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Critical Exchange

Emancipation, Progress, Critique: Debating Amy Allen's The End of Progress

Amy Allen, The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, ISBN: 9780231173247

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Introduction: Amy Allen's Angelus Novus

Albena Azmanova

Amy Allen is cautious of progress. And she is fighting for it. The ammunition, elaborated in her audacious The End of Progress, is a form of critique that emanates from a synergy she builds between the discontents of post-colonial theory and the insights of critical theory. The debates that followed the book's publication often presented Allen's enlightened scepticism as scepticism of the Enlightenment; her rejection of the hubris of a Eurocentric historical logic of progress -- as a wholesale rejection of the universalism implied in the commitment to emancipation. The commentaries collected in this exchange (which began at a meeting in Prague in May 2017) rebalance the pendulum of criticism – while most of Allen's critics have found her unpalatably critical of progress, these five interventions urge her to be more boldly so. Guilel Treiber counsels her to pay due attention to the insignificant and the infamous, Andrew Feenberg -- to acknowledge the way technical artefacts and systems are appropriated or suffered by ordinary people, Noëlle McAfee – to have stronger trust in the moral intuitions of lived experience, Azar Dakwar and Martin Saar -- to have the courage to think emancipation without the crutches of a notion of progress.

Earlier versions of the analyses collected here had a common denominator – they all lauded the author's passionate commitment to emancipatory critique and expressed a recognition of the book's magisterial status, powerfully established in the receptions it received in the last two years – a work that broke new ground, inspired discussions, stirred controversies and opened up trajectories for new work and further questions, to use Martin Saar's formulation of a stance all contributions articulated in various way. Yet, when preparing the papers for publication, I took the liberty to eliminate the acclaim – not only for the sake of parsimony, but also because there is no need to praise this fine book of Amy Allen's any more.

As an organiser of this exchange, and a silent spectator to many others, I prefer not to take a stance either on Amy Allen's views on progress or on the way she derives them. Instead, I will express a hope: that future engagements with this book will elaborate further and put to work the formula of emancipatory critique Allen has articulated: her idea of metanormativ contextualism - a contextualist but nonrelativistic account of the moral-political imperative of emancipation, empowered by the method of genealogical problematisation of specific struggles against injustice.

Allen has given us an emboldened version of Walter Benjamin's timid Angelus Novus – his face turned towards the past, seeing not progress but suffering, cognisant of Reason's fallibility, averse to ambitions for a perfect history, yet relentlessly driven by a single and singular calling – the fight against injustice. With an accomplishment of such magnitude, figuring out exactly how sceptical Allen is of progress might be beside the point.

Saving History from Progress
Martin Saar

Amy Allen's proposal is to rethink and revise the "normative foundations" of Critical Theory by problematizing the use that is made of conceptions of progress in various forms. She finds these uses problematic, even pernicious and dangerous, given the many convincing arguments against the parochial, paternalistic, ethnocentric nature of the visions of progress that have been and still are in circulation in modern Western thought. Revising these supposed foundations is therefore needed, but, Allen implies, progress can be recovered as a basis, as a different, recovered foundation. Critical Theory can remain founded on progress, if understood differently.

My point of departure is an uneasiness with Allen's first step to achieve this goal, her elegant but seductive distinction between two kinds of (concepts of) progress. One is taken to be backward-looking (progress as a "fact"), the other forward-looking (progress as orientation or "imperative"), the first is criticized as idealist and objectivist, the second praised as ethically motivated and action-oriented. From the first perspective, "progress is a judgment about the developmental or learning process that has led up to 'us,' a judgment that views 'our' conception of reason, 'our' moral-political institutions, 'our' social practices, 'our' form of life as the result of a process of sociocultural development or historical learning." From the second perspective, "progress is a moral-political imperative, a normative goal that we are striving to achieve, a goal that can be captured under the idea of the good or at least of the more just society" (11-12). While this is definitely a distinction that can be made and that can be reconstructed from several texts in the Critical Theory tradition, it might be harder to defend systematically than it seems. One might suspect (and I do) that the idealist heritage remains operative (even if implicitly) even in the very attempt to overcome the objectivist side of the concept of progress and that this attempt, too, remains tied to a framework that ultimately, I fear, cannot enable us to think real historical contingency today.

Let me just remind you of the conceptual function the notion of progress had in the emerging philosophies of history from the early Enlightenment to Hegel: "progress", the very idea, was meant to weave together into a single narrative the past, present and future by suggesting their continuity or teleological structure. Looking back on past achievements within the framework of a fully-developed philosophy of history in this framework just is the very basis for a projection into the future; looking back is the attempt for finding confirmation of the path chosen and an inspiration for staying on it. There would be much to say about the theological roots of this idea and their persistence even in secularized ideas of historical teleology (an issue J. Taubes, H. Blumenberg, K. Löwith and others were struggling with for decades, cf. Lara 2013). Moreover, there would be a need for differentiation between weaker concepts of historical progress (like Kant's and Diderot's) and their strongest, idealist version (in Hegel). But the categorical heritage as such seems rather hard to break: Conceptually speaking, talking progress means talking continuity, and this implies linking past, present and futurity in a substantial, continuous way. In other words, claiming that the notion of progress can be broken down into two different things that can be held apart (as Allen does: either "fact" or "imperative"), still commits to a thesis about this continuity, this essential link between the three different registers of temporality. Establishing this link is what a philosophy of history in the strong sense does, i.e. what a philosophy with a place for the notion of progress implicates.

In the current discussion there is a version of an argument Allen also might subscribe to (this is not obvious) that goes like this: any emancipatory intention or any form of progressive collective action needs to presuppose an idea of progress, the real possibility of things getting better. For many, this seems to be a knock-down, quasi-transcendental argument (that might be worthy of the late Karl-Otto Apel)), but I don't see that it is as strong as many authors claim (see the recent work of Thomas McCarthy on development, Axel Honneth on the inevitable progress in Kant, or Rahel Jaeggi on progress and regression). Trying not to commit past errors again, taking up historical responsibility or learning from the past does not – in my view – amount to a case for "progress" in the philosophy-of-history-sense, just for learning, for orientation, for politics. But I see that many authors in the current discussion seem to think so and this might tell us something about Critical Theory in critical times, at least that it becomes harder not to lose one's nerves. Restoring the philosophy of histories is certainly one way of responding to this situation. It might not come without cost, though.

Why is this – subscribing to progress or overcoming it – a problem in and for Critical Theory? Well, just because the case against progress as a concept as such seems to be an argument advanced by several prominent points of reference and interlocutors within Critical Theory, namely by Benjamin and Foucault in their attacks on the idealist and progressivist conceptions of history. Both of them seemed to worry that thinking history under the sign of progress (i.e. idealistically) amounts to a systematic denial of history or historicity as such. This opposition (progress vs. history) might not be easily mapped onto Allen's second pair of concepts, "historical progress" vs. "progress in history" (228); indeed, both of the latter might appear to be bound up with rest-idealist assumptions if one accepts the post-foundationalist, post-idealist critiques.

In his fragments on the concept of history, Benjamin (2003: 393) attacked what he calls the "conformism" of Social Democratic and Marxist political theorizing. The idea that the working class might benefit from the gradual advancement of science, technological and social reform has proven fateful: "Nothing has so corrupted the German working class as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological development as the driving force of the stream with which it thought it was moving" (Benjamin 2003: 393). Accordingly, a politics accommodated to bourgeois society was determined by a dogmatic concept of "progress of humankind itself (and not just advances in human ability and knowledge)", envisioned as "something boundless (in keeping with an infinite perfectibility of humanity)" and "inevitable–something that automatically pursued a straight or spiral course" (Benjamin 2003: 394). Calling for a "criticism of the concept of progress itself", Benjamin (2003: 395) was calling attention to the ideological function this notion has played by suggesting an inherent connection between certain historical events and the eventual liberation from social demise the working classes have suffered from. It is in this sense that progress as such, the very notion or idea, in Benjamin's eyes plays the role of a legitimating narrative or apologetic ideology, obstructing any real or disenchanted class struggle.

Foucault's attack on conventional perspectives in the history of ideas or in historiography in general might be said to have advanced in a similar way. Traditional historiography proceeds by creating unities and entities whose coherence and continuity they can only presuppose. But for Foucault, it is only their disruption and disassembling that will make visible the agonistic, dynamic character of identities and historical subjects or objects of knowledge. Philosophies of history, however, will conceal or even deny this ever shifting, ever contested realm, bury them under an appearance of unity or continuity and thereby

masking the war-like real nature of history in which mankind "proceeds from domination to domination" (Foucault 1998: 378).

When Allen claims, "that a certain vestigial remnant of the traditional philosophy of history remains in contemporary Frankfurt School critical theory", she means that there is an unquestioned reliance on "a certain developmental, unidirectional, and cumulative moral-political learning process" (9). However, we might suspect, even her own approach remains in the register of a philosophy of history. If her progress as imperative is to be progress in a meaningful sense, it, too, thinks the future philosophically in dependence from a common historicity with a meaning, a direction, a morality.

Against such perspectives, Benjamin and Foucault – rather differently, of course – and many others were posing the thinking of history proper, the autonomy of historicity, when we mean by this the radically non-Hegelian view that there is no overarching frame (not Geist, not morality, but also not the sheer will to give political meaning to history). In this perspective, overcoming history-as-progress, un-thinking progress first of all means opening up the space for truly thinking historically. At least, this is one possible way of reading Benjamin's and Foucault's contributions to Critical Theory, and it might run counter to some claims of Allen's concerning the inevitability of (some notion of) progress for any theory interested in contributing to political and social struggles. Outlining this possibility might therefore allow for reflecting on a different, maybe complementary story of how Critical Theory and critical theories today might relate to the problem of progress.

Therefore, I agree, it might help to truly "move beyond progressive, developmentalist conceptions of history" (32). But this might mean indeed to renounce the very idea of progress as a historical category, as something within history that could be known, presupposed or guaranteed. This project might sound (and be) less dialectical in argumentative structure, maybe more destructive than the idea that a better concept of progress can be achieved via an immanent critique of Left-Hegelian philosophies of history or that the idea that progress might be something "we cannot not want" (Spivak). However, I think, the concept of progress is something we do not want, do not need, but only the idea and the practice of politics, or collective action, or emancipation. But these points of reference do not have to be not historically grounded, do not have to be normative foundations, they can be thought without banisters. Freeing history from the burden of progress, means freeing the present for politics, unfounded, ungrounded, contingent.

It is true: A politics grounded on a strong vision of one world history, its centers and immanent directions, derived from ideological and philosophical discourses and clad into armor has led into impasses and abysses from whose consequences the world still has not recovered. This much is true about the postcolonial attack on the complicity between progressivist and developmentalist thinking and colonial politics and domination. Critical Theory, as Allen's book has compellingly shown, should have and does have the responsibility and the means to respond to and do justice to this argument, and to join the theoretical and practical struggles for a truly common world. Defending or claiming the idea of progress, I contend, is no necessary part of this struggle.

The Violence of Dust

Guilel Treiber

The fifth chapter of The End of Progress, "From The Dialectics of Enlightenment to The History of Madness", is a crucial chapter in Allen's overall argument for decolonizing the normative foundations of Critical Theory. In this part of the book, she builds on the preceding critical chapters a Foucauldian-Adornian alternative framework for thinking through the relationship between normativity and history (165). To think this relationship differently is to understand that the self-evident moral assumptions to which we are committed and which give meaning to our lives as moral agents must go together, in order for them to be truly moral, with an awareness of their contingent historical nature ("a fundamental humility") and a critical attitude that is always ready to put them into question (202). Allen offers a refreshing, highly original, and erudite reading of both The Dialectics of Enlightenment and The History of Madness. Her reading respects the individual character of the two works, while highlighting certain similarities between them, which allows her to formulate a Foucauldian-Adornian alternative approach to the concept of progress. She rejects the common reading of these two masterpieces that sees them as offering a regressive history of Western Enlightenment as a story of decline. She instead reads them as "serving a broader project of immanent critique" (164) aimed at a fuller realization of the heritage of the Enlightenment, more specifically, the values of "freedom, inclusion, and respect for the other" (165). Hence, Allen does not read Adorno or Foucault as lamenting the end of Enlightenment or as trying to break completely with its heritage, but as two thinkers who

enable her to propose a forward-looking concept of progress, emphasizing the open character of a future humanity to come (174).

It is tempting, to subscribe fully and without hesitations to Allen's version of progress and its ability to sustain a normative position that respects the other without ever succumbing to relativism. However, I would like to raise a few critical points, all concerned with the importance Allen attaches to Foucault's concept of the historical a priori, and the relation it entails between philosophy and history. Allen does not aim at an exegetical reading of Foucault's first important book. Hence, even though she has criticized Lynne Huffer for not being Foucauldian enough in her reading of The History of Madness, I do not aim to direct that same critique to Allen herself (Allen 2013: 21). My worry is that the use Allen makes of Foucault may bring Foucault too close to Adorno and reduce the practical value activists have attached to the former's work in the last few decades (Halperin 1997; Huffer 2010), rendering it nothing but "an avoidance of catastrophe" (175). The rapprochement Allen sets up between the two thinkers is possible through a specific understanding of Foucault's use of history and his relative status as a philosopher or as a historian. In other words, Allen reads Foucault's historical methodology within a specifically philosophical tradition to such an extent that it glosses over the fact that Foucault can be both more useful for her argument and more problematic. She reduces the potential of using Foucault politically for the sake of a specific reading that tries to place him within the tension between praxis and theory, which is emblematic of the Frankfurt School tradition but stands at odds with the militant activism of French intellectuals throughout the 20th century.

For Allen, "the aim of Foucault's philosophical-historical method is neither to vindicate nor to subvert" contemporary ways of life but to open up "lines of fragility and fracture" within that form of life (177, 182). The light we shed, through the work of critique, on the fractures in our historical a priori will enable us to turn fixed, stratified relations of domination into flexible, reversible power relations and to open ourselves up to new selves and new collective forms of social imagination (Allen 2015a, 525). However, Allen repeatedly attaches this process to thought itself, to the emancipatory potential of philosophy, and never to actual, lived experience, to practices or institutions, as Foucault repeatedly tried to do throughout his work. In an often-quoted interview, Foucault distinguishes between his work and that of the Frankfurt School by referring to Marx's idea that man produces man. He emphasizes that representatives of the Frankfurt School understand the result of this production as already given, for example, by positing the desired result (freedom, inclusion,

and respect for other) at the end of a process of emancipation. For him the production of man by man can come only as "a destruction of what we are as well as the creation of a completely different thing, a total innovation." (Foucault 1997a, 275) The destruction of what we are must be understood as potentially violent, not just in thought but in its concrete political manifestations.

For Allen, The History of Madness can be read as a "distinctly Hegelian attempt to take up and radically transform Hegelian philosophy from within" (177) History, with a capital H, is so crucial to our modern a priori that we can call it the "Historical historical a priori " (Ibid: 179). Foucault's History of Madness, read as a genealogy of History aims at opening up an internal fracture within the historical a priori of our Western societies, enabling us to think beyond the Hegelian dialectic of historical progress to which, according to Allen, Habermas and Honneth are still committed. If The History of Madness opens up the fracture, the figure of unreason used by Foucault throughout the book is what illuminates the "lines of fragility" that can open into real fractures (177-178). For Allen, the process of illumination seems to be a condition of any politico-epistemological change in the possibilities of social and individual imaginations. The process of illumination can happen only through meticulous "gentle digging," however, in the end, there must be a moment where "hammer blows" are necessary (182). If that is the case, then we must ask how one opens the fractures into a space of freedom. Although these hammer blows may be thought of as theoretical violence done to thought itself (173), there is no reason to assume their theoretical character. Hence, if one wants to break the cracks illuminated by the figure of unreason (and I think unreason could be replaced with the figure of the Orient or Queer), one must confront the question of violence – of real, practical, explosive hammer blows – done not only to the coherence of our historical a priori but to the coherence of our concrete social ways of being and even to our lives. Moreover, there is no reason to accept, as Allen seems to do, the necessary relation between theory and praxis or to understand theoretical efforts as conditions of praxis. On the contrary, in general after 1968 similar positions were rejected by post-structuralist intellectuals and specifically by Foucault himself (Foucault 1997b, 452–53). To use Allen's metaphor against her, the gentle digging usually comes after the hammer blows. If we understand hammer blows as practices of resistance, we may see in certain cases an interaction between them and the work of the critical theorist or the archeologist. However, this work is not their necessary conditions. History usually happens behind the back of its actors, and the best a critical theorist can do is often just

to suggest ways of interpreting the shifts we sense in our historical a priori without fully understanding from whence they came about.

All this comes down to the way Allen understands what history is for Foucault. The ongoing debate between Foucauldians regarding whether Foucault is a historian or a philosopher has preoccupied Allen in the last two years since the publication of The End of Progress (Allen 2016c; Allen and Aldea 2016; Allen 2017). The issue is crucial to her argument in the book. Although Allen presents her position as a middle ground between the two interpretations, and rightly claims that history is crucial for Foucault's methodology (179), she understands Foucault as engaging with a very philosophical history. Allen takes history to be, for Foucault, incomprehensible except in relation to the Hegelian History he rejects (177). Though Allen is partially right, her emphasis on Foucault's dialogue with Hegel, which she has emphasized for some time (Allen 1998) has brought her to reduce Foucault's history to that of a philosopher. History for Foucault is that of historians, as he has repeatedly made clear (Foucault 2005: 171–73, 1980: 43–46), a history of the dust and silence of the archive and not the abstract archive, but the real, concrete one, of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France or the Bibilothèque du Saulchoir. It is between the crumbling pages of manuscripts in the many archives that Foucault visited, that he wrote all of his books. The archive constitutes, for Foucault, a sort of implicit ethical impetus, which Allen could have used in her argument as well. For the archive is not meant to be dug for no reason, but to capture the marginal voices that official History has failed to erase. For Foucault, the beauty of these lives, forever forgotten, of which we have nothing but the echoes of their momentary meetings with power structures, is what constitutes the intolerable against which he must react.

In "The Life of Infamous Men," a text long neglected by American readers of Foucault, he highlights a theme that many of his previous works (specifically The History of Madness and Discipline and Punish) brilliantly captured: the significance of insignificant lives (Foucault 1979). Foucault's historical methodology is not only preoccupied with repeating Nietzsche's critique of Hegel as Allen suggests. It does something Nietzsche never intended to do with history, which is to give back a voice to those whom official history has forgotten. These lives of infamous men and women (and queers, perverts, libertines and freethinkers too) are to be understood much as history should, not in any abstract manner or as a philosophical concept, but in their "constituted materiality through a multiplicity of describable, positive dimensions" (Lorenzini 2015: 41–42). Hence, for Foucault, archival work as concrete historical practice carries within it the fractures of our historical a priori, which is never actually as coherent as one would assume. The role of the genealogist is indeed to trace their fragile figure, and to

summon them back into the present, although this work can never be in itself enough to open a space of freedom. Opening spaces for freedom is only possible by and through the actions of real living people in the radicality of their transgressive destruction and re-construction, in the violence of political oppositions and in the existential risk of their lives, subjectivities, and bodies, which are all missing in The End of Progress.

The End or the Re-enchantment of Progress? A commentary on progress and emancipation as Critical Theory's imperatives

Azar Dakwar

There is little doubt that Allen's The End of Progress is extraordinarily timely, daring and incisive, for it leaps into a paramount zone of vulnerability at the core of Critical Theory: the role and function of progress in critical historical and normative consciousness. My point of departure in this commentary is one of principled agreement with Allen – that is, both with her pointed critique of the justifications for historical progress in the works of a quintessential cohort of critical theorists and with her observations about the pressing need to decolonize Critical Theory's normative foundations. Yet, it is my intention to interrogate the plausibility of Allen's suggestive framework for "thinking about history and the question of its normative grounding" (5). To this end, I revisit Allen's reading of the Foucault-Derrida debate that followed the publication of Foucault's History of Madness as well as Foucault's 1960's brand of critical historicity for explicating Derrida's criticism in a light contrary to Allen's view thereof. Subsequently, I shall argue that Derrida's critique of Hegel's and Foucault's early historicity was not displaced or transcended by Allen's critical scheme.

On the one hand, despite how Foucault severs the Hegelian leap between the "Process of Knowing" and that of "Absolute Knowledge" (and how he historicizes this break), I concur with Allen that Foucault's early critical methodology of historicity cannot be understood but in relation to Hegelian historical reason. On the other hand, and unlike Allen, I will contend that the critical historicism of the early Foucault cannot set itself free from the inertia of Hegel's dialectical historicity, which endogenously conflates historicism as teleology with historicism as methodology (Funkenstein 1986; Moyn 2003). Following Derrida's line of argumentation, I will then highlight the uneasy interrelationship and habitual Hegelian enjoining of immanent reason, immanent history and immanent critique (the "immanentizing" of reason, history and

critique) in the critical methodologies of the Frankfurt School and the early Foucault. This will eventually lead us to question Allen's assertion that Critical Theory can hold onto a specific conception of progress and still be "truly critical" (Allen 2015a).

The notion of progress is Allen's main object of inquiry. Progress has been a touchstone of the discursive formation of modernity writ-large and of Critical Theory's conceptions of history and historicity, and of critique and normativity. While dispensing altogether with the claim to a backward-looking view of progress as historical fact, Allen's account ends up reaffirming the operative necessity of progress – that is, of a moral-political progressivism devoid of commitment to any particular story of historical progress. Furthermore, Allen claims that progress in history – which can be judged by normative standards that are themselves historically and contextually grounded – is both possible and desirable for decolonizing (and "criticalizing") Critical Theory (33, 226). Allen then couches this nuanced position on progress within a specific conception of normativity – namely metanormative contextualism – that is "thoroughly immanent" (13, 215). Taken together, if Critical Theory is to decolonize its epistemic premises and method, Allen prescribes placing a forward-looking conception of progress – "progress as imperative" – at the center of Critical Theory's normative core. In short, moral-political progress remains a "necessary fiction" for a decolonized Critical Theory.

Through this double move, Allen stretches thin (in the negative, Adornian sense) the normative foundations of Critical Theory. Still, she keeps them thin enough to look to the future and aspire to a form of "directionality" that takes its cues from certain ways of perceiving history. For if we were to remain true to a minimal yet "necessary" telos of the Frankfurt tradition, a theoretical apparatus with emancipatory intent must be maintained. Yet does the aspiration of emancipation from domination and suffering, whether of Frankfurter descent or otherwise, need to presuppose or pledge allegiance to any notion of progress? It is precisely this crucial entwinement of the imperatives of progress and emancipation in Critical Theory that Allen's book overlooks. Stated in the form of a question: Can Critical Theory sustain a minimal emancipatory intent – one divorced from a thick normative or utopian vision, as Allen perceptively requests (Allen 2015a) – without a notion of progress prefiguring its working concepts of history, normativity and critique?

The promise of emancipation from the historical "principle of domination" in society is what theology, religion and art managed to uphold until the consolidation of modernity's discourse and the universalization of its supersessionist claim vis-à-vis prior traditions and epochs. The principle of domination was subsumed in Kant's critical philosophy, and later in

Hegel's, under the immanence of the language of reason (Taubes 2010). For Kant, reason sits in judgment over the entire sphere of experience. Reason's self-grounding thus necessitates, even postulates in principle, an immanent critique of reason by reason. As a consequence, human emancipation from domination was exclusively delegated to immanent reason.

The prevalent notion of History (with capital 'H' – history as a totality) deployed in Critical Theory's discourse on reason and modernity can be attributed – in the paradigmatic sense – to Hegel. Hegel's notion narrates the procession of reason's dialectical self-realization as it progresses toward possessing or stabilizing a state of knowledge – what he calls "Absolute Knowledge." Foucault's critical projects – both early (History of Madness, Birth of the Clinic) and, to a lesser extent, early-middle (Order of Things, Archeology of Knowledge) – can be read in the shadow, and as a radical critique of Hegel's philosophy of history. Allen summarizes the early Foucault's sophisticated critical project and its relevance for present-day critique as follows:

> The most he would say is that there is historicity proper to our modern form of rationality – a form which, following Hegel, takes reason to be Historical, and history to be rational – and it is precisely the historicity of History that Foucault aims to reveal, as part of his critical effort to uncover the contingency of that form of knowledge, thus opening the possibility of moving beyond it. (Allen 2016c, p. 132)

For all that, Foucault's historicity of history is sustained through the individual's subjective experience of non-subjective, discursively formed historical openings – that is, of freedom (Oksala 2005). Such a stance, therefore, could be at odds with the "collective partaking" prerequisite of Critical Theory's imperative of emancipation.

This ambivalent tension between Foucauldian historicity's condition of possibility and Critical Theory's commitment to human emancipation poses an initial challenge to Allen, who seeks to secure for Critical Theory both normativity and critical immanence. Notwithstanding this problematic, Allen proceeds to ground her proposed method of immanent critique – problematizing genealogy – in the understanding of Foucauldian critical historicity elucidated above (191-92). Hence, she rises to defend it and dispel Derrida's critique of Foucault's qualified and reworked –yet reaffirmative – account of the Hegelian notion of history in History of Madness. In fact, Allen suggests that it is Derrida who is committed to the transcendence of reason, unlike Foucault who is a "theorist of the immanence and contingency of specific rationalities" (Allen 2016d: 117-18). Allen interprets Derrida's critique as "a charge of metaphysics," in the sense that Derrida mistakenly sees Foucault's methodology referring to

the unity of an original presence that precedes the split between reason and madness (Allen 2016d: 109). Allen passes this verdict in spite of her awareness that the idea of the transcendent moment of reason and that of normative transcendence are analytically distinguishable (Allen 2016d: 115).

Against this background, one should ask: What is holding immanence and contingence together (and still keeps them distinct) in Allen's account of Foucauldian historicity? Could it be the case that they are held together by a blind spot of Hegelian Entzweiung – that is, a fragmentation of a previous unity, of the unity of unity and difference? (Pires 2002). Put differently, aren't immanence and contingency sustained together (and apart), as Derrida argued, by a "cleavage and torment interior to meaning in general, interior to logos in general, a division within the very act of sentire [oriented perception]"? Which is to say: Aren't immanence and contingency "constituted" by a blind spot which is not transcendent to historical reason, as Allen claims, but is rather immanent (Derrida 2001: 45-46)? In this view, could it be that Derrida was indicating, contra Hegel, that the universality and immanence of reason does not entail immanent critique as the maxim guaranteeing the possibility and immanent operability of history's historicity? (Allen 2016c: 130).

To avoid any misunderstanding, Derrida concurs with Foucault that the mode of relation to actuality that we establish is itself historically determined and cannot be understood but through problematizing (or "deconstructing") History as well as historicity's alleged coherence. However, Derrida qualifies this observation historically by arguing that the problem lies not only in Hegel's progressivist concept of History (historicism as teleology), but also in the tools entailed for modern historiography and periodization (historicism as methodology), which should not be considered uncontestable given "facts." The latter might as well be the "nonhistorical capital of history," or what grants historicity its preordained credit (Derrida 2001: 37-38, 391). Derrida's oft-quoted quip "Hegel again, always" is what haunts his writings on History's historicity (Derrida 2001: 43).

Foucault's herculean critical historicization of Kant's project of critical reason and of Hegel's project of historical reason is précised in his own notion of the historical a priori, which stands for a set of rules that characterize a discursive practice and that emanate only from practice itself. As Foucault puts it, it is "a condition of reality for statements," or the positive condition of the "archive" (defines as a "complex volume" of "different types of positivity") that "differentiates discourses in their multiple existence and specifies them in their own duration" (Foucault 1971: 127-29). The notion of historical a priori is central to Allen's

comprehension of immanent critique as opening up "a space of freedom between ourselves and our historical a priori" (177). Actually, Allen sees immanent emancipatory critique as an effort to efface the Historical character of our historical a priori "out of which our contingent present is constructed" (185-86). Nevertheless, this understanding of immanent critique hardly discharges the question of origins and divisions within history. Historicism as methodology cannot remain immune from itself, from the historical quality of its practice. Indeed, the historical method itself has a history. But as each new archaeology/problematizing genealogy attempts to critique certain forms of rationality and divisions within history, blind spots and singularities are inevitably generated, and thus never "register" in the historical a priori. The implication of this insight is that yet another iteration of problematizing a "condition of reality for statements" cannot account for blind spots that this very work of critical historicity produces. Conversely, it might well be that historicity's blind spots are the condition of possibility of the "complex volume" of "different types of positivity."

The ceaseless repetitive drive of Hegelian historicism, which is supposedly only the hallmark of his historicism as teleology, does not wither away after Foucault purges it from his early critical method. Rather, Foucault's critical historicism as methodology sustains the expectation that the coming-to-true-knowledge signifies necessarily a repetition of the way of generating "condition[s] of reality for statements" and a reiterated extension or subversion of what the "complex volume" thereof had already been. Hence, repetition is also a structuring form of Hegelian historicism as methodology. The business of reproblematizing historicity prompts, therefore, repetition as well as singular blind spots. Derrida's critique conveys precisely this "injunction."

This provisional reading signals that what is perhaps at stake in the Foucault-Derrida debate is not "a fundamental methodological disagreement about how to do critical philosophy," as Allen argues, but rather a mere methodological disagreement in the form of a reservation: Hegel, probably not always (Allen 2016d: 106). Derrida unravels, in a subtle manner, the Gordian knot between immanent critique and reason's immanence that both the early Foucault and the Frankfurt School "inherited" from Hegel's dialectical scheme of historicity. Derrida does subscribe to the immanence of reason and does acknowledge the primacy of historical reason; yet at the same time, contra Hegel and early Foucault, he casts suspicion on the immanent nature of the critique of historical reason and calls for heightened awareness to the possibility of historicity-of-history as such (Derrida 1998, 2001). Dumping

historicization as teleology while insisting on the immanence of historicization as methodology à la early Foucault does not warrant a "thoroughly immanent" method of critique, and thus might produce "a space between ourselves and our historical a priori" that is oblivious to its condition of possibility. Hence, alongside possessing the capacity of "fracturing from within history," Allen's critical method does not account for the "interior historical rupture" it itself is. Ergo, Allen's aim to "de-dialectize Hegel" by reproblematizing the Historical historical a priori (through the early Foucault's methodological historicism) falters because it cannot secure the immanence of its critical work. Radical Hegelian historicism as methodology retains a built-in propensity to amalgamating blind spots due to its "predisposed" Aufhebung thrust. In a nutshell, we might call this Allen's Hegelian "Catch-22."

To conclude, Allen's groundbreaking critique of progress makes sense insofar as it channels the capacity to perform an immanent critique that is normatively valid in specific contexts. That is, a form of critique that maintains or even reinvigorates Critical Theory's quest for emancipation. However, while seeking and prescribing normative progress as a maxim for our emancipatory praxis, we must bear in mind a caveat underscored in the works of Derrida, Benjamin and the late Foucault: the association of progress or its critique with either pessimism or optimism in future emancipation might be misplaced (Brown 2001). If Critical Theory wishes to retain – dare I say – a "collective" emancipatory intent, or to otherwise decolonize its normative foundations, it must first think how to bracket the intuiting of historicity's structure of repetition, and then reflect on emancipation in the absence of the possibility of normative progress and the consequences entailed for Critical Theory's method of "immanent critique."

On Our Situated Standpoints

Noëlle McAfee

Amy Allen's goal in The End of Progress is twofold: "to decolonize critical theory" and to criticalize postcolonial theory to see how it "might respond to long-standing charges of relativism [and] … the normative status of its critique" (6). What prevents current critical theory—namely in the works of Habermas and Honneth —from being truly critical, she argues in the course of the book, are the ways in which supposed historical "facts of

progress" are deployed to provide a footing for standards of critique, which, though supposedly universal are really, she argues, particular, namely Eurocentric. Critical theorists locate these standards immanently and historically in particular forms of life—modern ones—but still attempt to use them transcendentally to do critical theory. (To Forst's more Kantian approach, Allen deploys a criticism of its universality.) In a certain sense, contemporary critical theory has wanted things both ways: critique founded immanently yet also critique that can transcend cultures in order to be able to critically reflect back on those cultures. The worry is that if we lack transcendental grounds for critique then anything goes. Without transcendence, that is, truths that are not merely context dependent, we are on a dire path to relativism, shorn of weapons for criticism.

In the background of the book there are these dichotomies: On the one side objectivity, transcendence and the capacity for critique without metaphysics (about which Allen is very sceptical) and on the other the slippery slope of relativism that can easily slide into skepticism, maybe even nihilism, and an unwillingness to engage in critical inquiry across cultures. Along with many critical theorists today, Allen takes to the barricades against relativism, insisting with every mention of it that she will not go there where surely danger lurks. So she is treading shaky ground, trying to dispense with a conception of progress (which she sees as a self-congratulatory Eurocentric claim about how far we western moderns have come, providing a normative footing for future critique) without losing all capacity for critique (relativism). But where Allen mans the barricades against relativism, I have long wondered outright whether critical theory might be able to acknowledge relativism and still preserve critical theory's power.

This all reminds me of an interview I conducted twenty years ago with Richard Rorty for a public affairs television program (McAfee 1997). With these sorts of worries in mind, I asked Rorty the same question from many different directions,

- How can people from one culture criticize the norms of another culture if there is potentially nothing that they share?
- How does a culture change its own norms if there is nothing transcending the culture itself?
- How can competing claims be adjudicated?
- Do we need some moral certainties in order to improve or critically reflect on society?

Rorty responded by drawing on John Dewey and Habermas, saying that with them he believed people arrive at what they call truth, though he doesn't call it truth, through their deliberations not about principles but about consequences—and that there was no way to independently decide whether their views were justified or not. Rorty was skeptical about people's ability to adjudicate between values; he attributed the ability to criticize one's own culture, to set aside self-interest, and the like only somewhat jokingly as miracles or lightning bolts. Asked about religious fundamentalism, such as the Taliban's in Afghanistan and how it treats women, he had nothing to say. Moreover, he could not see how philosophy could help people find any common ground. "Human beings are creatures of their cultures," he said, whether fascists or liberal democrats. And only through luck might they or their children change. Throughout the interview, Rorty held that we are products of our cultures, that the only gauge of truth is public opinion but, umm, the public often seems to get it wrong, and no we don't have standards for adjudicating right from wrong. Some cultures produce fascists, others liberal democrats, and there's little more to say about it than that.

If this kind of relativism is what Amy Allen's project of decolonizing critical theory needs to guard against, then I see her point. In fact, she quotes Habermas's disparagement of the skeptic (Allen 2016a: 65) for terminating his "membership in the community of beings who argue." Habermas may well have had Rorty in mind. But Rorty, despite his protestations against philosophy, was being a relativist as only a philosopher would: insisting practically on principle that, almost objectively, nothing can be true or justified. This is why relativism seems to pose such a danger, for it seems to lead straight toward quietism and a refusal to make any judgments at all. With Habermas, I would agree that Rorty was opting out of the community of people who argue. (To be fair, in his later work he did opt back in to the conversation.)

But as William James points out, this kind of radical skepticism is not an alternative to certainty and absolutism but the flip side of the same coin where everything rises or falls on the need for certainty. The philosopher committed to one side of the coin sees the only alternative as the opposite side. He, and it's often a he, cannot admit to any other alternative. In the actual world cultural and moral relativism does not play out this way at all. From within their world views, "relativists" are believers, not nihilists at all. Consider Protagoras's claim that "of all things the measure is man, of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not." Man the measurer has firm beliefs, justified by lived experience, not willy-nilly arbitrary ones. From this kind of relativist picture, the liberal

democrat who encounters the fascist has plenty to say, and vice versa. Each has convictions, and each may well engage in heated conversation about why their own view is right and the other's is wrong.

Allen draws on Adorno to go in this very direction, to show that relativism and absolutism are actually correlates. She quotes Adorno, "For the positive nature of beliefs, of ideologies, that prevail here and now is not relative at all. They confront us at every moment as binding and absolute" (216). Allen's own view points in the same direction: toward a metanormative contextualism that is also beyond the absolutism-relativism dichotomy. Metanormatively, the person engaged in debates across cultures can be fully aware that her standards and methods are derived from within her culture. By seeing this new kind of relationship between our "metanormative and normative commitments," Allen writes, "we could understand ourselves, at a first-order, substantive normative level, to be committed to the values of freedom, equality, and solidarity with the suffering of others, but understand these commitments, at the metanormative level, to be justified immanently and contextually" (211).

Unlike Rorty's liberal who cannot even engage with a fundamentalist, Allen's liberal can do so fully aware that her own presuppositions have emerged from a particular, say western, position. She will not presume that her ways of knowing and deciding are universally true, though she might firmly believe that they are better than other ways of knowing. Something like this is what I was trying to get from Rorty: an acknowledgment that even though we may not meet eye-to-eye with others, while there might indeed be a plurality of views and differences of opinion about their relative validity, there still might be a way to talk with and woo others to see merits in our own convictions.

Many critical theorists are prone to hear in the word "relativism" the other of certainty and rationality; that is, relativism seems to mean an inability to adjudicate. I suggest we hear in it instead ideas such as pluralism and perspectivalism, situated standpoints from which we come to see the world richly and deeply. Pluralism captures the fact that there are many perspectives and hence accounts of what is and is not. Pluralism is the condition that gives rise to the need for politics, that is, for the practice of deciding what ought to be done in the face of disagreement. Perspectivalism captures the fact that people see things a certain way, not an arbitrary way, from where they happen to sit. Everyone in this room has a very definite and distinct vantage on the room by virtue of where one is. Moreover, perspectivalism

provides ongoing challenges and tests of universalist claims, just as Habermas's D tests any U, and also just as any postcolonial criticism can test and challenge universalist claims that emanate from a Eurocentric view. In my view, we critical theorists do not need to purge ourselves of particularism, even any residual Eurocentrism, but recognize and use our multiple perspectives.

Neither perspectivalism nor pluralism denies the capacity for people to, as Arendt put it, "go visiting" other points of view, to reflect on their own points of view, or to make moral and political judgments along the lines that Forst and Honneth might support. Maybe human beings are wired to make judgments, or at least as those we have encountered in our philosophical anthropological investigations of those forms of life we know about contextually. Some might want to postpone such a political understanding until we can ground it non-tautologically, but then they would be waiting indefinitely for Godot.

I close with these observations: First, perhaps metanormative contextualism does not require adherents of a philosophical view to state up front that their view is contextual, that is, emerging from some particular and not normative position. For example, since Habermas already concedes that his theory emerges from what modernity has accomplished, it does not seem necessary, even according to Allen's criteria, that he also note that his view is contextual. If that is so, Allen need not find fault his view, but instead use it as a case for her own position. Second, contrary to Allen's worry that a plurality of forms of critique may stop other forms of discourse in their track, critics from the underside of history, such as Enrique Dussel, find multiple lines of critique and discourse to be tremendously helpful for social struggle. Likewise, Iris Young famously warned in her early essay on communicative democracy that critical theory needs more than one form of deliberation. Where deliberators in suits often sidelined alternative practices such as greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling, her call for communicative democracy includes valuing these other forms of discourse. So finally, I wonder if Allen could simply read Habermas, Honneth, and Forst as already in fact engaging in a contextualist project that is not terribly different from her own. The project then could be to offer a new, contextualist understanding of what critical theory is actually doing, Eurocentric and all.

Local Progress and Technical Rationality

Andrew Feenberg

While I agree with Amy Allen's skeptical but not entirely negative view of progress in her book on the subject, I was surprised on reading in the first chapter that she intended to ignore the role of science and technology. A brief mention of Bruno Latour's claim that "We Have Never Been Modern" justifies this elision. But how does one discuss progress without mentioning science and technology? The very idea of normative progress rests on an analogy to scientific-technical progress. Only if the latter can be explained in the local, future oriented terms Allen approves can the former be effectively reformulated on those terms. Mainstream political theory is formulated as though its technical basis were an exogenous variable. This is what makes it possible to discuss norms without reference to technical rationality. This makes no sense in modern societies structured by technology and other rational systems such as markets and administrations, what I call for short the "technosystem" (Feenberg 2017). Overlooked is the fact that progress is often realized essentially through technosystem change rather than the legal and policy changes that are the focus of political theory. Treating the technical conditions of progress as external accidents, happily present when needed, obscures the role of democratic struggles in changing the technical base itself.

Consider, for example, the Black Lives Matter protests. Few doubt that there are racist police officers in the United States, and that this is one of the sources of the problem. Nor is there any dispute about the rights of black victims of extra-judicial killings by police. But given the difficulty of changing attitudes toward race, racism cannot be the primary focus of reform. At issue are technical and administrative measures such as body cameras, training in the use of lethal force, and effective disciplinary procedures. The system must be redesigned under public pressure regardless of the attitudes of individual officers. That would be an instance of the local progress Allen invokes as a substitute for global progress. It is inextricably entangled with the technosystem.

There is another problem with Allen's argument. An effective critique of Eurocentrism must deal with the evident fact that the whole world has accepted Europe's scientific-technical superiority in the last two centuries. To be sure this is a contingent fact and neither epistemologically nor normatively decisive, but what a fact! It has created a world in which global corporations apply modern scientific-technical methods only to be

contested by critics and popular movements that demand alternative applications of the same modern scientific-technical methods. This is not to say that premodern sciences and techniques contain no useful knowledge, but for the most part that knowledge becomes effective today where it is combined with modern scientific-technical knowledge in hybrid forms.

Eurocentrism intrudes on the lifeworld of non-European societies primarily through capitalism and technology rather than normative claims. These are the forces transforming life throughout the world, often with little regard for the needs and rights of peoples. It is true that normative ideals such as democracy are also imposed on non-Western societies, but this is not a wholly independent aspect of the process of Westernization. In fact, more often than not, democratic norms are "metabolized" effectively by non-Western nations and become channels for the expression of traditional power relations while legitimating capitalist development.

Allen agrees in advance that consideration of sociotechnical issues may be required to complete her argument. This is a challenging task that will require much further work. Here are two examples. Allen criticizes Axel Honneth's claim that normative advance has an irreversible character because it remains in the collective social memory. For both Habermas and Honneth it is specifically the disentanglement of reason from power that cannot be forgotten. The "learning process" is unidirectional even if regression may occur at other levels. Is this really the way things work? Is the normative force of the abolition of slavery primarily perpetuated in social memory? I do not think so. Is it simply an effect of what Foucault calls "sovereign power?" Again, this cannot be right. This is a normative advance that has been realized in social, educational, legal, economic and technological arrangements so thoroughly and deeply that regression is inconceivable. Put another way, neither memory nor power has the power to make a normative advance irreversible. For that it must be embedded in what Foucault called the "capillaries" of society. This takes place, he argues, through a specifically modern form of power that is dispersed and impersonal.

The example of slavery shows that norms are not separate from the "facts" because they must be confirmed by the existing sociotechnical arrangements to be effective. Nor are the facts separate from norms since they have been constructed in accordance with them. Hegel would call this realized "rationality," the specifically modern form of Sittlichkeit. This concept was essential to Hegel's strategy for overcoming Kantian ethical formalism. It seems

that Allen and other critical theorists dissatisfied with Habermas are attempting to overcome his ethical formalism without a similar concrete basis in the social world. But the example of slavery shows why these attempts are unconvincing. Ethical "substance" today is technically inflected. Not only are we as subjects products of a world in which slavery was abolished, the world as object has been transformed in response to this normative achievement. The achievement is verifiable from both first and third person standpoints, both in our psyches and in our technical arrangements. The entanglement of norm and fact is ineradicable.

This argument reinforces Allen's critique of Honneth, and it also helps to explain an aspect of her argument with Forst. Forst believes that social life takes place in a "space of reasons" in which justifications are offered and received. The exercise of power on this account would involve limiting the reasons to which agents can respond to those favoring obedience. Allen objects that Forst overlooks the problem of the constitution of subjectivity which she elucidates in terms of a Foucauldian theory of social practices. Foucault holds that subjects become the subjects they are through the practices determined by the power relations in which they participate. If the subjects who enter the space of reasons are pre-constituted in some sense to respond to power, reason and power cannot be separated. One might even say that reason is simply a supplement of power that power gives itself.

This argument does not take account of the ambiguous effect of the practices on the constitution of the subject. As Albena Azmanova (2012) shows, practices do not determine the subject in some simple sense, but set up a common ground of expectations, concepts and rankings. The normative implications of the practices are internalized and frame the context of public debate. This frame establishes the categories that are relevant in the space of reasons and makes communication about them possible. The framing opens a field of possibilities. If the practices cause enough suffering, they can be challenged by contesting the rules in terms of the very categories they have made relevant. This can trigger further changes in the orientation underpinning the space of reasons, altering the boundaries of validity. New constellations of valid reasons arise from and alter social practices. Thus Allen's reference to the constitution of the subject needs to be completed by a consideration of the constitution of the space of reasons subjects are called to enter. The contextuality of rationality manifests itself in what can be taken as a reason in the space of reasons. In modern societies, the boundaries of that space are laid out by the practices embedded in the rational order of society. Finding the fissures and cracks through which alternatives can enter into the relation

of subjects to these systems is not a simple matter. We must follow the tracks of discontents, pathologies, and social movements.

The Foucauldian theory of power introduces a tension in Allen's argument she does not acknowledge. His concept of power is quite different from the sovereign power from which the Enlightenment attempted to disentangle truth. It corresponds to the impersonal power of the market Marx identified in the capitalist system, as contrasted with the personal power of feudal society. Colonialism involved a confusing mix of both types of power. Conflating the two types risks reducing reason to power. Romantic irrationalism would then challenge technocratic rationalism, a conclusion of some post-colonial arguments. As a critical theorist, Allen must reject that conclusion. She defends the idea that progress can occur locally through reforms that respond to rational norms. Although gender issues are the only ones she mentions prominently, I take it that she would include among worthy reforms the achievements of many progressive movements, such as environmentalism, movements for workers' rights, disabled rights, criminal justice reform, protection of privacy and free speech, protests against economic and racial inequality, and so on.

But many of these struggles take place primarily on the terrain of technical rationality. This suggests the importance of a critique of Habermas's system theory which is clearly inadequate to explain such struggles. Let me sketch an alternative view. The apotheosis of instrumental rationality has the effect of elevating functionality from a specialized attribute of certain artifacts into an ontological principle. But this is not a pure functionality such as Heidegger might conceive, nor is it Habermasian "system rationality," cleansed of normative bias. The functionality that prevails in actual social life reflects the dominant culture, the perspective on experience that guides the selection of useful properties. The functional transformation of society imposes ends privileged by the means that organize social life and those means bear the mark of capitalism. Thus the technosystem is not neutral, available to serve any conception of the good life whatsoever, but always already embodies a particular conception in its design.

As ever more efficient means are developed and extend to more and more domains of social life, the ends they are designed to serve are called into question by those who do not share the presuppositions that presided over their selection. Conflicts subvert the consensus around instrumental rationality in practice if not in theory. And since the realities revealed in the conflict of functional form and living human content cannot be represented by an

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effective worldview of the traditional sort, some other solution to the problem of social order must be found. That alternative is emerging today; it is democratic struggle and dialogue in the domain of the technosystem (Feenberg 1999: part ii).

Technical artifacts and systems are situated in the lifeworld where they are appropriated or suffered by ordinary people. They become objects of explicit normative judgment when they cause problems. Those judgments do not respect the separation of facts and norms, system and lifeworld assumed by Habermasian Critical Theory. In technosystem struggles rational concepts that have been refined and clarified in the technical disciplines are deployed in their original lifeworldly form. The design process is reactivated through interventions based on the concepts as they appear in the lifeworld. These vernacular versions of the rational concepts differ from the refined expert versions in being charged with explicit normative content. "Purity" has a technical meaning for those who manage water systems, but the same concept deployed by the citizens of Flint has normative implications as well. Such concepts support what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges," and can be invoked critically to realize such potentialities as health and justice. Thus rationality is ambivalent and can provide a basis not only for technical work but also for normative critique.

This approach builds a bridge between early Critical Theory and contemporary theory and practice. It situates struggles over the technosystem in a larger historical context in which the imperatives of capitalism have determined criteria of technical advance contested by democratic interventions. Subjugated knowledges arise from the technosystem and motivate struggles over oppression and injustice. Experience within the technosystem assumes a rational form capable of interacting with technical expertise. In many domains this is the meaning of progress today.

The Ends of Progress: Reply to Critics

Amy Allen

The contributions to this critical exchange challenge me from a variety of different theoretical directions and orientations and focus on a dizzying array of issues, from politics to historical

methodology to the possibility of cross-cultural moral and political judgments to the role of science and technology in my discussion of progress. In what follows, I fear I will not be able to do justice to all of the issues that they raise. Instead, I will focus on what I take to be main lines of critique, clarifying and defending my position where I can; but in some cases I will not be able to do much more than to acknowledge my own limitations.

Martin Saar expresses deep skepticism about what he takes to be the primary reconstructive aim of my book, which is to show that "progress can be recovered as a basis, as a different, recovered foundation. Critical Theory can remain founded on progress, if understood differently". Related to this, Saar wonders whether my distinction between backward and forward-looking conceptions of progress can really be sustained and systematically defended, and suggests that there is a lingering problem with my attempt to retain a forward-looking notion of progress, one that results in a lingering idealism that renders my framework unable to think historical contingency. As he puts it, "talking progress means talking continuity, and this implies linking past, present and futurity in a substantial, continuous way". Thus, Saar maintains that by hanging on to the idea of the possibility of progress in the future, I am necessarily committing myself to a substantial philosophy of history and thus to a strong continuity thesis – in other words, the notion of progress just can't be broken apart in the way that I suggest. He also insists that critical theorists simply don't need the concept of progress to do the kind of work that I claim the forward-looking notion of progress does – alternatives like "learning," "orientation," or "politics" might do just as well. My inability to let go of even a vestigial notion of progress represents, in his eyes, a failure of nerve on my part.

Saar's skepticism is grounded in his reading of Benjamin and Foucault, both of whom argue that we should be skeptical about thinking history as progress even in a forward-looking sense. If we follow this lineage of critical theory, then, Saar maintains, the true challenge becomes how "to renounce the very idea of progress as a historical category, as something within history that could be known, presupposed, or guaranteed". Furthermore, Foucault especially helps us to see that we don't need the concept of progress for contemporary political struggles, all we need is "the idea and the practice of politics, or collective action, or emancipation", thought without banisters, which is to say, understood in a truly contingent and ungrounded sense. It is interesting to me that Saar leaves Adorno out of this alternative genealogy, since Adorno's work is crucial for my attempt to break up the concept of progress, to pry apart its backward and forward-looking aspects. As I understand

it, Adorno's motivation for this is his awareness that although the claim that history has progressed up to now is utterly indefensible in light of the barbarity of the Holocaust, to give up on the possibility of progress in the future would be to wallow in conservative despair. I agree wholeheartedly with Saar that whatever understanding of progress might be recovered in the wake of its ongoing and persistent critique will have to jettison claims to continuity and unity within history, and furthermore that it will have to be measured and assessed according to criteria that are themselves understood as contingent foundations, which means that whatever we might take to count as an instance of progress will always stand in need of further ongoing genealogical problematization. But I'm not convinced – at least not yet – that such a recovery is impossible.

Insofar as we disagree, some of our disagreement seems to me to stem from what I take to be Saar's mis-characterization of the aim of my project. By saying that my aim is to recover progress as a foundation for critical theory, perhaps Saar is just trying to capture my endorsement of the idea that critical theory in some way requires a forward-looking understanding of progress in order to be critical – that is, it requires some conception of if not the good society then at least the less oppressive or less unjust society. But does saying this mean that forward-looking progress becomes the foundation for critical theory, in my view? I don't see why. I would say rather that my aim is to rethink the conception of normativity in critical theory in a contextualist and genealogical mode, which means that whatever "foundation" is articulated here is not progress but rather the method of genealogical problematization. To be sure, I maintain that this conception of normativity preserves the possibility of making normative claims – including claims about what we might take, here and now, to count as progress in the future – and I do see this as important for critical theory. (As an aside, I suspect that Saar does as well, or else I'm not sure how to read his references to things like learning and emancipation.) But this is a contingent foundation, and on this I think that Saar and I agree.

As I see it, once we have this conception of normativity in place, it can underwrite the reading of history in terms of progress, but only in a very local and contextual way. In other words, on the genealogical-contextualist account of normativity, progress cannot serve as a means of justifying our normative criteria, but it is possible that judgments about progress or regress may be entailed once we have adopted certain (contextually grounded) normative principles; this is what I try to capture with my distinction between "historical progress" and "progress in history" (see Allen 2016a: 225-229). Does this commit me to an idealist,

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substantial, and continuous philosophy of history? Although I would admit that I probably don't do enough work in the book to elaborate and defend this distinction, I don't see why this would be the case. Perhaps I give too much credence to a certain kind of transcendental argument, advanced by Rainer Forst, which holds that one cannot be against progress without also being for it. In other words, even the critique of progress as an ideological and implicitly imperialist concept itself relies on some notion of progress, insofar as this critique holds that it would be better if we could expunge critical theory of this ideological notion. Still, I don't think that my response to this argument commits me to a claim about the "real possibility of things getting better", that is, to a substantial claim about continuity within history. For better or for worse, what I have in mind with the notion of progress in history is a much thinner, less substantial view about what is entailed conceptually and normatively by certain types of critical claims. In the end, though, I think that progress in history means more or less what Saar calls politics: it refers to local and specific instances of emancipation, where this is understood as the minimization of domination, carried out in light of normative criteria that are contingently and contextually grounded and that, as such, always stand in need of ongoing genealogical problematization.

Echoing some similar themes, Guilel Treiber worries about my lack of attention to the specifically political and suggests that my approach ultimately fails to heed important Foucaultian insights. Treiber contends that my reading of Foucault brings him too close to Adorno, with the effect losing sight of the specifically political and activist dimensions of Foucault's work. On Treiber's reading, I attach the illumination of lines of fragility and fracture to "thought itself, to the emancipatory potential of philosophy, and never to actual, lived experience, to practices or institutions, as Foucault repeatedly tried to do throughout his work". Moreover, and relatedly, Treiber worries that I ascribe to Foucault a Frankfurt School critical theoretical view about the relation between theory and practice that he himself would not (maybe even did not) accept.

Treiber's radical, deeply political reading of my book calls attention to one of its obvious limitations. There is no doubt that he is correct to point out that my book does not pay sustained attention to questions of political praxis. The primary aim and energy of the book lies elsewhere, in developing a conception of normativity that can be gleaned, at least in part, in Foucault's work. But I'm not sure that it is fair to say that I am committed to the claim that critique is a necessary precondition for transformative or revolutionary praxis. As far as I can tell, I don't take a position one way or the other on this question in the book. In

fact, I am somewhat skeptical of the idea that critical theory has a privileged relationship to praxis – I have explored in great detail in my earlier work the ways in which critique is far from sufficient for practical political transformation (Allen 2008); more recently, I have wondered whether it is even necessary (see Allen 2016b). In any case, I'm inclined to agree with Treiber that there are many cases in which theory lags behind radical political transformations, struggling to catch up and make sense of them after the fact, and I don't see how that view is incompatible with the argument of my book.

However, none of that skepticism requires rejection of the claim that theory is itself a kind of practice. For what it is worth, I don't think that there's any doubt that Foucault accepted some version of this claim. Why else would he have claimed that all of his books are experiences, that is, designed and composed to have a transformative effect on both their author and their readers (Foucault 1997a: 239ff)? This at least suggests that there is, for Foucault, a meaningful sense in which critique can open up a space of freedom, not solely in theory but also in practice, even if one admits that theory can't by itself do all of the work required to achieve political transformation and that such transformations sometimes outrun our best critical theories, forcing us to play catchup. Moreover, it seems to me that Treiber himself implicitly acknowledges this point when he insists on characterizing Foucault's work as a historian – which is, after all, a type of critical-intellectual work, not a directly political praxis. Treiber is quite right that the point of Foucault's work as a historian is not only to challenge Hegelian philosophies of history but also to "capture the marginal voices that official History has failed to erase" and "to give back a voice to those whom official history has forgotten". I think Treiber is quite right to point out that I could have done more to reflect on this aspect of Foucault's critical historical practice in light of postcolonial concerns. But notice that Treiber is here implicitly assuming that Foucault critical-historical work has a political point and impact. I agree, and something like this is what I had in mind in talking about critique as opening up a space of freedom.

Unlike Saar and Treiber, both of whom seem to worry that I am not Foucaultian enough, Azar Dakwar aims to develop a Derridean critique of both the early Foucault and the use that I make of him in my book. Like Saar, Dakwar presses this reading in order to pose the broader question of whether the aspiration of emancipation from domination must presuppose or entail any notion of progress and to worry that my view has not fully expunged the residues of Hegelian philosophy of history. His sophisticated and nuanced critique turns around two specific points: first, his claim that the early Foucault and I both fail to

distinguish between historicism as teleology with historicism as methodology, rejecting the first while implicitly accepting the second, thus remaining stuck within a Hegelian historical framework; second, his contention that the early Foucault and I both endorse a problematic strategy for the immanentizing of reason, history, and critique, one that fails to take seriously the ways in which immanence and contingency may be held together by a blind spot immanent to (historical) reason itself. Dakwar's comments turn in part on the question of how best to read Derrida on the notion of historicity and whether it is fair to charge that his is an ahistorical conception of history (as Adorno might have said) that is incapable of comprehending the sheer contingency and radically discontinuous and transformative character of the historical event (as Foucault did say).

Since I don't think that here is the place to debate the fine points of Derrida interpretation – nor do I feel particularly well qualified to do so, since I would not describe myself as an expert on Derrida's work – I will instead focus on what Dakwar takes to be the payoff of his Derridean critique of my book. As far as I can tell, the payoff is the claim that the immanent critique of Hegelian historicism found in the early Foucault and in Frankfurt School Critical Theory remains too immanent, too internal to a Hegelian conception of history, and thus that this conception is condemned merely to repeat the underlying logic and structure of that conception. Insofar as this conception of critique hangs on to historicism as a core component of its methodology, it is ultimately incapable of breaking out of the teleological Hegelianism that it criticizes.

A great deal of the argument thus hangs on the characterization of Foucault as a methodological historicist in the relevant sense. Dakwar does not say much about what he means by this, but the core point seems to be the presumption of the "tools of modern historiography and periodization". Although Foucault's work is very closely associated with the emergence of new historicism in literary and cultural studies, and although the Annales School that was deeply formative for his intellectual development bears a complex relationship to historicism, it is important to keep in mind that Foucault is first and foremost a historian of the present. Thus, I'm not sure it makes sense to characterize him as a historicist in any straightforward sense of the term. Rather, as I argue in the book, his deployment of a specifically historical methodology seems to me to be contingently motivated. It is because of the grip that historical self-consciousness has on the modern historical a priori that Foucault feels compelled to work with historical tools, but the aim of this critical work is to open that

historical a priori up to radical transformation – which may entail a transformation to a point of view from which the very notion of historical a priori will cease to be compelling.

But perhaps Dakwar's argument aims to cut deeper than this, to impugn the very validity of immanent critique as such? Such an argument would call into question the assumption that gaining critical distance on our historical a priori requires using historical methods, even if the ultimate aim of doing so is the overcoming or undoing of that notion and those methods. I'm not sure if this is what he intends, but if it is, it is difficult to see how this argument could be advanced from a Derridean perspective, given Derrida's notion of inheritance, understood as taking up an intellectual tradition by radically transforming it from within. Insofar as both Foucault and Derrida position themselves as inheritors of the Enlightenment in this sense, as far as I can see this represents a significant convergence between their views.

Unlike Saar, Treiber, and Dakwar, Noelle McAfee focuses on my response to the challenge of relativism, a challenge that emerges from my contextualism about normativity. She begins by juxtaposing my position with that of Richard Rorty, as articulated in her 1997 interview with him (McAfee 1997). Rorty's position, according to McAfee, amounts to a problematic kind of relativism that critical theory would do well to avoid. As an aside, although I confess that I'm not knowledgeable enough about Rorty's work to judge her interpretation of him, I would at least note that Rorty's primary concern in the interview seems to be with claims about objective truth or right or wrong, and his problem with such claims is that no one has sufficiently explained what they are supposed to mean. This at least suggests that his position would be better characterized as a radical contextualism as opposed to a simplistic relativism. Be that as it may, McAfee helpfully distinguishes my metanormative contextualism from the brand of relativism that she attributes to Rorty. Indeed, McAfee is quite right to point out that one of the core animating ideas of my own reconstructive proposal is that the opposite of foundationalism is not relativism but contextualism. Thus, I think that McAfee captures my view well when she refers to it as "a metanormative contextualism that is also beyond the absolutism-relativism dichotomy".

Thus, I agree with McAfee that, on my view, her imagined dialogue between a liberal and a fundamentalist would be one in which each has a lot to say to the other – which is not to deny that this would be a difficult, perhaps even heated, and more than likely inconclusive exchange. Both the liberal and the fundamentalist would, on my conception of normativity,

be able to defend their views, and defend them robustly. What the liberal wouldn't be able to do, however is to justify her normative perspective either by an appeal to its grounding in universal moral foundations or by a claim about its historical-developmental cognitive or moral superiority. This imaginary scenario helps to underline the fact that the main focus of my argument is not so much the content of specific normative views but rather the stance that we adopt in dialogue across normative disagreements. One of the core intuitions that my book attempts to work out is that there is a big difference (politically) between saying that you think that someone is wrong and saying that you think they are backward – particularly when the claim of backwardness is entangled with ongoing histories of colonialism and imperialism. The latter is a way of denying or closing down what McAfee calls the conditions of pluralism and perspectivalism – by asserting that a certain way of seeing the world is superior to others, and thus can serve as the standard by means of which other ways of seeing the world are adjudicated – while the former is motivated precisely by the aim of preserving pluralism and thus holding open the condition for politics.

Perhaps this helps to provide an answer to one of McAfee's closing questions, namely, can one read Habermas, Honneth, and Forst as engaged in a contextualist project, and if one were to do so, what if anything would I find problematic about their views? In answer to the second part of this question, I would repeat that the argument of the book is focused on the metanormative level – that is, on the status claimed for various normative commitments and the strategies used to defend that status – rather than on the first order normative level – that is, on the specific understandings of discourse, or recognition, or justification advanced by these thinkers. Although I may well have other sorts of worries about the details of their normative projects, in the book these issues are not what's primarily at stake, which means that were these normative projects to be advanced in a more contextualist way, the position I lay out in the book would not cut as deeply against them. From this metanormative perspective, Honneth's position is probably the one that is closest to mine, despite my deep disagreements with his understanding of progress as central to critical theory, while Forst's is probably furthest away, so much so that it is difficult for me to imagine it in a contextualist form. The status of Habermas's work is more complicated insofar as it can be and has been articulated in a more pragmatist and contextualist way, though Habermas himself consistently resists such a reading.

Finally, Andrew Feenberg presses an entirely different set of concerns, stemming from my attempt in the first chapter of the book to set aside the question of technological or
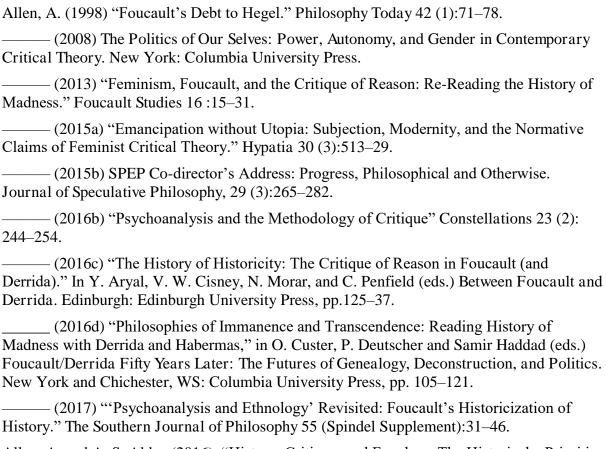
scientific progress in order to focus on progress in a normative sense. In a direct challenge to this move, Feenberg writes: "the very idea of normative progress rests on an analogy to scientific-technical progress. Only if the latter can be explained in the local, future oriented terms Allen approves can the former be effectively reformulated on those terms". Feenberg goes on to argue that modern societies are structured by rational systems such as technology, markets, and administrations – what he calls the technosystem for short (see Feenberg 2017). Changes in the technosystem – such as the adoption of body cameras as a means for curbing racialized police violence – can be understood as instances of contextual, local progress in the sense that I invoke. Morever, Feenberg insists that "an effective critique of Eurocentrism must deal with the evident fact that the whole world has accepted Europe's scientific-technical superiority in the last two centuries". This may be a contingent fact but it is, nonetheless, remarkable. But what if anything follows from it normatively? This is much less clear, as Feenberg himself admits.

Feenberg contends that I implicitly accept that a consideration of scientific and technological issues is necessary to complete my argument about progress, an issue that emerges for him both in my discussion of Honneth's account of ethical life and in my analysis of Forst's conception of the space of reasons. For Feenberg, ethical life and the space of reasons are technically inflected, entangled with a set of technical and scientific practices that are embedded in the rational order of society. As a result, many contemporary progressive political struggles take place on the terrain of technical rationality – a terrain that remains wholly unexplored in my account.

There can be no doubt that Feenberg is correct that my discussion of progress deliberately and explicitly leaves aside discussion of scientific and technological issues. There is a kind of irony here, in that to a certain extent this move is justified by a bifurcation of scientific-technical and normative conceptions of validity that is itself a function of the Weberian-Habermasian conception of modernity that I aim to critique. While acknowledging this irony, I nevertheless thought it important to attempt to set aside such issues given my own lack of expertise in the history and philosophy of science and technology. Although I realize that such a move may be unsatisfying to some, I'm not convinced that it is unjustifiable, particularly insofar as my aim in the book is not to produce a theory of progress or an overall assessment of modernity's relationship to this concept. Rather, the aim was to expose the ways in which certain strategies for grounding the normativity of critical theory rely on a particular story about normative progress – one that is articulated largely (though

perhaps not entirely) independently of claims about technical-scientific progress. In that sense, my focus is much more on the question of normativity than it is on the question of progress per se. Thus, I'm inclined to read Feenberg's not as an alternative to my approach to progress but rather as a rich, fascinating, and important extension of it.

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