

Spring 2016

# A||A Adorno and Augustine; Parallel Conceptions of Alienation and the Self

Lukas Hoffman  
lukas.hoffman@colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr\\_theses](https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses)



Part of the [Other German Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Hoffman, Lukas, "A||A Adorno and Augustine; Parallel Conceptions of Alienation and the Self" (2016). *Undergraduate Honors Theses*. 1018.  
[https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr\\_theses/1018](https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/1018)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Honors Program at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact [cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu](mailto:cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu).

**A||A**

**Adorno and Augustine;  
Parallel Conceptions of Alienation and the Self**

Lukas Hoffman

Germanic Studies Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

March 30, 2016

Committee:

Arne Höcker, Assistant Professor of German—*Advisor*

Laura Osterman, Associate Professor of Russian—*Honors Council Representative*

Elias Sacks, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and Jewish Studies

*“Theodor W. Adorno formulated the problem of faith in progress quite drastically: he said that progress, seen accurately, is progress from the sling to the atom bomb. Now this is certainly an aspect of progress that must not be concealed. To put it another way: the ambiguity of progress becomes evident. Without doubt, it offers new possibilities for good, but it also opens up appalling possibilities for evil—possibilities that formerly did not exist. We have all witnessed the way in which progress, in the wrong hands, can become and has indeed become a terrifying progress in evil. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in man's ethical formation, in man's inner growth (cf. Eph 3:16; 2 Cor 4:16), then it is not progress at all, but a threat for man and for the world.”*

**~Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi***

*“Augustine realized that redemption and history can exist neither without each other nor within each other but only in tension, the accumulated energy of which finally desires nothing less than the sublation of the historical world itself for the sake of nothing less than this, however, can the idea of progress still be thought in the age of catastrophe.”*

**~Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models***

The title of this project should not sit easily with the reader. The bringing together a Roman Bishop from the fourth century with the twentieth century Marxist philosopher certainly seems counter-intuitive; however bringing them together has potential to bring out certain aspects of their writings, which would otherwise go unexamined. In their book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer develop Marx's concept of alienated consciousness, which Adorno further clarifies in later essays and lectures. In this project I will explore this development from consciousness, which is alienated through economic circumstances (Marx) to a consciousness that is fundamentally alienated through the genesis of consciousness itself. Generally understood, this alienation can be simply described as alienation from nature, from others, and from self, which is remarkably similar to the Augustine's conception of the fallen man, wherein the effects of the fall can be simply described as alienation from self, from others, from nature, and adding the theological aspect: alienation from God. The purpose of this project is to explore, examine, and analyze the origins and phenomenology of these two conceptions of humanity's existential state. The obvious point of contact between these two thinkers is the question of progress. Indeed, Adorno himself quotes Augustine his essay titled "On Progress" in his *Critical Models*. Such work has been investigated indirectly by Adorno's student, Karl Heinz Haag, who inspired Adorno's short dialogue with Augustine, in his *Fortschritt der Philosophie*, and has been directly addressed by Peter Uwe Hohendahl in "Progress Revisited: Adorno's Dialogue with Augustine, Kant, and Benjamin." The choice to begin the dialogue between these two thinkers on the level of self, however is a conscious decision to attempt to create a more intense investigation into intersections of theology and critical theory that can potentially lay the ground-work for future projects of a similar nature.

I first began conceptualizing this project over two years ago, when I read the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* for the first time. I recognized Adorno's brilliance in the vigor of his critique of the culture industry; however I felt that a dimension was missing from his paradigm—a dimension of theological speculation. In its foundations, this project was oriented toward a theological expansion of this critique by outlining the pervasiveness of the culture industry as having spiritual implications, as well as material. As I began to ponder how this project could be accomplished I realized I would have to begin by displaying the similarities between Adorno's understanding of alienation and a Christian understanding of original sin. Defining a single Christian conception of original sin that could be set next to Adorno proved to be beyond the extent of this project and so I chose a thinker, whose conception of fallenness seemed to most closely pair with Adorno's thought—Augustine.

There are obvious theoretical issues with attempting a synthesis of Adorno and ancient Christian theology. The first and potentially most problematic issue with attempting this synthesis is the stark contrast between Adorno's metaphysical position of historical materialism and Augustine's position of strict theism and belief in the immaterial soul. I circumvent this problem through a phenomenological approach, through which I can compare these theories' phenomenological accounts of alienation, which would avoid the problem of metaphysics. This problem cannot, of course be completely ignored and I will acknowledge the critical differences in the discussion of the similarities. Originally, this project was conceived as proposing a synthesis of the two thinkers, but after beginning my investigation, I chose to begin by simply showing the parallels in thought between Adorno and Augustine. I position Adorno's understanding of alienated consciousness within the tradition of Marxism, in order to justify the theological engagement with Adorno, specifically. I will then provide a thorough, in depth

phenomenological analysis of Adorno's concept of consciousness, how it emerges as alienated, and how it becomes reified by the culture Industry, while working predominantly with the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "The Culture Industry Revisited," and the essay, which is central to this portion of the project, "On Subject and Object." After establishing a phenomenology of Adorno's concept, the focus will switch to the Christian-side of things. I plan to explicate Augustine's conception of the fallen man through his major works, such as *Confessions*, *City of God*, *On the Trinity*, among other minor texts. I also will engage with limited secondary literature on Augustine in order to justify the use of modern language within the context of Augustine's ancient writings. The third portion of this project will consist in the critical discussion of the two conceptions, wherein I will critically analyze the similarities and differences of both Authors. The project will conclude with self-reflection and point toward the potential of future projects of a similar nature.

## Adorno's Alienated Consciousness

Adorno does not specifically devote any intellectual effort to the exposition of the phenomenology of his concept of alienated consciousness, which is the subject of this paper. The project of Adorno is oriented always towards critique, not necessarily toward the exposition of his concepts. I will nonetheless attempt to explicate the phenomenon of which Adorno speaks when critiquing the culture industry as institutional reification of alienated consciousness. I begin this explication of the phenomena of alienated consciousness by beginning with Adorno's inheritance from Marx, where the concept of alienation is threefold—alienation from self, nature, and others. Then proceeding forward, I discuss the deviation of Adorno from the traditional Marxist picture in his localization of consciousness (and alienation) to the level of the individual. This individual consciousness can in part be seen as a return to Hegelian concepts of consciousness and I will argue that Adorno's conception of consciousness has some form of agency. The agency, in Adorno's consciousness, however differs greatly from the freedom of conscious agency discussed in Hegel, in that Adorno preserves his position of historically determined materialism. Although he acknowledges agency, this agency lacks any freedom because of the extent of its inherent alienation and the constant reification of alienation.

### *I. The Problem of Alienation in Adorno*

While Adorno does have fundamental deviations from Marx, he clearly positions the basis of his thought within the Marxist tradition. The identification of the phenomenology of alienation in Adorno is, however, rather problematic. Adorno's hatred for phenomenology leads him to write in a fashion, such that he does not engage in explicit identification of phenomena. For Adorno, phenomenology is a form of bourgeois thought that attempts to reconcile the subject

/ object relation in a dissatisfying fashion. His only phenomenology, is therefore a critique of this subject / object relation—a critique that does not build a positive identification of phenomena. He thus utilizes a form in his writing that avoids the identification of the underlying phenomenon by relying upon the level of abstract, negative-dialectical thought. In the attempt to identify the phenomena of alienation within Adorno's thought, his position in the Marxist tradition becomes incredibly important. Adorno inherits the concept of alienation through the Marxist tradition. Marx's empirical analyses of the phenomena of alienation are not discussed by Adorno, as they have already (in the Marxist paradigm) been empirically established. Thus, in the discussion of the threefold nature of alienation—alienation from self, nature, and others—is redundant to Adorno's project, but is important to the holistic identification of Adorno's conception of alienation. The clear Marxist nature of Adorno's project, therefore, provides a heuristic argument for such a form of alienation, without the redundancy of further reiterating Marx's empirical analysis. It is thus necessary, in order to explicate the fundamental phenomena of alienation in Adorno, to turn to Marx's empirical analysis of alienation.

Marx's analysis concludes that the three-fold nature of alienation is derived from the ever-pervasive form of empirical alienation found in capitalistic society—alienated labour. Under capitalism, the distinction between the “property-owners and the propertyless workers,”<sup>1</sup> is established and the worker is coerced to work for the capitalist, such that he is separated from his product. The product of his labour becomes the property of the capitalist and thus the worker is alienated from his work. The lack of participation of the worker in the profits derived from his work is a primary issue that Marx identifies with regard to alienation. The worker is separated

---

<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl. “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1978. Print. 70.



from his work and he is disenfranchised through the process of production. The consequence is that his labour becomes an external object, commodified, and exists as something alien to him. It possesses a hostile power over him and undermines his autonomy. Alienated labour is responsible for the three other forms of alienation identified by Marx as “production itself must be active alienation.”<sup>2</sup> Alienated labour thus produces a threefold alienated phenomenon.

Because of the split in self, caused by the alienation of one’s labour, which separates man as subject from his identity as worker, man’s self becomes alienated from itself. Within the Marxist paradigm, activity precedes consciousness. Life activity is thus the positing of self. As man’s life-activity (work) becomes alienated through the processes of capitalism, it produces “the estrangement of man from man.”<sup>3</sup> The production of worker as commodity, inherent in the wage system of capitalism, denies the worker his identity as subject. He becomes objectified and is thus separated from his nature as subject. He is a worker first, and only secondarily does he exist as a subject. Work becomes necessary for him to experience himself as subject and yet within the processes of work, this is exactly what he is denied; “the extremity of this bondage is that it is only as worker that he continues to maintain himself as a physical subject, and that it is only as a physical subject that he is a worker.”<sup>4</sup> His life becomes only a means to life and thus he suffers. This alienation of each man from himself leads to the alienation of man from others.

Within a system of alienated labour, man views others from the position of a worker. Thus, the relationship of man to others becomes infected with the alienation that man experiences within himself as a result of his labour, “estranged labour estranges the species from man.”<sup>5</sup> If man’s life-activity belongs to a being alien to himself, then his relationship to this

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 75

being—the other—becomes inherently alienated. Man’s consciousness of himself exists on the level of the collective in Marx.<sup>6</sup> Thus if man is alienated from self, he is by necessity alienated from the other. This alienation occurs through a practical medium,

Thus through estranged labour man not only engenders his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also engenders the relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and to the relationship in which he stands to these other men.<sup>7</sup>

As this alienation informs his self, so it also infects his relationships. Man becomes alienated from society because his own life-activity—his labour—is alienated. The processes of production condition the relation of man to man, thereby transferring alienation from one sphere to another. These two effects of alienated labour, alienation from self and from others, interact with each other and further alienate man from nature.

Nature is the means for man’s sustenance; however, under the conditions of capitalism and as a result of alienated labour, man becomes alienated from nature. Man relies upon nature to provide the necessities of life; however, “the more the worker by his labour appropriates the external world, sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of a means of life.”<sup>8</sup> In order to live, man must work within the conditions provided to him by society; however, these conditions deprive him of the means for life through forcing him to appropriate the external world—nature—and thus to alienate himself from it. Man, who once lived in accordance with nature without needing to possess it, now divides the external world into different pieces of property. Thus Marx argues that domination of nature is inherent to alienation from Nature, a concept

---

<sup>6</sup> This is a point of strong deviation of Adorno from Marx. Marx’s conception of consciousness does not deal with the level of the individual, but rather is identified first as the consciousness of species-being and later, as alienation and domination become pervasive in society, consciousness becomes divorced from species being and becomes more localized to class-consciousness.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 78.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. 72

which is quite formative in the Adornian picture. The propertyless worker is thus directly alienated from nature in that he appropriates nature for the capitalist, using property that he doesn't own to produce commodities which he is incapable of purchasing with his own wage. Even the mere concept of property implies alienation from nature in that it refuses man, as species, equal participation in nature as a means to life.

Adorno's inheritance of these concepts of alienation is important to establishing the holistic concept of alienation in his thought. The development that Adorno makes in the concepts of alienation cannot be understood except as implementing these phenomena. That is, without understanding alienated consciousness as estrangement from others and nature, in addition to the obvious alienation from self that is inherent in Adorno's conception, then Adorno's critique of enlightenment would be nonsensical. It is from the primal alienation of consciousness that the drive [*Trieb*] to domination proceeds. This drive to domination is the basis for the equation of enlightenment to myth and of fascism to capitalism. The fundamental difference between Adorno's understanding of alienation and the traditional Marxist's conception lies in the causality of alienation. As discussed, within Marx's paradigm, all alienation is essentially alienation of man from labour. Adorno, however, intensifies the problem of alienation by positing a different causality. In Adorno, all alienation proceeds first from alienated consciousness. This conception of consciousness is also a fundamental dissent with the Marxist tradition and will now be investigated at length.

## *II. Individual Consciousness vs. Collective (class) Consciousness*

While Adorno does inherit the phenomena of alienation from Marx, his thought diverges from traditional Marxism as a result of the attention he gives to individual consciousness. Within Marx's thought, the consciousness operates at the level of the collective. Individual

consciousness is of no concern for Marx because of his axiomatic standpoint that “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.”<sup>9</sup> Individual consciousness is therefore of no importance in his philosophy of historical materialism. The material nature of consciousness is such that it is derived from one’s life-activity—from work. One’s work does not flow from agency of the person, but is rather determined by the needs of man. The society produces needs and man’s life activity is determined according to the pursuit of the satisfaction of those needs. Man’s individual consciousness is therefore simply a product of the consciousness of the collective, insofar as the consciousness is consciousness of life-activity and life-activity is necessarily oriented toward the satisfaction of needs.

Adorno, however is concerned with the individual consciousness. Consciousness, for Adorno, can only exist in reference to subjectivity. Subjectivity, likewise, can only exist in the distinction of itself from objectivity. That is, the subject can only be subject insofar as it takes something for its object. There can be no such thing as a subject without having something for which it takes as its object because then the subject would have no subjectivity because it would have no apprehension and therefore it would simply exist as object and not as subject. Additionally, a subject is also an object, insofar as other subjects perceive that subject as their object. Adorno’s account of consciousness is highly reliant upon the concept the emergence of the conscious in the emergence of subject / object distinctions. Adorno operates within a sort-of Nietzschean metaphysic—wherein the “The separation of subject and object is both real and semblance;”<sup>10</sup> real because the perception of the separation cannot be divorced from one’s consciousness, but semblance because differentiation comes from undifferentiation. The world

---

<sup>9</sup> Marx, Karl. “The German Ideology.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*. Ed. Robert C. Tucker. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 1978. Print. 155.

<sup>10</sup> Adorno. *Critical Models*. 249.

which exists before the emergence of subject / object distinctions is incomprehensible and simply chaos.

Adorno asserts that there is an alienation presented to man in the emergence of consciousness as such. He also inherits a similar primal origin to his concept of consciousness from Marx, who shows that primal consciousness is directly related to religious consciousness. He does, however, give a slightly different genesis story to the emergence of consciousness. Man emerges from the chaos of nature only through the false establishment of himself as separate from everything else.

Before the subject constituted itself, undifferentiatedness was the terror of the blind nexus of nature, was myth; it was in their protest against this myth that the great religions had their truth content. After all, undifferentiatedness is not unity, for the latter requires, even according to Platonic dialectic, diverse entities of which it is the unity. For those who experience it, the new horror of separation transfigures the old horror of chaos, and both are eternal sameness.<sup>11</sup>

The transition from undifferentiatedness to the differentiation of self from the other (subject from external object) comes in such a fashion that necessitates the estrangement of the self from that which is other. Self-consciousness, which is the basis of subjectivity, finds its basis in a distinction that is historically ungrounded, and in the foundation of a form of reason which necessitates the alienation of the self from its own self. The subject, in order to perceive anything must perceive that which is to be perceived as an object—for were a subject to perceive that which is to be perceived as subject, this would violate the *pricipum individualis*, upon which its very consciousness is based upon, which is differentiatedness.

---

<sup>11</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998. Print. 246

This emergence of consciousness becomes the moment in man, which determines its history. Consciousness, which gives man the illusion of freedom, denies man this freedom precisely in the differentiation of self from other. In this lie, which the self tells itself in order to be constituted as a self, the self-determines itself to be subject to the world—for it must define itself as the negation of that which is external to it. Man thus becomes opposed to nature, while simultaneously subjected to it. This is what inspires man's first impulse toward domination. The desire to escape the subjection to nature is determined by the *principum individualis*, which is the first cause of the origin of consciousness and is first expressed in myth. In primal man:

the good and evil powers, the holy and the unholy, were not unambiguously distinguished. They were bound together like genesis and decline, life and death, summer and winter. The murky, undivided entity worshiped as the principle of *mana* at the earliest known stages of humanity lived on in the bright world of the Greek religion. Primal and undifferentiated, it is everything unknown and alien; it is that which transcends the bounds of experience, the part of things which is more than their immediately perceived existence<sup>12</sup>

Myth becomes on one hand an escape from the rigid distinctions between self and other, as the god is both other and an extension of self, while simultaneously being man's expression of domination—placing himself as superior to nature through the knowledge of nature that he derives from the myth. Man's first encounter with nature is as 'other', which designates the estrangement of man from nature. In realizing the 'otherness' of nature, man cries out in terror of the unknown, but "the cry of terror called forth by the unfamiliar becomes its name."<sup>13</sup> This is the origin of myth—or religious consciousness—which serves to reify (falsify) the already alienated consciousness of man. Myth "fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the

---

<sup>12</sup> Adorno, Theodor W and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002. Print. 11

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

known, permanently linking horror to holiness.”<sup>14</sup> Myth gives man power over nature, while becoming the echo of what was before the emergence of subjectivity.

That which is in nature becomes, for the conscious, both what it is and a symbol for something else—*mana*—the manifestation of the divine within the world. Adorno writes that, “This does not mean that the soul is transposed into nature, as psychologism would have us believe; *mana*, the moving spirit, is not a projection,”<sup>15</sup> but is rather the expression of the very weakness of the ego of primitive man in its reflection of the undifferentiatedness from which consciousness emerges. The mythic reflection upon the world has its genesis in the failure of man’s ego to fully impose itself upon the world as differentiated. As within Marx, the consciousness of man becomes conscious of itself as opposed to “the immediate sensuous environment ... a completely alien, all-powerful and unassailable force.”<sup>16</sup> Adorno builds off of this moment in Marx, emphasizing this historical moment as the foundation of consciousness and arguing that the alienation in this moment has never seen emancipation—at least as a historical moment. Marx emphasizes this moment as a proto-communism, a moment when man understands his species-being and works together for survival. There is no property or class distinctions. Adorno, rather, emphasizes this moment as the origination of alienation. The alienation present in the original consciousness of man enacts domination within the primal society. So, for Adorno, alienation is as present in proto-communism as it is within the mythic epoch and every subsequent system. Material forms of alienation, as exposed in Marx, are for Adorno the material manifestations of alienation as already present in the consciousness of individuals. For Marx, “Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life,”<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Marx. “German Ideology.” 158.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 155.

and Adorno builds from this premise. Life first determines consciousness, in so far as subjectivity must reference the object as external in order to establish itself as subject. Then, reflexively, Adorno states that “Everything comes from consciousness.”<sup>18</sup> A certain amount of agency is acknowledged in the subject by Adorno, while maintaining a position of historical materialism. The capacity of this agency to become free is, however, a very different question and will be discussed at length with Adorno’s relation to Hegelian thought.

### *III. Hegel, Agency, and Self-Alienation*

While Adorno’s position on consciousness and history is clearly within the line of the Marxist tradition, he also draws significantly back to the Hegelian tradition in his dialectical method. Engels stated that Marx took the Hegelian dialectic and “turned [it] off its head, on which it was standing, and placed [it] upon its feet.”<sup>19</sup> It could be said that Adorno takes Marx and turns him from his feet back onto his head in his return to a more Hegelian line of thought. Adorno is very cautious of this move, as he considers Hegel to be much too utopian of a thinker to be accepted whole-heartedly, “In Hegel history is regarded immediately as progress in the consciousness of freedom, such that consciousness for Hegel amounts to a realized freedom. This doctrine is extremely precarious.”<sup>20</sup> While Adorno does acknowledge a certain amount of agency within individual consciousness, he rejects wholeheartedly that this consciousness exists in freedom. In a dialectical turn, however, Adorno also denies that freedom can exist without consciousness, “Where a subjective interest, a consciousness, is absent, there can be no freedom. Where objective conditions cease to favour a person or a category, or even obstruct and

---

<sup>18</sup> Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 98.

<sup>19</sup> Engels. “Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy.”

<sup>20</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *History and Freedom: Lectures 1964-1965*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: Polity, 2006. Print. 3.



undermine them, there will be a corresponding loss of interest in them, and hence of the strength and ability required to help them to prosper.”<sup>21</sup> Freedom, then can only exist with consciousness; however no consciousness experiences freedom as a result of its own self oppression. Adorno problematizes Hegel’s master-slave dialectic and turns it back upon the free-consciousness that Hegel seems to proclaim.

For Hegel, consciousness is the knowing of an object. The process of this knowing is rather complex and is quite-frankly inapplicable to the concept of consciousness given by Adorno. What is important in Hegel; however, is the understanding of consciousness as freedom. Consciousness must exist in Freedom in the Hegelian paradigm because, as the self sets itself as an objective entity in the world, it determines itself. This positing of self as objective contains the objectification of the self—the creation of Ego. Hegel gives meaning to the tautology “Ich bin ich,”<sup>22</sup> by positing the subject (Ich) as different from the object (ich): I [self] am [my] Ego. The synthesis of the self and the ego becomes the self, who is conscious of itself, or self-consciousness as such. This self-determination is the origin of the freedom of agency within consciousness. This freedom is limited by desire, which in its movement outside the self towards some other object, which thereby undermines the self’s ability to establish itself as self because in its self-determining, it then moves away from itself. There remains freedom, however, in so long as the self maintains itself as self. The dialectical image that Hegel gives of self-consciousness—the master / slave dialectic—paints this picture of simultaneous freedom, although existing in different forms. The master is freedom to control the self (agency) and the slave is the ability to freely fulfill the needs of the master. Self-consciousness is the dialectical

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. "Die Wahrheit Der Gewißheit Seiner Selbst." *Phänomenologie Des Geistes*. Marxists.org. 1807. Web. 11 Feb. 2016.

synthesis of the master and the slave—the self is both master and slave simultaneously and therefore there exists always freedom in self-consciousness.

For Adorno, individual consciousness exists in the relation between the object of self—the ego—projected by the subject as self-understanding and differentiatedness and subjectivity itself. The weakness of the ego, however, disturbs the master-slave relation as outlined by Hegel. Adorno writes, “It is the servant which the master cannot control at will.”<sup>23</sup> In the inability of the ego to establish itself as objective, the self does not have control over itself. This is the phenomenon identified by Adorno as ‘ego-weakness’. It is because of the “ego [that the self] does not reach the point of a dialectic between his internal and external powers.”<sup>24</sup> Thus the insufficiency of the self to remain as self requires its subsequent subjugation to something other than itself. This is satisfied to man’s subjection to nature, as seen already in Marx; however it is re-capitulated on the individual level, as opposed to the level of class-consciousness and species being that Marx operates on. Adorno repositions the subjection to nature to the individual, “In the mastery of nature, without which mind does not exist, enslavement to nature persists.”<sup>25</sup> Adorno returns to a Hegelian position in order to insert Marx’s concept of historical materialism into the level of the individual. By doing so, Adorno acknowledges agency to consciousness, but denies that freedom necessarily accompanies agency.

The possibility of freedom within the agency of consciousness, then becomes the critical moment, which should be the focus of the enlightenment. Instead, Adorno criticizes the Enlightenment for being “totalitarian.”<sup>26</sup> While the aims of enlightenment are noble, the effect

---

<sup>23</sup> Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 29

<sup>24</sup> Adorno. *History and Freedom*. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 31

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

that it has had has been the further systemization of and differentiation from nature; which has had the effect of systematized domination. (Because the goals of enlightenment are fixed and clearly defined, they become totalizing and therefore totalitarian.) This further detachment of reason from nature reifies the consciousness of human beings and they begin to lose consciousness of themselves as nature. At this moment,

all the purposes for which they keep themselves alive—social progress, the heightening of material and intellectual forces, indeed consciousness itself—become void, and the enthronement of the means as the end, which in late capitalism is taking on the character of overt madness, is already detectable in the earliest history of subjectivity.<sup>27</sup>

The very emergence of subjectivity requires its differentiation from the object. This individuation reflects the later movement of enlightenment to completely detach the individual from nature, but by doing so, undermines the very goal of the enlightenment—greater freedom—and replaces it with reification.

The problems of individual agency in Adorno are furthered by more traditional Marxist claims, where he discusses class-consciousness. Since the individual's consciousness is reified through enlightenment and capitalism, the individual's consciousness becomes determined through the primacy of the object. The agency, lacking freedom, remains latent; however the discussions of class-consciousness, or the discussion of man as species-being become useful in explicating the phenomena of alienation. Adorno writes, "The principle of individuality was contradictory from the outset. First, no individuation was ever really achieved. The class-determined form of self-preservation maintained everyone at the level of mere species being."<sup>28</sup> So, while the consciousness of persons has the potential of agency, any freedom in this agency

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 43.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 125.

has been lost through the reification caused by the problem of individuation. This problem arises from the problem of subject / object distinctions as previously discussed. The mastery of self, as the object of self-consciousness, nearly always necessitates the destruction of genuine subjectivity, which is a necessary component of actual self-mastery. Preservation of self, then has historically lead to the destruction of the very thing which is to be preserved. The individual's agency, then has not reached the "stage at which self-awareness might lead this rationality to bring about change."<sup>29</sup> Enlightenment has promised this stage and simultaneously denied it from becoming realized through technical, systematized domination of nature and persons. Adorno's rejection of Utopian thought is not strictly speaking pessimism, but rather is the identification of the underlying problems brought about by alienation. True enlightenment remains a possibility; however the present "enlightenment... becomes mass deception and is turned into a means for fettering consciousness. It impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves."<sup>30</sup> There is, then, the possibility in Adorno for persons to have full, autonomous agency—to judge and decide consciously—however the reification, which is always present prevents this agency from ever reaching autonomy.

#### *IV. Reification, Agency without Freedom*

The concept of reification, in Adorno, is important for the phenomenon of alienated consciousness because it prevents the potential for autonomous (free) agency from ever becoming expressed. This reification can be understood as a deepening of the estrangement of consciousness from that which it takes to be its object. This concept of reification is, similarly to

---

<sup>29</sup> Adorno. *History and Freedom*. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Trans. J. M. Bernstein. London: Routledge, 2001. Print. 106

Adorno's conception of alienation, a deepening of the traditional concept through a localization to the consciousness of the individual. A rather influential figure in Adorno's conception of reification is Georg Lukács, who published *Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat*, which is critical of the Marxist Revolution. Lukács' concept of reification operates at the level of class-consciousness. With the advent of modern capitalism, the social structure becomes arranged entirely around the commodity and the exchange-value of the commodity far outweighs its use-value and as the society becomes structured around the expression of alienated labour, the commodity grows in power over the consciousness of the proletariat, such that they are unable to realize their own alienation. In orienting the social structure toward the product of alienation, the consciousness, which is already alienated by estranged life activity becomes reified—or the alienation is further falsified. Reification is the process of estranging the already alienated. In other words, reification is the re-orienting the alienated consciousness back towards that which alienated it in the first place. What is important in the reification of Lukács is the social structure as it affects the class consciousness, especially of the proletariat. Adorno's movement toward the consciousness of the individual then takes the concept of reification as given by Lukács and applies it to the individual's alienation.

Reification is the further estrangement of a person's consciousness from self, nature, or others. This deepening of alienation—falsification—occurs through a reflective relationship of consciousness to the world. Because the self must assert itself over nature in order to persist as self, domination is a fundamental anthropomorphic drive in man. As man begins to dominate nature (and others with it), he creates systems and laws which reflect that domination. Adorno writes, "domination, in becoming reified as law and organization, first when humans formed settlements and later in the commodity economy, has to limit itself. The instrument is becoming

autonomous: independently of the will of the rulers, the mediating agency of mind moderates the immediacy of economic justice”<sup>31</sup> The agency that consciousness has imposes itself on the world through domination; however this imposition has a negative, reflexive relationship that through the creation of social-structures and systems, the consciousness becomes subjected to these systems. Every decision of the self in Adorno becomes determined by commodities. The social structure, thus being oriented toward the proliferation of the commodity’s power in pursuit of profit gains autonomy. This autonomy of the social-structure—or instrument—is taken from its subjects through reification. This phenomenon, for Adorno, is not entirely constricted to modern capitalism, as it was for Lukács. Reification is the product of an alienated consciousness confronting and confronted by something other than itself. Subject / object confrontation is, for Adorno “already a piece of reification. Once this is seen through, then a consciousness objectified to itself, and precisely as such directed outward, virtually striking outward, could no longer be dragged along without self-reflection.”<sup>32</sup>The opposition between subject and object exists within the consciousness itself in the objectification of the self by the self—the ego. The self-reflexivity becomes the first manner in which human consciousness experiences reification and explains the deep-seediness of the problems of human alienation. Escaping a self-reified alienated consciousness necessitates more than the change in social-structures or classes. It requires more than the destruction of private property and non-estranged labour.

The problem of potentiality of the emancipation of the individual is qualitatively different for Adorno than Marx and Lukács. Because consciousness has agency and is capable of imposing itself on the world, the first step of emancipation must begin with the emancipation of

---

<sup>31</sup> Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Adorno. *Critical Models*. 249.

consciousness from the primacy of the other. The reification of consciousness, however, in its present state acts against the good of the conscious. Adorno writes, “Any need which might escape the central control is repressed by that of individual consciousness.”<sup>33</sup> While consciousness in Adorno’s paradigm possesses agency, within the society of mass culture—or the culture industry—the individual lacks freedom in their agency as their consciousness has been reified by such a social structure. The implementation of agency at the level of individual consciousness is an important deviation of Adorno from Marx, however he maintains a position of historical materialism through this concept of reification. That is, while there is potential for agency at the level of the individual, “the primacy of the object proves itself in that it qualitatively alters the opinions of reified consciousness.”<sup>34</sup> Adorno simultaneously denies and affirms Marx’s axiomatic claim, that life informs consciousness, not consciousness life; affirming that life informs consciousness (in the primacy of the object) and denying that consciousness cannot inform life (by admitting agency).

Adorno’s conception of alienation is thus a movement to localization of alienation. He inherits Marx’s identification of the phenomena of alienation as existing in a three-fold form—alienation from self, nature, and others. This movement towards localization of alienation while simultaneously retaining the phenomena identified by Marx allows Adorno to empirically establish the drive towards domination within the consciousness of mankind. Consciousness, insofar as it is alienated, is agent of all domination. Furthermore, Adorno re-appropriates Lukács’ concept of reification to become applicable to the level of the individual subject, giving him a more robust claim to the denial of freedom of individuals, especially within modern capitalism.

---

<sup>33</sup> Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 95.

<sup>34</sup> Adorno. *Critical Models*. 251.

This divergence from traditional Marxism also opens up Adorno to the dialogue with the Christian Tradition, which is the subject of this paper. In giving the individual agency, Adorno resembles a Christian anthropology more closely than other Marxists, who operate in a completely deterministic paradigm.



## Augustine's Fallen Self

Augustine presents a phenomenology of human fallenness that is quite similar to the conception of alienated consciousness in Adorno. This identification of the phenomena of the effects of original sin does, admittedly have an entirely different narrative of origin, and therefore a different metaphysic underlying it. The purpose of this paper, however is to identify and critically discuss the parallel in thought between Adorno and Augustine. Similarly to Adorno, it is not Augustine's specific concern to illuminate the phenomenological elements of the effects of original sin. Augustine's project was mostly concerned with refuting of the Pelagians<sup>35</sup> and attempting to solve the problem of evil. His discussion of the effects of original sin come from a combination of texts, ranging from his personal *Confessions*, to lofty theological explorations such as *On the Trinity*, to texts in specific engagement with the Pelagians such as *On Grace and Freedom*, and also including dogmatic texts such as Augustine's famous *City of God*.

According to Augustine, St. Paul begins the discussion of the effects of original sin in his Letter to the Romans and his First Letter to the Corinthians, by claiming that the effect of original sin was death.<sup>36</sup> This death becomes understood by Augustine as twofold—death of the soul, and the final death, which is death of body and soul. The death “of the soul takes place when God forsakes it, as the death of the body when the soul forsakes it.”<sup>37</sup> The final death is the solidification of the second death—that is the eternal existence in total forsakenness in adding the death of the body to the death of the soul. The first death is the death of specific importance

---

<sup>35</sup> Pelagius was a bishop at the time of Augustine who held that original sin did not affect the will and therefore that it was possible to achieve salvation as an act of the will—without the help of God or His grace.

<sup>36</sup> Rom 5:12 & 1 Cor 15:21

<sup>37</sup> Augustine. *The City of God*. Trans. Marcus Dods. New York: Modern Library, 1993. Print. XIII, 2, 412.

for the purposes of this paper, because we are not discussing soteriological phenomenon, but rather phenomena that are a part of every-day human life.

The forsaking of the soul by God has serious consequences for human life in the Augustinian paradigm. It occurs when the first soul, in the beginning of times, decided to disobey the commandment of God (which was given to him out of love and allowed him to be able to love).<sup>38</sup> This action against God and his love is done with the full consent of Adam's will and is not a result of him being deceived, for were he to have been deceived, it would not have truly been sin, "So we cannot believe that Adam was deceived, and supposed the devil's word to be truth, and therefore transgressed God's law, but that he by the drawings of kindred yielded to the woman"<sup>39</sup> Adam asserts a life with the woman to be a higher good than a life with God, denying the natural order, "the man could not bear to be severed from his only companion, even though this involved a partnership with sin."<sup>40</sup> Thus the soul's revolt against God is justly punished and "the soul is deserted by God."<sup>41</sup> This desertion has consequences beyond the obvious soteriological and eschatological consequences and results in an estrangement of the self from itself.

The soul derives support from God in order to exist as master over its body. As the soul rejects the authority of God, so too does the body reject the authority of the soul. This is a result of the loss of authority in the rejection of authority by the soul. In other words, "The soul,

---

<sup>38</sup> Were Adam to have had no commandment from God, having no specific revelation from God, he would not be free to love God because having no knowledge of God he would be unable to love him to move towards God. Man cannot love what he does not know and therefore the commandment was required in order for God to give Adam 1) knowledge of him and his will and 2) an opportunity also to disobey and turn away from love. For love without the option to not love is not truly love, but rather simply compulsion. The original commandments were therefore lovingly sent from God in order to give Adam the opportunity to love God, truly and freely.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. XIV, 11, 459 (Quoted in Marion's

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. XIII, 14, 423

reveling in its own liberty, and scorning to serve God, was itself deprived of the command it had formerly maintained over the body.”<sup>42</sup> There enters into the human a split—basically investigated—the members of the body no longer always obey the soul, as they would have before man fell. In his disobedience to himself, man experiences misery, “For what else is man’s misery but his own disobedience to himself, so that in consequence of his not being willing to do what he could do, he now wills to do what he cannot?”<sup>43</sup> Shame covers the movements of the body, which are no longer under the control of the soul. Man becomes alienated from himself, not being able to even be in full control of his body. This shame, however produces yet another conflict between human beings.

The woman becomes the object of Adam’s desire, and rather than acknowledging her in the love of God, he encounters her simply as object of his desire. In dis-acknowledging her as subject, this sin has communal effects, and she reacts to this objectification of herself in like manner. They thus can no longer stand before one and other as subjects, without shame in their nakedness, but rather feeling the alienation from the other, they are shamed and hide themselves. This opening of the eyes is the emergence of their objectification of the other and becomes lust, as well as the realization that they have been objectified. “[Lust] moves the whole man with a passion in which mental emotion is mingled with bodily appetite, so that the pleasure which results is the greatest of all bodily pleasures.”<sup>44</sup> This is a direct result of the alienation of their soul from God. Through the proclamation of self-will over love, man chooses freely to deny God’s love and to remove his will from its proper place, in its subjection to God. Thus he willingly chooses to sever himself from original justice and to exist in fallenness.

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. XIII, 13, 422

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. XIV, 15, 463

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. XIV, 16, 464

Lust, as a secondary movement of the consequences of original sin, becomes alienation from others. Lust is not only to be understood in Augustine as sexual lust, for it is also multifaceted, “There is, therefore a lust for revenge, which is called anger; there is a lust of money, which goes by the name of avarice; there is a lust of conquering, no matter by what means, which is called opinionativeness; there is a lust of applause, which is named boasting. There are various lusts, of which some have names of their own, while others have not.”<sup>45</sup> Lust becomes an inordinate movement of the lower passions toward an object. Thus, the power of lust places such an object in a position of primacy. Lust of money, for example, places money above all else, and persons who succumb to such lust place money above the proper order of their life, denying their proper identity and assuming an identity defined by money. Likewise this takes place with every type of lust which becomes dominant in a person’s life. This lust leads persons to alienate them from each other, in placing objects external to the identity of persons above the persons themselves.

In the case of sexual lust, a person becomes the object of the lustful desire. In this process, the whole person is not taken as the object of desire, but rather, the elements of the other which produce pleasure. This objectification of the person thus takes place in the fallen reproductive act, wherein the complementary parts of the man and the woman are required. Human’s need to reproduce (that the human race will not become extinct) necessitates this relation to the other; however this relation cannot happen in the way in which it was previously intended. Sexual relations become the first of the fallen relations, the first division of labour. The man and his wife are alienated from each other through lust, that is, the objectification of the sexual act that occurs in the fallen consciousness of mankind. The simultaneous objectification

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. XIV, 15, 464

of the other and subjective desire for the obtainment of the object result in the rejection of unity that was once inherent in the act. Thus Augustine claims that shame is always present in the sexual act. This shame is not necessarily the same as would be colloquially understood today, but rather pertains to the private nature of the sexual act. Sex is something that only occurs in private and discreet places and Augustine believes this to be the indicator of shame. “Lust requires for its consummation darkness and secrecy... all right actions wish to be set in the light *i.e.* desire to be known. This right action, however, has such a desire to be known, that yet it blushes to be seen.”<sup>46</sup> This shame elucidates the alienation from other present in the sexual act. The lover objectifies the beloved such that they cease to be the beloved, insofar as the beloved becomes to the lover an object of pleasure. Thereby the act which was once meant as expression of union and life-giving love has become a manifestation of alienation.

Man also becomes alienated from nature. Whereas once he existed in perfect harmony and receptivity of nature, his relation to nature is now cursed, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you shall not eat from it, cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life.”<sup>47</sup> Before his willing severance from God, he was able through this relation to receive nature and his response was proper to his position in nature; however as a result of his fall, his position in nature has been violated and he must now labour by the sweat of his brow to produce for himself. The ground must be tilled and he must ‘toil’ in order to survive. Nature, as man’s sustenance no longer yields according to man’s needs, but instead becomes the object of man’s desire. In order

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. XIV. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Gen 3:17

for man to survive, he must dominate nature in toil. The exertion of his will over everything becomes necessary to his survival.

The moment of original sin, the emergence of pride and self-consciousness, comes from Adams' exertion of his will away from God. This severance of relation results in a revolt of the body against the soul and a divorce of contemplation and action, this "opposition only arose when, through sin, activity became a hindrance, a disturbance to contemplation."<sup>48</sup> This moment, where "I will" replaces "I love" thus relates directly to its effects. Adam's exercise of his will is met by God's response—then by your will shall you toil. The fall from perfection necessitates man's fallen relation to nature. As harmony between man and nature no longer exists, man must now attempt to restore this lost relations through the exercise of his will. The disposition toward and encounter with nature, is however altered as a result of the emergence of subject / object relations. Man's relation to nature no longer exists in a state of receptivity; but rather is altered such that man's active role is severed from his contemplative role. He no longer receives the animals and calls them by name, but instead he must hunt them as prey. He no longer eats freely of the fruits of the trees in the garden, but rather works in toil by the sweat of his brow to cultivate food through plowing, sowing, and reaping. The fallen person can therefore be understood as alienated from God, self, and others.

*I. Augustine's Self—self-awareness and divide in the self*

Augustine's conception of the self after the fall exists in a fashion that is alienated from itself through a split in the self. As discussed this split exists between the body and the soul, but there is a further split, which exists at the level of self-consciousness. Augustine teaches that a person

---

<sup>48</sup> Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. "Action and Contemplation." *Explorations in Theology*. Vol. 1. San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989. Print. 232.

is conscious of their self in the process of thought. Beginning with the fall, and as a result of the forsakenness of man by God, a conception of the self by self—or ego<sup>49</sup>—emerges as the manifestation of pride. The self requires memory of itself in order to be conscious of itself as more than just a fleeting temporal existence. This memory (*memoria*) Augustine posits as extending beyond the self's conception of self because the self remembers itself through its own memory.<sup>50</sup> The self, then is finite in its conception of itself (and, indeed in its ontological manifestation), but it possesses a faculty of memory, which extends beyond the conception of the self. Jean-Luc Marion discusses this phenomenon as self-alienation

It [*memoria*] teaches me that in thinking, I am put at a distance from myself and become other than I myself, that in thinking, I do not enter into possession of any myself that could exactly and truly say itself in saying I, that the more I think myself (and the more I am by thinking), the more unknowing I become of who I am and alienated from myself.<sup>51</sup>

The self, in trying to know itself, is limited in its conception of itself, which must be more finite than the self itself is. The self, then limits its conception of itself by becoming hidden from itself. The ego, then, is limited in its manifestation as it cannot correlate fully to the actual self—that is, the self cannot become fully conscious of its own self. This inability of the ego to manifest itself as equivalent to the self poses problems for self-awareness; that is, the self of which a person is aware (ego) is not the self; “the supposed ego manifests itself by demonstrating the contradiction in it of its equality to itself. From the beginning A is not A; I am not myself.”<sup>52</sup> Thomas Pfau

---

<sup>49</sup>The use of the term ‘ego’ is done in order to aid dialogue of Augustine’s ancient thought with Adorno’s modern conceptions of self and self-consciousness. In his book *In the Self’s Place; The Approach of Saint Augustine*, Jean-Luc Marion uses this terminology to explain Augustine’s conception of the self in his chapter, “The Ego or the Gifted,” in order to explain Augustine to a modern audience.

<sup>50</sup> “if *memoria*, which contains the secret of my mind (*abditum mentis*), goes beyond what my *cogitatio* and my *mens* comprehend, then I will have to think beyond my own thought if I ever want to think myself.” Marion, Jean-Luc. *In the Self’s Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*. Trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2012. Print. 80

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*. 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 65.

claims that “The self [is] constitutively divided rather than subject to occasional ‘conflicted’ feelings.”<sup>53</sup> The ego possesses a weakness of manifesting itself as a self and is therefore the cause of the alienation of self-consciousness.

This inability of the self to be truly conscious of itself, combined with the simultaneous notion of a self, which demands that it is conscious of itself (namely the ego) leads to the split in self. This split is a result of a mind (*mens*) which is a faculty of the soul, but which conceptualizes itself “like a body.”<sup>54</sup> Augustine claims that there exists a desire for happiness within the mind. Everyone experiences this desire—it is central to the human condition. The happiness, which Augustine identifies as the object of everyone’s desire is not simply the ‘feeling’ of happiness, for he refers to this as ‘*delectation*’ and this feeling is fleeting, happiness is rather a state of being happy—a permanent resting in joy—the proper end of human life. This desire is known to some persons and unknown to others, but exists in all, “Even he who does not want to live happy wants to live happy... necessity constrains us to do so, since it is true that, on one hand, everybody wants to live happy and, on the other, everyone does not want to live in the sole way in which one can live happy.”<sup>55</sup> That is, it is necessarily a part of human nature to desire happiness (as this is the proper *telos* to which humans are oriented), but the order of life necessary to move toward such an end is not desirable to the mind because the mind does not think of itself as spiritual, but rather as a body. In thinking itself as a body, it orients itself toward material goods (which are opposed to happiness in their temporal nature).

---

<sup>53</sup> Pfau, Thomas. *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge*. University of Notre Dame, 2015. Print. 117.

<sup>54</sup> De Trinitate 10.3.8 [Quoted in Pfau’s Text.—(P)]

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. XIII 2, 7, 16, 284 [Quoted in Marion’s Text—(M)]



This orientation outward, toward material objects relocates the intrinsic desire (that which is oriented toward spiritual happiness) into the material world. Objects are apprehended by the person as the means of happiness and desire moves the person toward the object of its desire. The objects thus gain a certain primacy over the self—leading the self outside of the self through their eliciting desire. Marion reflects upon Augustine’s concept of desire claiming that, “desire comes to me as from elsewhere, therefore from beyond myself,”<sup>56</sup> and that my desire “does not come from me but imposes itself on me.”<sup>57</sup> The imposition of desire on the self from the world is a result of the mind’s denial of itself and therefore its true desires. As worldly desires impose themselves upon the self, life becomes in its entirety temptation. Everything to which the self finds itself moving is a temptation, which alienates man from happiness, “thus, as if crushed beneath its own weight, the mind finds itself cast out of happiness.”<sup>58</sup> As this process continues, the mind, being cast out of happiness only seeks it all the more, however the imposition of the world on the consciousness of man only relocates that desire for happiness back into the world and thereby further denies man the happiness he seeks. Life then, becomes a cyclical movement toward happiness, which is denied to the self as a movement of present desire because of the split in self.

## *II. Augustine’s Divided Will—Role of Desire and Love*

Augustine conceptualizes the will as the agent of choice which is unfree yet responsible, divided yet unifiable, synonymous with the self yet divorced from the true will of the self—in other words, the will is the most conflicted part of human nature. As has already begun to be discussed, desire plays a role in the alienation of the will from the self—in taking away freedom

---

<sup>56</sup> Marion. *In the Self’s Place*. 83.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 84.

<sup>58</sup> De Trinitate XII 11, 16, 16 (M)

from the will. The place where this is most clearly seen in Augustine is in the movements of the sexual appetite. Thomas Pfau reflects on this phenomenon, “Augustine’s emergent sexuality correlates the will with the ‘restlessness of youth’ and a consequent fascination with the created body at the expense of the creator. He characterizes this state as being ‘drunk on the invisible wine of its own will, perverse as it is and bent on lower things’ (Confessions 2.3.6)”<sup>59</sup> The will, which if it were not fallen, would follow the mind in reason, instead becomes ‘drunk on itself’ as it allows desire to take a primary role. The will, in having sinned, relinquished its freedom. This lack of freedom then afterward gives way to the primacy of desire, “A perverted will precedes the drama of contingent desires and temptations rather than being caused by them... the disorder and division of the will must not be misconstrued as something externally obtruded but, rather, as the inescapable manifestation of inherited sin.”<sup>60</sup> The fallen will thus, in its own weakness, allows itself to be a slave to desire,<sup>61</sup> moving only towards what is immediately desirable and not towards rational ends. But, man deceives himself into believing what he desires is, in fact, the truth.

For humans as rational beings desire to find truth, as they desire happiness. But, in desiring something that is contrary to the truth and by willing such a desire, they also will that what they will may be true, “And thus they hate the truth on account of the thing that they love in place of the truth.”<sup>62</sup> The mind thus becomes subjected to a will that is not rational. In willing that something become truth, the mind allows the will to have primacy over it—whereas in a properly ordered person Augustine would envision the will following the mind and always acting

---

<sup>59</sup> Pfau. *Minding the Modern*. 114-5.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 115

<sup>61</sup> “My will was perverted, and became a lust; I obeyed my lust as a slave, and it became a habit [*consuetudo*]; I failed to resist my habit, and it became a need.” *Confessions*. 8.5.10 (P)

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. X, 35, 55, 14, 240 (M)

according to proper reason. In the fallen-state, persons are unable to discern perfectly between reason and desire because the will is subjected to desire and then wills that the mind assert what the will wills as truth. In his confessions, Augustine writes, “The mind commands the body, which obeys at once; the mind commands itself, and it resists [itself].”<sup>63</sup> The mind is not necessarily divided from reason and can discern (albeit imperfectly) truth. It is however one of the largest paradoxes in Augustine’s thought as to how the mind can assert a truth, which then loses the power of the will to will at all, “The mind commands that the mind will; this mind is not something other and yet it does not do it. Whence this paradox? And why? It commands I say, willingly since it would not command if it did not will, yet it does not do what it commands.”<sup>64</sup> The mind commands the will to will what it cannot will when the mind commands the will to follow truth. Truth, in being rational and ordered away from individual material things, is not an immediate desire of man (especially because he wills what he desires to be truth, even though what he desires is individual and material). The result is, that in willing to will what is good and properly ordered, man is unable to will what he wills and wills precisely what he does not will.

This complete lack of freedom in fallen man to do anything other than that to which is will is oriented by the world of desire creates a conflict within man and causes him pain and suffering. This is especially true if one attempts to exit this cycle of unfreedom, “My two wills, one old, the other new, the first carnal, the other spiritual entered into conflict with one another and in their discord, ravaged my soul.”<sup>65</sup> One is unable to exit the paradox the “powerlessness to will.”<sup>66</sup> Because desire comes from outside, the self necessitates something external to change in order to

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. VII 9, 21, 14, 50 (M)

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. VII 9, 21, 14, 50ff. (M)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. VII, 5, 10, 14, 30 (M)

<sup>66</sup> Marion. In the Self’s Place. 176.

desire what it commands that it wills. When he simply attempts to will his way out of the situation, Augustine remarks that, “I have become to myself a land of difficulty over which I toil and sweat.”<sup>67</sup> This work is however to no avail. The will cannot overcome the obstacle that it is to itself. The will exists in its natural state with no freedom to will what it actually wills—destined to will only what is desired for it by the flesh.

Now, this lack of freedom does not infer, according to Augustine, a lack of responsibility for one’s actions, or a lack of agency. Actions that are contrary to the good (evil) still are chosen by the will—even if the will had no other choice, the action was willed by the will. Therefore, there is no efficient cause of an evil will, “for it is not efficient, but deficient, since this will is not effective but defective. For defecting from what is supremely, so as to fall toward what is less, this to begin to take on an evil will.”<sup>68</sup> For were the will not to have agency (that is, were the will not able to effect things in the world), then it would not be a will, rightly speaking. So, within the Augustinian paradigm, the will’s freedom is compromised by its disordered nature, but the will does consent to each action of the will, “Thus when I willed or did not will something, I was wholly certain that it was I and no one else who was willing it or not willing it; and I was now on the point of perceiving that therein lay the reason for my own sin.”<sup>69</sup> While the will may not have freedom to will anything other than the desires of the self, the will certainly does belong to the self, “My will is identified with me, to the point that it would become the self itself, this same self which most often escapes me under other names, under other movements, under the mask of my desires and my temptations.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, Augustine’s will is responsible yet divided.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> Confessions. X, 16, 25, 14, 184 (M)

<sup>68</sup> City of God. XII, 7, 35, 170

<sup>69</sup> Confessions 7.3.5 (P)

<sup>70</sup> Marion. *In the Self’s Place*. 163.

<sup>71</sup> Pfau. *Minding the Modern*. 109.

It lacks the freedom to will what is truly best for it and insofar as the self's desires are imposed upon it from the world, the will's decisions are likewise determined by the world through those desires, but it must be, for Augustine, that the will still is freely chosen by the self.

So, desires are imposed upon the self from outside the self (belonging to the world) as temptations, which are seemingly inescapable by the will. The will is determined, in its fallen state, to will what it desires, even if what it desires is not what the mind commands that it wills. Is it then possible for the will to truly ever will what is best for the will, namely for Augustine, the will of God? The answer is twofold—Yes and No. The stark ambiguity of whether or not one is able to will emancipated from the determinism of the will is a result of Augustine's understanding of love and grace. Love, understood as *eros*, is the strongest of the desires. Love gives the will the power to truly will, "I can will truly, *fortiter et intigre*, only if I love. Love does not constitute one of the possible uses of the will but the sole truly efficient (not deficient) mode of the will. It should not be said that the will alone permits loving but that loving alone permits truly willing."<sup>72</sup> Love as a desire allows the fallen will to operate according to its original *telos*. Love is not, though, a movement of the will but rather is a desire that, when properly ordered comes through grace. Grace is a gift from God, which is ever available to all humans. Grace gives humans the ability to love what is true and therefore, "puts the soul into motion as the place toward which it tends. For the place of the soul is not located as if in some space, which the form of a body would occupy, but in delectation where it rejoices to have come by following its love."<sup>73</sup> Love, then when it exists within the proper *telos*, is a grace which allows man to love God and then to will the will of God, which is the proper end, according to Augustine, to which

---

<sup>72</sup> Marion. *In the Self's Place*. 182.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 183.

mankind was created. Let us turn now to a discussion of the way in which grace interacts with the will.

### *III. Short discussion of Grace and the Will*

Understanding Grace is crucial to establishing a phenomenology of Augustine's conception of the self. Grace is the emancipatory potential for each person that lays hidden in the supernatural world as a free, unmerited gift from God. It is with grace that the will becomes truly free and undetermined by the external world. This grace operates within the self through love, transforming the fallen will from within, such that it is able to will what it knows to be best—to will the will of God. Augustine writes that the process of becoming transformed in Grace, “consisted only in not willing what I willed, but willing what you yourself willed.”<sup>74</sup> Such it is when the will becomes free—it dies to itself and wills the will of another. This is not, however a lack of freedom, but is the result of love coming to transform the will. This paradox of self-will can only be understood when, “be formulated in terms of the demands of love.”<sup>75</sup> Love, when accompanied by grace—that is love of the good or true—sets the soul back into its original *telos*, which is then recognized by the will as proper and according to its nature. The will then wills this order through assenting to the love that moves it. The will chooses this freely and can, therefore, reject such a transformation—but it is the freedom to choose the good which is truly grace, “Therefore even the victory over sin is nothing other than a gift of God, bringing into this combat his assistance to free choice.”<sup>76</sup> Grace, therefore is a gift from God which brings true freedom to will.

---

<sup>74</sup> *Confessions* IX 1, 1, 14, 70 (M)

<sup>75</sup> Marion. *In the Self's Place*. 160.

<sup>76</sup> *On grace and freedom*. IV 8, 24, 110 (M)

Grace is necessary for the will to be truly free, Augustine insists. Much of Augustine's writing is formulated, in part, as a treatise against the Pelagians, who held that salvation could be achieved without grace—solely by acts of the will alone. Augustine, however insists “that the gap between an intentional action and its successful execution cannot be closed by human means alone.”<sup>77</sup> Thus grace is required to restore freedom to the fallen will. It closes the gap between internal intentions and external acts of will—bringing the divided will back into a unity with itself. It transforms man's consciousness and allows him to have freedom willing what he loves. In Augustine, “Grace is for consciousness, an intentionality at once distant from consciousness and yet uniquely capable of focusing and elevating it.”<sup>78</sup> Grace transforms consciousness, not as a return to a pre-fallen state, but allows even this state to become transcended and everything is eventually informed by love. This final stage, however, is reached by few people in this world and as such Augustine does not propose a utopian social structure as a possible outcome of this process, but rather conceptualizes utopia as something eschatological—the city of God, or the kingdom of heaven which exists in the midst of the city of men and won't be made evident until the end of time, with the second coming of Christ.

---

<sup>77</sup> Pfau. *Minding the Modern*. 122.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 123

## Adorno and Augustine—A Critical Discussion

Now, we arrive at the point of the critical discussion of Adorno and Augustine, brought together. It is not the goal of this paper to posit a synthesis, to posit influence, or to insinuate a Christian undertone to Adorno. Rather, the goal is to critically approach the different paradigms, examining their striking similarities in the conception of the self, but also fully acknowledging their critical differences at the level of ontological structures and assumptions, but also even at the level of the phenomenon discussed. When I first set out to pursue this project, I imagined a perfect synthesis of these two great thinkers. On the superficial level, the similarities are salient. Both authors posit an understanding of alienation from nature, others, and strongly emphasize alienation from the self. Augustine obviously also discusses alienation from God as well; but at the natural level, nonetheless the synthesis seemed possible. Upon researching and beginning to explicate the two author's conceptions of the phenomenon, the superficial concept of synthesis faded—the problematization of setting these two authors next to each other became more and more apparent. The differences between them seem just as large as the similarities. I do, however, intend in the discussion of these differences, as well as the similarities, to lay out a clear parallel of thought. Adorno and Augustine certainly do not exist in the same school of thought, but their conceptions of the self parallel each other in such a way that there is critical potential in attempting to bring the two together.

### *I. Differences in Paradigms—Problems of Ontology and Genesis*

Adorno and Augustine come to the problems of human alienation from completely different angles. Adorno approaches the problem from critic of enlightenment and the culture industry and illuminates the problem within the light of a modern societal structure. He posits a genesis of



consciousness within primal man that has no root in the divine—operating on the level of a wholly material world. Adorno, who is not a theist, criticizes the Catholic Church and religious thought in general as an alienating force in the world that suppresses persons' freedom through the control of their action through morality. Theology, for Adorno is the masking of myth as absolute truth. Furthermore, Adorno operates out of a Nietzschean metaphysics that opposes any claim of an ontological order underlying the semblance of the individuation of objects. Not only is this his conception of the underlying chaos, but his notion is fundamental to his conception of self-alienation. This is all fundamentally antithetical to the suppositions of Augustine.

Augustine was the bishop of Hippo Regius, located in modern day Algeria, in late fourth, early fifth century, who came to the faith later in his life after belonging to the gnostic group the Manicheans and was heavily influenced by Neo-Platonism. His works are written after his conversion with the authority of a Bishop of the Roman Church. Augustine, therefore approaches issues of the human person from a fundamentally theological perspective. There is no clear distinction between strictly philosophical works and his theological works, as his paradigm takes the existence of the benevolent Christian God for granted. Augustine believes, in true Platonic fashion, in a firmly ordered world with rigid distinctions between objects. His paradigm accepts the *principum individualis* for granted as a foundation of rational thought. He adheres to a teleology of the person, arguing that the person is created by God, and that union with God is the proper end of human life. In other words, at a very basic level to bring together a modern non-theist and an ancient theist seems to be a project doomed to fail from the beginning. Adorno and Augustine certainly disagree at the level of their most basic outlooks on the world and this disagreement is one that cannot be overcome without anachronistic, unfaithful readings of the two thinkers. It is not, however, the nature of this project to attempt to overcome the differences

of Adorno and Augustine, but rather to explicate the strong similarities of their conceptions of the self, self-consciousness, and the role of alienation in human life.

*II. A || A; Adorno and Augustine on the Concept of Alienation and Original Sin*

As previously discussed, Adorno and Augustine's conceptions of this phenomenon—call it effects of original sin or alienated consciousness—have certain esthetic similarities when speaking of alienation from nature, others, and self. The alienation from nature discussed by Adorno, manifests itself as a drive to domination. Throughout human history, whether it be the myth of the god of the harvest or the rationalized systemization of nature in enlightenment, humans create ideologies that give them an 'edge' over nature. Within, Augustine the alienation from nature is manifest in the 'toil' which is required of interaction with nature. In the Christian conception of the paradise which precedes the fall, the first persons exist in a harmony with nature, but as a result of their fall from grace, their work no longer exists in a receptive capacity—tilling and keeping—but now takes on a divorces action from contemplation that requires toil. Man in his toil must conquer the difficulty of nature in order to survive. This estrangement from nature sets humans against nature and one could historicize this opposition in such a fashion that it seems that man responds to this opposition to nature with a sense of domination.

Central to Adorno's project of neo-Marxist enlightenment critic is also the alienation of man from others through the commodification of the person. Insofar as the culture industry orients everything toward commodities, it also makes the person's labour into a commodity and thereby alienates persons from each other. It is impossible to escape. Furthermore, the drive towards domination that has been intrinsic in man since the beginning is also expressed toward others—and insofar as man attempts to dominate other men, alienation persists in the using of others as

means toward an end. The same goes within the Augustinian paradigm. Although the language differs—he refers to lust rather than domination—the underlying concept is parallel to Adorno. The other becomes an object (of desire) who is then used for the satisfaction of that desire (lust). Both authors discuss the problem innate to the human condition that persons objectify other persons. This creates an estrangement between people that can be referred to as alienation from others, which is caused by the alienation from self.

Within their conceptions of the self lies a central problem of ego weakness. In Adorno and Augustine this concept looks rather different as a result of the different explanations of the genesis of self-consciousness. In Adorno, the weakness of the ego is the result of a semblance of differentiation that has as its underlying ontological structure a fundamental undifferentiatedness. The ego is the claim of individuation that creates this semblance; however the ego is unable to fully establish itself as differentiated, causing a division in the self and takes away freedom from the agency of self-consciousness. This is the root cause of the primacy of the object, which has power over the ego insofar as the ego requires the object to remain differentiated from it. In Augustine, the picture is slightly different. The self is surely ontologically distinct from other objects and the metaphysical presupposition is that there is an underlying ontological order in the world. In other words, Augustine would deny an underlying undifferentiatedness. But, he posits a self that experiences an inability to fully establish itself. For Augustine, this is the result of the person's need to rely upon God in order to exist as truly their self. The weakness of the ego in Augustine is additionally the inability of the self to be fully aware of itself as a result of the memory extending beyond the self. The ego claims to be the self and yet does not know the self. Nonetheless, the similarity to be found between both versions of ego weakness is a problem of subjectivity to establish itself, which is connected to a problem of freedom.

This problem of freedom also looks slightly different but begins to illuminate the gross similarities between the two conceptions of the human state. The two thinkers arrive at their prospective conceptions of this phenomenon in very different ways; however the parallel of their conclusions seems undeniable. Adorno's movement away from the necessity of historical materialism—in giving agency to the self—bears with it the similarity of Augustine's will divided against itself. The faculty of a 'will' is not explored by Adorno; however the agency of the individual is acknowledged. Adorno claims that the primacy of the object takes freedom away from the agency of consciousness. Consciousness, then, becomes determined by its environment. Consciousness, insofar as it becomes oriented toward the object appears to experience a very similar phenomenon in both Augustine and Adorno. The primacy of desire, which for Augustine is an experience of man that comes to him from the external world—that is, desire is for an object, giving a power to the external object in that it is the cause of desire. The object, thus in both circumstances has a primacy over the self in that person's decisions become predicated by the object. Adorno's 'commodity-determined' decisions can be seen as the kin of Augustine's lust—the inability of the will (or agency) of the will to exist in a state of freedom and instead is oriented toward the material, allowing itself to become determined, despite its intrinsic capacity to effect the world through actions or work.

There thus also exists in both paradigms, a split in the self. Adorno's conception of this concept is derived from Hegel's master-slave dialectic. The self is simultaneously the master and the slave—but this conflict reifies the inability of the ego to establish itself as sufficient. Were there to exist a coherent unity within the self, then one would achieve freedom in their agency. The self dominates its own self and reifies its own alienation. Remedying this problem is the true goal of enlightenment—peace for Adorno is differentiation without domination. Similarly in

Augustine, the split in the self occurs on multiple levels. There exists a split between the body and the soul—the body revolts against the soul and the mind (*mens*) thus struggles to maintain power over the body. This is the first sign of the effects of original sin, for Augustine, and the remedy of this problem is the last effect of grace in transforming a person—if this problem is ever remedied. There exists also a division, in Augustine's anthropology, within the will. The will wills what it cannot will, when it attempts to will the highest good. These splits within the self in Adorno and Augustine parallel each other also in their remedies, when speaking on the natural level. The potentiality of a permanent remedy is impossible and thus left to itself the self will remain split, no matter the attempt at unity.

## Epilogue

*“The story is told of an automaton constructed in such a way that it could play a winning game of chess, answering each move of an opponent with a countermove. A puppet in Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent from all sides. Actually, a little hunchback who was an expert chess player sat inside and guided the puppet’s hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophical counterpart to this device. The puppet called “historical materialism” is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is wizened and has to keep out of sight.”*

~**Benjamin**, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”

*“To regard Christ’s knowledge as though he carried out his actions in time from some vantage-point of eternity—rather like a chess-player of genius who quickly foresees the whole course of the game, and simply moves his men through a game which for him is already over—would be to do away entirely with his temporality and so with his obedience, his patience, the merit of his redemptive existence; he would no longer be the model of a Christian existence and of Christian faith. He would no longer be qualified to narrate the parables of expectation and waiting which describe the life of his followers.”*

~**Hans Urs von Balthasar**, *A Theology of History*

From the outset, this project has been oriented toward accomplishing the impossible. This is something that was not always evident, but has manifested itself in the course of its completion. I set out to bring together theology and critical theory through the examinations of parallels in thought. It is however the nature of parallel lines that they are distinct from one another, always looking at the other from a distance, but never touching and certainly never intersecting. This conception of a theological dimension within critical theory must first reconcile the divide between historical materialism and the supernatural element necessitated by theological thought. Within historical materialism, that which effects the world must necessarily be material; however the theological dimension removes this necessity. This project attempted to circumvent this problem by arguing on the level of phenomena identified by the two schools of thought. This, however, proved to be a distraction from the necessity to reconcile the material to the supernatural; however these parallels serve as a heuristic argument for the potentiality of this

sphere. The redeeming nature of this project lies in its explication of the parallels in thought between a father of Christian thought—Augustine—and a father of critical theory—Adorno. There could exist a space where critical theory enters a theological dimension. What I have accomplished in this project is outlining potential points of intersection, in order to justify the exploration of such a space. I have shown certain thoughts of Adorno to parallel the conception of a fourth century bishop in a way that is not exhaustive, but is certainly compelling.

If I were to approach this project anew, I would however certainly approach it from a different direction. The dialectical-structure of this text begins with Adorno as a thesis, continues to Augustine as an anti-thesis, and concludes in what was originally conceived as a synthesis, but has now become the ‘negative’ outcome of the dialectic. This structure was necessary for this project, but did not allow for the discovery of this space. Benjamin attempts to create such a space. He attempts to even reconcile theology with historical materialism; however it is this attempt at reconciliation that makes him antithetical to my aims. Within a Christian theological paradigm, there must necessarily exist non-material things, which effect the world—the trinity, the human soul, grace, etc. Christ is not the messianic chess-player in Benjamin’s theses. He does not aid determinism, but rather enables free choices that contribute to love. Historical materialism cannot be reconciled to Christianity, but perhaps, the future of this project exists in the examination of Adorno’s deviation from historical materialism and his position of historicized materialism. In the admission that consciousness can affect the material there exists a critical potential for an intersection of critical theory with theology. Perhaps, the future of this project necessitates the introduction of a post-Euclidean geometry—the discovery of the intersection of parallel lines—a space where historicized materialism secretly enlists the services of theology.