reproduced. An isolated individual, having no "exchanges" with the environment, would not be regenerated, therefore it would not exist. Right from the beginning, what Spinoza implies is that any individual has a need of other individuals in order to preserve its form and its existence."²⁰⁷

A rather surprising and unusual concept of individuality develops out of Spinoza's account of the process of individuation. On the one hand, we as finite beings (or, if you will, individuals) are vulnerable to and dependent upon the environment in which we live, both social and otherwise, but the very relationality between

²⁰⁶ Balibar will also use the term "transindividual" to refer to Marx's notion of a social and historical 'individual.' This concept, as it is related to Marx, will be clarified in a subsequent chapter.

²⁰⁷ Etienne Balibar, "Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality" (Delft: Eburon, 1997).

ourselves and the world, it turns out, is the source of our greatest power. Sharp explains the peculiar interplay of vulnerability and power in Spinoza's "transindividual" when she writes, "The vulnerability to others that the concept of transindividuality highlights is the very condition of possibility for life, strength, and wisdom. Spinoza's ethical subject still strives to become increasingly active and individuate itself."²⁰⁸ While human beings are necessarily passionate finite beings, and therefore sensitive to the world in which they are formed, the relation with others and the world around us forms the possibility for the increase in our power of self-preservation and action, and thus to be happy or flourish.

The Free State and The Economy of Affect

The power of the individual human being is, therefore, wholly imbricated within the power of the multitude. In coming together with others, we increase our power and thus our right. Spinoza explains, "If two men come together and join forces, they have more power over Nature, and consequently more right, than either one alone; and the greater the number who form a union in this way, the more right they will together possess."²⁰⁹ Politically speaking, this right is transferred to an authority and defined as sovereignty. The unification of the collective under the authority of the sovereign requires that the most effective sovereign is that which governs absolutely,

"This right [to command from communal consensus], which is defined by the power of the people [*potentia multitudinous*], is usually called sovereignty, and is possessed absolutely by whoever has charge of affairs of the state, namely, he who makes,

²⁰⁸ Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) 41.

²⁰⁹ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 686.

interprets, and repeals laws, fortifies cities, makes decisions regarding peace and war, and so forth."²¹⁰

Sovereignty, according to Spinoza, is not something that is top-down, but rather emerges from the combined power of the human beings that come together in forming the power that grants governance. This formulation of sovereign power is radical in its implications. While sovereign authority is absolute, the absolute nature of this authority is incremental to the extent that the sovereign authority is a reflection of the coordination and communication of the community as a complex individual. Thus, authority is generated only by the strength of the collective power of individual human beings. While one can be compelled to obey the communal consensus, the power of the state is wholly dependent upon the health of the interrelations between external forces, and even more significantly, its capacity to increase the power of individual human beings that constitute the power of the multitude. The strength of a given sovereign authority will therefore be determined by its capacity to increase the power of the people that compose a given state through the effective communication of the parts and the whole, both internal and external to the state.

The state insofar as it is a highly complex individual can only sustain its form if it is capable of preserving its form amidst continual change and transformation of the bodies that compose the state. Therefore, the preservation of the state depends upon the communication of the finite bodies that form the more complex body of the state. The state can only serve the individuals that constitute the state power if there

²¹⁰ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 687.

is harmony between subject/citizens of the state.²¹¹ This leads Spinoza to announce the main aspiration of any community or state in striving for self-preservation,

“To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose as it were one mind and one body; that all should strive together, as far as they can, to preserve their being, and that all together should seek for themselves the common advantage of all.”²¹²

If one were not to account for the physics of Spinoza’s theory of the affects, this claim would perhaps appear as a moralistic appeal. However, when one considers the nature of finite bodies, one understands how the striving for common advantage can emerge from individual human beings, who by nature seek their “own advantage.”

In contrast to the liberal tradition, where freedom and the egoism of ‘seeking one’s advantage’ is tied to the ability to follow one’s inclination, Spinoza identifies the capacity to reason with the ability to know one’s advantage. However, Spinoza notes that human beings are often guided not by reason but by the passions through which human beings can be “contrary to one another.”²¹³ The multitude is swayed by superstition and passionate affect that can lead to strife and civil unrest, and the state can be weakened to the point of imploding if divisive affects are powerful enough to dissolve the coherence of the body politic. Spinoza distinguishes himself from political theorists who act as though human beings are not swayed by passions but rather deride human passions and posit a theory that ignores the fact that political theory, if it is not to simply devolve into myth, must negotiate the coordination and communication of the multitude that is often guided by those very passions. Spinoza emphasizes the importance of the negotiation of

²¹¹ In relation to state power, human individuals are aspectively both citizens and subjects. Spinoza explains, “We call men citizens insofar as they enjoy all of the advantages of the commonwealth by civil right; we call them subjects insofar as they are bound to obey the ordinances or laws of the commonwealth.” Shirley, *Political Treatise* 690.

²¹² Curley, *Ethics* IIP18S.

²¹³ Curley, *Ethics* IVP34

power when he rejects as tyrannical the attempt to subjugate the deleterious effects of human passion. Rather, Spinoza claims that the most free and strongest state is one that effectively incorporates and aligns human passions while the citizens are free to express their judgments about what they perceive to be their advantage. He recognizes the significance of the task that guides his *Theological-Political Treatise* when he writes, “I think I am undertaking a not ungrateful or unprofitable task in demonstrating that not only can this freedom be granted without endangering piety and the peace of the commonwealth, but also the peace of the commonwealth depend on this freedom.”²¹⁴ Just as individual human beings are more powerful the more they are capable of a heterogeneous and multiplicity of affect, the individual of the state is more powerful as it is capable of being affected in a multiplicity of ways.

Still, Spinoza’s ‘natural’ political account of human beings addresses the need for the divisive passions to be mitigated or directed toward the preservation of the state. This can be accomplished either by rational means, or by generating unifying affects that are stronger than the affects that are debilitating to the cohesion of the state. Under the best of circumstances, the guidance of reason will allow for the unification of the multitude under the sovereign authority of the state. Reason for Spinoza is the expression of desire as it is adequately directed toward one’s advantage, and since he demonstrates the common advantage of collective sovereign rule, rational action is to uphold the collective, sovereign power under the auspices of the state. “Only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason,” Spinoza writes, “must they always agree in nature.”²¹⁵ Reason informs us to follow reason because it teaches human beings to

²¹⁴ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 390.

²¹⁵ Curley, *Ethics* IVP35.

“practice piety and to be calm and kindly in their disposition, which is possible only in a state.”²¹⁶ So long as people are guided by reason, they are given to a cooperative and friendly disposition that will strengthen the ties that sustain the sovereign power. There is more to be said regarding the rational organization of the state but there are two preliminary reminders that should be made about the relation of reason to the generation of a political theory. Spinoza hits upon these when he writes,

“We have shown that reason can indeed do much to control and moderate the passions; but at the same time we have seen that the path taught by reason is a very difficult one, so that those who believe that ordinary people or those who are busily engaged in public business can be persuaded to live solely at reason’s behest are dreaming of the poets golden age or of a fairy tale.”²¹⁷

Firstly, so long as we are guided by reason human beings are capable of greatly diminishing the influence of the passions, and the more the multitude is organized by rational relations, the more powerful is sovereign authority. Secondly, the finite nature of human beings, not to mention the lessons of experience, instructs us that the multitude would never be solely guided by reason.

The most powerful state would be possible only in a society where social relations foster the influence of reason. The influence of reason cannot be forced upon the citizenry from above, for such an arrangement would not only be tyrannical, but also self-defeating to the authority of the sovereign. Spinoza writes,

“It is not...the purpose of the state to transform men from rational beings into beasts or puppets, but rather to enable them to develop their mental and physical faculties in safety, to use their reason without restraint and to refrain from the strife and the vicious mutual abuse that are prompted by hatred, anger, or deceit. The purpose of the state is, in reality, freedom.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 688.

²¹⁷ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 682.

²¹⁸ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 567. In this passage, Spinoza equates the purpose of the state with freedom, while in the *Political Treatise*, he mentions that the “virtue of a state is its security.” (Shirley, *Political Treatise* 683). This would appear to be a point of departure between the two treatises. While a careful analysis of this seeming discrepancy is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is worth noting that in both iterations the power of both the individual human beings

The state must therefore strive to develop an economics of affective relations that will ensure the influence of affable and ‘pious’ relations amongst citizens. While the task of forming a strong state lies in its capacity to develop a citizenry (for “men are not born to be citizens, but are made so”)²¹⁹ that strives toward the advantage of one and all; that is, one that strives for rational ends.

Since affable relations between citizens cannot be ensured strictly by rational means, the sovereignty of the state will often depend upon the generation of an economy of stronger affects, often passionate, that will overcome the affects that lead to social faction. In fact, Spinoza does not grant reason any special distinction from other affects, for superstition and prejudice can also manifest themselves as the natural striving for self-preservation. In fact, the difference between rational and unrational striving is not a difference in kind, but rather a matter of the perspective of what constitutes the advantage of a given finite being. Just as with reason and unreason, Spinoza’s ‘naturalism’ does not demarcate a separate order for the state of nature and civil society. Perhaps strangely in light of the importance afforded to reason contra the passionate affects, Spinoza marks the distinction between the state of nature and civil society only insofar as the multitude is directed to share in the affects of fear and hope. Spinoza writes,

“For in a state of Nature and in a civil order alike man acts from the laws of his own nature and has regard for his own advantage. In both these conditions, I repeat, man is led

and the state is of utmost importance. It seems reasonable to speculate that the influence of the historical events that surrounded the two texts had a significant influence upon Spinoza’s emphasis. There is compelling reason to believe that the historical circumstance of the Dutch political climate, namely the assassination of the De Witt and turmoil that led to the rise of the more conservative Orangist, inspired the transition from the indicating the state’s purpose as ‘freedom’ to ‘security’. (See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*). For a further discussion of the continuity of the *TTP* and the *TP* addressing the question of relation between safety and freedom see, Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “Whose History? Spinoza’s Critique of Religion as an Other Modernity,” *Idealistic Studies*, Vol. 33:2-3, Summer/Fall 2003, pp. 219-235.

²¹⁹ Shirley, “Political Treatise” 699.

by fear or hope to do or refrain from doing this or that. The main difference between the two conditions is this, that in the civil order all men fear the same things, and all have the same ground of security, the same way of life.”²²⁰

The challenge and task that confronts sovereign authority is to generate the economy of affect that increases the power of the multitude and the individual human beings in their self-preservation. In a turn that might first appear antithetical to a so-called ‘rationalist,’ Spinoza follows a Machiavellian line of thought that emerges out of this theory of the force of affects. The appearance of authority is of utmost importance, whether that appearance manifests itself by means of reason or by the affects of hope and/or fear.²²¹ Idit Dobbs-Weinstein offers an analysis of this relation between reason and passion as it plays out in the authority and obedience in the commonwealth when she writes,

“Since reason cannot be viewed in isolation, since the real distinction between reason and passion, just as that between the state of nature and the state of society is a theoretical fiction, for Spinoza, some sovereign law is necessary for both the few and the many and obedience to it can only come about through some passion, (for choice is a manifestation of passion) albeit different ones. Understood this way, the sovereign law must *appear* to possess the same necessity as do the laws of demonstration.”²²²

The appearance of the necessary rule of sovereign authority provides a greater affective force (in accordance with IVP11) by which the cohesion of the passions of the individuals can be ensured with greater confidence. Insofar as we are guided by reason, human beings have a greater affect toward that which is to their own advantage (in part, because the determination of such advantage is understood

²²⁰ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 690.

²²¹ Spinoza starkly presents the importance of the force of this appearance of the authority of the sovereign when he writes, “It is not the motive for obedience, but the fact of obedience, that constitutes a subject.” (Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 536). Spinoza’s critique of religious authority follows a similar line of thinking in which he distinguishes the role of scripture, which serves to instill obedience, and the rational deduction of the main teachings of “true religion” (of which “charity and justice” are the central tenets). Adequate knowledge through the insights of “true religion” or the virtue of sovereign rule leads to a greater power of acting. But since in both the cases of religious and civil instruction, adequate knowledge is often rare, the resources of the passionate forces of hope and fear are often needed to instill obedience.

²²² Idit Dobbs-Weinstein, “Re-Reading TTP in the Light of Benjamin,” *Peace, Piety, and the Freedom to Philosophize*, ed. Paul J. Bagley (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999) 84.

under the order of necessity). However, since the multitude is more often swayed by divisive passions than reasoned and adequate understanding, the preservation of the commonwealth becomes dependent upon generating an economics of affect that, through the force of the passions of hope and fear, the multitude is affected toward that which is rational, i.e. peace, friendship, and collective advantage.

Translated into Marxian vernacular, the importance of sustaining an economics of affect leads to the question of the ubiquitousness of ideology in the maintenance of sovereign authority. As Spinoza does away with the binary understanding of reason and passions, he also dispatches with a moralistic distinction between rule that is guided by ideology or truth. The imaginative force of the 'appearance' of the necessity of sovereign authority draws upon the resources of passionate affects. But does this not embroil the sovereign authority in deceptive practices in order to maintain authority, thus preserving the state on the back of ideological force? The critique that Spinoza levels against the destructive modes of authority does not entail an indictment of the force of imagination, per se, but rather the debilitating force that emerges from prejudices, such as those that take an anthropomorphic, subjectivist or teleological form.

Louis Althusser refers to Spinoza's writing as the "matrix of every possible theory of ideology." Such a claim arises from Spinoza's critique of the isolated individual and the kernel of a theory of class struggle. Both emerge out of the critique of religious prejudice in the *Appendix of Book 1* of the *Ethics* that states that human beings are conscious of their appetites but "ignorant of the causes." Spinoza levels his critique of isolated subjectivity that fails to identify individuality as

developing from a process of relations between finite beings. And the striving of these beings in their finite struggle for existence means that these relations are always already power relations. At the social level, Althusser finds in Spinoza's account of the struggle between ever more complex individuals, united in the coalition of their collective conatus, the lever from which the critique of society along the lines of class struggle emerges. In the words of Althusser, and in contrast to a merely "individual subjectivity," Spinoza offered an account of a "social subjectivity, that of a conflictual human group, that is of a class and therefore of antagonistic classes."²²³ This nascent critique of ideology gains its force from Spinoza's theory of finite, passionate beings. As a "matrix" for ideological critique, Spinoza recognizes the role of imaginative forces in not only dividing but also coalescing the power relations of finite human beings. Thus, the belief that such finite beings could live without the influence of imaginative and passionate forces would be by its very nature ideological.

As it turns out, ideology is not exclusively the domain of the social construction of material relations but rather a combination of the natural relations of finite beings and thoughts that are directed by the imagination, as well as the product of human social construction. Rather than presenting a false dichotomy between the 'real' and the 'social,' Spinoza's account of the relations of finite beings under the attribute of thinking (as well as corporeality) transforms the framework of ideological critique. Sharp seizes upon this insight while drawing upon the Althusserian understanding of Spinoza's writings as a "matrix" for ideological

²²³ Louis Althusser, "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part I: Spinoza," *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 7.

critique, when she comments, “ideological critique becomes an engagement with the life force of ideas.” Spinoza’s theory of *mens* presents an account of how thinking is both fully ingrained within the deterministic order of nature, while at the same time not passively imprisoned by that order. Sharp continues, “Freedom must be produced through an immanent displacement and reorganization of our constituent relations with others, including other ideas.”²²⁴ The task of ideological critique requires an engagement with the organization and interrelation between human beings and the natural order that provides the conditions in which the collective imaginary life is coercively usurped for the interests of the ruling class (or race, gender, etc.).²²⁵ Spinoza presents the relation between finite bodies as being of the same “order and connection” as the relation between finite thoughts. Just as the preservation of finite bodies is always a power struggle, the struggle for finite ideas, and the task of generating the force to overcome the debilitating effects of ideology, is also a matter of power. In the cases of the attributes of both thinking and bodies, the capacity of producing such an opposing force means drawing from the network of power relations that are present and marshaling a counteractive source of power to the flourishing of a given thought or body. Sharp sets the task of overcoming the debilitating effects of ideology when she writes, “Ideology critique becomes a project of ascertaining particular disabling assemblages of thought, which must be countered through the mobilization of alternative constellations of thinking

²²⁴ Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 57.

²²⁵ Spinoza offers the framework for taking his theory of attributes and affect, and applying them in a critical manner to contemporary concerns, such as the eviscerating impact of prejudice upon the flourishing of communities. There is much to add to this discussion, and while it is my hope that account presented here lays out the manner in which such arguments would follow, it is outside of the scope of this dissertation to delve into such discussion with the degree of specificity that they deserve.

force.”²²⁶ In order to generate the conditions in which human flourishing, and thus happiness, could be possible, the power struggle against the enervating effects of imaginative forces must be addressed in concert with the physical struggle for resources. The strength of a commonwealth, as well as that of finite human beings, depends upon a communicative interrelation with the surrounding finite bodies, whether they be human or otherwise. Although Spinoza had not framed his discussion in these terms, ideological critique must be a central component of generating the sociable conditions in which human beings, understood in the sense of ‘transindividuals,’ are able to thrive.

The Most “Natural” State, or the Most Absolute Power

In the *Lemmata* of *Book 2* of the *Ethics*, Spinoza sets about to show the nature of bodies and how they interact or communicate. The manner of this communication becomes central to the integrity of finite bodies. In *L7*, Spinoza writes, “The individual so composed retains its nature, whether it, as a whole, moves or is at rest, or whether it moves in this or that direction, so long as each part retains its motion, and communicates it, as before, to the others.”²²⁷ The integrity and strength of an individual is determined by the communication and coordination of its parts to the whole, and in terms of the highly complex individual that is the commonwealth, Spinoza describes democracy as “closest to the natural state” because it is in democracy where the power of the state most closely aligns with the power of the multitude. Even more, it is in a democracy where the communication of the power between parts and whole is most interactive, and therefore stronger than in a state

²²⁶ Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 58.

²²⁷ Curley, *Ethics* IIL7.

where power is imposed from the sovereign authority down to the subjects of the state.

Spinoza's definition of the integrity of finite bodies is reflected in his description of the democratically constituted state. Spinoza writes,

"Without any infringement of natural right, a community can be formed and a contract be always preserved in its entirety in absolute good faith on these terms, that everyone transfers all the power that he possesses to the community, which will therefore alone retain the sovereign natural right over everything, that is, the supreme rule which everyone will have to obey either of free choice or through fear of the ultimate penalty. Such a community's right is called a democracy, which can therefore be defined as a united body of men which corporately possesses sovereign right over everything within its power."²²⁸

Spinoza's defense of democracy emerges from his account of the nature of finite bodies in the *Ethics*. What makes the democratic form the most "natural state" is that it allows for the configuration and communication of individual and collective bodies to be sustained in a manner that both allows the parts to maintain their discrete power while at the same time unifying under the integrity of sovereign authority. In a democracy sovereign authority is most secure because of the dynamic nature of communication amongst its constituent part, and thus the most absolute.

The unfreedom of tyrannical rule arises out of the arbitrary nature of individual affect and inclination. In a commonwealth in which authority is granted solely to the whims of the individual ruler (or ruling class), the assurance of the welfare of the commonwealth and the multitude is left to the fortune of the arbitrary will of the sovereign. The unity of such a commonwealth is suspect because those who live in such a state will suffer the imposition of the will of an external authority.

²²⁸ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 530.

And the external and arbitrary nature of such an authority is what enslaves the populace under such conditions, and not the requirement of obedience to that authority. Spinoza elaborates,

“Now perhaps it will be thought that...we are turning subjects into slaves, the slave being one who acts under orders and the free man who does as he pleases. But this is not completely true, for the real slave is one who lives under pleasure’s sway and can neither see nor do what is for his own good, and only he is free who lives wholeheartedly under the sole guidance of reason.”²²⁹

Reason guides human beings to obey sovereign rule because just as all finite beings, human beings have more right, and therefore are freer in a commonwealth than in isolation.²³⁰ Reason guides human beings toward their advantage, and thus toward the union with others. However, the organization of the commonwealth can determine the extent to which one can be said to be more or less free when submitting to a sovereign authority. Spinoza explains, “But in a sovereign state where the welfare of the whole people, not the ruler, is the supreme law, he who obeys the sovereign power in all things should be called a subject, not a slave who does not serve his own interest.”²³¹ Spinoza sets up a ratio in which the right, or strength of the state, correlates to the legal constitution of power in the multitude.

Democracy is the “most natural state” because it identifies the actual source of the state power in the multitude. Sovereign authority is not defined by the power of the sovereign but by the multitude, and this is true in the most democratic as well as the most tyrannical state. The strength of the commonwealth, as well as the welfare of the individual human beings that constitute that commonwealth, is

²²⁹ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 531.

²³⁰ Spinoza offers a demonstration of this argument in *Ethics* IVP73.

²³¹ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 531. One can see again the duplicitous effects that ideology can have within a community in defining the interests of the multitude.

determined by the coordination of power and the communication of the expressions of power between the finite beings that constitute the whole. It is the strengthened communication between finite beings that makes possible the unified multitude under the guise of the sovereign authority. The 'absolute' power of the commonwealth is never decided by fiat but as we have seen with individual human beings, its unity and identity as an individual (albeit highly complex) entity, is a process. Alexandre Matheron explains why Spinoza's commonwealth is not forged either by fiat or by social contract when he writes, "Political society is not created by contract; it is engendered and reengendered at each moment by a consensus that must be permanently renewed."²³² The democratic organization allows for the continued thriving of the body politic. And while Spinoza calls for the sovereign authority to be absolute, the absolute nature of this power is always dependent upon the extent to which the communication of power is sustained to reflect the actual power of the sovereign in the multitude. In a democracy, this communication of power is most 'natural' because it approaches,

"most closely to that freedom which nature grants to every man. For in a democratic state nobody transfers his natural right to another so completely that thereafter he is not to be consulted; he transfers it to the majority of the entire community of which he is a part."²³³

The democratic organization of the commonwealth allows for the greatest input of communication between parts and the whole and limits, to the extent that it is possible, the irrational inclinations and passions of particular human beings. Rather than leading to faction, as Hobbes cautioned, democratic organization of sovereign

²³² Alexandre Matheron, "The Theoretical Function of Democracy in Spinoza and Hobbes," *The New Spinoza* 216.

²³³ Shirley, *Theological-Political Treatise* 531.

authority is the greatest assurance of the rational coordination and communication of the disparate interests of finite beings into the unity of the collective of the state.

In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza outlines the ways in which the power of the commonwealth can be strengthened while serving to increase the capacity for the flourishing of individuals. The guarantee of the strength does not come from the good nature of its rulers or its citizens, for as he repeatedly emphasizes, it is natural for human beings to be swayed by passions. Spinoza emphasizes the laws and institutions that structure society as the guarantee of their preservation,

“It is certain that rebellions, wars, and contempt for or violation of the laws are to be attributed not so much to the wickedness of the subjects as to the faulty organization of the state. Men are not born to be citizens, but are made so. Furthermore, men’s natural passions are everywhere the same; so if wickedness is more prevalent and wrongdoing more frequent in one commonwealth than in another, one can be sure that this is because the former has not done enough to promote harmony and has not framed its laws with sufficient forethought, and thus it has not attained the full right of the commonwealth.”²³⁴

Spinoza clearly understood the constructive power of human beings, in the power of the multitude, to form a society that increases the power of the individuals living in that collective. The organization of society could not, however, be dictated as if human beings were not the finite, passionate beings that we are. Rather, the organization of the commonwealth, beginning with the constitution (i.e. the “soul of the state”) to the institutions that structure the intercourse and the conditions for communication among the multitude, is what will define the strength of the commonwealth.²³⁵ While Spinoza offers the insight and model for social

²³⁴ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 699.

²³⁵ Shirley, *Political Treatise* 750. The formation of the constitution and the structuring of social institutions opens up a vista of political analysis that would be invaluable in organizing a society to serve the advantage of the multitude. Such analyses would provide the specificity to challenge the political and social structures that work against the interests of the individuals that make up the multitude, but are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

organization, his accounting of the need to sustain the communication and coordination of the individuals that constitute the power of the multitude and the state present an ongoing challenge to both Spinoza's thinking and to political theory in constructing a social order that serves human flourishing. Even more, the capacity for political theory to form such dynamic institutions will determine the power of the preservation of individual human beings within that society, deciding whether and to what extent human happiness, or flourishing, could be possible.

Chapter Four

Marx's Critical Relation to Happiness: Ambivalence, Sacrifice, and Revolutionary Possibilities

Your idea of happiness: "To fight"
Your idea of misery: "To submit"
-Karl Marx²³⁶

In the extensive corpus of writings attributed to Karl Marx there are scant explicit references to human happiness. However, the reticence in his writings to address the topic of happiness directly reflects neither an indifference nor antipathy to the concern for happiness, but rather a critical and intentional ambivalence. One must take a long view of Marx's corpus to gain an understanding of the shape and significance of this reticence. The seed of his future intellectual and revolutionary pursuits can be found in the schoolboy Marx who wrote that, "History calls those men greatest who have ennobled themselves for the common good; experience acclaims as happiest the man who has made the greatest number of people happy." Here we find the romantic dreams of a seventeen year-old boy, yet Marx offers an insight into his developing concern for the tragic condition of human beings amidst this wish for happiness when he continues,

"If we have chosen the position in life in which we can most of all work for mankind, no burdens can bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all; then we shall experience no petty, limited, selfish joy, but our happiness will belong to millions, our deeds will live on quietly but perpetually at work; and over our ashes will be shed the hot tears of noble people."²³⁷

One may be inclined to object to granting any weight to such childhood, if not entirely childlike, ambitions. Yet, the endurance of these young aspirations comes

²³⁶ Karl Marx, "Confessions of Marx (1865)," in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin, 1983) 53.

²³⁷ Karl Marx, "Reflections of a Young Man on The Choice of a Profession," Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 49 vols. (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975) 1:8-9.

into relief when one views the unfolding ambivalence toward happiness that persisted throughout the course of Marx's writings.

This tragic notion that one can barely speak of happiness, without at the same time reflecting on one's own ashes, finds its expression throughout Marx's revolutionary writings. When the autobiographical element dissipates, the claim to happiness becomes cloaked under revolutionary demands and a spirit of sacrifice. In other words, once the autobiographical impetus is removed from Marx's writings, so does his explicit elaboration of what it might mean for a human being to be happy. The insights of young Marx with regards to happiness are not strictly the expression of a personal feeling, but rather a signpost on a search for meaning that transcends autobiography. However, the elaboration of happiness as a subjective phenomenon becomes a futile effort in approaching what, for Marx, can only be understood and achieved socially. When confronted with the social realities of capitalist society, Marx is no longer inclined to speak of happiness, but rather finds his voice in critically expressing the unhappiness that weighs upon the exploited masses. At the same time, he activates a *eudaimonic* revolutionary practice in which happiness is not reflected upon in terms of an abstract individual, but rather finds its realization through class struggle. One can appreciate the caution toward granting too much weight to an autobiographical ambition. However, Marx's early ambitions are instructive in shedding a light upon his reluctance to place the call for human emancipation under the guise of subjective feelings of happiness.

For Marx, the futility of pursuing the examination of the subjective expressions of human happiness follows from a realization regarding the individual

within society as a whole. It is uncontroversial, even to bourgeois ideology, to claim that human beings are social animals in the sense that we interact with one another and produce within communities. Marx, however, takes the view that our very individuality is a product of our social organization when he writes, “The human being is in the most literal sense a ζῶον πολιτικόν, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society.”²³⁸ This insight indicates Marx’s distanciation from bourgeois political theories of society that begin with the isolated individual as the foundation of politics. Marx’s notion of the ‘political animal’ is not restricted to the atomistic orientation of a given individual that collaborates (i.e. is “gregarious”) with other individuals. Rather, he treats the individual as both the product and producer of a social world. Therefore, the difficulty of addressing human happiness by starting with the isolated needs and wants of the individual of bourgeois ideology would prove fruitless in principle. Marxist critique will distinguish itself through an avowed concern for the living individual understood not in isolation, but as an already social product and producer of society.

Following the framework of his understanding of human beings as the ζῶον πολιτικόν, Marx contests not only the bourgeois analysis of society, but also the ‘materialist’ approaches that rely upon a dissection of society in terms of ‘civil society’ and ‘State.’ Marx identifies the limitations of this “old materialism” and heralds a new revolutionary materialism in the tenth of his “Theses on Feuerbach” in which he declares, “The standpoint of the old materialism is “civil” society; the

²³⁸ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolas (New York: Penguin Books, 1973) 84.

standpoint of the new is human society, or socialized humanity.”²³⁹ Any concern for human happiness must not only reject the atomized individual as its foundation, it must also reject the ideological distinctions of civil society and state, as well as ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres that are born out of a dualistic understanding of the relation between the individual and society, in favor of a revolutionary insight for “socialized humanity.” By rejecting the dualistic foundations of bourgeois and ‘old materialist’ social science, Marx repudiates the claims of freedom and human flourishing that are built upon such foundations. The standpoint of socialized humanity serves as the foundation of a “new materialism” that provides a critical lever through which Marx is able to make revolutionary demands for human beings in opposition to the ruling class and their fetishized idolatry/ ideology that weigh upon the living.

The egoistic individual that provides the foundation of modern political theory confronts its limitation in the abstracted rights granted to this “individual” in form only. Marx acknowledges the achievements of bourgeois revolutions in stripping away the power of feudal ideological and theological influences, albeit in a backhanded way, when he writes, “The bourgeoisie, wherever it has gotten the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his ‘natural superiors,’ and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’.”²⁴⁰ While dissolving the ideological beliefs that

²³⁹ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978) 145.

²⁴⁰ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2013) 63.

buttressed feudal authority, the bourgeois revolutions heralded a new relation between human beings that is viewed through the lens of 'fetishized' individuals whose interactions take place under the rubric of the brutal exploitation of 'personal' economic interests. Through the division of the individual and society into various ideological 'spheres,' bourgeois individuals no longer view themselves as social beings, but rather as isolated monads whose identity and interests are private. Marx writes, "Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means toward his private purposes, as external necessity."²⁴¹ As a product of a historical process, the development of the isolated individual appears to those under its sway as a self-evident fact. This supposed 'fact' has not only proven decisive for bourgeois economists and political theorists, but has also shown the limitation of the "old materialism" that is still burdened with the ideological belief of the isolated individual. "What is to be avoided above all," Marx warns, "is the re-establishing of "Society" as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual *is the social being*. His life, even if it may not appear in the direct form of a *communal* life carried out together with others – is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life."²⁴² The appearance of 'society' out of an ideological abstraction places the limitation of its claims for human flourishing in the formalized reification of the concept of the bourgeois individual. Marx's critique of the bourgeois values of freedom and equality is that they are confined to these merely formal boundaries, parameters

²⁴¹ Marx, *Grundrisse* 84.

²⁴² Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *The Marx-Engels Reader* 86.

that Marx exposes through the ‘new materialism’ that emerges from a concern for the “socialized” individual.

The commitment to human happiness, or flourishing, does not exhaust itself for Marx in the critique of ideology (or bourgeois ideals of liberty, equality, and security) or political economy, but finds expression in the affirmation of revolutionary thought and practice. In the “Theses on Feuerbach,” Marx begins an explicit turn in his thinking that reconfigures the role of the critic into that of the revolutionary. This turn is clearly announced in the eleventh thesis when he declares: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, the point is to *change* it.”²⁴³ The revolutionary insistence in eleventh thesis emerges out of, even if distinctively away from his previous ‘critical’ writings.²⁴⁴ What this means with regard to his demands for human flourishing is that he must identify not only whence the ideological foundations of liberal theory arise, but also must enact the revolutionary practices working toward what he refers to as “human emancipation.”

Marx’s critique of bourgeois ideals and “old materialism” does not merely have a negative resonance, but founds a “new materialism” that emerges from an understanding of individuals as both constituted by and constituting their world. Marx illuminates the distinction between a society of isolated individuals, divided

²⁴³ Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” *The Marx-Engels Reader* 145.

²⁴⁴ With this moment of Marx’s writing, Louis Althusser, drawing upon a phrase of Bachelard’s, refers to an “epistemological break” that brings forth a new science of history culminating in the writing of *Capital*.²⁴⁴ While Althusser is warranted in identifying in Marx a radical break from previous philosophical practice, it is an overstatement on Althusser’s part to identify this moment in his writing as an intellectual gulf as it relates to his earlier, more simply critical works. Marx’s writings offer greater justification to view the eleventh thesis as a developmental expression of Marx’s earlier writings that David Lachterman refers to as the “philosophical matrices” of Marx’s later writings. David Rapport Lachterman, *The Ontology of Production in Marx, The Graduate Philosophy Faculty Journal* 19(1996) 5.

by class and “personal” interests from a liberated society in *The German Ideology* when he writes,

“In the previous substitutes for the community, in the State, etc., personal freedom has existed only for the individuals who developed within the relationships of the ruling class, and only insofar as they were individuals of this class. The illusory community, in which individuals have up to now combined, always took on an independent existence in relation to them, and was at the same time, since it was the combination of one class over against another, not only a completely illusory community, but a new fetter as well. *In the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association.*”²⁴⁵

The ingenuity of capitalist ideology lies in the fact that the subordinate classes no longer experience their enslavement as fetters because the physical chains of slavery are not always required by, or even conducive to, capitalist social order. The formal or juridical freedom that exists in the ‘illusory community’ maintains the appearance of freedom for human activity when in fact this freedom is a fiction. “The Roman slave was held by chains; the wage-labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads,” writes Marx in *Capital*, “The appearance of independence is maintained by a constant change in the person of the individual employer, and by the legal fiction of a contract.”²⁴⁶ What then, is involved in breaking free from the “invisible threads” that bind the majority living within the force of this illusory community? Marx’s response lies within his identification of the only outpost of personal freedom left amidst the force of this illusory community: the revolutionary practice played out in the arena of class struggle. The so-called “freedom” within capitalist society is only afforded to those of the ruling class by virtue of their position within the ruling class. “Human emancipation,” therefore, entails the dissolving of the capitalist class system upon which the ideological,

²⁴⁵ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader* 197.

²⁴⁶ Karl Marx, *Capital: Vol. 1* (New York: Penguin Books, 1976) 719.

imaginary freedom of the 'illusory' community holds sway. "The emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation."²⁴⁷ The demand for liberty, if one takes a Marxist perspective, is at best an idle platitude and at worst a threat to the realization of human emancipation, unless this demand is integral to revolutionary practice, a practice which takes the flourishing of active, living human beings as its hallmark.

Marx's call for revolutionary practice finds expression in revolutionizing Hegelian dialectics. This turning of Hegel on his feet is enunciated through the demand for a practice that not merely negates, but revolutionizes the real. In Hegel's view, the movement of reason is expressed in a teleological relation of the rational and the real, propelled forward through the power of the negative.²⁴⁸ The internal contradictions that Marx reveals as lying at the heart of capitalist social order belie Hegel's claim that history entails the movement of reason materialized. Where Hegel finds the end of history in the universalized perspective of reason, Marx uncovers the oppression of living individuals under the force of the inequities and contradictions within society governed by class rule. For Marx, reason does still have a role; one that is not complicit with the 'real', but rather located in the

²⁴⁷ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844" 80.

²⁴⁸ Etienne Balibar explains this overturning of Hegel succinctly when he writes, "It is not enough to say with Hegel that 'the real is rational' and that the rational, of necessity, becomes reality: one has to say that the only thing which is real or rational is revolution." Etienne Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, (New York: Verso Books, 2007) 33.

exposure of the irrationality of class rule and acted out in the revolutionary practice of class struggle.

Marx's writings provide a distinctive departure from the Hegelian dialectic of reason, but this departure appears to either undermine or at the very least unsettle the role for philosophical and theoretical practice. Is Marx, as it may appear, severing the need for philosophical thought in the interest of revolutionary change, or is he calling for a radical shift in the definition and orientation of philosophical practice? Marx expressed little interest in the place of professional intellectuals and only a critical interest in philosophical thought insofar as it serves as an 'ideological reflex' of material conditions. More pressing to Marx's concern for human flourishing, however, is the place for theoretical or philosophical practice in making revolutionary demands. While "interpreting" the world is only a means of ideologically preserving the status quo, there is still the question of whether there is a place for theoretical knowledge and reason in the service of revolutionary practice. Louis Althusser places the onus upon those picking up the mantle from Marx to decipher Marx's theoretical practice:

"The problem posed – what constitutes Marx's 'inversion' of the Hegelian dialectic? What is the specific difference which distinguishes the Marxist dialectic from the Hegelian? – has already been resolved by Marxist practice, whether this is Marx's theoretical practice or the political practice of the class struggle. So its solution does exist, in the works of Marxism, but only in a practical state. We have to express it in its theoretical form, that is, to move from what, in the most of the 'famous quotations', is a practical recognition of an existence, to a theoretical knowledge of it."²⁴⁹

Althusser has been criticized by many Marxists for intellectualizing Marx through his emphasis upon an epistemology of "science" and "theory" that is disengaged

²⁴⁹ Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, "On the Materialist Dialectic," (New York: Verso Books, 2005) 180-181.

from revolutionary practice, yet he does enunciate a concern for the place of theory in Marxist thought.²⁵⁰ Happiness is a fundamentally practical question in light of Marx's concern for human flourishing that obligates a dialectical commitment to an understanding of what is or is not rational in the real. The point is to "change" the world, yet not all change is revolutionary. Marx's 'new materialist' dialectic does not, as vulgar Marxists would have it, castrate the capacity for theoretical reason, and thus also for revolutionary practice. He does not reduce the place of reason, but rather requires that reason inform the demand for revolution. In other words, in the eleventh of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx is redefining the role of theory and theoretical practice in the service of human flourishing, while the demand for revolutionary change sustains the place for reason within an irrational world.

Marx, in making the claim for revolutionary change, must reckon not only with the way in which human beings exist in the world, but must also account for the extent to which human beings are, at the same time, producers of both the world and themselves. "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator himself,"²⁵¹ explains Marx, clarifying the role of human beings as immersed within the nexus of a world that is both inherited and capable of transformation. Thus, human beings are positioned to effect a change that impacts both the inherited material conditions as

²⁵⁰ For an example of such a critique, see Stathis Kouvelakis, "The Crisis of Marxism and the Transformation of Capitalism," *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism (CCCM)*, ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Boston: Brill, 2008) 23-38.

²⁵¹ Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," *Marx-Engels Reader* 143.

well as human activity, as Marx clarifies in continuing the third thesis. “The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionising practice.”²⁵² The productive power of human beings, in concert with the revolution in practice, impacts the possibility of human happiness in ways that could not be underestimated from a Marxian perspective. For a “socialized humanity,” the changing of the material conditions, including social relations (most significantly, the relations of production) entails the changing of the producers themselves.²⁵³ Marx’s revolutionary demands redefine not only the production of the world and our interaction with nature, but also have a decisive impact upon what we as human beings are and of what we are capable. It is, however, his insistence that this change be materialist and revolutionary that distinguishes Marx’s change from the ideological fantasies of the transformative power of human beings, as found in similar claims made by many thinkers of the Enlightenment.

Marx’s call for revolution emerges out of a demand for the present. However, this present is neither the abstracted and fleeting time of linear history nor is it the projection into the future (as found, for example, in Augustinian temporality). The recognition of human beings as producers of their conditions and themselves does not lead Marx to create a model of human construction in the vein of a ‘tabula rasa.’ “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please in circumstances they choose for themselves; rather they make it in present

²⁵² Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” *Marx-Engels Reader* 144.

²⁵³ As David Lachterman puts it, “Activation is at the same time substantiation. What man produces is not simply an external, material object but, more importantly, the overt evidence of his transformative prowess, i.e. of his being human.” Lachterman, *The Ontology of Production in Marx*, 7.

circumstances, given and inherited. Tradition from all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”²⁵⁴ This zombified representation of capitalist inheritance is not merely meant to provide a vibrant metaphor. For Marx, his historical analysis illuminates the force by which the past weighs upon the present. This burden appears in the form of class divisions, as well as the inheritance of ideological and semiotic resources that justify and reproduce the conditions of capitalist accumulation. This accumulation deepens the oppression of the living and limits the horizon under which demands for revolution can be expressed and enacted.

In the light of communist revolution, Marx does not view this inheritance as merely a burden, for it is only through the activation of the revolutionary resources that are inherited from the past that the possibility of human flourishing, or happiness, is revealed. In the “Critique of the Gotha Program,” Marx identifies not only the debilitating force of history but also clarifies the way in which the past provides the conditions for a revolutionary society:

“What we have to deal with...is a communist society, not as it has *developed* on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it *emerges* from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”²⁵⁵

In this passage, Marx responds to a new opponent from within the ranks of the left. It is no longer simply the “old materialists” of *Thesis III* who grasp the deterministic influence of the past upon the present circumstances but fail to recognize the productive role of human beings in creating the circumstances in which they live. In

²⁵⁴ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte*, trans. Terrell Carver, ed. Mark Cowling and James Martin (London: Sterling Press, 2002) 19.

²⁵⁵ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 529.

the “Critique of the Gotha Program,” Marx contends with the aspirations of a leftist vanguard that seeks to act as if their revolutionary strength could arise from nowhere. The over-zealous attempt to construct a communist society from scratch deteriorates by submitting to the dangers that were presented in the fantastical constructions of bourgeois political and social theory. Marx’s concern for human flourishing, therefore, appears as a concern for the present that sustains its materialist strength in an emergence out of the past, which serves as the womb from which the communist society can be born. “In bourgeois society...the past dominates the present; in Communist society, the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has not individuality.”²⁵⁶ The possibility of happiness, therefore, becomes dependent upon a materialist demand for living human beings; that is, a demand for the present that emerges from but is not enslaved by the past. Thus, Marx’s development of the “science of history” does not serve merely as an analytical tool, but also as an instrument by which revolutionary demands for living (i.e. social and historical) human beings could be realized.

In his more programmatic writings, Marx becomes less restrained in his confidence in the fruits of the revolution of the working class. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx heralds the coming of a classless society. “What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers,” Marx declares, “Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”²⁵⁷ While the status of this “inevitability” is a matter of debate, what is not contested is that Marx’s vision of

²⁵⁶ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 76.

²⁵⁷ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* 73.

human flourishing is woven into and out of the fabric of capitalist society. This fulfillment will not come as the realization of the promises of capitalist rule, but rather as the completion of the unraveling of its internal contradictions at the hands of the working class. Marx's vision of human happiness does not descend from a desire to flee from the conditions in which workers are oppressed, but rather emerges from the conditions that are developed within the rule of the capitalist class. In the 'world' that the workers have to 'win,' Marx locates the possibility of realizing the promise of happiness for living human beings. Marx, in this regard, is a steadfastly unequivocal writer in spite of the formidable forces that stand in the face of the liberation and flourishing of a "socialized humanity."

Marx's commitment finds expression in an ambivalent relation to human happiness, because under the conditions of capitalist production and dominant ideology have significantly coopted and usurped the critical and revolutionary force of an appeal to happiness. Under the oppressive conditions of capitalist rule, the critical aspect of Marx's writings address the condition of unhappiness in which the working class lives. Marx writes,

"What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?...First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, *does not feel content but unhappy*, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind."²⁵⁸

For Marx, the concern for human happiness must arise in the performance of the revolutionizing practice alongside a critique of the conditions of capitalist production and the promises of bourgeois ideology. Human happiness, or flourishing, must be couched within the call to arms in class struggle, which offers

²⁵⁸ Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," *The Marx-Engels Reader* 74.

not so much the promise of happiness as the enunciation of informed outrage.²⁵⁹ Marx's ambivalence toward the discussion of human happiness emanates, at least in part, from the importance of fostering revolutionary outrage and resistance to the redemptive promises of capitalist production, consumption, and politics.

In order to analyze the possibility of human happiness from a reading of Marx, it is imperative to understand the way in which human beings are created by and create their circumstances, thereby having a constitutive power over not only the world but also themselves. Marx's analysis of history and the process of commodification becomes central to the awareness not only that there needs to be change, but also what the nature of that change must be if it is to serve human flourishing. He does this while, at the same time, rejecting the impetus to reintroduce a teleological aim that would defeat the aspirations of his "new materialism." Marx's concern for human flourishing finds its most explicit elaboration in his ability to express the forms of unhappiness that reign under capitalism and the emancipatory elements that lie within Marx's demand for a revolutionizing of practice. This ability entails not only practically and intellectually transcending the given while sustaining the commitment to living individuals, but also harnessing the linguistic tools to express such an embodied transcendence. In Marxian terms, the capacity to champion human happiness will depend upon

²⁵⁹ This concern is echoed by Walter Benjamin when he points out that in the class struggle, the working class must not "forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren." Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Howard Eiland and Micheal W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003) 394.

developing an emancipatory “new poetics” that aspire toward human happiness while sustaining the spirit of sacrifice.

Marxian Practice and the Poetics of Production

The mode and relations of production become the central axis upon which Marx’s new materialism comes to define the possibility of human flourishing. Production is not merely something that human beings *do*, but rather is what we *are*. Human production first and foremost allows for the sustenance of human life. Marx does not, however, limit human production to this realm of bare necessity. While not constrained in this way, the Marxian concept of production does account for the need of food and shelter as a necessary point of departure upon which human beings are capable of free activity and expressive production. As Marx explains, “Life involves, before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing, and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs. The production of material life itself.”²⁶⁰ Even this limited form of production does not end with consumption, but rather out of such consumption arises the formation of new needs.²⁶¹ For Marx, the cycle of production and consumption is ceaseless in the formation of new needs that serve as the creative impetus from which human beings are concurrently productive and produced. The definition of human flourishing for Marx, therefore, develops out of the modes and relations of production that provide for the emergence of new forms

²⁶⁰ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader* 156.

²⁶¹ This generative account of production is reminiscent of Hobbesian felicity. “Felicity is a continual progresse of the desire, from one object to another,” writes Hobbes, “the attaining of the former, being still but the way to the later.” Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 70.

of free and expressive activity. It is evident that any Marxian definition of human flourishing will entail human beings engaged in free activity, but the manner by which human productivity could move from bare necessity to the flourishing of a free and active humanity calls for elaboration.

While on the one hand, Marx believes that human productivity has the emancipatory power to create a world in which human beings can realize and express themselves, on the other hand, labor ties human beings to their physical needs, to nature, and to the inherited material conditions in which they live. Hannah Arendt charges Marx with elevating the labor of necessity (*animal laborans*) over the labor of human beings in their constructive creativity (*homo faber*) and therefore reducing the possibility of human happiness under the thumb of a strict and restricting determinism.²⁶² Another way of phrasing this criticism is that Marx is reducing *praxis* to technical production that for him the free self-fulfilling activity of praxis becomes subsumed under the production that is tied to the material world, or nature. To accuse Marx of such a “theoretical workerism”²⁶³ is to fail to recognize the complexity of Marx’s notion of production; a notion that is neither limited to the realm of instrumental needs, nor to the power of free self-expression in the active production of themselves and the world. In order to navigate the manifold nature of the Marxian notion of production and its relation to human flourishing, it becomes necessary to understand how human beings as well as production are transformed by the material circumstances in which human beings produce, and the way in

²⁶² Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

²⁶³ Etienne Balibar, *Philosophy of Marx*, 41.

which that production gives birth to new needs that redefine the circumstances in which human beings express themselves.

The inherited material conditions in which we find ourselves are not, for Marx, a reality from which we can escape. While one can sympathize with the desire to escape from these conditions, revolutionizing practice and production are only possible through our embeddedness in inherited circumstances. The present is imbued with the forces of the past that must be reckoned with historically if there is at all to be a possibility of revolutionary change. This insight compels Marx to write in Volume 1 of *Capital* that, "Alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arriving from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production, with their accompanying train of anachronistic social and political relations. We suffer not only from the living, but from the dead."²⁶⁴ While the past weighs upon the present, it is the contradictions within and between the relations and modes of production that unleash the possibility of social revolution. In other words, present material conditions are riddled with the inheritance of the contradictions that lie at the core of capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. The capacity for revolutionary transformation becomes clear when one draws upon two insights that Marx has regarding the historicity of the present. The first insight is that the present, sensuous world does not arrive from an abstract eternity but rather as the result of the history of human productivity.²⁶⁵ And the

²⁶⁴ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 91.

²⁶⁵ In *The German Ideology*, Marx critiques Feuerbach's brand of materialist critique as submitting to the sensuous world as if it were some eternal reality, thus reinscribing a dualistic framework when he writes, "[Feuerbach] does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession

second insight is that change, even revolutionary change, emerges from the conditions that provide for the transformation into new modes and relations of production. “Mankind thus inevitably sets itself only such tasks as it is able to solve,” Marx writes, “since closer examination will always show that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution are already present or at least in the course of formation.”²⁶⁶ In other words, the sensuous world as it is appears to human beings as a product of industry that presents the possible formation of revolutionary changes in human practice and production, even if not in its ‘given’ form. The revolutionary role of internal contradictions in Marx’s theory crystallizes in the understanding of the present possibility of revolutionary change in human production.

There are two models of production that have guided modern philosophical thinking; one that can be described as ‘constructive’ and the other as ‘procreative.’ In redefining human free activity, or *praxis*, and technological production in the form of *poiesis*, Marx reshapes the traditional definition of production.²⁶⁷ Marx’s

of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its industry and its intercourse, modifying its social system according to the changed needs.” Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 170.

²⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Maurice Dobb (New York: International Publishers, 197) 21.

²⁶⁷ Rather than adhering to a traditional interpretation of Marx’s notion of production as privileging *poiesis* over *praxis*, one can find defenses of the redefinition of production in Marx in the writings of William Clare Roberts who claims that in Marx’s writings “Production has expanded to embrace new activities only by taking on certain structural features of the activities it now encompasses, thus transforming the very meaning of production” (William Clare Roberts, “The Reconstitution of Marxism’s Production Paradigm: The Cases of Benjamin, Althusser, and Marx,” *Philosophical Forum* 41 (4) 416.) and in the writings of Jason Edwards who, in his essay “The Materialism of Historical Materialism” claims that Marx redefines the category of production to include material practices that are “more broadly conceived as all those practices involving material bodies –organic and inorganic—that, from the point of view of historical materialism, can be seen as a totality of practices that reproduce the relations of production over time.” (Jason Edwards, “The Materialism of Historical Materialism,” *New Materialisms*, ed. by Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 283.) Both Roberts and Edwards defend a broadened notion of materialism and of

redefinition of production transforms the nature of our understanding of human activity and, at the same time, what it means to be human in a wholly non-essentialist way.²⁶⁸ The dissolution of the radical distinction between *poiesis* and *praxis* opens for Marx the possibility of redefining free activity without being encumbered by the counter-positioning of the acting and producing human being necessarily against 'nature,' 'the world,' or other human beings. Marx locates the modern aspiration of the constructive subject in Descartes' writings, in which the transformation in thought is all that is needed for there to be a transformation in production, such that man could subdue the limiting force of nature under the dominion of human intellect. In this manner, the Cartesian constructive model of human production allows for "free" human domain in the deterministic natural world. Marx characterizes the Cartesian model of production as a reflection of early capitalist ideology when he writes,

"Descartes, in defining animals as mere machines, saw with the eyes of the period of manufacture. The medieval view, on the other hand, was that animals were assistants to man...Descartes, like Bacon, thought that the altered methods of thought would result in an alteration in the shape of production, and the practical subjugation of nature by man."²⁶⁹

The Cartesian model defines free activity in terms of both its freedom from and subjugation of the material of production. From this modern, or as Marx puts it, "manufacture," model of production, the division of intellectual and physical labor

production that draws from the Marxian insight that human production is a dynamic concept that is transformed by both the human beings who produce and the material bodies upon which they produce.

²⁶⁸ Etienne Balibar expresses the scope of this transformation when he writes, "There is a whole empirical history of production (which will oblige the philosopher to become an economist, historian, technologist, ethnologist, etc.), but, above all because Marx removed one of philosophy's most ancient taboos: the radical distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*." Balibar, *Philosophy of Marx* 40.

²⁶⁹ Marx, *Capital, Volume 1* 512fn.

and the severance of man and nature are the cornerstones upon which 'freedom' can be found in intellectual construction and the domination of nature.²⁷⁰ For Marx, however, such a model is merely the reflection of an ideological semblance that enslaves not only nature, but the producer as well.

In contrast to the Cartesian constructive model, Marx introduces a unity of man and nature and offers a model of production that is procreative rather than constructive. Rather than being separated from nature in productive aims, human beings are wedded to the sensuous world. "The worker can create nothing without *nature*, without the *sensuous external world*. It is the material on which his labor is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces."²⁷¹

The Marxian model of production allies natural and human production by interweaving the producer with the matter in the process of production. It would, however, be an overstatement to suggest that man is merely extending natural creation, but rather that human production works upon the sensuous world in order to develop new needs and new modes of productivity. In other words, the imbrication of human production and nature is permanent, yet the capacity for human beings to unleash the present forces of nature is made possible through the enactment of the human power of providing distinct form to the matter of the sensuous world, whether that matter is inorganic as in the production of material goods or organic as in the case of the production and reproduction of social order.

²⁷⁰ It is worth noting that in the same footnote, Marx points out that "on the whole...the early English economists sided with Bacon and Hobbes as their philosophers, while, at a later period, Locke became 'the philosopher' κατ' ἐξοχὴν of political economy in England, France, and Italy." (Marx, *Capital* 512fn) See the previous chapter on Hobbes to find a fuller examination of Hobbes' relation to the constructive model of production.

²⁷¹ Marx, "Philosophic and Economic Manuscripts," *The Marx-Engels Reader* 72.

David Lachterman describes the entanglement of man and nature in human production, when he writes, “Marxian Man loves to bring nature out of hiding to make it show its true face, which turns out to be a human face.”²⁷²

Human production works upon the sensuous world (which includes both the matter of organic and inorganic objects), but, as his previously addressed critique of Feuerbach will attest, the sensuous world is a world that does not lie dormant, but is rather a product of human industry and embodies a living history. This living history is reflected not only in the production of material objects but also in the development of intellectual production. Human production is therefore bound to the sensuous world in all of its materiality, sociality, and historicity. Marx dissolves the fantasy of human creativity from nowhere and, by placing human production within the historicity of the sensuous world, illuminates the capacity of human beings to transform the world and themselves in their production. Just as modes and relations of production can only be fashioned out of the inherited material conditions, the reform, or emendation, of the intellect is only possible when one works through the inherited modes of intellectual production, albeit in a critical manner. “[The reform of consciousness] will transpire that it is not a matter of drawing a great dividing line between past and future, but of carrying out the thoughts of the past. And finally it will transpire that mankind begins no new work, but consciously accomplishes its old work.”²⁷³ Marx counters the Cartesian model of human production, not by merely subordinating human production to the attachment to the material world (i.e. subordinating the traditional free activity of

²⁷² Lachterman, *The Ontology of Production in Marx*, 16.

²⁷³ Marx, “For a Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing,” *Marx-Engels Reader* 15.

praxis to the 'tethered' production of *poesis*), but rather by transforming the distinction between human beings and the matter of their production. By weaving together the creative power of human beings with the material conditions in which they produce, Marx provides a non-utopian model of transformative production that identifies not only how the world reflects human productive capacity, but also how the modes and relations of production transform the producers themselves.

The transformative power of Marx's notion of production unfolds with the capacity to reveal how human production creates new needs and to expose the gaps or contradictions within the prevailing modes of production. The task that Marx attempts to tackle, for example, in *Capital*, is to historically demonstrate how the internal contradictions within the capitalist mode of production reveal the revolutionary possibilities that are born in these defects. Both the critical and emancipatory power of the analysis of human production is revealed within the lacunae of internal contradictions that open up the revolutionary possibilities at the heart of human production.²⁷⁴ On the one hand, production is not the mere making of objects for consumption, but rather the opening up of the possibility of the present for the development of new needs. In this sense, Marxian notions of production are inherently resistant to a utopian impetus, while at the same time, indicating the transformative power that lies within given modes and relations of production. On the other hand, the critical analysis of the given modes and relations of production reveals the internal contradictions within capitalist rule; and it is this critical analysis that is the task of historical materialism as laid out by Marx in

²⁷⁴ See, for example, Althusser "On the Materialist Dialectic" in *For Marx*. And, William Clare Roberts, "The Reconstitution of Marxism's Production Paradigm: The Cases of Benjamin, Althusser, and Marx."

Capital. As the opening up of the space in which new needs and new production can be developed, the Marxian notion of production allows for a clearer understanding of how it is within the capacity of human beings to transform the world. The critical strength of this notion arises from both its inherent resistance to utopian or teleological impulse as well as its capacity to reveal the avenues of revolutionary change in the service of human happiness.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx critiques Feuerbachian materialism in failing to recognize the sensuous world as a product of human industry. Marx is cognizant of the fact that the sensuous world, both in terms of physical and social order, is to a great extent a manifestation of human productivity. The productive and reproductive force of capitalism is bemoaned in *The Communist Manifesto* when he points out that capitalism “creates a world after its own image.”²⁷⁵ In the *Manifesto*, however, Marx reveals how the power of human productivity opens up the capacity to interrupt the forces that reproduce capitalist modes and relations of production. “Modern bourgeois society with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such a gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”²⁷⁶ The power that capitalist productive forces unleash will prove, according to Marx’s analysis, to cannibalize its own capacity to reproduce those conditions of production, leading to the opening of revolutionary possibilities. The capacity to transform the modes and relations of production, therefore, signifies a renewed ability to form a world that will prove

²⁷⁵ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 65.

²⁷⁶ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 66.

emancipatory and enhance human flourishing. The task of Marxian ‘science of history,’ aka historical materialism, is to provide the analytical and historical work to reveal, with historical specificity, how capitalist modes and relations of production serve to restrict self-affirming activity, while at the same time identifying the redefinition and transformative power of human productivity that is embedded within the given material conditions.

The scope of Marx’s insight regarding the development of human productive activity is not limited to an external relation to a ‘world’ that surrounds active human beings. Marx’s claim is even more dramatic, arguing that human beings not only have the revolutionary capacity to change the world, but that in changing the world, human beings are changing themselves. One is reminded of the passage in *The German Ideology*, where Marx explains, “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and *how* they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production.”²⁷⁷ Human production, therefore, not only determines the form of the world in which we live, but it is also constitutive of the ‘nature’ of living human beings. Under the rule of capitalist modes and relations of production, human beings, in their labor, are reduced in their activity to the level of commodities. “With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men.” Marx writes, “Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* –

²⁷⁷ Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 150.

and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally.”²⁷⁸ The possibility of human flourishing, therefore, hinges upon the capacity of human beings in their productive activity to form a “sensuous world” in which the modes of production and the relations of production allow for free activity. The paradox of capitalist production is that it unleashes the productive forces required to free human beings from the bare necessity of material survival, yet it does not allow for this freedom to find its expression within the relations of production. When Marx demands a revolution in the modes and relations of production, he is calling for the harnessing of these productive forces so that they are no longer “fetters” but are rather the motor with which to form a free humanity. At this point in our investigation, it is not clear whether such a transformation is possible, but what is clear is that, according to Marx, the possibility of happiness for living human beings is contingent upon the modes and relations of human production that form both the material conditions in which we live as well as what we are as human beings.

An investigation of the possibility of human happiness, for Marx, will depend upon the critique of present modes and relations of production and an analysis of the internal contradictions that reveal the revolutionary possibilities that lie within present material conditions. The relation between analysis of production and the possibility of human happiness is found in the nature of human productive activity, i.e. labor. Labor can serve both as the means toward subjugation as well as emancipation. David Lachterman identifies this “paradox of labor” when he writes, “Labor is, at one and the same time, the promise of Promethean striving and the

²⁷⁸ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 71.

curse of Edenic exile.”²⁷⁹ Marx identifies the doubled nature of human labor in recognizing that it is the outward manifestation and affirmation of living human beings, but it also can serve, especially in capitalist society, as an activity that deepens the laborers subjugation and estrangement from their own activity. Rather than affirming, labor has the power to entrench the laborer into the conditions of their own oppression. As bleak as this may seem, Marx’s revolutionary theory of production and productive activity concedes that the possibility of emancipation lies within the very conditions of production (division of labor, private property, etc.) that have led to the ‘estrangement’ of labor. However, in unleashing the productive power of capitalism, bourgeois society has exposed itself to the possibility of relations of production that, in Marx’s analysis, are not based upon an oppressive class structure. While it remains to be seen with full historical specificity whether this analysis bears fruit in making a claim for human happiness, Marx identifies that modes and relations of production serve as the locus upon which an evaluation of the possibility of human happiness must originate. The caveat, however, is that this is a dynamic origin within which there is a persistent opening up toward new forms of production that shift to reflect the social and historical conditions from which they emerge. It is from this internal absence that Marx is able to develop his revolutionary theory of production into a “science of history,” i.e. historical materialism.

²⁷⁹ Lachterman, *The Ontology of Production in Marx*, 16.

The Science of Emancipation

“There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.”²⁸⁰

The passage above is a response to an editor’s concern that the introductory sections of *Capital* will prove too challenging to for the French public. Marx, unapologetically, responded to the editor by satirically echoing the aspirations of Hobbesian science of politics. Marx develops a science of social organization that is committed to the realization of human flourishing for living human beings, and in having such a commitment Marx is compelled to unpack the internal contradictions that buttress bourgeois authority in capitalist modes and relations of production. In order to reveal the nature of these internal contradictions (as well as potentialities), Marx develops a form of scientific investigation that looks not only at the relationship between laborers and the modes of production, but also reveals the ways in which these contradictions are concealed from those living under bourgeois rule. Marx engages in scientific investigation along two lines of critique, the critique of ideology and the critique of political economy. While both investigations perform the destructive function of opposing various means of oppression, they also serve to set the affirmative task of emancipation in the light of the material conditions in their various physical and psychical manifestations. The critique of ideology entails identifying the modes of domination (in conjunction with the authority of the state) as reflected in human consciousness. The critique of political economy turns to the modes of domination that are present to living individuals as they are drawn into the capitalist marketplace of labor. As Marx puts it, “Political economy conceals the

²⁸⁰ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, “Preface to the French Edition,” 104.

estrangement inherent in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production.”²⁸¹ It therefore becomes the task of Marx’s science to lay bare the “real” contradictions that inhere within capitalist relations and modes of production and their impact upon laborers. This will require that the science Marx heralds must begin with living individuals and the relations between those individuals in their fullness, i.e. in their social and historical complexity.

The initial stages of Marx’s introduction to the development of a science take on two forms. In one form, Marx rejects the claims of empiricism and positivism that propose that the object of knowledge is given to the scientific observer. As becomes evident in both his critique of ideology and perhaps even more in his account of commodity fetishism, any claim to knowledge regarding human social organization will require that the individual, in the form of the subject, is recognized as a product of a division between abstracted labor power and the conditions in which human beings produce. Human social relations thus elude the empiricist desire to treat the isolated individuals as the raw material and foundation of a social science.²⁸² In order for Marx to develop a theory of human social dynamics and power, he will need to resist the temptation to treat what is the product of human construction and historical development (the subject, juridical

²⁸¹ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” 73.

²⁸² Marx criticizes the Hegelian theory of the state because of its treatment of the subject as the foundation upon which the state is constituted. *The Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, Marx identifies the mystification of individuals in Hegel’s theory of the state when he writes, “If Hegel has set out from real subjects as the bases of the state he would not have found it necessary to transform the state in a mystical fashion into a subject...The mystical substance, therefore becomes the actual subject, and the real subject appears as something else, as an element of the mystical substance.” Karl Marx, “The Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” *Marx-Engels Reader*, 18.

person, citizen, etc.) as the given foundation of that theory. The individual, as it turns out, is the product and impetus that guides ideology formation.²⁸³ Marx is compelled to investigate the origins of the individual as social products in the relations between the living individuals and the modes of production and domination that guide those relations. Marx sets out to develop a theory of the conditions of oppression that produce ideal subjects in either the bourgeois state (ideological critique) or of the market (commodity fetishism), by looking at human beings in their practical, active relations. Thus, in the *German Ideology*, Marx writes, “We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises.”²⁸⁴ When it comes to the “seed” of Marxian knowledge regarding human social relations, it becomes quickly evident that the starting point of this knowledge is an understanding of living human beings in the conditions of their activity. In this manner, the determination can be made whether the material conditions, which necessarily include social relations, are conducive to self-affirming activity; that is, to what extent they are conducive to the possibility of human flourishing or happiness.

²⁸³ Luis Althusser latches onto this Marxian insight when he writes, “The category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of ‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects.” Luis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001) 116.

²⁸⁴ Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader* 154.

The Marxian pursuit of knowledge is guided primarily by the interests of emancipating the working class from the debilitating order of bourgeois rule. In order to develop a body of knowledge that draws upon the strength of materialist critique against the forces of ideological or fetishized abstraction, Marx shifts the traditional scientific perspective of an isolated observer working upon a given object to the dialectical relationship of a knower and object that are both socially and historically contextualized. It is the relationship between the context and knowledge that distinguishes Marx's dialectical materialism from the Cartesian image of the isolated knower constructing a world of knowledge from scratch. Despite the fact that the actual labor of scientific inquiry is a practice done in solitude, Marx readily points out that, "when I am active *scientifically*... then I am *social*."²⁸⁵ The sociality of his scientific activity is not merely in the fact that knowledge is shared, but that knowledge of living human beings entails an understanding that is necessarily social and historical. The materialist perspective that forms Marxian dialectics recognizes the inheritance of the object upon which new knowledge is formed.²⁸⁶ For Marxian dialectics, the labor of knowledge is not the 'other' or the 'negation' of ideology, but rather entails the historical working

²⁸⁵ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts Of 1844," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 86.

²⁸⁶ Althusser, in highlighting the distinction between Hegelian dialectics and Marx's dialectical materialism, situates the starting point of materialist knowledge of universal abstractions, when he writes, "a real understanding of materialism reveals that this 'labour' is not a labour of the universal, but a labour *on* a pre-existing universal, a labour whose aim and achievement is precisely to refuse this universal the abstractions or the temptations of 'philosophy' (ideology), and to bring it back to its condition by force; to the condition of a scientifically specified universality. If the universal has to be this specificity, we have no right to invoke a universal which is not the universal of this specificity." The "specificity" in this passage provides the dialectical element from which the universal is abstracted and upon which it emerges and then reflects back upon that specific historical and social context of its emergence. In other words, the object of knowledge is received from the material conditions in which it is formed and performed.

through of the ideological abstractions that hold sway upon our thinking in their historical and social specificity.

This is not to say, however, that human labor (intellectual or otherwise) is in no way constructive or that it is merely procreative from the conditions in which human labor is performed. Rather, Marx identifies the role of the human capacity to 'transcend' the dictates of the material world to the extent that human beings are constructors. Marx writes,

"What distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally."²⁸⁷

The logic of the materialist dialectics that guides Marx's theory of knowledge recognizes that a central component of human intellectual and physical production is the capacity to ideally conceptualize the product upon which they will labor. The Cartesian constructive model of human production and Hegelian dialectics share this aspect of Marx's thinking, but differ from it fundamentally in that Marx's production is always rigorously situated in a dialectical relation between the capacity to conceptualize ideally and to remain situated within the socio-historical context in which such labor is to be performed. In this manner, Marx dissolves the traditional poles of determination and freedom, and instead places the possibility of realizing the free activity of human production by sustaining its situated emergence within the specificity of its material conditions.

The aim of Marx's science of history, also referred to as 'historical materialism,' becomes the task of identifying, and laying bare, how the modes of

²⁸⁷ Marx, *Capital, Volume 1*, 284

consciousness can mystify or stupefy the experience of real social relations. “The fact is...that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations.” Marx enters empirical observation into his inquiry with a great amount of caution, recognizing that empirical facts are often the products of ideological or fetishized distortions of the world. This does not, however, mean that Marx turns his back on empirical observation entirely. He continues, “Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production.”²⁸⁸ In “The German Ideology,” Marx critiques the manner in which, on the one hand, Hegelian idealism covers over the contradictions that persist despite a supposed “negation of the negation,” and thus serving as an expression of bourgeois ideology. On the other hand, Marx is taking exception to the self-defeating position of reductive materialists and anarchists who believe that the task of materialist critique is to do away with abstraction in favor of an idealized notion of matter. Etienne Balibar offers a concise account of Marx’s dialectical critique of ideological forms of thought, in writing,

“The point is no longer to denounce the abstraction of ‘universals’, of ‘generalities’, of ‘idealities’, by showing that abstraction substitutes itself for real individuals; it now becomes possible to study the genesis of those abstractions, their production by individuals, as a function of the collective or social conditions in which they think and relate to one another. And, as a result, instead of being endlessly faced with an all-or-nothing choice (either accepting or rejecting all abstractions en bloc), one has a criterion by which it is possible to discriminate between those abstractions which represent real knowledge and those which merely have a function of misrecognition or mystification; and, even better, to discriminate between circumstances in which the use of abstractions is mystificatory and those in which it is not.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Marx, “The German Ideology,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 155.

²⁸⁹ Balibar, *The Philosophy of Marx*, 36.

Marx's critique of ideology enacts a performance of the "new materialism" that heralds a new method of investigating not only the material and economic factors, but also and in conjunction, the intellectual and/or ideological constructs that guide social and political life. This task is expanded in Marx's critique of political economy that consumed the later years of his life. Marx's treatment of the history of the development of human production in *Capital* reveals both the oppressive modes and relations of production along with the spiritualized forms of deception that serve to mask and sustain the status quo. He initiates a method of inquiry (or a science, if you prefer) that has the dual task of destroying the means of oppression that are available to the bourgeoisie, and of opening up the threads that hold the possibility of enacting a change in the service of human flourishing. William Clare Roberts, in recognizing the debt that Althusser and Benjamin's notions of production owe to Marx, wrote, "It is not where your practice starts, but how it transforms the starting point that matters."²⁹⁰ By breaking down the supposed 'origin' of political economy in the form of commodities, Marx is able to show how the fetishization of that origin has led to the exploitation of the working class. At the same time, Marx is able to unravel the threads that hold capitalist production, unleashing the emancipatory possibilities to effect a transformation of the status quo.

The Myth of Origins and the Commodification of Labor

In Marx's critique of political economy, he sets out from the vulgar economists' supposed 'raw material' by way of an analysis of commodities. For bourgeois economists commodities serve as the given material upon which a theory

²⁹⁰ Roberts 427.

of economic production can be constructed. Marx, however, there finds the fractured beginnings of an internal contradiction. He recognizes that the power of bourgeois economic theory lies in the apparent given-ness of commodities as the building block of that knowledge when he writes, “A commodity appears at first sight to be an extremely obvious, trivial thing.” The commodity will also provide the starting point of Marx’s historical analysis; rather than serving as the building block upon which his theory will stand, however, Marx treats it in his historical analysis as the entryway through which he can reveal the mystified elements that lie at the heart of bourgeois ‘experience.’ For the analysis of the commodity “brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”²⁹¹ Value becomes attached to commodities in a manner that conceals the sources of that value under a “metaphysical” veneer. Marx explains that such value is divided into use-value and exchange-value, revealing the fact that in order for an object to become a commodity, it then must attain the thoroughly social form of exchange-value. The commodity becomes “fetishized” by hiding its social character in the relations of production and the “congealed labour-time” that dictate its value. This mystified ground discloses the fact that there is an internal absence at the core of this supposed building block, belying the sense of given-ness attached to the commodity. The “fetishization” of the commodity, or the folding of this dual character of the production of commodities and the production of value into a unified whole, is how Marx identifies the construction of the bourgeois ‘objective,’ and thoroughly fetishized, world.

²⁹¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 163.

The fetishization of the world of commodity exchange, as it turns out, expands in scope as Marx reveals the manner in which real human productivity and labor relations are reified into the commodity form. “Initially the commodity appeared to us as an object with a dual character, possessing both use-value and exchange value.” Marx writes, “Later on it was seen that labour, too, has a dual character: in so far as it finds its expression in value, it no longer possesses the same characteristics as when it is the creator of use-values.”²⁹² Marx is examining the constitution of social objectivity by way of commodities, introducing not only the world of objects qua things but also the social world, as they structure the relations of exchange. While the “theological” element of the commodities and commodified labor permeates the appearance of the ‘objective’ world, the internal absence at its core shifts understanding of relations of production and social relations in general. At the same time, this profane revelation sentences the world constituted by commodity fetishism to self-destruction.

Armed with the theory of commodity fetishism, the critique of the modern subject or individual emerges from the notion of commodified labor. The subject is no longer the starting point of forming a social theory, but rather the product of the historical development of capitalist production. The critique that Marx levies against the ‘vulgar economists’ is that their reflection upon the social order occurs “*post festum*”²⁹³ and treats the products of a historical process as an eternal given. Althusser latches onto Marx’s critique of the isolated individual or modern subjectivity when he writes,

²⁹² Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 131-132.

²⁹³ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 168.

“If the essence of man is to be a universal attribute, it is essential that *concrete subjects* exist as absolute givens; this implies an empiricism of the subject. If these empirical individuals are to be men, it is essential that each carries in himself the whole human essence, if not in fact, at least in principle; this implies an idealism of the essence. So empiricism of the subject implies idealism of the essence and vice versa.”²⁹⁴

The concrete individual becomes abstracted through the process of exchange of labor, losing any connection to living human beings and instead taking on the fetishized, or in this case one could also say reified, form.²⁹⁵ The concrete individual or producer is destroyed under the weight of capitalist relations of production that cannot conceive of embodied individuals. The inheritance of the economists who are commenting on the social world promotes the solidification of the historical process that has turned concrete producers into tools for the reproduction of the conditions of exploitation, in the form of commodified labor.

The laborer in the capitalist relations of production is no longer working toward their own expression of self-affirmation, or even in their own interest. Through the engagement in productive labor, workers recreate the conditions that perpetuate their own treatment as a thing, abstracted for the machinery of capitalist production. This becomes evident in Marx’s treatment of the valorization of labor and the analysis of the production of surplus-value on the backs of exploited labor.

²⁹⁴ Luis Althusser, *For Marx*, “Marxism and Humanism”, 228.

²⁹⁵ This abstraction that allows for exploitation in the labor market finds its echo in the religious reflection of Christianity and the belief in individualized salvation. Marx explains, “For a society of commodity producers, whose general social relation of production consists in the fact that they treat their products as commodities, hence as values, and in this material form bring their individual, private labours into relation with each other as homogenous human labour, Christianity with its religious cult of man in the abstract, more particularly in its bourgeois development, i.e. in Protestantism, Deism, etc., is the most fitting form of religion.” (Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, 172) In other words, Christianity provides the greatest reflection of the social order of capitalist rule because it reflects the notion of individuals, as they are workers in the labor market. That is to say, wholly abstracted and leveled ideally in order to cover over the concrete inequalities in their actual relations of labor. Whether it is found in the Christian God, a sovereign, or in the capitalist, the worker, as isolated individual, is provided with an essence from above that directs concrete relations below.

While productive activity is the source of self-affirmation under conditions in which the worker reaps enjoyment and ownership from the products of labor, under the relations and modes of production that define capitalist order, the productive activity turns against the interest of the laborer. Marx writes,

“The concept of productive worker...implies not merely a relation between the activity of work and its useful effect, between the worker and the product of his work, but also a specifically social relation of production, a relation with a historical origin which stamps the worker as capital’s direct means of valorization. To be a productive worker is therefore not a piece of luck, but a misfortune.”²⁹⁶

The fetishization of commodified labor leads not only to the reification of abstract labor for theoretical reflection, it also has the consequence of manipulating living labor into the confines of the abstracted ‘scientific’ organization of labor. By organizing productive labor according to the dictates of ‘scientific’ organization (most famously found in Taylorist or Fordist models for the organization of labor), the active living human beings are reduced to quantified elements of a structure built to promote profit at the expense of the worker. In other words, the disembodied, or fetishized labor force suffers doubly; firstly, in the construction of the conditions in which living labor is abstracted, and secondly, in the theoretical reflection of that order by economists who treat the contemporary “individual” or “subject” in their fetishized form.

The analysis of commodity fetishism opens the critique of bourgeois rule beyond the horizon of economic production. Marx’s analysis of commodities discloses the manner in which the conditions for bourgeois rule are reproduced also in the “superstructure” of political, intellectual, and cultural life, as well as in our everyday interactions. While the commitment to revolutionizing modes and

²⁹⁶ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 644.

relations of production is first and foremost what Marx envisions in overturning the debilitating authority of bourgeois rule, this does not mean that Marx's critique is narrowed to the economic field. Antonio Gramsci emphasizes the need to recognize the necessarily broadened scope of Marxist critique in writing,

“Not only does the philosophy of praxis not exclude ethico-political history but that, indeed, in its most recent stage of development, it consists precisely in asserting the moment of hegemony as essential to its conception of the state and to the accrediting of the cultural fact, of cultural activity, of a cultural front as necessary alongside the merely economic and political ones.”²⁹⁷

Gramsci acknowledges the role that cultural life can have in bolstering the 'hegemonic' power of the ruling class, and this insight has continued to gain influence in Marxist research over the last century.²⁹⁸ By opening up of the center, or “kernel,” of bourgeois economic theory, Marx not only placed the issues of modes and relations of production as the core focus of revolutionizing the social order, but he also opened up new vistas of critical examination in political, intellectual, and cultural life. However, a critique of cultural activity, for example, that is not concomitant with a critique of economic and political factors, runs the danger of slipping back into the realm of ideology. Unless critique is cognizant of the defects within the social order that creates the conditions in which self-destructive ideology is able to thrive, then the force of the fetishistic or ideological elements will continue to hold sway. Althusser writes:

“Marx never believed that an ideology might be dissipated by knowledge of it, for the knowledge of this ideology, as the knowledge of its conditions of possibility, of its structure, of its specific logic and of its practical role, within a given society, is simultaneously knowledge of the conditions of its necessity.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 194.

²⁹⁸ The influence of this insight can be found extensively in the writings of Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Frankfurt School writers, for example.

²⁹⁹ Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism” 230.

That is to say, awareness of the forms that ideology and fetishism take within a given society does not even have critical force without the identification of the necessity of those forms within the material conditions from which they arise. The expansion of the scope of Marx's critique of bourgeois rule finds its materiality and strength in its persistent, dialectical relation to the material conditions of production. These conditions are reflected, even if not in the form of a direct causal relation, in the 'superstructure' (cultural, intellectual, political, etc.) that maintains and deepens the hegemonic rule of the bourgeoisie.³⁰⁰ Marx's critique, as it turns out, not only destroys the apparently solid origin of bourgeois theory, it also opens up new horizons for critique.

Marx follows his earlier insights from the *Theses on Feuerbach* that the point is not merely to interpret, but to "change" the world, when he offers his vision of the overcoming of the force of mystification within society:

"The religious reflections of the real world can, in any case, vanish only when the practical relations of everyday life between man and man, and man and nature, generally present themselves to him in a transparent and rational form. The veil is not removed from the countenance of the social life-process, i.e. the process of material production, until it becomes production by freely associated men, and stands under their conscious and planned control. This, however, requires that society possess a material foundation, or a series of material conditions of existence, which in their turn are the natural and spontaneous product of a long and tormented historical development."³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Marx points out that one of the ideological resources employed by bourgeois rule is the narrowing of the definition of productive labor, reducing the broader category of productive labor to the narrower definition of labor that creates surplus-value for the capitalist. "The concept of productive labour also becomes narrower." Marx explains, "Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is, by its very essence, the production of surplus-value. The worker produces not for himself, but for capital" (Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 644). Thus it becomes important for Marx to not fall into the trap set by capitalist definitions of production, but to extend both his definition, and his critique to aspect of human life that are outside of the 'vulgar' definition of productive activity as that which generates surplus-value. This means including everyday practices that reproduce the social order into the notion of productive activity, which has been the impetus to extensive Marxist research.

³⁰¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 173.

The necessity that dictates the metaphysical reflections in a given society are revealed only to a society of individuals who are “freely associated” in their production. While the conditions that provide the necessity for these mystified reflections arise within the process of historical development, there remains a possibility that human beings would not be subject to these mystifications to the extent that the material conditions are under the “conscious and planned control” of these free individuals. The task that Marx sets for the critic is to identify the material possibilities emergent in the historical process that may allow for such free association. For Marx, unveiling the internal contradictions within the given mode and relations of production and their mystified reflections is a product of the inherent possibilities that lie within a historically specific set of material conditions.

Marx distinguishes his form of ‘scientific’ analysis from the modern desire, exemplified in Cartesian methodology, in that his investigation into human activity and knowledge is always bound to the social and historical context in which said knowledge arises. Following from this insight, Marx engages in a thoroughgoing critique of the impetus for inquiry to “start from scratch.” This includes a rejection of what Althusser describes as the “economic cogito,” treating knowledge as a-historical, a-social, or what amounts to the same thing, based upon a mythological origin. Whereas Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism dispels with the mythical object of origin, his analysis of “primitive accumulation” provides the critique of the capitalist story of origin. Marx writes, “So-called primitive accumulation... is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears primitive because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of

the mode of production corresponding to capital.”³⁰² The appeal to a story of origin is complicit in the attempt to treat as eternal what has a history, a history marked by the expropriation of the means of production from the producer. In revealing the bourgeois economists’ conceptual myth of origin in the form of the commodity, and in doing the same with the historical myth of origin in so-called ‘primitive accumulation,’ Marx unravels the myth of capitalism’s seemingly eternal nature, as well as the ideological forms that support this myth. Marx is able to destroy these myths by developing a method of inquiry that, even unlike the “old materialism,” does not treat any of its objects of inquiry as given, but rather draws its material strength from placing those objects of inquiry as situated in their social and historical context.

Revolutionary Chasm and the Materiality of Time

The revolutionary call for human flourishing requires that one consider human beings in their historicity. Two insights guide Marx’s treatment of history; the first is the primacy of production, and the second is the role of class struggle as the motor for history. Following from these two insights, Marx is able to challenge the ideological forms of historical narrative that bolster the rule of the status quo as well as elucidate the manner through which revolutionary transition is made possible. In *The German Ideology*, Marx offers a definition of history that arises from the “first historical act” of production through the formation and development of capitalist rule, when he writes, “History is nothing but the succession of the separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive

³⁰² Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 875.

forces handed down to it by all preceding generations, and thus, on the one hand, continues the traditional activity in completely changed circumstances and, on the other, modifies the old circumstances with a completely changed activity.”³⁰³ With this definition, Marx has woven the elements of inheritance and transformation that arise with critical knowledge of the history of political economy. Marx wishes not merely to state the historical “facts” as given, but rather to show how such a givenness becomes possible, and in what way historical knowledge can provide the impetus for a revolutionary intervention into the historical process.

The primacy that Marxian theory of history gives to production and the economic factors that determine the mode and relations of production provide the departure point from which he develops an empowered body of knowledge regarding human activity. While the “new materialism” placed history at the core of materialist theory, Marx still must distinguish what is meant by a ‘materialist’ history in contrast to Hegelian and/or bourgeois capitalist economic theory that also incorporates a notion of history into their theory of human social activity and order. The revolution in materialist theory involves a notion of history that will destroy teleological and linear notions of history that endorse the narrative of progress, thus justifying the present order as the product of an ‘eternal,’ or at the very least, ‘natural’ order. Marx presents a distinct version of materialist history that operates in contradistinction to bourgeois conceptions of history, when he writes,

“This conception of history depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the material production of life itself, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this mode of production (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; and to show it in its action as the State, to explain the different theoretical products and

³⁰³ Marx, “The German Ideology,” 172.

forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., etc., and trace their origins and growth by that basis; by which means, of course, the whole thing can be depicted in its totality (and, therefore, too, the reciprocal action of these various sides on one another)."³⁰⁴

Rather than being defined by consciousness, historical transition would now be revealed through the threads that are woven together to form and sustain a given mode of production and concomitant social totality, as well as the ways in which those threads either unravel or coalesce in forming that totality. By placing human production at the center of a materialist notion of history, Marx is able to identify the focus of theoretical knowledge that not only reflects the material conditions in which it becomes manifest, but seeks to identify the means by which to transform the historical process toward the possibility of human flourishing.

While the primary factor in the formation of political, philosophical, and cultural practices can be found in the “structural” economic factors of the mode and relations of production, this does not mean that those practices have a directly causal relation to economic factors. Gramsci takes issue with such a reductionist reading of Marx when he writes,

“The claim (presented as an essential postulate of historical materialism) that every fluctuation of politics and ideology can be presented and expounded as an immediate expression of the structure, must be contested in theory as primitive infantilism, and combated in practice with the authentic testimony of Marx, the author of concrete political and historical works.”³⁰⁵

One of the “concrete political and historical works” to which Gramsci is referring is Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, an analysis of the economic and political factors that were at play in France after the defeat of the 1848 revolution and the successful coup by Louis Bonaparte. While it is outside of the scope of this

³⁰⁴ Marx, “The German Ideology,” 164.

³⁰⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 190.

chapter to delve into all of the nuances, hiccups, reactions, interests, intrigues and disappointments that were at play in Marx's historical account, what is relevant are the complexities that Marx was able to draw out regarding the relation between the economic 'structure' and the political and ideological superstructure. Although economic factors maintain their primacy, there is rarely a direct line of causality to explain the confluence of factors that lead to the variegated expressions reflected in the superstructure. In other words, the individual historical moment allows for a multiplicity and diversity of expressions in the superstructure. This reality becomes exacerbated with bourgeois rule, where the contradictions between the mode and relations of production become more pronounced. Marx is able provide a departure point from which to understand how the threads of social organization are woven together or become tense, frayed, or broken. While Marx's primacy of production sets his knowledge of history in motion, the richness of Marx's analysis of the interaction between the 'structure' and the 'superstructure' cannot be reduced to a direct relation of causality and his analysis of the transition from one historical period or epoch to the next cannot be reduced to linearity.

The motor of history is not found in mental ideas, beliefs, and aspirations, but rather in the internal contradictions that emerge within a social order, particularly those between the modes and relations of production. These contradictions are played out in class struggle that acts as the engine that propels social change. Marx writes, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle."³⁰⁶ This insight follows directly from Marx's focus upon material

³⁰⁶ Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, 60.

production, starting with the “first historical acts” by which human beings develop the means to sustain life. The passage of history can be traced, according to Marx, not by looking to the history of ideas (at least not primarily), but by tracing the division of society from those who maintain ownership of the means of production and those from whom the means of production have been expropriated. To understand what constitutes a historical era, and thus how life is lived for active individuals, one must look at the nature of the social divisions that have defined that age. What Marx points out is that the agent of history, contrary to the belief in the movement of an ‘idea’ or some eternal progression, can be identified with class struggle. While the debates within Marxism regarding the constitution and definition of the class structure within capitalist society continue to this day, the insight that Marx depicts in his description of the centrality of class struggle provides the framework from which, and under what conditions, a historical conjuncture could become revolutionary. In other words, Marx declares that the contradictions between the mode of production and the concurrent relations of production have historically provided the grounds for revolutionary change.

In identifying class struggle as the motor for historical change, Marx has not only countered ideological historical narratives in favor of a materialist notion of history, he has also interjected into historical analysis the tools for recognizing the conditions that could provide for the realization of human flourishing. Marx brings to the fore the notion of the “real contradiction” as a force for the formation of change. Real contradictions, for Marx, set the historical stage for revolutionary change, rather than a post-hoc interjection of ‘meaning’ into historical

transformation that merely treats history as a means for the justification of the status quo. Marx critiques the “bourgeois economists,” and Hegel specifically, for engaging in such an ameliorating project. His criticism hinges upon the fact that, for example in the case of Hegel, his dialectic is established formally and only subsequently filled with the “content” of historical ‘fact.’ What makes Hegelian dialectic particularly compelling, yet in Marx’s view detrimental, is that it draws upon the “bad side” of history, acknowledging the “slaughterbench of history” as the dialectical play in which even catastrophe can be justified as the necessary power of the negative playing itself out in human history. Marx establishes the task of the new materialist analysis of history as thinking the materiality of real contradictions in history. In *Capital*, Marx historically lays out how the tendencies that allow for capitalist social order to persist are also the same tendencies that clash in the form of real contradictions.³⁰⁷ While the demise of capitalist rule is inevitable, the nature of this inevitability is dictated by the confluence of both material conditions and collective action. That is to say, while Marx does prophesize the end of capitalist rule, the way that these real contradictions play themselves out is the challenge of each historical moment, or in what Walter Benjamin poses as the problem of the “time of the now.”

³⁰⁷ Balibar seizes upon this insight when he writes, “The entire originality of the Marxist dialectic lies, then, in the possibility of unreservedly thinking that contradiction *is not an appearance*, even ‘in the final tally’ or ‘at infinity’. It is not even a ‘ruse’ of nature, like Kantian *unsociable sociability*, or a ‘ruse’ of reason, like Hegelian alienation. Labour-power keeps on being transformed into a commodity and thereby enters the form of the capitalist collective...yet, such a process involves an incoercible residue, *both* in the individuals and in the collective... And it is this material impossibility, which inscribes the reversal of the capitalist tendency in necessity, whatever the point at which it occurs.” Balibar, *Philosophy of Marx*, 102.

Marx's theory of history must reckon with the capacity to understand the nature of historical transformation. This theory resists falling back into an idealist understanding of history through a critique of notions of progress and resistance to an evolutionary account that falls back upon a 'naturalized' notion of a teleological end to history. The impulse to teleological accounts of history can be seen through Marx's own difficulties in resolving the explanation of historical change while resisting the imposition of ideological narratives. Marx's rejection of the linearity of time allows him to recognize the historicity of any given present while identifying the various historical threads (with modes and relations of production taking the primary place in the concurrence) of what Marx describes as the "historical process." It is safe to say that the problem of the materiality of time and the insistence upon the historical treatment of the present, with its less-than-evident actualities and possibilities, posed a consistent challenge to Marx, as well as to subsequent practitioners of historical materialism. While the extent to which Marx was successful in this endeavor is a matter of controversy, the very proposal of the dilemma of thinking historical transition, transformation, and materiality as a task for critical thinking is a central aspect of the inheritance left by Marx.³⁰⁸

There are three dilemmas that arise in Marx's presentation of his theory of history. The first is the problem of thinking transition or transformation while not succumbing to a teleological or even an evolutionary account of history. The second

³⁰⁸ Marx exhibits his anti-teleological interpretation of historical transition in his account of the movement from feudal to capitalist society. Rather than a culmination, capitalism is a product of dissolution in which the threads that are manifested in the real contradictions of feudal society can no longer be sustained. Marx writes in *Capital*, "The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter set free the elements of the former." Marx, *Capital: Volume 1* 875.

confronts the problems coeval with the explanatory power of the primacy of production and the nature of the relation between the 'structure' and the 'superstructure'. Marx understood the nuanced nature of this relation and complicates the simple traditional division between what is symbolic and what is material. While Marx is committed to the primacy of production, what is entailed by production is problematized within his writings (cf. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte*), and has been taken up by Marxists who have been inspired to examine the reciprocations and reverberations that mark the relationship between the structure and the superstructure.³⁰⁹ Third, Marx's historical account in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* also places the reductive claims of class analysis and antagonism into question. The centrality of class struggle is of fundamental significance for Marx's account of history to be sure, but that a variety of societal forces play into a given historical moment which are not easily identifiable into the division of "bourgeoisie" and "proletarian" camps was already quite evident to Marx, and has proven restrictive to understanding the multiplicity of forces engaged in present-day struggle. The resolution, or even exhaustive account, of the dilemmas opened up through Marx's treatment of history, is far beyond the scope of the present work, but the nature of the challenges left in the wake of Marx's writings helps to focus upon and constructively complicate what it means to think of a present condition as a product and possibility born out of the processes of history.

In developing a method to accompany his call for a "new materialism," Marx introduces what would be referred to as a "science of history" or "historical

³⁰⁹ Gramsci, Judith Butler, LaClau, Zizek, to name a few of the more prominent names that have taken up this mantle in various expressions.

materialism.” Marx did not employ these terms, but if one would like to refer to Marx’s treatment of the history of social transformation as either a “science” or as “materialist,” one will have to be disabused of traditional understandings of these terms. Marx’s “materialism” is distinguished from traditional forms of reductive materialism that, from the Marxist perspective, succumbs to an idealism of the given. Marx’s “science” does not share the traditional perspective of the detached, ‘objective’ observer, but rather aims at revealing the historical threads upon which revolutionary transformation can be effected. In other words, a proper evaluation of historical materialism could only be performed insofar as it serves as a body of knowledge that informs revolutionary transformation in a given historical context. Rather than a static collection of facts, Marx’s treatment of history guides both Marx and his inheritors by focusing and providing the tools for the analysis of the transformative potency of a given context. Marxist knowledge of history is not a passive awareness, but rather a determination of the capacity of intervening revolutionary activity into a historical moment.³¹⁰ By unveiling the threads that compose the historical process, Marx’s treatment of history aims primarily toward unleashing the conditions inherent in a historical moment that are revolutionary; that is, those moments that allow for the material transformation toward the possibility of human flourishing.

³¹⁰ It is this mode of intervention that compelled Lukacs to refer to historical materialism as an “instrument of war.” Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1971), 224.

Conjunctures of Unhappiness

Marx's critique of capitalist society is waged against the conditions in which the workers are stripped of their access to the social rewards for their labor, as well against the "reflections" of consciousness that sustain and reproduce the capitalist social order. The history of the development of capitalism as described by Marx, "the history of [the] expropriation [of the working class], is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."³¹¹ Marx analyzes the historical process by which the working class has been created, while in the process of recreating the conditions of its own demise. The critical weight of this analysis arises out of a commitment to a deterministic outlook that evaluates the confluence of factors actuating a given historical process. Marx does this by accentuating the primacy to the role of productive forces in forming the conditions of bourgeois rule, while evaluating the reproductive power of the "ideological reflexes." This process of legitimization occurs not only for the dominant class, but perhaps more importantly, in the beliefs and ideas of the subordinate classes. "Thus, in imagination," Marx writes in *The German Ideology*, "individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because the conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are more subjected to the violence of things."³¹² The task for Marx, therefore, is to identify the distinction between what constitutes imaginary impediments that human beings believe themselves to have overcome, and the real contradictions that stifle the possibility of realizing material

³¹¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 874.

³¹² Marx, "The German Ideology," 199.

freedom and flourishing for living human beings. For it is only in identifying and transforming these real contradictions that human flourishing can be realized.

Marx's critique of bourgeois political economy aims to counteract the work of bourgeois economists who shroud the real contradictions that impact the lives of the working class. "Political economy," Marx writes, "conceals the estrangement in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) and production."³¹³ Central to Marx's ability to both critique and change the world is therefore his capacity of overturning the analysis of bourgeois economists and theorists in defining freedom and power within the confines of the imagined ideals that persist along with the influence of ideology (in terms of the State) and fetishism (in terms of the market). Marx illuminates how the real contradictions within capitalist society deepen the conditions that stifle the working class when he writes,

"Capitalist production...reproduces in the course of its own process the separation between labour-power and the conditions of labour. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the conditions under which the worker is exploited. It incessantly forces him to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident that capitalist and worker confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the alternating rhythm of the process itself which throws the worker back onto the market again and again as a seller of his labour-power and continually transforms his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the worker belongs to capital before he has sold himself to the capitalist."³¹⁴

In this passage, Marx is able to penetrate bourgeois ideology that identifies the freedom of the worker with the act of selling oneself in the marketplace. When contrasted with Ancient or Feudal social orders, this act of moving into the market appears to entail the freedom of the worker to choose the conditions of labor.

³¹³ Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," 73.

³¹⁴ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 723.

However, the analysis of the commodity and abstract labor reveals that the free agency of the worker is also a step in the process of reproducing capitalist social order.

The real contradictions played out in the expropriation of the social rewards of the working class has had a deleterious effect upon those under the thumb of capitalist rule, both in terms of the material and spiritual life of individual. In the “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” a young Marx outlines his account of the conditions of the laborer in terms of “estrangement” and “alienation,” whereas a more mature Marx will be able bring into critical-material focus with historical specificity. He outlines the “alienation of labour” in a three-fold description in which labor itself confronts the worker in a relation of opposition to rather than as part of self-affirming activity. “The fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind.”³¹⁵ In other words, the nature of commodified capitalist labor denies the self-affirming satisfaction of free human productive labor and precludes the possibility of happiness. It does so, according to young Marx, by “estranging” the relation of the worker to the object of labor, the relation of the worker to her own productive activity, and the relation between human beings.³¹⁶ In various contexts, Marx will return to the themes of the sources of unhappiness in the commodification of human beings, the social isolation of capitalist relations of

³¹⁵ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” 74.

³¹⁶ Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” 75-77.

production, the deterioration of working conditions, and the usurpation of the rewards of one's labor. By clarifying the conditions of labor's discontent, Marx identifies what revolutionary transformation will involve and what it can offer.

In bourgeois economic and political theory, the individual is treated as a thing, abstracted from his/her actual living existence, and considered only to the extent that s/he fits within the operations of the capitalist marketplace. The consequence of such abstractions has real consequences in the unhappiness arising from the subjection to the vicissitudes of the marketplace and the hollow promises of political freedom and equality. In the market, Marx describes living human relations when commodified:

"The labour of the private individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products, and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore, the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather as material relations between persons and social relations between things."³¹⁷

The consequences of the commodification of labor become evident as workers are manipulated to conform to the demands of the marketplace. The conditions of capitalist production requires that "economic subjects" be constituted "which are part of objectivity itself or which are, in other words, given in experience *alongside* 'things', alongside commodities, and *in a relation to* them."³¹⁸

The so-called 'freedom' and 'equality' that is found in the market reverberates in the political realm, deepening the condition of discontent. Politically, human beings are reduced to the essentialist construction of the

³¹⁷ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 165-166.

³¹⁸ Balibar, *Philosophy of Marx*, 67.

“egoistic man” and the formal status of “citizen.” In bourgeois political theory, the abstracted individual confronts the illusory state in a manner that, despite the claims of empowerment made at the formal level, leave the material conditions of worker’s enslavement intact. Marx explains,

“Egoistic man is the passive, given result of the dissolution of society, an object of direct apprehension and consequently a natural object. The political revolution dissolves civil society into its elements without revolutionizing these elements or subjecting them to criticism. This revolution regards civil society, the sphere of human needs, labour, private interests, and civil law as the basis of its own existence, as a self-subsistent precondition, and thus as its natural basis. Finally, man as a member of civil society is identified with authentic man, man as distinct from citizen, because he is man in his sensuous, individual and immediate existence, whereas political man is only abstract, artificial man, man as allegorical, moral person. Thus man as he really is, is seen only in the form of egoistic man, and man in his true nature only in the form of abstract citizen.”³¹⁹

Just as society is divided into civil and political realms, the living individual is doubly reduced to conform to the needs of bourgeois rule. On the one hand, the living individual is transformed into the “abstract citizen” whose claims to freedom and equality skate along the surface of the abstracted “spiritual” realm of bourgeois politics. On the other hand, the living individual is reduced to the “egoistic man” in conformity with the needs of survival within the context of capitalist rule. As a result the so-called ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ guaranteed by bourgeois political emancipation does not penetrate the material conditions of production in which the working class suffers.³²⁰ Rather than bringing human flourishing, the “abstract citizen” is only entitled to a formal emancipation, which for active and producing individuals means the prolongation of the conditions that stifle their flourishing.

³¹⁹ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 47.

³²⁰ “Where the political state has attained to its full development, man leads, not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life, a double existence – celestial and terrestrial. He lives in the political community, where he regards himself as a communal being, and in civil society where he acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as a means, degrades himself to a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers. The political state, in relation to society, is just as spiritual as is heaven in relation to earth.” Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” 34.

Capitalist order produces commodities, surplus value, and the reproduction of the conditions of its continuation. The process by which surplus value is extracted out of the production of commodities is attained by enslaving the worker for a period of the workday and by heightening the efficiency of that work, thus maximizing profit. For the worker, this has resulted in the development of efficiency models such as Taylor's "scientific management" and more recently the "McDonaldization" of human productive organization.³²¹ While unquestionably very efficient, these models have injected abstracted labor into the mechanized order of the workplace at the expense of the worker. Marx recognizes and anticipates the continued deterioration of the conditions of the workplace, as specialization, efficiency, profit, and dissatisfaction of the workers increases. Marx writes,

"[The worker] becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him...In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, whether by the prolongation of the working hours, by work extracted in a given time or by increased speed of the machinery, etc."³²²

In this passage, Marx highlights the trajectory of capitalist production that deepens the initial enslavement of the worker and worsens the conditions in which labor is forced to act. Rather than the self-fulfilling productive activity that in many ways defines human happiness for Marx, the conditions under which the worker is productively active increasingly, and by design, grows more intolerable.

Capitalist social relations divide society through the expropriation of the means of production and the accumulated labor of the worker. This division

³²¹ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society*, (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1995).

³²² Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 67.

requires that human social relations between living individuals become reduced, as “egoistic man,” into mere means. This secondary vivisection of the individuals within society leads to the isolation and opposition of individuals. In both the critique of ideology and in the critique of fetishism, Marx addresses the relation of the division of labor and competition, and their relation to the abstracted ideals and beliefs that are dominant under bourgeois rule. The pitting of workers against each other, and ultimately themselves, finds its ideological counterpart in the belief in atomized power. The turning of “man against man” under bourgeois rule gives capital, a social power, the appearance of a private source of power. Thus, for the worker who has been abstracted and commodified in the marketplace, the fellow worker appears as a threat or a means for advancement of one’s own access to the means of survival. As Marx points out, however, that power is social when writing, “Modern universal intercourse can be controlled by individuals...only when controlled by all.”³²³ Instead of striving toward emancipation from the conditions that prevent human flourishing, the division between individual workers serves as a source of unhappiness, thwarting the only means by which human power could be corralled for the self-determination of living, active individuals.

The forced nature of work operates on the level of physical coercion, but more potently, it works on the level of desire. The physical force that comes to bear upon the worker, apart from instances of explicit brutalization, takes the form of the threat of starvation, homelessness, and poverty. The “invisible chains” of capitalism are effective because the individual worker takes on the interest of the firm, turning

³²³ Marx, “The German Ideology,” 191.

their desires against themselves. In the separation of the worker from one another, the desire of the individual worker is directed against their fellow workers in the service of the ruling class. The power of marketing invigorates the interests of the dominant class by injecting the desires of the multitude toward the conditions of their own subjugation. The desires of the workers are aligned explicitly in the cooptation of the desires of the firm, and more subtly, though no less effectively, in the manipulation of the material desires in the direction of superfluous consumer goods. As the desire for consumer goods increases, the chains of indebtedness are tightened, ensuring the prolongation of the rule of the dominant class. In the “free markets” of wage labor and consumer goods, the conditions of the unhappiness and enslavement of the workers are deepened.³²⁴ Only by illuminating how the grasp of the cooptation of the desires of the working class can be overcome will the possibility of revolutionary transformation be revealed.

For if the strength of ideology and commodity fetishism resists even the identification of what freedom, equality, or empowerment (i.e. what is desirable) might entail, then how could Marx still claim that the end of capitalism is inevitable? One may be inclined to take a bleak outlook on such a concern, except that the specific historical moment, as Marx details in his analyses of historical tendencies, is not merely determined in the form of a linear causal sequence. Rather, Marx’s historical analysis reveals the manner in which the internal contradictions within capitalist social order open up revolutionary possibilities.

³²⁴ Frederic Lordon points to the “co-linearization” of the desire of the worker to align with the boss, when he writes, “There is no such thing as voluntary servitude. There is only passionate servitude. That, however, is universal.” Lordon, *Willing Slaves of Capital: Spinoza and Marx on Desire*, 17.

Borrowing from Freud, Althusser describes as “overdetermined” the specific historical moment that is rife with contradiction and thus textured and varied in its possibility.³²⁵ Because the situation is “overdetermined” in such a manner that defies the logic of linear history as well as reductive accounts of causality and possibility, Marx is able to sustain the strength and promise within the analysis of capitalist modes of production and social order.

Marx lays out several of the contradictions that ripen the material condition to revolutionary possibilities. While thorough analyses of historically specific conditions are always required in Marx’s view, he is able to illuminate the contradictory tendencies inherent in bourgeois rule that have the capacity for unleashing revolutionary possibilities. In Marx’s analyses in *Capital*, he illustrates how the mode of production of a given era (ancient, feudal, modern) can surpass the lagging relations of production at a historical moment, discharging the revolutionary elements that were inherent in the outmoded social order. Marx points out several notable contradictions such as the increased production capacity of capitalism that allows for the supersession of the relations of production that assume a condition of material scarcity and toil for the majority. In the formation of the working class, as Marx views it, the capitalist system has created the agent that will bring its own demise. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx succinctly lays out these revolutionary contradictions when he writes, “But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the working class—the

³²⁵ See Luis Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” *For Marx* 87-128.

proletarians.”³²⁶Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* 67 While more careful analyses are required to identify with historical specificity the contradictions at the present moment that reveal themselves to be revolutionary, as well as the manner in which Marx’s analyses of the nature of the contradictions in bourgeois rule may be subject to subsequent criticism, the value of Marx’s insight about the revolutionary capacity inherent in the internal contradictions of capitalism becomes evident. It is with this insight that one can focus an evaluation of the revolutionary possibility inherent within a given moment, despite what appear to be ‘obvious’ obstacles.

Revolutionary Constellations and Happiness

The state, rather than providing the ‘concrete’ expression of ‘Spirit’ as Hegel would have it, or ensuring the possibility of individual freedom, as bourgeois theorists contend, displaces the individual into the imaginary realm of idealized secularism. To the extent that human beings are considered in their sociality, we are “the imaginary member of an imaginary sovereignty, divested of his real, individual life, and infused with an unreal universality.”³²⁷ The supposed “individualism” that is to be the hallmark of bourgeois claims of political emancipation, as well as the claims of ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ that arise out of the foundation of the bourgeois individual, are exposed in Marx’s critique as merely ideal. The “political lion’s skin” that constitutes the individual within the state, as citizen, posits an individuality as well as a community that does not address the actual life of living individuals, but only their formal status as ‘persons.’ Just as the state’s emancipation from religion does not constitute the emancipation of living

³²⁶ Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 67.

³²⁷ Marx, “On the Jewish Question,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 35.

individuals from religion, the ‘political emancipation’ of bourgeois theory, even if it were to reach its zenith, would not revolutionize the material conditions and relations of production, and therefore “does not abolish, and does not strive to abolish, man’s *real* religiosity.”³²⁸

The ideological narrowness of the perspective that only calls for political emancipation mires the majority under the thumb of capitalist social order. Evidence of the limitations of political emancipation is revealed in Marx’s account of the political struggles in *The 18th Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte*. There, Marx provides a historically specific analysis of the coup of the second, ‘farcical’ Bonaparte, detailing the political intrigue and shuffling of power at the merely political level. In other words, the change of political actors belied the underlying prolongation of the ruling interests of the bourgeoisie. Bob Jessop diagnoses the limitations and impact that the ideology of the commitment to merely political emancipation has upon the dominated classes when he writes that the stability of bourgeois ‘democratic’ rule,

“depends on the continued willingness of the dominated classes to accept only political emancipation rather than press for social emancipation and/or on the willingness of the dominated class(es) to be satisfied with social domination (i.e. with the de facto subordination of the exercise of state power to the imperatives of capitalist accumulation) rather than press for the restoration of their earlier monopoly on political power.”³²⁹

Emancipation that would allow for the conditions of human flourishing would require, therefore, that not only political power be wrested from the ruling class, but that social power be brought into the control of the dominated majority. As Marx declares, it is only when the living individual (of the dominated class) “has

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Bob Jessop, *CCCM*, 418.

recognized and organized his own powers so that he no longer separates this *social* power from himself as *political* power,"³³⁰ that their activity can become revolutionary.

Marx's critique of bourgeois individualism, and therefore also bourgeois conceptions of liberty and equality, is that they ultimately can be reduced to private property and consumer rights. Private property, according to Marx, is simply the accumulated labor of the dominated classes as it takes the form of a social power that endows the dominant class with the authority and power to continue and increase the oppression of workers. Thus, the stated aim of the communist revolution is the abolition of private property. In *Capital*, Marx elaborates upon the goals of the communist revolution that go beyond the simple destruction of private property. Marx's call for revolution is often, and incorrectly, characterized as the 'simple negation' of individual private property in favor of collectivism. Communist revolution demands the abolition of private property, what he terms the "first negation," but he also calls for the communist revolution to build upon the achievements of capitalist production. Except, rather than serving the oppression of the dominated classes, it would serve to form the possibility of human flourishing. Marx writes,

"The capitalist mode of appropriation, which springs from the capitalist mode of production, produces capitalist private property. This is the first negation of individual private property, as founded on the labour of its proprietor. But capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a natural process, its own negation. This is the negation of the negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the production produced by labour itself."³³¹

³³⁰ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," *Marx-Engels Reader*, 46.

³³¹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 1*, 929.

The communist revolution is initially defined in its critical or “negating” aspiration of abolishing private property, and along with it class divisions and their inherent social and political inequality. Yet Marx goes further in his call for a “social” or “human emancipation” in which the instruments and productive forces of capitalism are co-opted in service of the majority.

For Marx, the seizing of state power is only an initial stage in the overall communist revolution that would allow for human flourishing. The seizure of the instruments of state power alone does not, however, address the underlying issues that oppress the dominated classes. “The executive of the modern State,” Marx famously writes, “is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”³³² Marx echoes a Spinozistic conception of the democratic state in which power emerges from the populace, indicating that there is no material distinction between sovereign authority and the living individuals who constitute that authority. In contrast to the monarchic, or even liberal democratic state that harnesses its real power by hovering ideally over its subjects, Marx insists that authority can only lie in the hands of the people. In order for power to be in the hands of a sovereign authority, divorced from the material power of the living individuals that constitute a state, there must be an idealization of that authority whether cloaked in the religiosity of the Christian or secular, yet not profaned, modern state. This “imaginary” state exists to cover over the defects in the social order, and therefore revolution from the Marxist perspective, calls for the destruction of the modern bourgeois state that stands in opposition to the working

³³² Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, 62.

class majority. In *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx writes, “Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it, and today, too, the forms of state are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the “freedom of the state.”³³³ Rather than being ideal ‘subjects’ to the authority of the state, this social revolution will bring state power under the control of the living individuals who constitute that power.

The only form of government that expresses an emancipated relation between individual and authority is democratic rule. Marx clarifies the emancipatory element that lies within his materialist conception of democratic rule, when he writes, “In democracy the *formal* principle is at the same time the *material* principle.”³³⁴ The enactment of the democratic principle in the revolutionary democratic form that Marx champions differs from the modern liberal democracies under bourgeois rule as starkly and along the same lines as heaven and earth. In a materialist democracy, the active individuals living within a society form its basis, while in bourgeois “democracies” it is only the imaginary and formal individual that forms its merely ideal basis. Marx and Engels commented, perhaps over-exuberantly, regarding the link between democracy and communism when they wrote, “Democracy has become the proletarian principle, the principle of the masses. The masses may be more or less clear about the unique and true significance of democracy, but there is still a feeling that the basis of social equality

³³³ Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” *Marx-Engels Reader*, 537.

³³⁴ Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 20-21.

is in democracy.”³³⁵ Ultimately, Marx believes that a society in which the means of production are shared socially rather than along class lines would not require the rule of an idealized sovereign authority. To the extent that there is a need for state power to be divided from social or civil power, then this division of authority reflects an unfreedom for those living under its rule.

There is, however, a well-founded concern that the practical experiments in applying the Marxist doctrine have led to authoritarian statist forms of rule. The defense for this form of government, most commonly associated with Stalinism, harkens to the “dictatorship of the working class” referenced in Marx’s essay on “The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850.” The emergence of this phrase warrants considerable analysis and critique, but at the very least, it is quite clear in Marx’s writings that by parroting this phrase, Marx did not imply the move toward totalitarianism. The phrase grew out of the dismay that Marx experienced with the defeat of the 1848 revolution, and it came along with the sober realization that the seizure of the state apparatus will require an authority to stand in its place. To think otherwise would be to advocate for a utopianism and/or an anarchic libertarianism that stands in opposition to Marx’s position with regard to the revolutionary state (which, in some respects, is an oxymoron in Marxian terms). Sidney Hook points out that “wherever we find a state we find a dictatorship” in Marx’s writing.³³⁶ This follows from the realization that the dissolution of class division will require, in its initial stages, that the revolutionary working class seizes

³³⁵ Marx and Engels, *Werke*, ed. Institute for Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic (Berlin: Dietz, 1956-68) II, p. 613.

³³⁶ Sidney Hook, *Towards the understanding of Karl Marx* (New York: The John Day Company, 1933), 300 ff.

hold of the state apparatus. The term “dictatorship” in Marx’s writing is applied to any form of society in which the class division persists, and not necessarily the oppression of personal liberties that the term implies to contemporary readers. In order to resist the ossification of class divisions and state structures, Marx refers to the communist revolution as a “permanent revolution” that would destroy the protraction of class (and therefore state) oppression. Marx’s commitment to democratic principles could be seen in his insistence that the revolution is only possible when considered through the living relationships from within the revolutionary class. The defeat of 1848 had apparently curbed Marx’s willingness to ally communist politics with liberal democratic groups, but not the need to foster the relationships and growth of a revolutionary class dedicated to democratic principles.

Just as the definition of production has been expanded in Marxist literature to include elements of human social activity that do not fall under the traditional economic categories of production, such as those in everyday interactions, the category of state power has seen a similar expansion in Marxist literature. Since the power of the state is constituted by the multitude, state power as it finds expression in human life would not be restricted to the narrow confines of what is thought to define bourgeois state power. In fact, it is an ideological component that justifies the bourgeois state to keep the ‘political’ realm within such narrow parameters. A common definition of the modern state hinges upon the state as having the monopoly on violence. While this expresses an element of state power, the depth of Marx’s theory of state expands the means by which state power is

exercised upon a populace by the force of ideology. Althusser notably elaborates upon the ideological expression of state power with an analysis of the role of “ideological state apparatuses” (or ISA’s). Althusser distinguishes the ISA’s from the traditional concept of the “repressive” state apparatus by clarifying that the repressive state apparatus functions by violence, while the ISA’s function by ideology.³³⁷ ISA’s include, but are not restricted to churches, schools, culture, etc. that reproduces the ideological practices and thus the conditions for the states continued existence. Althusser’s analysis differs from earlier treatments of the function of ideology that primarily emphasize ‘consciousness’ without recognizing the role of practices in reproducing the conditions of state control, and thus elaborating upon the material existence of ideology. Althusser contends that, “no class can hold power over a long period of time without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the state ideological apparatuses.”³³⁸ Under this interpretation, what holds for the repressive state apparatus also holds for the ISA’s, and therefore the seizure of state power will require not only the revolutionary class to control the physically repressive instruments of power, but also the ideological institutions and practices that reproduce that power.

This, however, introduces a dilemma in the form of a paradox for Marx’s notion of human emancipation. Marx’s early writings are tinged with a naivety regarding the transitional stage from rule of the bourgeoisie to the rule of the proletariat. In his later writings, Marx recognizes that the communist revolution

³³⁷ Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 97.

³³⁸ Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” 98.

will still bear the marks of the rule of the overthrown bourgeoisie. In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx writes,

“What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges.”³³⁹

To be stamped with a birthmark is to bear the defects of bourgeois rule, and thus to require the continuance of an imaginary state that requires both the repressive and ideological functions of the state in order to survive. On the one hand, this form of realism reflects a commitment to the materialist emergence of a communist society in contrast to the idealistic flight of the utopian and thus illusory appearance of that society. On the other hand, the marks of bourgeois rule weigh upon the revolutionary process with the very same violent and illusory features for which Marx harangues the modern bourgeois state. Althusser interjects into the discussion that, “Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies *without ideology* and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not just one of its historical forms) would disappear without a trace, to be replaced by *science*.”³⁴⁰ In other words, this seeming paradox is only insurmountable if one holds the ideological moralistic perspective of the communist society as a fantastic rather than materialistic rejection of bourgeois rule. Even in a communist society the need for ideology, for example in the form of ethics, culture, religion, etc., would still be necessary. The very belief in a flawless society is itself, therefore, a product of an ideological belief. The distinction between the function of ideology (as well as violent, ‘repressive’ functions) in a communist state and in a bourgeois state is that

³³⁹ Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program,” 529.

³⁴⁰ Althusser, *For Marx*, “Marxism and Humanism,” 232.

in the former, ideology serves to benefit rather than oppress the multitude. “In a classless society,” Althusser writes, “ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is lived to the profit of all men.”³⁴¹

For Marx, the question of whether a political doctrine or set of beliefs can be considered ‘materialistic’ is not whether or not it has completely rid itself of any ideological vestige, but rather whether it serves the profit of all. The danger of such a position can be, and has been in the case of the Stalinist state, enacted as the justification for a violent and ideologically oppressive state, under the guise of serving the “people,” “workers,” etc. Such a danger haunts any social formation, and the self-critical tools provided by the “new materialism” heralded by Marx attempts to address lurking ideal threats to human flourishing. In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx redresses his colleagues when insisting that revolutionary practice demands persistent self-critique. Unlike the Christian salvation, and the concomitant notion of happiness as a static state free from desire, the communist revolution that Marx envisions must be rigorously self-critical to assure that it is abetting the aims of human flourishing and the materialistic democratic principles that must guide such a revolutionary social order. And since the material conditions of human flourishing are in a constant state of flux, Marx can only imagine the communist revolution as a continual process of striving, or a “permanent revolution.”

³⁴¹Althusser, *For Marx*, “Marxism and Humanism,” 236.

Marx's materialist principles and the commitment to democratic social organization that emerge from those principles broadens the task of revolutionary transformation to a variety of elements that make up the social order, the most important being the relations of production. As with Hobbes, Marx's commitment to materialist principles poses challenges to his overarching ethical aspiration of enacting the change in the social order to the benefit of the multitude. What may appear as paradoxical to his materialist principles, such as the recognition of the continued necessity for ideological elements within a revolutionary society, turns out to be a product of a materialist realism that does not succumb to idealist and/or moralist utopianism. These same materialist principles also lead Marx to a commitment to the democratic organization of social power. However, this commitment does not end at the steps of political authority, but rather must surpass the limitations of "political emancipation" to include the broader social institutions and practices (such as educational, legal, cultural, familial, etc.). In the model of society that views these various elements in the form of a constellation (rather than in a relation of linear causality), the task of the revolutionary theorist would be to analyze the ways that these various elements interact or "intervene" upon one another.

Rather than thinking of the relation between the various elements of society by way of an architectural model of base and superstructure, perhaps it would be best to draw upon Gramsci's anatomical model. Gramsci rejects economism by offering this analogy: "By highlighting the anatomy and the function of the skeleton nobody was trying to claim that man (and still less women) can live without the

skin.”³⁴² This model emphasizes the dynamic nature of social organization and the complexity of transforming and maintaining hegemonic power in society, most especially during the birth pains of the break from bourgeois rule. The maintenance of social and political power relies upon the material force of the rhetorical resources present in a given context. Marx relates the need for a revolutionary movement to feed upon the semiotic repertoire of the past when he writes, “Likewise a beginner studying a new language always translates back into his mother tongue; but only when he can use it without referring back, and thus forsake his native tongue for the new, only then has he entered into the spirit of the new language, and gained the ability to speak it fluently.”³⁴³ While the transformation of the language of the past into the revolutionary language of the future works from the conditions of its inheritance, there is a challenge that is posed upon the present forms of expression to resist the regression to the counter-revolutionary conservative elements within the inherited language. The relative independence of the various elements of society emphasizes the importance of harnessing the linguistic resources of a given historical present in both constituting and transforming the overall conditions for, or against human flourishing.

While Marx acknowledges the inheritance of the past, he distinguishes the social revolution as one that “let the dead bury the dead.” And unlike regressive authorities that rely upon the ‘superstitions’ of the past, social revolutionaries will need to free themselves from the grip of the idols of the past. Marx writes,

³⁴² Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 197.

³⁴³ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 20.

“The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot create its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin until it has stripped off all superstition from the past. Previous revolutions required recollections of world history in order to dull themselves to their own content. There phrase transcend content, here content transcends phrase.”³⁴⁴

Marx’s here calls for a new poetry that overcomes the discursive and ideological limitations to representing the interests of the revolutionary class. To lack a new poetry is to lack the resources for defining the source of unhappiness and to submit to the conditions that ensure that unhappiness. The challenge that Marx poses to the revolutionary class is two-fold: Firstly, to allow for a ‘new poetics’ and revolutionary practice that addresses rather than covers over the inequities that stifle human flourishing. And secondly, to develop the discursive resources that gain their vibrancy in perpetual self-critique rather than in the ossification of revolutionary ambitions of the near or distant past. Thus, the task of the revolutionary critic is to uncover the real contradictions that subjugate the working class, but also to corral the linguistic and self-critical resources available within a historical moment to express the interests of the multitude. These expressions must arise out of a concern for human beings in their active and historical present, and that is why Marx is insistent that “here content transcends phrase.”

The need for permanent self-critique arises from Marx’s insight that ideological forms continue to persist even where revolutionary aims would have found success in defending the ‘economic’ interests of the oppressed classes. This insight holds in terms of discursive aspirations for elaborating the interests of the oppressed classes as well. Contrary to the claims of Enlightenment thinkers who believe that there is a way to sterilize language of any deceptive or ideological

³⁴⁴ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Luis Bonaparte*, 22.

residue, Marx believes that the critique of ideology and the development of a 'new poetry' does not consist in a division of absolute truth and untruth, but rather in the process of persistent self-criticism and the demand for human flourishing. Slavoj Zizek draws upon discourse analysis when echoing the rejection of the Enlightenment belief in a language that is sterilized of ideological residue in his criticism of the perceived attempt by Habermas to free ourselves decisively from ideology in writing, "What the tradition of the Enlightenment dismisses as a mere disturbance of 'normal' communication turns out to be its positive condition...The concrete intersubjective space of symbolic communication is always structured by various (unconscious) textual devices that cannot be reduced to secondary rhetoric." Zizek, following Marx's lead, rejects the simple contrast between ideology / non-ideology as a symptom of a deepened, uncritical form of ideological thinking. "What Habermas perceives as the step out of ideology is denounced here as ideology *par excellence*...The 'zero level' of ideology consists in (mis)perceiving a discursive formation as an extra-discursive fact."³⁴⁵ While the desire to escape the discursive tools and complicity with power relations is understandable, the belief in such a linguistic redemption is as ideological as the notion of a society bereft of power relations. Rather than reflecting a materialist commitment, or the aspiration to promote human flourishing, such ideological beliefs are complicit in the self-defeating belief in the salvation of a world without striving.

³⁴⁵ Slavoj Zizek, "The Spectre of Ideology," *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Zizek (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 10.

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Marx, like Hobbes before him, approached the question of human happiness with a reticence that reflected a concern regarding the way in which happiness, when coopted by capitalist ideology, had come to mean fleeting subjective feelings rather than self-actualizing activity. While capitalism can be very effective when it comes to providing for the creation and fulfillment of new needs, the formation of these new needs serves the interests of the ruling class and the desire for and practical fulfillment of these needs turns against the interest of the multitude. Rather than reflecting a greater possibility of achieving human flourishing in the practice of free activity, the act of striving to satisfy the desire for the products of capitalist production often only serve to deepen the subordinate role of the oppressed classes. In the context of capitalist consumer culture, the fulfillment of material desires often turns against the buyer. As the debt of the working class is increased, the stranglehold of the dominant class tightens. Under bourgeois rule, the endeavor for happiness often takes two forms of “false consciousness,” both of which call for an attempted flight from the material conditions that are restricting the possibility of free activity. The first seeks satisfaction in the material goods and the second seeks satisfaction in the retreat from the world that oppresses. Both of these avenues prove to be irrational and self-defeating, since they turn against the interest of those seeking respite from the sources of their unhappiness. Only revolution is rational, according to Marx, because the goal as well as the means of attaining human happiness must be redefined. According to Marx, happiness must entail the increasing capacity for

self-actualizing free activity, or human flourishing. This redefinition of happiness does not signify a change in fashion or taste, but rather a revolutionizing of the social order in which the desire for happiness finds expression. Marx never departs from his aspiration of bringing about the transformation of the social order in which human happiness could be realized, but the expression of that aspiration must be accompanied with a 'ruthless' critique of the dominant expressions of happiness, and a self-critical attitude that affirms one's capacity to achieve the free activity that happiness must entail.

Marx's commitment to materialist principles finds expression in his reconceptualization of human happiness. His "new materialism" engages human beings as they live in their activity, and the conception of happiness that focuses upon the capacity for free, self-actualizing activity bears the reflection of that engagement. The failures, dilemmas, and challenges that confronted Marx offer lessons to the readers and inheritors of Marx and the Marxist tradition who aspire to change the world by unleashing the possibilities of human flourishing while, at the same time, staying true to his material principles. To be sure, Marx slipped into various levels of humanism and teleology throughout the course of his writing and political activity. However, besides presenting a new conceptualization, a "new poetics," of materialism and human happiness that is resistant to the dogmatic and reductive character of many of the so-called materialists who preceded Marx, his writings instruct future revolutionary theory and practice to develop an ethos of rigorous self-criticism, and as an impetus for further analysis of the specific historical conjunctures that contain the possibility of social emancipation. For it is

through the ethos of self-criticism that Marxian theory resists ossification and regressive elements from overtaking any revolutionary practice that aims at unleashing the possibility of happiness for living, active individuals.

Chapter Five

Decayed Bodies, Redeemed Past: Adorno, Benjamin, and the Deformation of Happiness

“A man...of late cultures and refracted lights, will typically be a weaker person: his most basic desire is an end to the war he *is*. His notion of happiness corresponds to that of a medicine and a mentality of pacification (for instance the Epicurean or Christian); it is a notion of happiness as primarily rest, lack of disturbance, repletion, unity at last and the ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’.”

-- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

In the waning passage of *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno leaves his readers with an insight into what remains of the aspiration for finding happiness that entails the capacity to think or, perhaps more appropriately, to critique. He cautions, “The only philosophy which can be responsibly be practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption.”³⁴⁶ Rather than mere instruction, this insight is delivered as a warning due to not only its urgency but also its necessity. Of the myriad of questions that arise from such a warning, there are several that must be addressed if one is to even appreciate let alone heed this counsel. The first demands that one understand the nature of the “despair” that confronts the attempt to think, and what buoys the continuance of this catastrophe? Also, how is contemplation from the “standpoint of redemption” fitting to a condition of despair while allowing for the persistence of thinking? Adorno’s injunction locates an alliance between what he describes as “the despair” and redemption that, despite the apparent contradiction, begs the possibly shameful question of what happiness that is not dependent upon the hopefulness of salvific redemption might entail. However, at this point I must

³⁴⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

take pause so that we do not hastily project our inquiry beyond the catastrophe in which we stand.

The pervasiveness of the catastrophe arises with the destruction of embodied, historical experience, not only turning against bodies and tradition, but also subduing the antidotes that might allow for the resistance to such devastating forces. The impoverishment of experience becomes wedded to the emergence of construction as the predominant mode of human thought and production. Walter Benjamin speaks from the perspective of a child who appears in a world in which experience is devalued to the point that it has become a mere 'moment' that must be overcome, for experience has become anathema to a world already furnished with meaning yet devoid of tradition. Young Benjamin asks, "Yet – are our elders, with their tired gestures and their superior hopelessness, right about *one* thing – namely, that what we experience will be sorrowful and that only in the inexperienceable can courage, hope, and meaning be given foundation?"³⁴⁷ The depth of this question betrays the youthfulness of its perspective, unraveling the ready-made concepts that endow the world with meaning and solace to those who have already submitted to their own impoverishment. In other words, the impenetrability of those who have lost the capacity to experience is akin to the 'mindless' despair that seeks refuge in supposedly redeeming, delusional flights. Benjamin locates the birthplace of such despair in the loss of experience when he writes, "Only to the mindless is experience devoid of meaning and spirit. To the one who strives, experience may be painful,

³⁴⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, "Experience," trans. Lloyd Spencer and Stefan Jost (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996) 4.

but it will scarcely lead him to despair.”³⁴⁸ The impoverishment of experience is the other face of the despair that yearns, in its powerlessness, for redemption, not only precluding the possibility of a world endowed with substantial meaning and fulfillment, but also deepening the delusions and therefore the despair.

The loss of experience is reflected in the relation that human beings have to the historical process in which they are situated, because the ‘achievement’ of such an impoverishment demands that the mind and body be severed, and the relation to history fall squarely in the realm of detached mind. The loss of experience therefore opens up an authorization of the tyranny of thought born from the delusional sense of power that accompanies the belief in the isolated thinking subject. In other words, the impoverishment of experience appears to grant the authority to construct a world “from scratch” by severing the relation between thinking and embodied history. However, this is a delusion that arises from a perspective of weakness that turns against its adherents. As Adorno writes,

“Knowledge no sooner starts from scratch, by way of a stabilizing objectification, that it will distort the objects. Knowledge as such, even in a form detached from substance, takes part in tradition as unconscious remembrance; there is no question which we might simply ask, without knowing of past things that are preserved in the question and spur it.”³⁴⁹

The persistence of embodied history upon thinking does not depend upon the acceptance or rejection of any individual thinker; rather its rejection is symptomatic of the weakness of the times in which such a prejudice holds sway. The impoverishment of experience entails an enervation of the powers of memory (in the loss of history) and, more generally, the ability for affect to penetrate ready-

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1973), 54.

made concepts. It is clear to see, at this point, how such a loss is detrimental to knowledge, but it is less clear why Adorno and Benjamin are compelled to attach normative and dramatic terms such as “catastrophe”, “despair”, and “barbarism” to the impulse for “starting from scratch.”³⁵⁰

The incapacity for experience can be seen not only as an achievement of modernity, but also an intellectual and ethical value. Thus, the ramifications of such a poverty are not suffered merely at the level of the individual, but at the level of society. Benjamin clarifies the scope of a poverty that exceeds the individual human beings that suffer its consequences.

“Indeed (let’s admit it), our poverty of experience is not merely poverty on the personal level, but poverty of human experience in general. Hence, a new kind of barbarism... Barbarism? Yes, indeed. We say this in order to introduce a new, positive concept of barbarism. For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further, looking neither left nor right. Among the great creative spirits, there have always been the inexorable ones who begin by clearing a tabula rasa. They need a drawing table; they were constructors.”³⁵¹

The discussion regarding the impoverishment of experience (and our subsequent discussion about the distinction between happiness and redemption) can therefore not be addressed along individual lines. The question is not whether one individual or another has ‘experienced’ more; rather, the poverty of experience is a consequence of social and historical forces that we embody as its inheritors. From the above passage, however, it is not clear how such impoverishment ought not to be characterized as an error or miscalculation rather than as a “new kind of

³⁵⁰ While the use of these terms do not exclusively refer to the loss of experience, the role of the loss of experience is central to understanding the depth of not only their critique, but also the suffering that accompanies this loss.

³⁵¹ Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, “Experience and Poverty,” trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 732.

barbarism.” By referring to the poverty of experience as barbarism, Benjamin emphasizes the threat that the loss of experience imposes. Adorno puts the danger that makes such a condition not only self-defeating, but also perilous, in concrete terms in a discussion of the preponderance of “the authoritarian personality” and anti-Semitism. The authoritarian personality, he writes, “must be defined in terms of character traits such as a thinking oriented along the dimensions of power and powerlessness, a rigidity and an inability to react, conventionality, the lack of self-reflection, and ultimately an overall inability to experience.”³⁵² And the “genuine anti-Semite,” he explains, “is defined far more by his incapacity for any experience whatsoever, by his unresponsiveness.”³⁵³ The horror of the despair that Adorno addresses becomes evident in his discussion of these pathological character types that have proven their pervasiveness to this day. As a preliminary attempt to address a question posed at the outset, the loss of experience is marked by a weakness of affectivity, of responsiveness, that is necessary not only to think, but also to resist complicity with the catastrophe.³⁵⁴

When considering available strategies, one cannot simply choose in favor of an enrichment of the capacity for experience, for experience is not one among many various possible “standpoints.” Besides the fact that it is not up to the individual, “experience,” in Adorno’s words, “lives by consuming the standpoint; not until the

³⁵² Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models*, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 94.

³⁵³ Adorno, *Critical Models*, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 101.

³⁵⁴ The incapacity for substantial happiness and freedom are symptomatic of a weakness of the ego. The unresponsiveness of the authoritarian personality is indicative of this weakness. One could even evaluate this capacity in relation to the strength or weakness of the ego. This insight, central to understanding the possibility of substantial happiness and freedom, demands careful treatment in light of the issues presented here, but lies outside the immediate scope of this chapter.

standpoint is submerged would there be philosophy.”³⁵⁵ In light of the loss of experience, thinking is left, at best, with the ability to shed light on the form in which particular deformations have taken hold, and thus to see them in their deformity. This, from Adorno’s perspective, is the task imposed upon thought with the loss of experience. He writes, “Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.”³⁵⁶ Critical thought, therefore, must also be estranged from the world as it presents itself if it is not to be complicit with the forces that ensure its demise. Primarily, this means that thought cannot be considered merely as an instrument to action because such an expectation would disarm the capacity for critique. The closest that one can come to thinking “in the messianic light” would be to identify the seductive force of complicity with the new barbarism. Since the allure of complicity is the promise of redemption, it is the task of the critic to ‘reveal’ the ways in which such a vacuous hope for happiness deforms and cripples both thinking and action, and stunts the possibility of a more substantial form of happiness.

The threat posed by the promise of redemption to not only seduce the impoverished, but to quash any resistance, gains its force by creating historical fictions that validate and entrench the status quo. Benjamin recognized the power of historical fictions that create the illusion that the deformations of the world are, in fact, not deformations at all. He warns, “Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it. The Messiah

³⁵⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 30.

³⁵⁶ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 247.

comes not only as the redeemer; he comes as the victor over Antichrist.”³⁵⁷ The Messiah arrives in a struggle against historicism that not only legitimates the status quo, it actually serves to immunize its authority from any experience that may offer resistance to its claims. With this in mind, Benjamin heeds Adorno’s demand for new perspectives, but emphasizes its urgency in calling for a “state of emergency.” Benjamin writes, “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” However, the immunization from experience shows itself, in Benjamin’s view, in the surprise at the horrors of Fascism. He continues, “The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are “still” possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.”³⁵⁸ The experience of the passage above is instantly negated as a historical anomaly, and thus disregarded as an exception to the historical “rule” as it is handed down. One way to find a new perspective and to wrest tradition from conformity is to “seize hold” of these “moments of danger” in which the historical narrative is challenged. In this way, these supposed exceptions can be revealed as the exposed wounds of bodies subject to the deformations of the present state of affairs. Embodied and historical experience, in the above example, flashes up only to be stamped down by a conformism that props up the status quo.

³⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 391.

³⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 392.

The seductive force of mythic redemption distorts the relation to our bodies and tradition, by seemingly severing mind from body, and offering a release from bodily suffering in favor of imaginative delusions. Out of the powerlessness that accompanies the impoverishment of experience, the notion of happiness is deformed into a self-defeating flight from bodies. In heeding Adorno's call for finding new perspectives, I will clarify the distinction between a substantial and mythic notion of happiness, examining the way in which Adorno and Benjamin stake a claim for substantial happiness by leveling a critique of its deformation through the historicist desertion of embodied history. I will seize upon the moments that accentuate "time of the now" in which mind and body are combined in resistance to the notion of a homogenous, historicist history. Finally, I will look to how freedom in the shadow of mythic redemption turns against bodies, thus ensuring the unfreedom of those held under its seductive force. The pervasiveness of the impoverishment of experience and the entrenchment of a specific form of happiness demands that the only possible claim for happiness or critique depends upon the capacity to expose the duplicitous nature of this reformation of happiness.

Costly Flights

Benjamin encounters this problem of the profoundest implications in the destruction of experience in the (de)form(ation) of "happiness...indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption."³⁵⁹ This problem has only increased in its profundity, if not its errancy in persistent modernity. As bodies, with their incapacity for experience, become damaged under a specific trajectory of the

³⁵⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 254.

historical process, their only hope appears as a reactive bent against the conditions that are consuming them. Benjamin describes the peril in which human bodies find themselves and the odds against the capacity to withstand these forces by sustaining the capacity for embodied experience. He offers this brief, but salient account:

“For never has experience been more thoroughly belied than strategic experience was belied by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflations, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, the tiny, fragile, human body.”³⁶⁰

Embodied experience becomes overwhelmed by the very real forces that work against it, leaving no means of finding satisfaction except for in fantastic fictions that go a long way in finishing off the struggle. The body becomes consumed by the play of bodily dissolution and imaginative resurrections, ultimately finding its respite in submission to the forces of its own demise. To the exhausted, however, this respite does not appear as submission, but rather as the redemption from torments; that is, as happiness.

The predominance of such redemptive ‘happiness’ is symptomatic of a world in which satisfaction is solely possible in the realm of fantasy divorced from any experience. Adorno diagnoses those suffering under such conditions as susceptible to the “two ideological complements” of resignation and delusion.³⁶¹ On the one hand, resignation allows one to be swept up by the forces that appear to be, if not

³⁶⁰ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Writings of Nicolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Howard Eiland and Micheal W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 144.

³⁶¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 52.

incontrovertible, then at least irresistible. Resignation can take on many forms, but what the various kinds of resignation have in common is that they share the practical purpose of reproducing the present relations of power.³⁶² On the other hand, since the aspirations for substantial happiness can no longer be found in the world, delusion becomes its surrogate. “Delusional mania is the substitute for the dream that humanity would organize the world humanely,” Adorno writes, “a dream the actual world of humanity is resolutely eradicating.”³⁶³ To be clear, this pathologizing of society is not enacted simply as individual struggles, but rather, involves devastating political and ethical implications. However, human beings confronted with a world that denies the possibility of their substantial happiness become subject to a pathology whose origin lies elsewhere. Adorno writes, “Collective delusions, like anti-Semitism, confirm the pathology of the individual, who shows that psychologically he is no longer a match for the world and is thrown back upon an illusory inner realm.”³⁶⁴ In the identification with a collective, the desire for happiness persists, only in a mutilated form that attempts to escape the sources of unhappiness through the alignment of one’s desires in accord with those of the oppressive authority, lashing out against what opposes that authority, even within oneself. The apparent harmony of this convergence of desire belies the tragedy, both inward and outward, that follows the deformation and rage that accompanies the desire for happiness as salvific redemption.

³⁶² Action, divorced from intellectual reflection, devolves into resignation that is complicit with the forces impeding substantial happiness. The distinction between such activity and praxis (or, activity that arises with intellectual reflection) is particularly central to Adorno, and demands further elaboration and inquiry, but lies outside of the scope of this chapter.

³⁶³ Adorno, *Critical Models*, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 98.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Substantial happiness, in contrast, is not born as a reactive rage against one's own powerlessness. The primacy of critique for Adorno arises out of the psychoanalytic insight that the possibility for happiness depends upon the capacity to sublimate the rage one feels towards the forces that are preventing one's satisfaction. He explains,

"Whoever thinks is not enraged in all his critique: thinking has sublimated rage. Because the thinking person does not need to inflict rage upon himself, he does not wish to inflict it on others. The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humanity. The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such. Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it. By this alone happiness reaches into the universal unhappiness. Whoever does not let it atrophy has not resigned."³⁶⁵

It is clear from this passage that thinking plays a central role in the possibility for substantial happiness, and that it is precisely this element of critical thought that is lacking for those who are suffering under the desire for redemptive happiness under the force of myth. However, it is less clear what kind of critical thought might be afforded to those who live with a poverty of experience. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno suggests that substantial philosophy, and thus thinking, must involve a coincidence of argument and experience.³⁶⁶ But if one is to understand the task of critique as the enunciation of universal unhappiness, then this can begin to be accomplished only by revealing the distortions inherent to and consequent upon self-defeating redemptive desire, even amidst the dearth of experience. The challenge facing modernity, therefore, becomes not the immediate aspiration to "move beyond" the despair that accompanies the loss of embodied and historical experience, but to bring the nature of the deformations that accompany this loss

³⁶⁵ Adorno, *Critical Models*, "Resignation," 293.

³⁶⁶ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 29.

into relief. When looked at in this light the demand for substantial happiness does not look as shameful as it might appear in the face of disaster. However, it hardly looks closer to fulfillment.

One common objection to the notion of substantial happiness noted by Adorno and Benjamin is that it lacks an identifiable image of happiness, while the redemptive notion of happiness is almost defined by its capacity to provide ready-made image of what it means to be redeemed. Such a complaint arises as a consequence of the strangeness of even introducing the question of happiness in the midst of a catastrophe. Are we even justified in the expectation that the question of substantial happiness can be addressed in the face of despair? In other words, has the question of happiness become gratuitous? To be sure, the discussion of happiness comes with the risk of blinding oneself to the catastrophe in which we stand; however, without critical thinking (which Adorno, in one form, equates with substantial happiness) there is nothing left but resignation. Substantial happiness depends upon thinking that must always be engaged with the present conditions without submitting to their inevitability. The teleological nature of salvific redemption requires that an image be generated from outside the present conditions, retroactively creating a historical theodicy that justifies the present, and imposing a historical trajectory upon the future that, while offering fantastic images, have no basis in the conditions out of which they supposedly appear. Therefore, substantial happiness cannot offer the solace of images of redemption, but it is also not dependent upon such images that arrive from the ether as delusions. In contrast, substantial happiness will depend upon images form a “new poetics,” to use Marx’s

term, in which the image of the past 'flashes up' to resist the forces that stifle human happiness.

A Tiger's Leap

The power of detached images of redemption gains tremendous force when directed toward the past. In the passage referred to above, Benjamin begins, "Our image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption."

However, he draws an identical relation to the way in which the redemptive image operates in history as well. He continues, "The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption."³⁶⁷ In the case of the image of happiness, it has been shown that redemptive happiness ultimately serves the status quo by offering hope while leaving the present conditions, at the very least intact and at worst justified. This image of redemption when projected upon the past works in concert with desire that is born out of powerlessness to cut off a remaining vestige of resistance. For the struggle for history is a struggle against the air of inevitability and destiny that suffocates voices of opposition, past and present, that might contest the present state of affairs.

The nature of the alliance of historicism and mythic redemption first and foremost must rely upon a teleological trajectory in which all that is in the past becomes knowable; in other words, nothing of any significance is forgotten. Benjamin links this historicism to the notion of progress, in which the past becomes transparent, and the present a mere vessel to a redeemed future. He writes, "The

³⁶⁷ Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 389-390.

concept of mankind's historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogenous, empty time."³⁶⁸ "Homogenous," because when the past has been twisted into conformity with contemporary norms, all that is excessive in the past poses a danger to that teleological story of progress and therefore must be extinguished. And "empty," because such a past could not be grounded in the experience of living human beings, but rather must be imposed as a fiction that presents itself as historical fact. The past becomes transparent and readily available to the living, for a mythically redeemed past depends upon the totalizing gaze of a past that serves their distorted desire. As Benjamin explains, "Of course only a redeemed mankind is granted the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments."³⁶⁹ The redeemed past, or a past that is allied to a teleology of progress, relies upon fictions that become superimposed, sweeping all past events into their service. Not only must such a history seem eminently knowable, but also continuous, for its strength is found in appearing both indubitable and impenetrable.

The only way in which the fiction of redeemed history can be sustained is through the destruction of memory, which operates in relation to history the way the destruction of experience impacts thinking...by annihilating bodies. The story of progress reduces all suffering by either giving it meaning or by erasing it from collective memory. Adorno presents the unceasing danger of the loss of memory as framed in ethical, even religious terms: ""And it's as good as if it never happened," which comes from Goethe but, at a crucial passage in *Faust*, is uttered by the devil in

³⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 395.

³⁶⁹ Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 390.

order to reveal his innermost principle, the destruction of memory. The murdered are to be cheated out of the single remaining thing that our powerlessness can offer them: remembrance.”³⁷⁰ A past that is “citable in all its moments” must, therefore, sever the possibility of the resurgence of the atrocities of the past that would contest the historical narratives that survive by extinguishing all heterogeneity. The reason why Goethe and Adorno are right in attributing the destruction of memory to the devil is that the annihilation of bodies can be made absolute when there can no longer be remembrance of this loss.

The impoverishment of experience and a weakness of memory, therefore, bolster the conditions in which a redeemed past can flourish, and allows for the relentless redressing of the past in a glorified form. In so doing, the attachment of memories to an embodied history becomes lost, and what is left is not the remembrance of living human beings, but rather historical narratives in which the suffering of the dead is no longer relevant. In the desire for the past to pull one out of present suffering, the oppressed relinquish the source of resistance. Benjamin identifies such a redemptive desire expressed in the valorization of labor by Social Democrats when he writes,

“The Social Democrats preferred to cast the working class in the role of a redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This indoctrination made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than the ideal of liberated grandchildren.”³⁷¹

The past that is mythically redeemed severs its relation to suffering of past generations, thus abdicating the force of history once again to the oppressors,

³⁷⁰ Adorno, *Critical Models*, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 91.

³⁷¹ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 394.

abetting the persistence of this suffering in the present. A point that the quote above emphasizes is that while the strength of a redeemed past may be tied to the completeness in virtue of which all events are swept under its authority, its allure arises out of a promise of redemption that is always looking to the future. Not only is the suffering of the bodies of the dead lost to remembrance, but also the demands of the present living human beings. The present becomes merely a passage from a glorified past to a redeemed future, never ceasing for a moment at which actual human bodies could reassert their claim for substantial happiness.

With the impoverishment of experience and the weakening of memory, the desire for a redeemed future is given the conditions under which it can persist. This futural orientation can be seen in the practices of historicism, where the past becomes knowable “as it really was,” and modern science, where there is a propensity to believe that knowledge can be freed from the burdens of the past. For both depend upon a detached perspective in which the so-called “objective” observer has all of the necessary facts available and uncorrupted by the burdens of history. Adorno critiques the desire to “start from scratch,” unburdening oneself from the horrors of the past. He writes, “One wants to break free of the past: rightly, because there will be no end to the terror as long as guilt and violence are repaid with guilt and violence; wrongly, because the past that one would like to evade is still very much alive.”³⁷² While a desire to escape a past that carries with it so much despair is understandable, except for the fact that this despair is still weighing on the present, and if one is seeking to escape the suffering of the present, one must

³⁷² Adorno, *Critical Models*, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” 89.

also reckon with the history of suffering that still exerts its force today. Benjamin characterizes the contemporary (one could read here “postmodern”) man as celebrating not the “traditional, solemn, noble, image of a man, festooned with all the sacrificial offerings of the past,” but rather “the naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a newborn babe in the dirty diapers of the present.”³⁷³ Here, Benjamin offers a critique of the contemporary man who looks out into the future for redemption from an unburdened present, all the while naively unaware of the profound effects of embodied history upon the moment in which they stand.

In what Benjamin terms “messianic” history, he locates the combination of mind and body that counteracts the annihilation of bodies occurring within historicist narratives. He writes, “At every stage of its existence, the form of the historical is that of mind and body combined. This combined mind and body is the category of its “now,” its momentary manifestation as an ephemeral yet immortal being.”³⁷⁴ The emphasis on the moment in which mind and body are combined runs in stark contrast to historicism in which all interpretation is looked at from above, reinterpreting all events as mere passages through a disembodied teleological structure. Thus, history cannot be thought according to a teleology bent on redemption that, in its haste for completeness, also destroys all lived moments, past and present. Benjamin explains, “History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the now-time.”³⁷⁵ The insistence

³⁷³ Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Vol. 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, “Experience and Poverty,” 733.

³⁷⁴ Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Vol. 1, 1913-1926*, “Outline of the Psychophysical Problem,” 393.

³⁷⁵ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 394-395.

that Benjamin places upon the “now-time” displays the aspects central to his critique of historicism. First, the demand of the “now-time” reasserts the form of history as not merely a fiction, but the form in which mind and body combine, staking a claim against any notion of history in which the relation to bodies, past and present, is covered over. Secondly, the “now-time” does not follow the linear structure of homogenous time, but rather injects the relation to the past with moments that, in their uniqueness, will always prove to be excessive to any narrative that attempts to attribute posthumous causality. In this way, the completeness and continuity of a ‘redeemed’ past will be torn apart. Finally, those who relate to history in the “now-time” are not detached from present concerns, but rather are eminently situated in the present moment so that they can make its claims upon a past that is in service to present demands. Such a historian, Benjamin writes, “grasps the constellation which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as the “now-time” which is shot through with splinters of Messianic time.”³⁷⁶ Since the present, in the “now-time,” is not caught in between a teleology that moves from a knowable past to a redeemed future, it is able to redeploy what is excessive to the historical narratives of progress in making a claim for living human beings in the present. All the while, this “tiger’s leap into the past,” as Benjamin refers to the dialectical engagement with history, never ceases to recognize that the claims that are made

³⁷⁶ Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 397.

for present fulfillment can only be made from within the present conditions, including the present distribution of power.³⁷⁷

Since a redeemed past is purportedly knowable in all its instances, history when bound to the image of mythic redemption is viewed as retrievable for posterity. However, such a prejudice is only possible when the strength for collective memory is lost. For Adorno, the very possibility of philosophy (i.e. critical thinking), as the mode in which substantial happiness can be found in enunciating our unhappiness, is dependent upon resisting this prejudice of historicism that claims that past knowledge and events are, and will be, readily available to the critical observer. Adorno sends out the challenge that “philosophy must do without the consolation that the truth cannot be lost.”³⁷⁸ With the desire to “start from scratch,” history must not only be considered as knowable, but also detached from the present. It is understandable that one would desire to break free from a past filled with such suffering, however, the only way that such suffering can be overcome is to draw strength from the moments of suffering that are necessarily excessive to the narratives of dominant teleology. Because of this, the struggles of the past must not seem irrelevant to present concerns, but rather the insistence upon remembrance of past moments of struggle must interrupt the appearance of continuity in a history that is redeemed, in spite of the impoverishment of experience and the weakening of the power of memory. This fleeting aspect of historical memory in light of the loss of historical, embodied experience requires that the memories of past moments must be halted so that they are not swallowed

³⁷⁷Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 395.

³⁷⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 34.

up by the broad strokes of oppressive teleological narratives. Benjamin addresses this concern when he writes, "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again...For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image."³⁷⁹ The retrieval of the image of the oppressed past, of "enslaved ancestors," penetrates the veneer of the image of the past presented for historicism. The insistence upon the perspective toward history as the "time of the now" gives Benjamin the critical resources to resist the loss of memory and linear continuity of redeemed history. For both he and Adorno recognize the stakes of abdicating history to the authority of teleological fictions born out of the desire for redemption. The repetitive warning that the past *can* be lost emphasizes the importance of remembrance in resisting the force of a redeemed history that is linear, and therefore detached from present concerns.

The significance of Benjamin's notion of 'messianic' time as the "time of the now" emerges when it is contrasted with the linear, homogenous, and empty time of a redeemed history. Realizing that the power of historicism comes from its allure in the face of powerlessness, he contends, "The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called "Once upon a time" in historicism's bordello. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history."³⁸⁰ This "blasting open" of history is made possible by taking history as embodied moments that exceed any teleological narrative that has been draped

³⁷⁹ Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 390-391.

³⁸⁰ Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938-1940*, 391.

over past events in order to serve those in power. Messianic time arises out of present struggles and the insistence that the “now” is not a mere passage, caught between the continuous trajectory between a glorified past and a redeemed future. The homogeneity and emptiness of redeemed history comes from the loss of any connection to a past of living bodies. Messianic time claims the struggles of living bodies that prove excessive to the narratives that attempt to vacuum all events into their web of fabricated meanings. By seizing the moments of danger, both Benjamin and Adorno resist the notion that embodied history can be viewed as anything but heterogeneous to a story of redemption, and in its embodiment, is anything but empty. This advocating for what is heterogeneous, as it turns out, is not only requisite for dialectical thinking, it is also imperative in staking a claim for history. The stakes of this struggle for history is decisive in whether the force of desire complicit with the status quo will continue to predominate, or whether the striving for substantial happiness can persist.

Kafka's Cough

The impoverishment of experience is marked by a detached relation to both the past and to bodies, and most decidedly by the disengagement to one's own body. What is most devastating, perhaps, about the loss of experience is that the desire for happiness turns the relation to what will bring substantial happiness and freedom on its head. In the spiritlessness of resignation, the impoverished place a greater value on their poverty than on its overcoming. Benjamin describes the situation in this way:

“Poverty of Experience. This should not be understood to mean that people are yearning for new experience. No, they long to free themselves from experience;

they long for a world in which they can make decided use of their poverty – their outer poverty, and ultimately also their inner poverty – that it will lead to something respectable.”³⁸¹

In light of the impoverishment of experience, those who suffer under their immediate conditions in turn make a value of their own detachment, and strategically find that this is conducive to achieving what is perceived as a modicum of success. They are not inexperienced from Benjamin’s perspective because they are well versed in the sort of “experience” that endows the world with preordained meanings and values. However, in this sense, they are no longer capable of thinking, let alone happiness, but have merely become technocrats, capable of navigating their way through the social and political machinery. The response to powerlessness is not the insistence on substantial happiness nor substantial freedom, but rather the submission to the forces that overwhelm their capacity for experience. Freedom, therefore, becomes marked by the flight from the body as the source of suffering. Rather than striving for the conditions in which substantial happiness could be possible, the oppressive forces that prevent those conditions are turned inward.

The notion of freedom under the sway of complicit desire seeks to cut ties from one’s relation to a past that does not offer a redeemed future, and one’s body which, as a location of suffering, is perceived as the nemesis to the delusional flight. As previously discussed, the desire to “break free” from the past or to “start from scratch” is directly related to the deformed notion of freedom that seeks to forget a history that involves pain and suffering. For the powerless such a response offers

³⁸¹ Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 2, Part 2, 1931-1934*, “Experience and Poverty,” 734.

the false hope that one can escape the past by sheer force of will, and this desire would not be so pernicious, if it did not depend upon the persistence of the mistaken denial of the past's spell over the present. The force of the past becomes overwhelming to those exhausted by the continuance of the atrocities of the past, so in response there is a submission to the delusion that one can be born again into a world that has no embodied history. However, as the above discussion has shown, substantial freedom in relation to history can only be won by making a claim for history that explodes the empty linearity of historicism in favor of a history in which past struggles of living, embodied human beings are seen as the concerns of the present. Even more, the claim to freedom is made possible and strengthened by this critical engagement with, rather than imaginative flight from, the past.

Traditional notions of freedom in Western philosophy have pitted the necessity of the functions of bodies against the freedom of the mind. Such notions of freedom and necessity, therefore, rely upon the separation of mind and body, and the notion that freedom entails escaping the necessity of the body. This prejudice allied the notion of submissive freedom with the loss of embodied experience, making bodies the regrettable source of unfreedom. The deformation that the desire for mythic redemption inflicts upon the notion of freedom turns against the very possibility of overcoming the material sources of unfreedom. This estrangement is captured by Benjamin in his essay on Kafka when he writes, "Because the most forgotten source of strangeness is our body – one's own body – one can understand why Kafka called the cough that erupted from within him "the

animal." It was the vanguard of the great herd."³⁸² For it is our "animal" nature that is said to bind us to necessity, while the flight of the human mind and volition that are said to define our freedom. However, since the impoverishment of embodied experience castrates the capacity for thinking, the aspiration for redemptive freedom in the mind contra the body only leads to a deepening of the unfreedom that has exiled the body to a "forgotten alien land." Any desire for substantive freedom will depend upon the capacity for living human beings to express that freedom through the interpenetration of thinking and bodies. That is, to seize upon the perhaps strange arrival of the body (a "cough") upon a world that is saturated by the unfreedom inherent in a world that attempts to subjugate bodies.

In challenging both teleological narratives of history and the estrangement from our bodies, Adorno and Benjamin do not seek to do away with mental, intellectual, or theoretical aspects of thinking, for such a desire is merely the resurgence of mythic redemption as approached from the other side of the dilemma. Those subject to the prejudice of mythic freedom separate everything according to the broad, oppositional, and fictional categories of "mind" and "body." In the desire for redemption, this prejudice leads theory to become severed from bodies and action to become severed from thinking. One manifestation of mutated desire that must be resisted seeks redemption by attempting to escape bodies, and the other by attempting to escape what is theoretical in thinking, yet both of these desires are founded upon the delusional prejudice that thinking and corporeality represent distinct and somehow opposing realms. For Adorno and Benjamin, the only way

³⁸² Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Observations on the Writings of Nicolai Leskov," *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 810.

that thinking or acting could be considered free is by understanding this relation dialectically. Adorno writes, "Theory and mental experience need to interact. Theory does not contain answers to everything; it reacts to the world, which is faulty to the core. What would be free from the spell of the world is not under theory's jurisdiction. Mobility is the essence of consciousness; it is no accidental feature."³⁸³ Theory is not capable of "freeing" itself from the turmoil and messiness of the world, but rather arises within the historical process that combines the aspects of mind and body. Substantial freedom entails having the 'mobility' that is possible only in theory that emerges out of experience. The "fall" of man is not the spiral into 'animal' bodily desires, but rather the incapacity to develop theory that responds to the world. Such a freedom assimilates experiences into thinking while not spurning the theoretical tools necessary to engage with the world critically. And the freedom to move between theory and experience opens the possibility of finding substantial happiness and freedom, through the critical expression of universal unhappiness and unfreedom.

The overwhelming force that consumes experience must be confronted if there is to be a possibility of substantial freedom. The forces (technological, military, economic, etc.) that swamp the capacity for experience lead to a well-founded sense of powerlessness. In order to make a claim for freedom, these forces cannot be allowed to employ this feeling of powerlessness to quash any spirit of resistance. Benjamin writes,

"The less a man is imprisoned in the bonds of fate, the less he is determined by what *lies nearest at hand*, whether it be people or circumstances. On the contrary, a free

³⁸³ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 31.

man is in complete control of what is close to him: it is he who determines it. The things that determine his life with the force of fate come to him from a distance. He acts not with "regard" to what is coming, as if it might catch up with him, but with "prudence" toward what is distant, to which he submits."³⁸⁴

The claim for freedom, therefore, cannot be won by co-opting the order of the world, people, and circumstances that are binding one's ability to think and act. The universal appearance of the authority of the status quo gives the strong impression that one's thoughts and actions (if they are to be free, or at least not inconsequential) are destined to conform, and therefore, resignation is the only path available. In determining what lies nearest to them, those who are free break through this appearance of universality. Adorno describes the role of speculative thought in this struggle for freedom when he writes, "The power of the status quo puts up the façades into which our consciousness crashes. It must seek to crash through them." However, that is not enough, because the thought must always be in the relation with experience that exceeds the limitation of that thought. Otherwise, the freedom born of speculation devolves into merely a new form of ideological bondage. Adorno explains, "Where the thought transcends the bonds it tied in resistance – there is its freedom. Freedom follows the subject's urge to express itself."³⁸⁵ The power of thinking (and, therefore, philosophy) is that it has the speculative strength to penetrate the pervasive force of what oppresses, and the depth of experience to refrain from the flight of redemption. By offering a way of expressing what binds that which is nearest, critical thought has the power to enable substantial freedom to the extent that it is possible today. Adorno states plainly what makes philosophy a free practice, "The freedom of philosophy is

³⁸⁴ Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, "Outline of the Psychophysical Problem," 398.

³⁸⁵ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 17.

nothing but the capacity to lend a voice to its unfreedom.”³⁸⁶ What is left of substantial freedom and happiness is the possibility for critique that finds expression in the resistance to unfreedom, rather than reverting to the delusions and resignation indicative of those suffering under the restrictive force of the desire for mythic redemption.

There is an affinity between freedom and happiness, and this affinity is born out of their shared complicity with nature. Enunciating unfreedom does not entail severing the ties to one’s body or history, but rather it involves the coalescing of theory, embodied experience, and the historical process. In other words, contra the traditional notion of freedom that sees the determinative power of nature (i.e. bodies) as a binding force that restricts freedom, substantial freedom only emerges out of and within nature as always already historical. Benjamin attributes such a liberating force to fairy tales, writing, “The liberating magic which the fairy tale has at its disposal does not bring nature into play in a mythical way, but points to its complicity with liberated man. A mature man feels this complicity only occasionally – that is, when he is happy; but the child first meets it in fairy tales, and it makes him happy.”³⁸⁷ Central to understanding Adorno and Benjamin’s notion of freedom as substantial is its complicity with nature, in contrast with redemptive freedom that stakes its success upon a war waged against nature. And the freedom that critical thinking offers in expressing that complicity (or lack thereof) with historical and embodied nature opens the possibility for substantial happiness.

³⁸⁶ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 18.

³⁸⁷ Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Writings of Nicolai Leskov,” *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 157.

Hunchback's Perspective

The shadow of despair that hangs with the impoverishment of experience imposes a distortion upon human desire. The desiderata of happiness and freedom deteriorate as the loss of experience becomes decisive. Thus, the task of the critical thinker is to lend a voice for freedom and happiness by revealing the distortions and mutilations that follow from a desire that seeks mythic redemption. Since the loss of experience does not afford direct access to what Benjamin describes as a “messianic” vision, it becomes necessary to identify and diagnose the symptoms of the deformation of that vision. There are several occurrences of this deformation, such as the moments of struggle that rise out of the flat surface of homogenous, empty time, or the animal cough of Kafka in which the alien body reasserts its presence. The real challenge, however, is not only to identify these moments, but to allow them to show their complicity with nature by not reducing them to another standpoint among others. As Adorno writes, “Experience lives by consuming the standpoint.”³⁸⁸ And from this it follows that critical thinking cannot rest at simply making a claim about bodies or history, but must be strong enough to persist amidst the overflowing of that claim. The desire for redemption, as it pertains to history, freedom, and happiness, feeds upon and exacerbates the conditions of delusion and resignation. It does so by seizing upon the fragmentary condition of contemporary human beings and deepening the wounds by making virtue out of a poverty. The despair that follows from the detachment from history, bodies, and even the present moment, colors everything, leaving only the possibility for a healthy resistance in

³⁸⁸ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 30.

the exposure of these wounds in their deformity. If Adorno is correct when he writes that “thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it,” then it is the task of the critic to find think amidst the excessiveness of the present, allowing it to be possible to recognize the mutations of “universal unhappiness” that accompanies the weakened standpoint of redemption.³⁸⁹ In so doing, the possibility of harnessing what is left of our “weakened messianic power” can be directed toward a substantial happiness that is immersed within the capacity for embodied thinking and praxis.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁹ Adorno, *Critical Models*, “Resignation,” 294.

³⁹⁰ *Praxis* understood as activity that is not severed from intellectual reflection.

Chapter Six

Epilogue

The dialectic of happiness provides the critical framework upon which the striving for human flourishing can be sustained, even in the midst of material conditions and relations of power that oppose that flourishing. The failure of various attempts to champion human flourishing can be located in the challenges that confront the development of a praxis that is resistant to accommodation while not relinquishing the constructive capacity to transform and organize a world in which the promise of happiness could be realized. The model of the dialectic of happiness, offered in the works of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, places demands upon critical thinking that are necessary when approaching the question of the possibility of happiness. The happiness that is promised by the “naïve” yet not so innocent conceptions of happiness that predominate in mass-culture consumerism as well as the reductively instrumental or a-historical conceptions prevalent in academic and activist circles undermine the efforts of their own striving. What is at stake in the critical reevaluation of the striving for happiness is nothing less than the resistance to the condemnation of self-defeat. While the allure and danger of the promises of happiness within a fetishized culture cannot be underestimated, the insidiousness of theorizing that is coopted by the strategies of accommodation often masks the dangers in righteous political aims and supposedly good intentions. The task that Adorno and Benjamin lay out for the critical theorist maintains the dialectical connection between thinking and historical experience, thus implicating the oppressed past with the claim for human flourishing in the present. Rather than

realizing present possibilities in the historical experience of missed opportunities, the attempt to run ahead (and thus away) from the conditions that block the experience of those (lost) possibilities moves along in step with the forces in which the loss is decisive. The theories of human flourishing represented in the works of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Marx reflect the threat that lurks in the conceptualization of human affect in its experientially excessive and historical nature. In the turn to these political theories of happiness that arise from theories of the affects one can identify the possibility of theorizing in spite, or perhaps, because of their failed attempts. The turn to political conceptions of happiness that emerge from materialist theories of the affects proves instructive to the evaluative turn to theorizing in the present. The value of addressing the attempts at thinking the political conception of happiness is that it allows for the reformulation of the notion of praxis in the interest of human flourishing.

The dialectic of happiness confronts political theorizing by insisting upon the dynamic relation of thinking, the object of thought, and the experience that is conceptualized while at the same time resisting that conceptualization. To think of human happiness in its historicity is to unlock the 'kernel', or concept, that drives political theorizing. Just as the commodity entailed both the closure and the opening of understanding economic relations for Marx, the concept of happiness can serve as either the garrison protecting the loss of experience or the signpost to indicate the missed opportunities that reveal historical and thus present possibilities. By revealing the role of the dialectic of happiness in the underlying conceptions that guide political theory, one is able to critically identify and ally thinking and acting

with the capacity for human flourishing. “Insistence upon a single word and concept as the iron gate to be unlocked is also a mere moment, though an inalienable one,” writes Adorno, “To be known, the inwardness to which cognition clings in expression always needs its own outwardness as well.”³⁹¹ The concept of happiness bears the veneer of the possibility of human flourishing when understood dialectically. However, in the form that submits to strategies of coping, accommodation, and/or reification, the concept of happiness can be coopted in service of the forces that oppose human flourishing. The dialectic of happiness poses a challenge to thinking in the insistence upon the “inwardness” of the concept that allies it with the capacity for historical experience and the necessity of an “outwardness” to the concept that runs the risk of reinstating an idolatrous or idealized notion. While the failure of concepts to adequately express the objects of thought weighs upon the idea of happiness, what makes happiness a unique concept in the realm of political thinking is its susceptibility to becoming idolized and coopted by ruling powers. Although the same could be said of many political concepts, most notably the concept of ‘freedom’, it is in the conception of happiness that one can find the most significant forms of submission and resignation to the forces that prevent human flourishing. The dialectic of happiness thinks between the poles of its inwardness in the possibility of the resuscitation of experience and the outwardness of its presentation and organization of society in the interests of human happiness.

³⁹¹ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1973) 53.

The writings of Adorno and Benjamin offer unique examples of how the dialectical notion of happiness can be modeled in which a new understanding of political praxis can find expression. The concern for human happiness is elaborated in a critical stance toward forces of accommodation. Whether those forces appear as the allure and immersion into consumer and cultural products, in the flight of detached and abstract theorizing, or in unreflective and hopeful activism, the critique of the promise of such strategies of accommodation reveal the possibility of happiness even amidst their failure. The intervention into failed strategies of preservation and flourishing offers a critical lever that is resilient in the face of conditions that deepen despair. While not hopeful, the dialectic of happiness as enunciated by Adorno and Benjamin reveals the possibility of happiness through a critique of un-dialectical cultural and political products, both intellectual and material.

The dialectic of happiness undoes the modern Epicureanism that deflates the notion of happiness and reduces it to satisfactions that bolster the status quo. The spectacle of the fetishized world deflects the recognition of the deformities of such conceptions, and the question of happiness is blurred by the (dis) ordering of desire against the interests of self-preservation and human flourishing. Rather than satisfying the need for emancipation, the promise of happiness is presented in the satiation of pleasurable wants. To be sure, the allure of the satisfaction through the goods of consumer culture is a response to a need, but it is a reactive response to material conditions that deny one's substantial happiness. In lieu of emancipation, the gratification of unsubstantial desires can serve as a lever to prop up the ruling

class. Whether it be the fascination of novelty or the negative satisfaction of not losing one's job, the redirection of desire toward adaptation to the status quo twists the aspiration for happiness into a self-defeating exercise and reason into a merely instrumental endeavor.

Thinking the dialectic of happiness while theorizing about political and social organization in the interest of human flourishing poses the difficulty of resistance to the reification of the concept and reintroduction of a teleological orientation of salvation. Whether this idolatrous or fetishized notion of happiness is explicitly mystical or secular makes no difference; as long as it becomes stuck upon the undialectical representation of the concept, it works in service of myth and against human flourishing. Such an undialectical image of happiness crushes its possibility for living human beings under its promise. However, just as one cannot do away with the "outwardness" of the concept in thinking, political and social organization cannot do without structure. As thought struggles with the loss of experience while not being able to do away with concepts, political thinking struggles with the theorizing of the living individuals that are to flourish in the organization of social power. This organization demands structure, but that structure must be responsive to living individuals. The difficulty is presented here in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, the institutions that form a political order must sustain a dynamic relation to the individuals whose interests they are to serve. And on the other hand, the power that allows for the flourishing of the individuals can only be represented in the form of a loss, or in the negative image of missed possibility. Otherwise, the

realization of happiness will be condemned to subservience to the conditions that assure the loss of experience and the perpetuation of misery.

The internal struggles and ultimate failure of Hobbes's science of politics provides a critical insight into the challenge of a theory of politics that is committed to human flourishing. On the one hand, Hobbes organizes his materialist physics of desire in accordance with the dictates of his theory of affect. On the other hand, his undialectical commitment to a science of politics that fetishizes both individuals and sovereign authority undermines the understanding that emerges regarding the relations of power between affective individuals. Rather than sustaining the insights of his theory of the affects, Hobbes reverts to the overarching, undialectical image of sovereign power in the 'Leviathan'. Of course, it could be argued that the fantasy of the demands of a detached 'science' and the Epicurean notion of happiness doomed him to retreat into the image of an authority that overwhelms all faction within a fractured society. Even in his failure, Hobbes's science of politics is instructive of the demands of organizing a society while resisting the descent into idolatry or fetishization. A common thread that runs through the three theorists that were addressed in the present study is that all three represented attempts to conceive of a theory of politics that emerges from an understanding of a theory of the affects and desire and from the communication of power amongst individuals in their collective strength. In other words, the insights of the relations of power as expressed in their theory of affect, at least in Spinoza and Marx, becomes manifest in a defense and public declaration of the merits of a democratic social order. In contrast to liberal democracy, the expressions of democracy found in Spinoza and

Marx are felicitous to the insights of dialectical thinking. Their felicity is owing to their account of the dynamic nature of power relations in which individuals coalesce through the coordination of their respective power, strengthening the collective power of the multitude, and thus improving their power for self-preservation and flourishing. However, both Spinoza and Marx struggle to conceptualize the transformation that will bring about such a condition of human flourishing, both in terms of the social structures and institutions that would ensure the persistence of such a community and in terms of the mobilizing elements that could bring about such a revolutionary change. This is not to say that Hobbes, Spinoza, and Marx do not offer models for thinking about the possible realization of human flourishing, but that in their struggles to conceptualize such a transformative politics, the challenges that confront the possibility of human flourishing comes into relief.

Political theory must be responsive to the nature of the individuals and the relations of power of which it is theorizing. Because of this, the dialectic of happiness cannot be burdened by a dogmatic insistence or appeals to a doctrine that is somehow cleansed of the material conditions of inheritance. The 'outwardness' of social organization will often adopt a stance that is *prima facie* ideological, yet persistently self-critical. At the moment in which the critical orientation ceases, the ideological elements of thinking overcome the dialectic. Just as the dialectic of happiness rejects the flight from the historically inherited and deformed power relations, the residual ideological elements cannot be wished away, but rather critiqued and put in service of human flourishing. The resistance to unreflective ideological forces accompanies the opposition to idolatrous representations of both

power and happiness. Benjamin's critique of the Social Democrats provides a warning to the realization of human flourishing through teleological and fetishized conception of happiness. The idea of happiness that is left for us could not be found in a concept purified of the residue of the past or in the fantasy of a liberated future. The dialectic of happiness locates its possibility in the critical, envious relation to the missed opportunities for happiness as they are expressed historically.

The present study spurs a multiplicity of avenues for further research. The return to theories of human happiness, thinking, and political organization that inform the present debates regarding human happiness and social and political theorizing can be enacted through the critical lens of the dialectic of happiness. In the struggle for critical thinking, one can envision a challenge to the descendants of "critical theory" who return to various strains of idealism, ontologizing, and accommodation with liberal theory. The engagement with contemporary critical theory can be addressed from the awareness of the insights and failures of the thinkers that helped to develop the dialectic of happiness through the historical engagement with living individuals in their social relations of productive and consumptive activity (or re-activity). There appears to be an impetus within critical theory that calls for self-critique, either toward detached abstractions and intellectualism or toward activism and liberalism. In either case, the critical force of critical theory depends, at the very least, upon the rejection of such modes of accommodation and resignation. For this critical force arises from the insight that human bodies and culture are historical and that the emancipation that is required for human flourishing must reject the conditions in which the present is

unreflectively dominated by the past. The present study, in posing the question of the possibility of happiness also asks what is left for the emancipatory possibilities that could only arise in a praxis that is ruthlessly critical.

The struggle for human flourishing today must entail the critical engagement with emancipatory politics from the discriminatory and exploitative relations that have been inherited and still maintain an active force to this day. The dialectic of happiness opens up a way of approaching such struggles that will sustain their emancipatory strength while avoiding the allure of setting up new idols or without confusing accommodating activism with the transformation of society in the interest of human flourishing. This dialectic shows the critical importance of a theory of the affects in organizing society in a way that harnesses the power of the individuals and the collective strength of the multitude, while not subsuming individuals under the thumb of an abstract collective. Along with the theory of affect, the critique of ideology informs the direction that emancipation will have to take if it is to intervene upon the force of ideas that oppose human flourishing. While these interventions will require specific, historical engagements with the forces that struggle for or against human flourishing, the dialectic of happiness will prove to be instructive in developing the expressions and (re) organization of society against debilitating forms of discrimination and exploitation in the interest of the realization of happiness for living, active human beings.

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