



‘Who is a Negator of History?’ Revisiting the Debate over Left Fascism 50 Years after 1968

ABSTRACT: This paper revisits a debate dating from 1968 over the existence of left fascism and the role of theory and praxis in combating it. I trace the contours of the debate through the philosophy of history as it is delineated by Adorno, Deleuze, Foucault, and Marcuse. This positions the existence of left-wing fascism as a question concerning the role of history and futurity in thought and action. Specifically, the debate is formed by disagreement over the possibility of spontaneous action unconditioned by authoritarian social structures. I argue that Adorno and Foucault both require the use of history in service of liberation, while Deleuze and Marcuse seek to negate history in order to develop a new world in which the subject might be free. Lastly, I provide contemporary context to this unresolved debate, ultimately arguing that both sides of the debate must be considered in irresolvable dialectical tension with the other.

KEYWORDS: Theodor Adorno, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Herbert Marcuse, fascism

‘A revolutionary undertaking is directed not only against the present but against the rule of “until now”’.

—Michel Foucault, ‘Revolutionary Action: “Until Now”’

‘The realm of true freedom is beyond the realm of necessity. Freedom as well as necessity is redefined’.

—Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism*

This paper looks at the works of four philosophers: Theodor W. Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Gilles Deleuze, and Michel Foucault. I argue that the varied positions of each on the student movements in 1968 are a result of each philosopher’s position on the philosophy of history and its relationship to their contemporary social institutions. These four philosophers not only wrote explicitly on the student movements, but frequently played a direct role as, at times, comrade in arms, teacher, or agonist. Further, my choice of these four figures is philosophically driven. During and after the events of May, Adorno and Marcuse exchanged a series of correspondence on the movements themselves—each of them clarifies and critiques the other in turn. While Foucault and Deleuze did not know each other during the events of May, they had a number of postconfrontation exchanges and

discussions concerning the events that have been distributed as interviews—perhaps the best known instance of this is ‘Intellectuals and Power’. Due to historical circumstance, the intellectual project of coming to grips with the events of May 1968 has been siloed: Marcuse and Adorno, on the one hand, and Deleuze and Foucault, on the other. This methodological siloing of critical thought concerning the students’ tactics obscures the true nature of their varied disagreements: specifically, the way that each philosopher’s philosophy of history informs his analysis of radical political action. There are two axes of disagreement along which both Adorno and Foucault fall to the one side, while Marcuse and Deleuze fall to the other. First is the relationship shared between theory and practice. Second is the role of history in radical political thought and action.

These two axes of disagreement have philosophical and practical contemporary relevance. This relevance will be further drawn out in the last section of this paper. However, consider the contemporary philosophical debates concerning the proper role of students in their own education. A number of high profile incidents have occurred on college campuses in the past few years, including ‘Decolonize the Curriculum’ at Leeds School of Arts and Sciences, protests at Evergreen State College aimed at undermining the predominance of Western thought as the basis for knowledge, and a series of attempts at refusing a platform at universities for people such as Charles Murray, Steve Bannon, Jordan Peterson, Milo Yiannopoulos, and Richard Spencer. In the wake of these events, Brian Leiter has referred to student protesters as ‘spoiled children’¹ while claiming that student protests are not a major threat to academic freedom. Debate abounds on *Daily Nous* concerning the role of free speech, student protest, and academic freedom on university campuses, leading a number of philosophers to claim that professors now work in repressive environments generated by student demands.² These concerns are not new and in fact mirror the concerns and considerations of philosophers working in the late 1960s. This paper seeks to clarify the philosophical issues that underpin such a debate.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, I delineate the interrelations and frictions between the four philosophers’ perspectives on 1968. Second, I argue that underlying disagreements about the philosophy of history have motivated the debate over theory and praxis. These underlying disagreements can serve to support a different schematic for understanding the history of critical theory. The term ‘critical theory’ refers generally to a broad swath of self-consciously self-critical work, usually in the Marxist tradition. Specifically, the term may refer to two kinds of critical theory: critical theory in the style of the Frankfurt School, which insists on the enmeshing of humanities methods and social scientific investigation. Alternatively, the term may refer to a broad swath of theoretical investigations into discourses on power, culminating in an archaeological or genealogical investigation into how concepts are formed and form power

¹ <http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2017/10/no-free-speech-crisis-on-campus.html>.

² See a variety of posts here: <http://dailynous.com/tag/free-speech/>. Though Justin Weinberg, the blog’s editor, frequently argues that free expression on campus is actually still valued, a variety of commenters consistently claim that Weinberg’s position is dangerously mistaken.

relations, structures, and subjectivity. These are, of course, broad generalizations admitting of boundary crossing, bending, and lack of fit. Against this ordinary method of dividing up the field of critical theory, I argue that the more important explanatory mechanism is each philosopher's perspective on the idea of history: with Adorno and Foucault attempting to move within and merely comprehend it, while Marcuse and Deleuze attempt, in Foucault's words, to negate it. These positions can be derived from the same place: each philosopher's interpretation of Kant's antinomy of freedom and what this implies about the movement of history. In this sense, we can see a definitive break within the critical theory that informed and was informed by 1968. Adorno and Foucault both double down on history in their readings of Kant, while Marcuse and Deleuze negate history in their attempt to subvert it without confrontation.

While the methodology of this paper is a critical reconstruction, its aim is altogether different. The aim of the paper is to think through how a disciplinary divide occurred in critical theory, fifty years ago, on the problem of theory and praxis. The disciplinary divide is not merely methodological, traditional, or linguistic. In *The End of Progress* (2016), Amy Allen argues that the major figures in critical theory can be divided by their historical and philosophical conceptions of 'progress' (a project that works in tandem with colonial logics). I take a similar tactic here but mobilize it toward different ends: to make sense of the debates concerning the student movements in 1968. The disciplinary divide is to be found in a question of praxis. What does it mean to do critical theory today? Does doing so require that we look to the past? For both Foucault and Adorno, the answer is very simple: figuring out how to act in such a way that prevents the spread of fascism. For Marcuse and Deleuze, the answer is more complex, but it involves the modification of the subject in such a way so as to multiply pleasure. The distinct dividing line, then, falls into one particular area. Do humans desire fascism, and if so, what can be made of the pleasures of fascism?

In 1968, Adorno invoked state power over student protesters interrupting his lectures. He could not convince them to leave or to cease their disruptions. In what some claim to be the pinnacle of reactionary behavior, he called the police. In 1969, while Adorno was giving a lecture, students unfurled a banner that read: 'Berlin's left-wing fascists greet Teddie the Classicist'. Months later, another group of student protesters (all women) took over his lectern, surrounded him, stripped their torsos bare, danced erotically, and threw rose petals at him. Months after students distributed ephemera declaring that 'Adorno as an institution is dead', Adorno himself had died (for a clear and compelling account of these events, see Leslie 1999 and Jeffries 2016). In his last years Adorno was mired in conflict with the New Left.

In what may have been the last set of interviews he granted before his death, Foucault is tasked to provide an account of himself during 1968. He was not on the front lines in France, nor was he involved in the student movements. This was the source of much criticism. If he believed his own theory of power, why was he absent? Foucault, in answering this question, plainly states that he was in Tunisia and when he returned to France: 'I brought with me a foreigner's way of seeing things, with the expected result: what I had to say was not always easily received'

(1981: 132). He goes on to decry the infighting, the ‘hyper-Marxistization’, the lack of physical, concrete, and personal stakes in the actions, and the endless discussions that occurred in France in the wake of May 1968.

Herbert Marcuse was a major figure of the student movements in the United States, living in Berkeley, California, in 1968. He is often referred to as the ‘father of the New Left’—a title bestowed upon him as a result of his militant publications and controversy courting headlines such as ‘Student Protest is Nonviolent Next to the Society Itself’ (2005: 46). He unflaggingly stood by the students protesting the war in Vietnam, the unequal treatment of people of color, and frequently produced work in support of the so-called sexual revolution. He chided Adorno for calling the police on student protesters. He refused to come speak in Frankfurt unless his own students agreed that he should. In this sense, he thought himself more of a useful tool for the student movements, rather than their leader, as he was often portrayed in publications critical of his work (Adorno and Marcuse 1999).

Gilles Deleuze, for his part, admits to having been ‘blindsided’ by the events of May 1968. He was not involved in the militant revolutionary politics that surrounded him at the time. Rather, Deleuze was in the stacks during those two months attempting to complete his doctoral thesis while working in the Philosophy Department at the University of Lyon. Though he was not involved in any direct confrontation (and in fact did not even meet Felix Guattari until after the end of the street fighting that characterized those months in France), he expressed support for the movements. Notably, he was the only member of the faculty in the Philosophy Department at University of Lyon to do so (Dosse 2011: 177–78).

Adorno and Foucault: History and Critique

In *The End of Progress* (2016), Amy Allen connects Foucault’s intellectual lineage back through Adorno via their shared view on the way in which subjectivity, power, and epistemology converge to deny human beings emancipation. Of this connection, she says, ‘for both Adorno and Foucault, the problematization of our own point of view has a normative point. It aims at a *fuller realization of a central normative ideal of the Enlightenment: freedom*’ (2016: 196, italics in original). Adorno and Foucault are also related via a shared position on the student movements in May ‘68. In commenting upon what Foucault refers to as ‘the Events of May’, both he and Adorno separately detail the claim that those participating in the actions are allowing practice to overtake theory—seemingly acting unmoored from any theoretical considerations involved in a revolutionary or radical political action. Action unmoored from thinking forms part of the social and psychic framework that enables the spread of fascism. (Adorno argues this in a number of places, most notably in ‘Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda’ [1994] and *The Authoritarian Personality* [1950]). This underscores a fundamental unity in Adorno’s and Foucault’s work: that of navigating political action in a world that bends the subject toward fascism. (In many ways, this position is what develops the impetus for both of them to claim that the subjects must trouble their own easy relationship to epistemic authority.) Put otherwise,

both ask how we can act politically in a world that imbues the subject with fascist tendencies? This relationship can be understood through a reconstruction of each philosopher's understanding of the relationship between thinking, judging, and acting. For both Foucault and Adorno, thinking, judging, and acting require a perverse or negative dialectical understanding of Kant's conception of history. For both authors theory and praxis are constrained in some ways by the causal mechanisms of the past. The reconstruction I offer will be accomplished by reading a number of Adorno's essays and aphorisms alongside Foucault's 'What is Enlightenment?' as well as varied interviews he gave after 1968. In each case, my readings pull out threads of the way in which Enlightenment reason is both freedom and domination: a dialectic based primarily in a particular reading of Kant's critical and historical work.

While Allen has thoughtfully reconstructed the alignment of Adorno's and Foucault's work under the aim of providing a decolonial normative foundation for critical theory, I work here to uncover what the alignment means for the formation of a social movement. If freedom slips easily into its double as domination, we are left with the series of questions posed by Foucault in his preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, 'How does one keep from being a fascist, even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant? How do we rid our speech and our acts, our hearts and our pleasures, of fascism? How do we ferret out the fascism that is ingrained in our behavior?' (1983: 3). This series of questions mirrors those of Adorno in his book, *Minima Moralia*, which asks its reader to comprehend a rather difficult and central normative contention: 'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly' (2005: 39). In his *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno modifies this aphoristic contention into a political and normative imperative, 'The only thing that can perhaps be said is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen. . . . Other than this negative prescription no guidance can really be envisaged' (2001: 167–68). Both Adorno and Foucault acknowledge the way in which bourgeois social institutions and their tendency toward fascism generate subjects imbued with fascist impulses and psyches: for Foucault this generates questions, but for Adorno it generates imperatives (Adorno 2017: 80; Foucault 1977c: 222). As such, having been imbued with the tendency to dictate, with violence if necessary, we must ask ourselves whether beings like us, given our social embeddedness, are capable of being or doing against fascism and if so, how?

In a little discussed interview, 'Who is a Negator of History?' Foucault comments on his relation to the Frankfurt School and forcefully argues against the idea that he is a 'negator of history' (1981: 115–30). In so doing, he notes that his greatest disappointment with the Frankfurt School (namely, Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) is that they did so little history. On the other hand, Foucault sees himself primarily as a historian; the history Foucault seeks to uncover is a history of power. In doing so, Foucault recognizes both his continuity with and subversion of the Enlightenment project. He states this explicitly in his 'What is Enlightenment? (*Was Ist Aufklärung?*)' where he considers part of the Enlightenment project to be philosophy's self-reflection on its own immanence in history. To ask 'what is Enlightenment?' is to ask after the historical role of

Enlightenment in the here and now (Foucault 1984). According to Foucault, this is the exact inverse of how Kant poses the question of enlightenment as an *Ausgang*—an exit. Enlightenment is, for Kant, a flight from a historical past in which man was immature, prerational, mythic, or prehistorical. Foucault characterizes Kant, here, as a negator of history and positions himself in opposition to Kant. For Foucault, Kant's negation of history leads him to misunderstand the subjectivization that occurs in and through historical processes. This is especially the case as it concerns the function and process of social, political, and economic institutions. For Kant, we must see ourselves as significantly independent of these processes (via the *noumenal* realm) in order to maintain the real possibility of human autonomy. Allen (2003) argues that Foucault, in fact, performs a Kantian critique of Kant himself. He historicizes Kant and along with him the subject of the Enlightenment.

For Foucault, critique can no longer search for universals or develop a universalizing system. Rather, critique must be a historical investigation into the self-same subject completing the critique. He presents the task of a critical theory that can take up the Enlightenment tradition, but also subvert it arguing, 'criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying' (1984: 45-46). Critical theory, on Foucault's account, requires a history of power in order to develop a theory of the subject. The subject is the locus for action, for desire, but it is also to be acted upon by power.

Adorno's perspective dovetails with Foucault's, but highlights another aspect of the problem. In denying the subjectivization that bourgeois civilization inflicts on us, we are not merely permitting ourselves to be passive agents of fascism; we are furthering the cause of fascism. We do so insofar as we undermine our own place within the tradition of history by negating it. In correspondence with Marcuse, Adorno decries the students' movement for a lack of consideration of the theoretical, saying, 'I would also concede to you that there are moments in which theory is pushed on further by practice. But such a situation neither exists objectively today, nor does the barren and brutal praxis that confronts us here have the slightest thing to do with theory anyhow' (Adorno and Marcuse 1999: 127). Adorno's criticism of the movement's 'practicism' has roots in his political thought: specifically, in 'Resignation', he argues that 'within absolutized praxis, only reaction is possible and for this reason the reaction is false' (1998: 167). Rather than a method of open thinking that would enable one to understand the subject's current historical and material location, practicistism relies on the reactionary (and thus conservative) claim that action without thinking is best. It is action without thinking that Adorno critiques heavily in his theory of authoritarianism. In 'Resignation', for example, he refers to this sort of behavior as 'pseudo activity'—behaviors that provide the sense of action enabling subjects to believe they are effective agents. Pseudo-activity follows in the bourgeois Enlightenment tradition of providing the subject with a sense of real autonomy, which at the same time hinders the real expression of free action because it undermines or fails to draw from open thinking.

Foucault too critiques this element of the students' actions. The distinction between the students' actions in Europe and in Tunisia, according to Foucault, lies in a lack of concrete stakes for the students in France. He argues that in France, 'the May experience was overshadowed by the phenomenon of splinter groups, by the fragmentation of Marxism into small bodies of doctrine that pronounced excommunication on one another' (1981: 141). Foucault's analysis of '68 in France sees groups of students dedicated to a particular set of doctrinal commitments that produces factions aimed more at fighting each other than at opposing or undermining the structures of power that regulate and govern everyday life. Overall, Foucault decries hyper-Marxistization, the overly theoretical debates that do not translate into actions and subsequent factionalism of the students' movements in Europe. To further this argument, Foucault delineates the contours of the students' own internal disagreement over the events of May in his conversation with Deleuze in 'Intellectuals and Power', claiming that Deleuze overly generalizes and universalizes the struggle, without attending to the particularities involved in the various elements of what students were struggling against. Admittedly, Foucault does see how the events connect to the general struggle of the proletariat; however, unlike Deleuze, he does not deny that the process of theory is distinct from practice. Like Adorno, Foucault claims that theory is a form of praxis. Yet, the events of May show us that practice no longer requires the intellectual; theory can be done by those who are themselves subjugated. They do not need the intellectual to perform the function of consciousness-raising. Indeed, the intellectual's new role is to 'struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge", "truth", "consciousness", and "discourse"' (1977b: 208).

Because both Foucault and Adorno see human subjectivation as part of a historical process, our autonomy is always compromised (or was perhaps a lie to begin with). This means that we cannot simply *declare* that we have broken with a fascist or authoritarian tradition, especially if we have been subjectivized under such a regime. For both Adorno and Foucault, then, to negate history is to deny the embeddedness of the subject within historical processes that help determine the meaning and function of individual acts. In this sense, it would be odd indeed if individuals who are institutionally trained (via mechanisms of discipline) to be fascist were able simply to declare that such an institution is not of their lineage, thus releasing them from any complicity in fascist social formations.

In both Adorno's and Foucault's negative and perverse readings of Kant the aim of critique is no longer to develop a once and future metaphysics. Rather, the aim of critique is either freedom or liberation. Adorno, ever the Kantian, understands Kant's antinomy of freedom to be perfectly backward. Kant has gotten everything but the most important part correct: we are in fact made unfree by our use of reason (Adorno 2007: 213–17). Foucault poses the exact same problematic. Critique requires a new impetus set apart from the supposed humanism of Enlightenment reason:

This means that the historical ontology of ourselves must turn away from all projects that claim to be global or radical. In fact we know from

experience that the claim to escape from the system of contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions. (1984: 46)

This has produced a return of the most dangerous traditions, the supposition that we can simply shed the historical, theoretical, and metaphysical baggage of the Enlightenment and determine our own escape (an *Ausgang* by other means) from it simply returns us to it. For Foucault and Adorno the attempt to begin anew is what does not allow us to begin anew. In fact, it does the diametric opposite: it repositions us within the worst, most destructive, and most dangerous parts of the Enlightenment tradition. It creates domination where there could be freedom. Taken together Foucault's preface to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, 'What is Enlightenment' demonstrates that Foucault finds the attempt to escape the dialectic of freedom and domination via theories that claim to pose an outsider status to be, instead, a reclamation of totality that slips into authoritarianism. It is this movement that creates the possibility of left fascism.

To conclude, Foucault's lament aligns with Adorno's scathing critique of socialist realism in *Minima Moralia*. The aphorism, 'Deviation', provides a lengthy glimpse:

All that is left is its shell, belief in the power and greatness of the organization as such, devoid of any willingness for individual action, indeed, imbued with the destructive conviction that while spontaneity is no longer possible, the Red Army will win in the end. . . . 'The gentleman does not find this world to his liking? Then let him go and look for a better one'—such is the popular parlance of socialist realism. (2005: 114–15)

Adorno decries the abandonment of the project of our world. He challenges the idea that we can simply wrest our current or future conditions from the conditions of our past in search of a utopian multiplicity. Rather, for Adorno, the only possibility of the opening of multiplicity comes from not merely an end to wrong life: reconciliation is much more than the liberation of our future. It would 'revoke the suffering that is irrevocably past' (2007: 403).

For Adorno, only a false liberation is possible via the bid to subvert history. It is yet another in a long attempt at gaining subjective advantage over the objective world: the dialectic of identity and nonidentity played out via 'revolutionary' politics and theory. The notion that we ought to go and look for a better world is an essentially conservative proposition. It relies on a kind of Freudian nostalgia wherein the subject yearns for a past that never existed. Were we to restart the world, and with it human history, it tells us that we could do and be better this time around. Such a position is fundamentally a false liberation. For Adorno, liberation requires reconciliation of nature with history. Eliding history, rather than opening up liberatory possibilities, forecloses them: 'advanced philosophy was bound to note the understanding between universal history and ideology, and the discontinuous character of blighted life. . . . To strike out the latter [universal

history] as a relic of metaphysical superstition would spiritually consolidate pure facticity as the only thing to be known and therefore to be accepted' (2007: 319). In this way, the attempt to elide universal history through the jettisoning of an account of subjectivity as embedded in the movement of history undermines the possibility of liberation. It makes of the subject a pure object, a pure fact—failing to recognize the dialectic of subject-object—or the way in which subjects mould themselves toward and for objects, while at the same time proclaiming an absolute dominance over the furniture of the world.

What, then, is the antidote? As a slogan of the sixties goes, you need to get rid of the cop in your head. (In fact, this was a slogan motivating the student movements in France in May 1968; see Althusser (2014: 178) on his disdain for the slogan.) Subjects must resist their own desire for dominance, dictation, and control. Foucault takes aim here not at the police in uniform who impose structural violence on disparate communities due to the latter's supposed undesirability. Rather, Foucault takes aim at our internal policing mechanisms that demand psychic compliance of our solidary groups and coalitional members. Primary for both Foucault and Adorno in their rejection of Kant is the destruction of authority with which we endow ourselves. In this sense, both Foucault and Adorno find themselves asking the same questions a frustrated undergraduate student may ask, 'Says who?' Notably, the undergraduate is frustrated on account of the fact that any response to the question is a naked appeal to authority. Applying Kantian reason to the rational subject himself highlights that the individual subject completely lacks the authority to determine the truth of the matter.

Marcuse and Deleuze: Killing our Fathers

Adorno, having been the subject of complex and long-standing protests by the student movement in Germany, discussed his position with Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse unabashedly supported the student movements for anti-imperialism, antiwar, antiracism, and antisexism (at the very least). In contrast, Adorno was critical of the student movements, particularly as they disrupted his work with increasing frequency; at one point, he even called the police to have the protesters removed.

Despite his reputation as a 'German Mandarin' and a 'Classicist', Adorno argued that there was a complex relation between theory and praxis (for Adorno's clearest statements on the question of theory and praxis, see 'Resignation' and 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis' in *Critical Models* [1998]). Marcuse and the students' movements demanded praxis above all. Adorno's understanding of praxis, though, has much in common with his dialectical reading of Kant:

Its descent from labor is a heavy burden for all praxis. To this day it carries the baggage of an element of unfreedom: the fact that once it was necessary to struggle against the pleasure principle for the sake of one's own self-preservation, although labor that has been reduced to a minimum no longer needs to be tied to self-denial. (1998: 262)

To the extent that praxis is derived from the necessary struggle for existence, it is tied dialectically to the past, which threatens the freedom it seeks with the necessity of social conditions that serve as the condition of the possibility of the struggle itself. Contrary to this orientation, Deleuze and Marcuse seek to negate history so as to avoid making a virtue of necessity.

In his correspondence with Adorno, Marcuse defends the students' actions. He argues that the students are working to create conditions in which it is possible for life actually to live. Marcuse takes Adorno's accusations of practiciness seriously, yet denies them:

You know me well enough to know that I reject the unmediated translation of theory into praxis just as emphatically as you do. But I do believe that there are situations, moments, in which theory is pushed on further by praxis—situations and moments in which theory that is kept separate from praxis becomes untrue to itself. (Adorno and Marcuse 1999)

Here, Marcuse outlines a structure of theory and praxis that requires that theory sometimes be motivated by praxis (rather than the reverse). Based on this claim, Marcuse argues that there simply is no such thing as 'left fascism', referring to it as *contradictio in adjecto* (an argumentative contradiction). To support this, he argues that he has not forgotten that contradictions can be dialectical ones, but that not all contradictions *are* dialectical—some contradictions are simply wrong. Unlike a dialectical contradiction, they cannot point us to anything truthful about the world via the *radical* (to the root) development of the contradiction. This position significantly sets Marcuse apart from the other three authors considered here—he is the only one who denies even the logical or micrological possibility of left fascism.

Much like Marcuse, Deleuze argues in conversation with Foucault for a primarily praxis-centered approach to radical political action. Deleuze argues, that 'Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing this wall' (Foucault 1977b: 206). Sharpening this position, Deleuze concludes that where theory and practice are concerned, 'there's only action' (Foucault 1977b: 207). The primacy of activity serves as a denial that there is any theoretical or practical distinction between thinking and acting. Further, it seems to rely on what Adorno and Foucault both determine to be a fascist psychic pattern: sublimating critical thought in favor of political action. However, Deleuze pushes this distinction almost to its limit: dissolving any remaining distinction between theorizing and practicing. One no longer practices a theory or theorizes a practice: one acts. It is useful here to draw upon Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between a tool and a weapon, developed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Here, Deleuze and Guattari argue that tools are merely practical instruments: actual mechanisms of instrumentality. This is in distinction to the 'weapon', which 'as such relates not to the Work model but to the Free-Action model, with the assumption that the conditions of work are fulfilled elsewhere' (1987: 398). Weapons are exogenous forces that enable the possibility of 'free

action' as they are untied from the causality imposed by superstructure or base. In contrast, tools are instruments used primarily to fulfill the demands of work, as they exist within the broader context of capitalist society, and tools are designed toward productive (i.e., capitalistic) ends. This distinction between the tool and the weapon, though, cannot map neatly onto the collapsed dichotomy of theory and practice. For Deleuze, theory is a weapon insofar as it is always set apart from the entanglements of power. Theory is unburdened from the control exerted either by external, material circumstance (such as social structures or what Foucault might call regimes of governmentality) or by virtue of historical causality. It is here that Deleuze stands apart from the other three, who maintain that there is at least some productive tension between theory and practice, in flattening both into the all purpose category of 'action'.

Little has been written about Deleuze's conception of history. In part, this stems from the dearth of explicit writing by Deleuze on the concept. As Paul Patton puts it, Deleuze and Guattari propose 'a universalism that would understand all history in the light of capitalism' (2009: 33). Yet, Deleuze and Guattari write explicitly against the uses (which are, on this account, nearly all abuses) of history in understanding events. In the essay, 'May 68 Did Not Take Place', cowritten with Guattari (2007), Deleuze claims:

In historical phenomena such as the revolution of 1789, the Commune, the revolution of 1917, there is always one part of the event that is irreducible to any social determinism, or to causal chains. Historians are not very fond of this point: they restore causality after the fact. (2007: 209)

This is not to say that he argues against history, but he does argue against the way historians conceptualize events as determined—when, in fact, they are spontaneous. In claiming 'spontaneity' for the events of May 1968, Deleuze and Guattari assert that individual and collective acts are possible outside the boundaries of history and the historical determination of the subject via material institutions of law or economics. In this sense, the events are to be understood as fully spontaneous (perhaps this is what motivates, or was motivated by, Deleuze's sense that the happenings took him 'completely by surprise').

Deleuze and Guattari claim that May 1968 did not happen because the moment of realization for a variety of leftist politics was missed: 'The historical phenomena we are invoking were indeed accompanied by determinisms or causalities, but these were of a peculiar nature. May 68 is of the order of pure event, free from all normal, or normative causalities' (2007: 209). For Deleuze, providing a history or situating an event in history is to impose false causation. For this reason, Deleuze's metaphysics of history butts up against both Adorno's and Foucault's, who despite their substantive differences, both argue that material history and a history of power is something we ought not to avoid even if it were possible to do so. Adorno and Foucault position the call to subvert history as a movement toward conservatism rather than radicalism. In any case, on their account, it is not

possible to avoid doing history (even, and perhaps especially, when one protests that one is *not* doing so).

In their cowritten *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (composed of *Anti-Oedipus* [1983] and *A Thousand Plateaus* [1987]), Deleuze and Guattari provide an alternate genealogy of theoretical concepts that might enable liberation or revolution. They write explicitly against the possibility, promise, or necessity of providing a history because it 'is always written from the sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one' (1987: 23). From this, they claim that a nomadology is necessary as the opposite of a history. A nomadology is intended to find or develop 'an adequate outside with which to assemble in heterogeneity, rather than a world to reproduce'(24; one can find an echo here of Adorno's depiction of a liberated world as one in which the subject can be 'different without fear' [2005: 103]). For Deleuze and Guattari, history requires negation in order to open up a plethora of possibilities (what they call *lines of flight*) for micrological resistance to fascism.

A return to Marcuse's work is apt here. In *Reason and Revolution* (1941), Marcuse interprets Hegel's philosophy of history as ending in 'doubt and resignation'. Perhaps this is an adequate interpretation of Adorno's and Foucault's philosophies of history as well, taking, as they do, a dialectical cue from Hegel about the movement between the subject and object. In his interpretation, Marcuse presents Hegel as, in essence, finding human freedom in what Kant would call the *noumenal realm*. He argues that 'The free subject arises only when the individual no longer accepts the given order of things but stands up to it because he has learned the notion of things and learned that the truth does not lie in the current norms and opinions' (1941: 244). The free subject moves, on this account, by withdrawing from the movement of historical processes, but also from the movement of *the material or objective world*: toward subjectivity. In considering this, Marcuse claims that, 'progress implied that the given state of affairs would be negated and not continued' (1941: 226). Marcuse makes this orientation most clear in his final manuscript project, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978). In this text, he claims that subjectivity is a necessary focus today, as we live in a world of 'totalitarian' and 'aggressive' social processes and institutions. For this reason, he argues, and I quote at length:

Liberating subjectivity constitutes itself in the inner history of the individuals—their own history, which is not identical with their social existence. It is the particular history of their encounters, their passions, joys, and sorrows—experiences which are not necessarily grounded in their class situation, and which are not even comprehensible from this perspective. To be sure, the actual manifestations of their history are determined by their class situation, but this situation is not the ground of their fate—of that which happens to them. (1978: 5)

Marcuse, then, turns inward from the world-historical processes described by Hegel in order to find the possibility of a subjectivity free of determinism. This 'detachment' has much in common with Foucault's interpretation of Kant's Enlightenment as

requiring an *Ausgang*, an 'exit'. For both Marcuse and Kant, human freedom arises in a withdrawal from material, social, or historical conditions as these conditions limit autonomy. This is perhaps most evident in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (1964), where he argues that a Marxist revolution is possible without a proper proletariat. While Adorno sees the missed opportunity for revolution as a disappointment (in *Negative Dialectics* [2007] and 'Resignation' in *Critical Models* [1998]), Marcuse argues that we have not missed it at all. (For more on Adorno's sense of critical thought requiring remembrance of materiality, see Pensky [2004].)

Marcuse outlines how such an 'inward turn' is possible in his *Essay on Liberation* (1969), arguing that liberation requires a radical break with the historical lineage that has brought the contemporary subject to this point. In so doing, it also requires a break with the present—a nod to the idea that the causality of future events is contingent on our present, which itself is not yet determined (1969: 7–9). Later in the text, in discussing the possibilities of liberation, Marcuse makes it clear that history, as a history of the subject, provides nothing other than context and justification for the subject as a being who needs to dominate (1969: 19). This form of subjectivity, based entirely on the desire to dominate, is a product of the historical movement of capitalism. In this way, the historical movement of capitalism requires a radical break in order to open up the possibilities of a liberated future. How, then, ought the subject to remake itself against the fascism embedded in its formation?

Marcuse stakes his claim most clearly in his treatise of the same name on the friction between 'Philosophy and Critical Theory' (available in *Negations* 1968: 99–118). Claiming that the concern of critical theory is Kant's last of three questions—for what may I hope?—Marcuse argues that the project of critical theory is a future-oriented one. In contrast to this, philosophy is a bourgeois project that is unable to comprehend the possibility of externality, unable to theorize the abolition of itself as well as the abolition of the subject and social conditions that provide it with the conditions of the possibility of its own existence (1968: 147–51). As a kind of antidote, Marcuse points toward a de-identification with the genetic history of mass atrocity. He states:

This would be the sensibility of men and women who do not have to be ashamed of themselves anymore because they have overcome their sense of guilt: they have learned not to identify themselves with the false fathers who have built and tolerated and forgotten the Auschwitzs and Vietnams of history, the torture chambers of all the secular and ecclesiastical inquisitions and interrogations, the ghettos and the monumental temples of the corporations, and who have worshiped the higher culture of this reality. (1969: 24)

He highlights how it is possible for the subject to subvert the fascism and authoritarian social systems that surround the production of subjectivity: by denouncing world-history and turning inwardly to the history of the individual subject.

As Marcuse delineates it, 'without phantasy [the imagination], all philosophical knowledge remains in the grip of the present or the past and severed from the

future, which is the only link between philosophy and the real history of mankind' (1968: 155). Contra Adorno who focuses on the prehistory and history of man—specifically, the history of mass atrocity—Marcuse argues that the true history of philosophy requires an orientation toward the future, rather than toward the past or present conditions. Marcuse negates history in order to call forth the possibility of utopian longing, which requires an orientation toward the society to come. Toward the end of the essay, though, Marcuse recognizes that, 'Critical theory must concern itself with to a hitherto unknown extent with the past—precisely insofar as it is concerned with the future' (1968: 158). In this sense, the past and future must be concerned in tandem. We cannot negate history if we wish to anticipate a future. This claim sits in tension with Marcuse's earlier claims in the essay, for example, the claim that truth, if it cannot be realized within our social order, will be present in the ability to imagine beyond the possibilities and constraints of our given social order (1968: 143). In this way, Marcuse's last-ditch effort to avoid the negation of history may be in dialectical tension with his determination that concern with the past is regressive. However, to the extent that a dialectic is developed, the dialectic resolves toward the future, rather than the past. We should concern ourselves with history, but only to negate it all the more fully.

In an effort to subvert the Enlightenment legacy and capitalist structures that develop bourgeois norms, systems, and subjects, both Deleuze and Marcuse negate history or call for its negation. To be truly liberated, on their accounts, requires that the individual spring fully formed from the head of Zeus—that there is, in fact, no before before us. At the very least, on their accounts we must disentangle our liberatory praxis from the reactionary threat of history and causality. This can account for the way in which neither Marcuse nor Deleuze were concerned with the structural capacity for leftist movements to become fascist in more than a micrological way. Fascism, for them, is a movement internal to the history of the subject, not external in the movement of material history.

Doing Critical Theory Today: Theory and Praxis, Again

The spirit of critical theory is deceptively simple. It is motivated by the human impulse, drive, or desire for emancipation. The motivation of a critical theory—to seek a truth that is capable of liberation—continues to motivate scholars. Nonetheless, we currently live in a world more repressive than most had imagined it would be. It would have been hard, at the height of the success of the liberal welfare state to imagine the 'regression' of democratic desires, the collapse of the welfare state, and the rampant ethnonationalist sentiment that pervades North America and Europe. In the face of the movement of history, a critical concern with resistance has emerged. This critical concern is nothing other than an attempt to breathe life back into Kant and Marcuse's question—for what might I hope? Indeed, for *what*, exactly, might I hope?

To do critical theory today requires that we once again consider the possibility of left fascism. The conservative press in the United States consistently publishes articles with titles such as 'Another Left-Wing Fascist Movement on the Rise' (2017). It is no

surprise that conservative movements would use the thought and concepts developed by the Left as a critique: it is a clear attempt to show that leftist theorists and actors are, themselves, hypocrites. Yet, pushback to contemporary leftist student and youth movements is not relegated to the Far Right. It also originates within the Left.

In a now-deleted blog post titled 'Planet of Cops', Fredrik deBoer (2017) argues that we live in a world of cops. (Though deBoer, in the midst of a mental health crisis, deleted his entire internet presence in mid-2017, much of his work has been archived by the Internet Archive and is available through its Wayback Machine.) He claims:

The irony of our vibrant and necessary police reform movement is that it's happening simultaneously to everyone becoming a cop. I mean everyone—liberal, conservative, radical and reactionary. Blogger, activist, pundit, and writer, obviously, but also teacher, tailor, and candlestick maker. Cops, all of them. Cops everywhere. Everybody a cop.

He does not mean that literally everyone is now a police officer, employed by the state. Rather, in his view we have all succumbed to the authoritarian impulses within us. In particular, deBoer criticizes leftist spaces for their endless judgment, surveillance, and suspicion before finally declaring, 'Everyone's a detective in the Division of Problematics, and they walk the beat 24/7'. Here, deBoer accuses leftists of building a panopticon of their own. A space in which all action is surveilled or at the least threatens to be surveilled. Much like Foucault's panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), the panopticon created by leftists need not always be staffed, it merely has to suggest that *someone is watching*—such is the authoritarian impulse: *control yourself*. It is yet another incident of the desire to punish, to control, to dictate. It is clear that both Adorno and Foucault shared concerns about the student movements that are similar the ones deBoer articulates about contemporary leftism.

In part, this concern can also explain the contemporary way in which both Adorno's and Foucault's theory are utilized in praxis—that is to say, they are not. Contemporary democratic socialists find Foucault to be a reactionary. (For a representative sample of claims concerning Foucault as a reactionary, see Daniel Zamora [2014a and 2014b]. Another iteration of this critique is present in Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent's cowritten *Foucault and Neoliberalism* [2015].) Adorno, already decried as reactionary during his lifetime, wrote 'Resignation' as a defense. As Bell (2014) articulates it, in this text, 'against the charge of apolitical 'resignation', Adorno articulates a defiant vision of critical thought beholden to no master'. In this sense, Adorno and Foucault were unwilling to succumb to the politics of their day, unwilling to be policed, even by their fellow leftists. The critical tradition that follows them must inevitably require the same of us today. Rather than resign ourselves to the authoritarian impulses within ourselves and others, we must maintain our guard against the cops in our heads. Or, as Foucault puts it, we must not quit searching for 'what on earth is it that can set off in an individual the desire, the capacity, and the possibility of an absolute sacrifice without our being able to recognize or suspect the slightest ambition or desire for

power and profit?’ (1981: 136). The critical tradition, as it follows Foucault and Adorno, must truly grapple with the question of autonomy and freedom, taking seriously the challenges posed by both philosophers to the possibilities of spontaneity presented by our entanglement with history.

The critical tradition that follows from Marcuse and Deleuze is much more vibrant, particularly in praxis. Marcuse’s work, specifically his ‘Repressive Tolerance’ (Marcuse 1961), has become a full-throated defense of the antifascist tactic of ‘de-platforming’. This tactic has given rise to the exclamation slash lament, turned in-joke, ‘So much for the tolerant left!’. (For more on deplatforming, see *ANTIFA: The Anti-Fascist Handbook* [2017], in which historian Mark Bray devotes an entire chapter to these practices. The chapter is aptly titled, “‘So Much for the Tolerant Left’: ‘No Platform’ and Free Speech” [143–66].) If Marcuse was the father of the New Left, he is now the grandfather of the *new* New Left. His unabashed partisanship, his dedication to avoiding police intervention, and his unwillingness to give even an inch to fascism animates contemporary student movements (which popular publications refer to as ‘censors’ and ‘anti-intellectuals’: one need only open *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to find examples).

To follow a contemporary debate played out via blog posts (today’s version of ‘correspondence’): Adam Kotsko (2015) claims that if deBoer is indeed so afraid of the omnipresence of ‘cops’, he should push back against them, resist them, and subvert them. In Kotsko’s post, ‘The Scourge of Political Correctness on Campus’, he claims:

If we can still embrace leftist politics despite the Gulags, I daresay we can still embrace the concerns behind what is pejoratively called ‘political correctness’ despite the fact that college kids sometimes express their jerkiness and insecurity through the misapplication of half-digested ‘politically correct’ rhetoric. I would even go so far as to say that if we’re concerned about people being turned off of leftist politics by such abuse, we should actually step up and intervene in the (likely rare!) cases when we see such abuse getting out of hand.

That is to say, we should resist the fascism in others via the same mechanisms and techniques through which we resist the fascism of the state or bourgeois society: micrological interventions in the drama of this world.

For its part, Deleuze’s theory animates contemporary radical anarchist movements (I am thinking particularly of the Invisible Committee, a French anarchist collective, an alleged member of which has been accused of terrorism in connection with a train bombing). In his *Dark Deleuze* (2016), Andrew Culp argues that Deleuze’s thought is one that requires us to, as the slogan goes, ‘make total destroy’ or to destroy the world using thought as a ‘war machine’ (it is notable that to accomplish his argument Culp relies on Marcuse’s ‘Repressive Tolerance’). Again, the world to be destroyed is not the world to come, but the world that has passed (i.e., the past itself). The call to destroy the world is in direct tension with another slogan of leftist movements: ‘no future’. No future, no

past—only the present remains. We have finally arrived at the place where critical theory finds itself today—there is no unproblematic avenue through which to proceed. This is the precise condition for which the methodology of the Frankfurt School was developed: according to Adorno, dialectics, 'is the world's agony raised to a concept' (2007: 6).

In sum, the varied positions on leftist movements of the four philosophers can be clearly traced to a schism in critical theory (and one that still animates contemporary debates) over the role of history in determining the individual subject. For Foucault and Adorno, left fascism is both possible and terrifying, precisely *because* of the process of historical subjectivization. Subjects are *made* and are made, in no small part, by the history and material conditions in which they live. To grapple truly and critically with our contemporary social, political, and economic conditions we must understand them as part of a historical material process in which we are created as much as they are. Opposed to this, and in some ways, more truly exemplifying Kant's sense of Enlightenment as *Ausgang*, are Marcuse and Deleuze. Both see radical thought and action as requiring an absolute break with history, rather than merely a reinterpretation of it. In requiring that revolution (in either thought or material conditions) slough off the influence of history, they reassert the spirit of Kantian autonomy in which the subject is truly capable of absolute self-determination. For Marcuse, the subject is so capable of such a radical self-determination that he can determine his own father. As if one can control even the material conditions that existed before oneself existed as a subject: a purely self-determined individual. For Deleuze, only flight from the world can possibly liberate us—an actual exit.

The two traditions as I have posed them read as a dialectic. On the one hand, Adorno and Foucault present the necessity of theory as a form of freedom. They do so in order to realize more fully the ideal of the Enlightenment. In the process of doing so, Enlightenment reason must apply its critique to itself—historicizing the ahistorical ideals it purports to defend. We must, in other words, remake the past. On the other hand, Marcuse and Deleuze present the necessity of praxis as a form of freedom. In order to subvert and completely destroy the legacy of the Enlightenment, we must actually become the subject the Enlightenment promised but failed to deliver. In the process of doing so, we must, like Odysseus, remake ourselves *against* the world, so that we might control, destroy, or remake it for the future. To do critical theory today requires not merely a critical attitude, but an appreciation of the dialectic developed by these twin traditions of critical theory and praxis.

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