

Retrieving the universalism of critical sociology—Adorno, Hegel, and Rose.

Universalism (as an abstraction) has fallen into disrepute, and rightly so. Grand narratives of history are now exposed for their one-size-fits-all philosophy, claiming absolute universal validity for itself, and grounding that validity in the *Weltanschauung* of the white, western, anthropocentric male. The sovereignty of masterful conceptuality has fallen to difference and been exposed as *ressentiment*, and structural over-determination has fallen to local narratives. But the Janus-face of these defeats is that the universalism of the concept of the 'social' has fallen to the heterogeneity of the other. It requires something of Adorno's critical sociology to be able to point out just how much, and in what ways, *free-market consciousness* has been the condition of the possibility of this collapse of the universality of the social, and how the market then continues to take full advantage of it.

In the face of this collapse of universalism, how can the universal still be theorized? This question invokes conceptual, practical and political responses. Plato's *Politeia*, Kant's three *Critiques*, and Hegelian-Marxist philosophy have each tried to unite the conceptual, practical and political into theories of universality. But each has also shown how the experience of the universal disrupts definitions of the universal. An *individual* experience of the *universal* has the universal as an object over against it and has the *particular* as a part of that object. Three, here, does not make a crowd (or a collective or a society). The individual is not the whole or a part but is the experience of both of them. As such, the experience of the universal has not been a universal experience. Instead, it has been an experience of being dominated by intellectual conception, by moral compliance, and by political power. Each domination enjoys its own form of legitimacy as forms of 'law' embracing the racism, colonialism, sexism and anthropocentrism within the hierarchy, science, classification, and mastery of the great chain of being, the philosophy of history, and grand narratives in general. Such domination is often regarded as definitive justification for the politics of inclusion and social justice to reject any and all claims to universality.

Perhaps critical sociology still has the resources to be able to theorize that there is a universalism at work in such critiques of universalism. It is the universalism of *abstraction*. Abstraction, whether in Plato's cave, Marx's fetishism, or Adorno's identity thinking, involves concealing the conditions of possibility that are nevertheless presupposed in creating the appearance of equality, be that of shadows, commodities or individuals. But the contribution that critical theory could make here is to point out there is currently an even more significant form of abstraction—that of 'universalism' from the experience of truth. As the products of labor are abstracted from the process of their production and fetishized as objects in-themselves; and as the products of thinking are abstracted from the process of their production in experience and fetishized as concepts in-themselves; so, the logic of the universal is abstracted from the presuppositions of its conditions of possibility and fetishized as truth in-itself. Property law is the presupposition of all such abstraction.¹ It is the logic of the legitimacy of masters and ends, and the illegitimacy of things and means.

¹ I explore this in my book [Socrates on Trial](#) (Bloomsbury, 2022).

This universalism of abstraction currently has the universalism of the social in full retreat. In the USA, a civil war beckons between the racialized identity of the forces of abstract market-freedom and the remnant of universalism that is struggling to hold to any vision of the social or universal interest. The UK (or England in particular) has rejected European cosmopolitanism. European member states face tension from reinvigorated nationalism and separatism. Strongmen leaders create tyrannies and oligarchies in all continents of the globe. They practice terror through the bombing of civilians in other countries and through the suppression of protest in their own countries. And they offer role models for those who aspire to such fascistic leadership.

Another powerful and significant shape of free-market abstraction is the consciousness of the consumers who consider themselves free to choose between the providers, the networks, and the platforms which structure the knowledge they receive and communicate. Digital consumers, choosing their own ideological platforms, are encouraged to believe that their choices reflect some kind of critical consumer judgement, and constitute a rejection of the idea that there is one ideological apparatus operating in one grand interest that creates and recreates mere ideological subjects. This free-market consciousness extends beyond the digital and defines and shapes almost all political debate and much of the character of social relationships and individual identities. It is also shaping the so-called culture wars, for example, that between free speech and equal rights, and threatens the complexities of the struggle for the recognition of and protection for non-cis identities.

Abstraction also shapes the forces that oppose it. In many respects, the protests against the domination implicit in universalist claims has been empowering for the marginalized and the excluded. But abstract universality so dominates the theorizing of the universal and the protests launched against it, that it also marginalizes and excludes any other interpretations of the universal, therein denying the struggles for inclusion and justice any appeal to universal interest. It disallows any *other* or different universality, including within the experiences that disrupt the abstract universal. As such, it denies universal significance to any critique of abstraction, including that which assigns such significance to historical collectivities. If the struggles for inclusion and justice also accept this denial and cancel all theorizing of universality, the danger is that they fall straight into the trap that abstraction has set.

Sociological consciousness of the kind found in Adorno has been a foil to the complete triumph of abstraction. This is borne out in the antagonism that the forces of abstraction have shown themselves to bear against such sociological consciousness. It knows that this consciousness challenges abstraction because it exposes the dependency of its mastery upon social formations. The British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was bold enough in 1987 to say what the free market had often been a little more cautious to express in public: 'There's no such thing as society.'² In this version of free-market consciousness the freedom of the individual is abstracted from any dependency upon a mediating agency. The invisible hand of the market is the only regulation that such freedom would sanction, being the

² A fuller quotation is "They are casting their problems at society. And, you know, there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families. And no government can do anything except through people, and people must look after themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then, also, to look after our neighbours." – in an interview in *Women's Own* in 1987.
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes>

mechanism of each individual in pursuit of its own interests without regard for those of others, except insofar as they have needs that another individual can exploit. A recent iteration of Thatcher's view is the reaction against charges of institutional sexism and racism. If there is no such thing as society, then there can be no such thing as socialized racism or socialized sexism. There is only personal responsibility, saving institutions from any culpability in or as cultures of discrimination and persecution.

A Kantian incentive to sociological consciousness has been the division of the experience of abstraction into the opposition of freedom and necessity. The freedom of the abstract master is opposed by its necessary dependency upon pre-existing social relations. This has been replayed in the Covid crisis. The free master has needed social institutions to provide universal medical care (in Britain, the National Health Service), to disseminate universal information (in Britain, the BBC), and to exchange universal medical research (universities). Such 'universal institutions' have long been and remain targets of the free-market consciousness. But the pandemic exposed the dependency of the abstract upon existing social conditions of possibility. Indeed, in the first year of the pandemic in the UK, it looked as if people's love of the NHS in particular, and care for collective welfare in general, could revitalize the theorizing of the universal by way of a renewed sociological consciousness.

The antinomy of abstract freedoms and social necessities is not new. Aristotle defined freedom as independence (or abstraction) from the necessity for and therefore dependence upon labor, and he defined truth as independence (or abstraction) from the necessity for and therefore dependence upon the labor of mediation and its consequent contradictions. As Kant and Hegel both noted, nothing changed regarding this truth and logic from Aristotle to the eighteenth century. But their own attempts to do so could be seen to have worked in opposition to their best intentions. Out of Kant's Copernican revolution comes the catastrophe for universalism of the post-truth age,³ and out of Hegel's science of logic comes the tyranny of universal or absolute spirit. Both contributed to the conditions for the much-heralded end of metaphysics and of philosophy, but also for the end of the universalism of the sociological consciousness which, as I will demonstrate, they also helped to create.

If a retrieval of social universalism can challenge the universalism of abstract forms of consciousness by way of a retrieval of sociological consciousness, then this commends us to re-examine what sociological consciousness was, what its conditions of possibility were, and what shapes it might take in any reappearance. Adorno, one of sociological consciousness's great champions, argued that while philosophy must yield the idea that it had the Absolute at its command it need not 'bargain away anything of the emphatic concept of truth.'⁴ What, then, in the ruins of philosophical and sociological conceptuality, survives of truth and universalism for critical sociological thinking, or indeed for radical philosophy, to work with? Perhaps it is the necessity 'to provide a refuge for freedom'⁵ in full acknowledgement of the abstractions that thinking both expresses and undermines. In 'Why Still Philosophy?' Adorno said that 'Praxis, whose purpose is to produce a rational and politically mature humanity, remains under the spell of disaster unless it has a theory that can think the totality in its

³ See for example, Anthony Morgan (ed) *The Kantian Catastrophe* (Exeter: Short Run Press Ltd, 2017).

⁴ T.W. Adorno, 'Why Still Philosophy?' in *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia Press, 2005), 7.

⁵ Adorno, 'Philosophy,' 10.

untruth,⁶ or unless it can theorize the totality as false without sacrificing the universal that is retained in thinking totality falsely.

Adorno responded to Hegel's claim in the *Phenomenology* that 'The True is the whole'⁷ by stating in *Minima Moralia* that 'The whole is the false.'⁸ (#29). But the whole is not thereby dogmatically rejected. Answering the question 'why still philosophy' he ended his essay on 'Resignation' with the significance of education and learning that is carried in the experience of such a totality of untruth. 'Whatever has once been thought that can be suppressed, forgotten, can vanish. But it cannot be denied that something of it survives. For thinking has the element of the universal ... The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humanity. [But] The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such.'⁹

Perhaps sociological consciousness carries that most elusive of Adorno's ideas, the universalism of a theory that can think the truth of the abstract totality in its untruth. A renewed theorizing of the universal would involve holding abstract universality accountable to its conditions of possibility. It would require the distinction to be made between abstract universality and the culture in which universality is formed and re-formed. Sociological consciousness has consistently challenged this domination of abstraction. It is the consciousness of the necessary presupposition of social conditions of possibility.

One way to revitalize this critical theory-style theorizing of the universal is in the universalism of this sociological consciousness by way of the antinomical experiences that characterize divisions in social and political life. I will suggest that the sociological universalism that exposes the social preconditions of abstraction is not the closed and imperial universality of abstraction. It is instead the universality that changes and learns and reforms itself. It is the non-imperial universality that might be able to speak of non-white-male versions of universality and of non-anthropocentric commonalities of life on earth and beyond it. In such culture(s) of universality the (s) is no longer held captive by the abstract domination of what can and cannot count as universal. And perhaps, counter-intuitively, we might attempt this retrieval of sociological consciousness by way of the work of someone whose relation to Adorno remained ambiguous, despite several very critical appraisals of his work. Gillian Rose has argued for Hegel *contra* sociology. I think we can find in this opposition a convincing counter-intuitive idea of Hegel *pro* sociology, retrieving in the process the significance for her of being employed in a department of sociology, not philosophy.¹⁰

From the Kantian tribunal ...

In *Dialectic of Nihilism* (1984) Rose says that philosophy after Kant was superseded by social theory in response to the Kantian diremption of law and ethics, itself reflecting the

⁶ Adorno, *Critical Models*, 14.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1977), # 20.

⁸ T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, (London: Verso, 1991), # 29.

⁹ Adorno, *Critical Models*, 293.

¹⁰ *Hegel Contra Sociology* was Rose's second book—G. Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1981). She once talked to me of the importance for her of not losing her sociological identity to philosophy. See also n. 18 below.

antinomies of philosophy's tribunal carried out in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹¹ The antinomies of the tribunal are grounded in the propertied forms of law that the tribunal presupposes. Reason is asked to list its rightful possessions (concepts) and is also asked (conceptually) to justify its possession of them. This means that what is being investigated is also what is being employed as the means of the investigation. The tribunal looks like a put-up job because the judge, the witnesses, and the clerk of the court all presuppose the validity that is under investigation. Philosophy is marking its own homework. This presupposition of validity in examining validity shows that the tribunal must fail and will not bring about the resolution, or the peace, or the kingdom of ends, that it hopes for. It can only reproduce the anxiety that instigated the tribunal.

The antinomy of the law of the tribunal consists of antithetical claims that possession of concepts is both immediately (necessarily) valid and contractually (freely) valid. But it cannot be both. This antinomy of freedom and necessity is the failure of property to justify itself rationally, and thus exposes its legitimacy as grounded only in the force of violence. This opposition of freedom and necessity is experienced as the antinomy of Kantian law. The categorical imperative's response to the antinomy was to define freedom as having no personal ends, no interested experience at all. Pure freedom is claimed to belong to persons (or property-owning masters) for they are where duty is an end in-itself. But this only rehearses the dualism of thing and person (master) that is already and abstractly universalized in property law and experienced antinomically. As Hegel would later point out, this is only to say that 'a specific form of legality has been reproduced in the determination of form as such.'¹²

One might add here that Kant was forced to separate law and ethics because his revolution in metaphysics was not also a revolution in the experience of truth or therefore in the ancient logic of identity and non-contradiction. Aristotle had secured identity (freedom, truth, nature) in-itself against any external necessity or mediation by experience and the philosophical tradition carried it forward as the domination of abstract validity over the activity of cognition. Kant's metaphysical revolution did not change this logic by which absolute truth was judged unknowable in-itself. It only confirmed it, despite showing that the problem lay not with the object but with the limitations of understanding that was dependent upon experience. The reason for the unknowability of truth in-itself is revolutionized but not the unknowability itself. Faced with the antinomy that truth is both necessary and necessarily unknowable, Kant tried to resolve the contradiction by neutralizing it. If the truth of experience is found in the representation of the representation of objects, then 'the contradiction vanishes.'¹³

While Kant does not redefine truth according to the necessity or universality of its being conditional upon experience, nevertheless he has the tool to do so in the synthetic a priori judgement. Whereas analytic judgement works simply according to the logic of abstract identity, synthetic judgement has mediation as its condition of possibility, or as its determination. But Kant does not employ the synthetic a priori for absolute truth because its mediation still offends the traditional identity of truth in-itself being unmediated.

¹¹ I now rehearse her reading.

¹² Gillian Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 20. Her words, not Hegel's.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), Bxxx.

The implications are felt in Kant's practical philosophy. The antinomy of Kantian theoretical truth is replayed in Kantian practical truth in the antinomy of law, or as freedom and necessity, and morality and legality. Freedom is the purity of interest without corruption or mediation by anything heteronomous; necessity would be just such an impurity for it would corrupt pure interest or duty with an external force or an ulterior interest or end. Necessity becomes legality while freedom becomes moral autonomy. Here the diremption of law and ethics repeats the antinomies of Kantian truth inherent in the tribunal.

Why, then, does Rose say that social theory and sociology emerge from this diremption, and indeed supersede philosophy after Kant? To explore this question requires us to re-visit her first chapter in *Hegel Contra Sociology*.

... to neo-Kantian sociology

Rose follows the path of various neo-Kantian responses to the Kantian crisis of validity, showing in the process how the diremption of law and ethics became neo-Kantian sociology. Into the abstraction of validity from experience Rudolph Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) added a third reality, that of values in order to safeguard absolute values. In Lotze's threefold model there are necessarily valid truths, immediately cognized facts of reality, and absolute values within the conscience. Values settled in the inner world of feelings and rational conscience and the outer world of ethical action (moral philosophy) while validity became a general logic, a *Geltungslogik*, a methodology of objective classification, valid because free from experience. The general logic took up the task of applying rules of identity to objects. Like validity in the tribunal, methodology is left unaccountable to and for the presuppositions of validity that it already serves. For the truth of values and validity experience (mediation, contingency) is once again the problem. Validity without experience lacks value. Values without experience lack validity. Experience is a plague on both houses. Neo-Kantianism went both ways. The Heidelberg School prioritized a transcendent realm of values, while the Marburg School prioritized a general logic of validity. 'But in both cases the transformation of Kant's critical method into a logic of validity, a general method, excluded any enquiry into empirical reality.'¹⁴

It is the condition of the possibility of values and validity within experience that marks the beginning of the superseding of philosophy by sociology. The universalism of validity and of values is determined within, and therefore also contradicted by, their being experienced. The experience of contingency is not new. But the experience of being the condition of the possibility of truth itself (the real Kantian revolution) was now the experience of freedom and necessity as the 'social' antinomy of law (validity) and ethics (values). Freedom and necessity were now a social experience because the unknowability of truth in-itself was a social experience. And this social experience was the consciousness of being the condition of possibility (the practical antinomy of law and ethics) that philosophical truth necessarily presupposes. It would be incorrect to see this as just the transition of practical philosophy into sociology because practical philosophy already carried the antinomies of the tribunal. The social accounts for the failure of the tribunal and begins the end of philosophy. This new social experience was a consciousness that named itself sociology.

¹⁴ Rose, *Hegel*, 9.

But sociological consciousness is different from the abstractions of neo-Kantian sociologies. It is the consciousness that presupposes the conditions of its possibility. It is also abstracted from those conditions and has them an object of its experience. In keeping with the crisis of validity and values that it expresses, the transition 'from Kantian epistemology to neo-Kantian sociology'¹⁵ was played out in the dualism of structural and action sociology. Sociology as a form of universal consciousness is itself dominated by the way its universalism merely pervades 'our common sense as oppositions.'¹⁶ Such sociological universalism could have been found in the 'highest principle of all synthetic judgements,'¹⁷ for it was the antinomy of truth known as its experience. It could have re-defined philosophical experience. Sociological consciousness was the consciousness of being the condition of the possibility of experience in general, and the condition of the possibility of the objects of experience. But this social condition of the possibility of philosophy, in keeping with the logic of mastery, sought independence for itself as the science of society, and reduced philosophy to merely abstract conceptualization, empty if avoiding the social condition of its possibility.

In sociology's struggle for identity Rose argues that Durkheim prioritized validity over values and Weber prioritized values over validity, thus abstracting sociology from its own sociological consciousness. Durkheim sought to resolve the antinomy of law by moral facts while Weber did so by means of legitimacy. For Durkheim, society was the necessary precondition of social facts just as for Kant God had been a necessary precondition for truth. Durkheim then turned this transcendental necessity of society *sui generis* into a general logic, and into rules of method, regarding social and moral facts. This became the method of moral education and his version of the sociological consciousness in his lectures at the Sorbonne in 1902-3. The antinomies in these lectures between freedom and necessity exist within the sociological consciousness of his idea of moral education.

Weber repeated the same task in reverse, arguing that values *sui generis* conferred validity. Since there is no access to empirical reality that is not already a value, the validity of values is a matter of faith. This raised the specter of the warring gods in society, a relativistic chaos of incommensurable facts and values. In response, and like Durkheim, Weber makes what Rose calls a Kantian turn against the neo-Kantians that simply separates validity and values. His ideal-type serves as empirical reality for the purpose of measurement and comparison. But since there can be no access to such reality without values, the measuring is invalid. He sought to resolve this with a notion of objective possibility as a regulative (but not a constitutive) principle to make sense of the antinomic (legal) challenge of valid value-based social life. The cost of Weber's Kantian turn is the importing of means-end rationality (and therein the rationality of the Protestant ethic) so that values can become goals and categorized (or naturalized) into the typology of legitimate orders.

Sociological consciousness, then, is Kantian in being the synthesis of the (social) conditions of the tribunal, and is neo-Kantian as a discipline that, having the social as the object of its study, continues to separate validity from experience as its methodology. Where, then, did sociology experience its own sociological consciousness as a shape of the antinomical thinking of freedom and necessity? Where did it think itself as the consciousness of the

¹⁵ Rose, *Hegel*, 6.

¹⁶ Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), xii.

¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 158/ B 197.

presupposition of social preconditions? Where did it become self-conscious as the antinomical experience of logic and property law? The possessive 'of', for example, in the sociology of education, or the sociology of the family, etc., suggests that it rather enjoyed its meta-status as their condition of possibility. But as Rose notes, the sociology of knowledge was a special case. Here Kantian epistemology turned into consciousness of itself as subject and object.¹⁸ It is where the social condition becomes the consciousness of necessity. Its universalism challenged the universalism of its abstraction with the necessity of its being socially determined. Abstraction cannot survive this kind of dependency unscathed, including the abstraction of social pre-condition into a *social or structural domination* of its experience or its sociological consciousness. Sociology was unpopular with the free-market consciousness, *and* with totalitarian consciousness, because it was the experience of the mediation of their abstract forms of domination. And the sociology of knowledge was unpopular in sociology because it subjected all sociology to mediation by itself. It left no abstraction unchallenged.

As such, sociological consciousness was left wrestling with its own significance as some kind of perspective on the 'totality'. Individuals had the conditions of their possibility in society. Identities were socially constructed. Upbringing was socialization. Truth was relative to social context. The import of this totality of perspective depended upon the character assigned to the totality. Seen as a machine, or as a mechanism of social life, it functioned to make sure all the right parts were in the right place. Seen as a mechanism of the free flow of capital, based on the exploitation and alienation of labor, it functioned as the ideological machine of the ruling class. As Peter Osborne has noted, 'Marx is an elusive presence in Rose's writing.'¹⁹ Her critique of Marxist sociology is that it too is the antinomical consciousness of the separation of validity and experience. But she suggests that, because Marxism has no sense of itself as a culture, it cannot experience its own reformations within property relations, and instead holds on to the validity of a theory of objective social relations. For Osborne it was just such objective theory that made possible the transformations of the subject-object relation in capitalist relations that Rose's critical sociological Marxism could know immanently but not transform materially. It fell to the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School in particular, to retrieve and to develop sociological consciousness, including the social pre-conditions that abstracted the universal class from its universal consciousness. For Adorno, at least, this expressed 'a theory that can think the totality in its untruth.'²⁰

¹⁸ I base this sentence on one of Rose's MA course outlines on the sociology of knowledge from Sussex University, UK, in 1986. In conversation she described this development as 'the sociology of sociology'.

¹⁹ Peter Osborne, 'Gillian Rose and Marxism' *Telos* 173 (Winter, 2015), 60.

²⁰ Adorno, *Critical Models*, 14. For Osborne it was further evidence that Rose's critical Marxism as a whole 'represents the end-point of modern philosophy; a point at which the self-critique of epistemology has reached its limit, and from which it can progress no further, condemned to eternal repetition, the never-ending production of a speculative experience of society which remains trapped within the confines of the perspective it knows to be false. For through her critical reading of Hegel, Rose has arrived at just that point at which Adorno, whose path was more tortuous, came to rest: recognition of the fact that the essential negativity of the dialectic of consciousness means that it can have no resting place, can secure no 'true' knowledge' (Peter Osborne, 'Hegelian Phenomenology and the Critique of Reason and Society', *Radical Philosophy* 32, 1982, 14-15). Note here that Jay Bernstein reported that at a restaurant Rose once confided to her students that 'she couldn't distinguish her own thought and Adorno's' (J. M. Bernstein, "A Work of Hard Love," *The Guardian* (UK), December 11, 1995).

Rose notes the development of other metacritiques which often rejected the privileging of consciousness within Kantian epistemology and neo-Kantian sociology, in attempts to avoid its inherent contradictions. Distrustful of the role played by experience in the tribunal and blaming reason for its own self-defeating practical presuppositions, these metacritiques did not accept the social as the precondition of valid cognition. They returned to the question of validity by seeking to identify different pre-conditions. These presuppositions of pre-conditions varied, but Rose grouped them under the title of new ontologies. She lists these presuppositions of pre-conditions as 'life' (Dilthey), 'social-situation' (Mannheim), *Dasein* (Heidegger) and 'history' (Gadamer). One might add 'communicative action' (Habermas), 'structuration' (Giddens), alongside *différance* (Derrida), power (Foucault) and repetition (Deleuze). Each of these seeks conditions of possibility different from the tyrannies of the now exposed empire of rational consciousness. But for Rose, a specific form of legality has been reproduced in the determination of these new ontologies. As such, they offered only new abstractions and therefore new dominations of the sociological consciousness. The forms of legality that these new philosophies carried but denied, and practiced but masked, moved Rose to write *Dialectic of Nihilism* and led thereafter to her own critique of the new wave of such philosophies.

The decline of sociological consciousness

If, as Osborne observed, *Hegel Contra Sociology* confirmed the exhaustion of philosophy, there is a sense in which *Dialectic of Nihilism* registered the decline of sociological consciousness.²¹ Jean Hyppolite's influential reading of Hegel in the mid-20th century plays an important part here. In *Logic and Existence* he argued that Hegel privileged thought over everything else, calling the totality of thought the Absolute because it colonised everything, leaving nothing un-thought or absolutely other. The imperialism is grounded in Hegel's claim that the Absolute becomes other to itself only so that it can claim to be all otherness. How, then, to oppose this imperialism without becoming part of its total culture? Hyppolite, and then much post-structural thought after him, sought an otherness that exceeded Hegel's Absolute, one which it cannot colonise, and a radical openness that it cannot close. This was found in doubling, or as difference. Difference, it is argued, is not opposition. Difference is this *and* another. It is not this *or* another. It is not contradiction. Equally, difference is not part of the totality of absolute thought. Difference pre-exists absolute thought. The Absolute needs difference, but difference does not need the Absolute. Difference pre-exists the Absolute because the 'and' in one thing *and* another thing, pre-exists the 'or' in one thing *or* another thing. The 'and' is a different difference to the otherness claimed by the Absolute. The 'and' is difference *as* difference.

If sociological consciousness is the necessary totality of social determination, then Hyppolite's recovery of what is un-thought by this consciousness marks the beginning of the end of sociological consciousness. It is partly to the political significance of this that Rose draws attention in much of her work. When the new ontologies claim to have avoided the tyrannies of reason, they have masked their reproduction of the categories of property law. They generally rest on the claim to have avoided the pretensions to totality of the

²¹ But not the end of sociology as an academic discipline, which learns to adapt to life without its so-called grand narratives.

sociological consciousness. But for Rose, the inevitable neo-Kantian antinomies of such 'postmodern' thought at once reveals its own formation within property relations. So, for example, in *The Broken Middle* Rose takes up the challenge of postmodern attitudes that announce the end of philosophy, the end of metaphysics, and perhaps also now, the end of sociological consciousness. The rejection of the perceived sovereignty of conceptualization, she says, has emboldened the postmodern judges to renounce law and logos in the names of discourse, pluralism and 'the Other'. But this renunciation, and the celebrations of the end of Western metaphysics, might be a little over-hasty. These critiques of universalism/concept display the same disjunctions of law, the same antinomies, as those found in Kant's practical law, disjunctions within which postmodernity 'disallows itself any conceptuality or means of comprehension for investigating its own implication and configuration.'²² This is because postmodern thinking suppresses the process of conceptuality with violent singularities that rip the history and determination out of experience and treats the latter as almost messianic events or happenings.²³ But to suppress the determination of singularity within the sociological experience is to suppress precisely the disjunctions that condition the appearance of the singular. Postmodernity, and with it the celebrated end of philosophy, and now also of sociology, reproduces the Kantian antinomy of law but does so with intrigue regarding the violence of its subterfuge. The result is that postmodernity became a 'triumphant ecclesiology' and a 'sociality of saints'.²⁴ These singular immediacies, which hold themselves immune to the antinomies of law by declaring themselves not determined within the universalities of law, then seek only to justify new laws, new violence, in the name of authenticity; and here authenticity means authentically undetermined and unconditioned by, or free from and immune to, conceptual determination, or social determination, or universal presupposition; and one might add, free from the question of freedom. Even if the rejection of universalism did not aim to give property relations a new shape of intrigue, property relations nevertheless operate in the rejection of universalism.

If property relations are to be rendered visible as the shape of all cognition of truth and freedom, then perhaps a renewed universalism, a renewed sociological consciousness, and a renewed understanding of the experience of the necessity of social condition, are going to be required to meet this challenge. The exposure of the continued domination of propertied universalism cannot be realized by the shape of consciousness as (propertied) difference. It is a universal consciousness that can know its own universal determination in and by universal property relations and is therein equipped to know universality differently than as abstraction demands. This was at the heart of Rose's project for a critical and cultural Marxism in *Hegel Contra Sociology* and beyond.

So how did Rose describe her own Hegelian philosophical project to negotiate the sociological experience of a totality that is nevertheless false? Her disappointment with Adorno was that his negative dialectics was a morality of method; not a general logic of objectifications but an infinite task to preserve the sociological consciousness from total assimilation into the totality that it nevertheless clearly understands. This is Adorno's non-standpoint, or non-identity, his conviction of totality of being non-identical with itself. But it

²² Rose, *Broken Middle*, xii.

²³ For example, Agamben's 'time that remains' is the claim to a time that avoids implication in and configuration by the law. See G. Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005).

²⁴ Rose, *Broken Middle*, xiii.

is also the limitation of the sociological consciousness in relation to a Marxism that seeks to transform the objective social determinations of material relations. In the face of the limitations of the universalism of non-identity one can fall to resignation by demanding abstract solutions and actions, or by rejecting sociological consciousness altogether as unable to transform the conditions of its own possibility.

In her earliest book Rose notes that these limitations raise the question of whether critical sociology is even possible given its self-defeating rationality. In the *Hegel* book she responds to this by invoking a 'speculative sociology'²⁵ that can retrieve the absolute within the thinking of social relations. In the light of her future work, this speculative sociology is the sociological consciousness of the diremption of law and ethics, carrying the universalism of the experience of its own necessity in social conditions of possibility. The change in thinking that this commends is a different kind of universalism to that of the abstract logic of identity. It commends 'a unity of theory and practice'²⁶ and a 'different way of transforming ... unfreedom.'²⁷ Her later work rehearses this different universalism across a variety of themes, but always with a view to uncovering the suppression of the consciousness that knows the suppression of its own critical universalism. From the *Hegel* book, her idea of the sociological consciousness is described in the following way.

Once it is shown that the criterion of what is to count as finite and infinite has been created by consciousness itself, then a notion is implied which does not divide consciousness or reality into finite and infinite. This notion is implied by the very distinction between finite and infinite which has become uncertain. But it is not pre-judged as to what this notion, beyond the distinction between finite and infinite, might be. It is not pre-judged in two senses: no autonomous justification is given of a new object, and no statement is made before it is achieved. The infinite or absolute is present, but not yet known, neither treated methodologically from the outside as an unknowable, nor "shot from a pistol" as an immediate certainty. This "whole" can only become known as a result of the process of the contradictory experiences of consciousness which gradually comes to realize it.²⁸

The central parts of *Hegel Contra Sociology* work through the determinate negation of subjective substance as this educational process. This is what now looks so 'quixotic'²⁹ in an age when the whole, or subjective substance, is clearly linked to the evils of sexist, colonial and racist views in Kant and Hegel. But perhaps there is also a different kind of universalism accompanying these stereotypes that pervaded the 'scientific' hierarchy of the great chain of being and the philosophy of history, one that does not define truth in abstractions of totality, exclusivity and closure.

Hegel *pro* sociology

Osborne notes that Rose saw the importance of the value-form in Adorno, and that she saw Hegel's 'logic of illusion' behind the idea that value subtracts the individual from social labor

²⁵ Rose, *Hegel*, 32.

²⁶ Rose, *Hegel*, 51.

²⁷ Rose, *Hegel*, 201.

²⁸ Rose, *Hegel*, 46.

²⁹ Osborne, *Rose and Marxism*, 55.

and appears 'only in the illusorily self-sufficient form of monetary relations ("money").'³⁰ But Osborne interprets illusion in Rose in terms of recognition and misrecognition, and notes that these are insufficient for transformation of material being. This, he says, illustrates precisely 'the social-epistemological bias of a wholly phenomenological ethical Hegelianism'³¹ that not only haunts Rose's oeuvre but also much of the work of Rose's supporters. As such, radical philosophy 'needs' (his word) a 'social correlate of Heidegger's concept of *immanent transcendence*'³² that is not reducible to experience. This 'need,' conditional upon the separation of cognition and validity, hopes to avoid the antinomies of freedom and necessity in which it is nevertheless implicated. But as twentieth-century European history demonstrated, immanent transcendence has sought validity in immediacies of authenticity and futurity that are held to be unaccountable to conditions of possibility that are not already asserted as authentic and futural. One should be dubious that any jargon of authenticity will offer that which Osborne seeks, namely, 'the horizon of historical intelligibility' that frames the 'critique of political economy with the social history of capitalism, in its nation-state and globally transnational forms.'³³ More likely any impatient desire for an immediacy of identity different from that created in the antinomial mastery of reason,³⁴ will continue to extinguish the sociological consciousness of social pre-condition, something which, as we see, all-too-easily becomes license for new forms of law and new forms of violence that replace the question of freedom with the demands of compliance.

In a different reading of Hegel's logic of illusion to that of Osborne, one might find not just Hegel *contra* neo-Kantian sociology, but also Hegel *pro* an Adorno-style sociological consciousness. Rose does not speak much of illusory being in her *Hegel* book. Nevertheless, the logic of illusory being is the logic not just of her Hegelian critique of neo-Kantian sociology, but also of her Hegelian reconstruction of critical sociology into something like a speculative sociological consciousness. Illusion for Rose is actual in the Hegel that is *contra* sociology. Perhaps the illusion of the totality, and of universalism, is also the Hegel that is *pro* sociological consciousness, and crucial in the struggle against the domination of abstraction and the retrieval of its social conditions of possibility.

In the second Preface to the *Science of Logic* Hegel reminds us that the essence of things is the work or mediation of thought. He shrugs off Kant's unknowable thing-in-itself, or essence, as only 'the so-called thing-in-itself of empty abstraction.'³⁵ For Hegel, being and essence are thought's presupposition of itself. As such, its truth and logic are forever without abstract grounding or universality. But rather than being the tautological presupposition that motivates the desire for immanent transcendence, Hegel finds a logic of illusion whose truth is this contingency within presupposition. This makes it incompatible

³⁰ Osborne, *Rose and Marxism*, 62.

³¹ Osborne, *Rose and Marxism*, 62.

³² Osborne, *Rose and Marxism*, 63.

³³ Osborne, *Rose and Marxism*, 63.

³⁴ I am not saying that Osborne shares this impatience.

³⁵ GWF Hegel, *Science of Logic* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 36. Perhaps Kant's reply to Hegel would be that logic itself 'teaches us nothing whatsoever about the content of knowledge' (CPR, A61/ B 86), and that Hegel's pretensions to make logic a substantive content is just so much 'logic of illusion' (A 61/ B 86). And perhaps Hegel's reply to Kant would be that this is only the case if he presupposes, methodologically, the separation of validity and experience.

with a logic of abstraction but fertile for renewed notions of the universal interest in social life.

If the highest principle of Kant's synthetic a priori judgement is the positing of the conditions of the possibility of experience in the experience of that positing, then this is a principle of the necessity that is already actual precondition. It was Hegel rather than Kant who took up the challenge of thinking the truth of synthetic judgement, or who conducted the tribunal of the illusions of the tribunal. The truth of this second tribunal is the logic of essence as illusory being. Hegel's illusory being is the path that the tribunal of Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy, and neo-Kantian sociology, eschewed. But it is the path and the logic that gives sociological consciousness its own social substance, or universalism.

What is illusory being? On one level, it is a (non-Aristotelian) logic of recollection in which presupposition is a non-linear logic of cause and effect. That which is recollected is already posited, and that which is posited has also determined the recollection. Here is the same circular structure of Kant's synthetic a priori judgements in which 'thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.'³⁶ This applies as much to the object of recollection as to recollection that becomes its own object. It is a whirlwind of instability, something that Žižek makes great play of. There is no objective event to recollect, and there is no objective event of recollection.

Essence is the illusion that this is a logic of reflection, where the particular is returned to the whole. The illusion is the reflective shape taken by presupposition. In reflection a mirror reflects back the (external) part to the whole or the essence. But in illusory being there is no original figure that the mirror reflects. Instead, illusory being is as two mirrors facing each other, neither of which is the essence of the other. As such, essence is only illusory being. It is 'essentially the presupposing of that from which it is the return'³⁷ or 'the movement of nothing to nothing.'³⁸ For the certainty that is housed in and offered by abstraction this simply does not count as an identity or a truth. It is merely an empty infinite regression that because it is inherently self-contradictory is otiose. But for a logic in which presupposition can, and necessarily already has, shown itself, a new science of logic announces itself. It is a logic of the illusion present in knowing the conditions of the possibility of illusion. Or, again, it is a logic of conditions of possibility becoming their own experience. As a logic of presupposition being its own self-consciousness, it is therefore also the logic of sociological consciousness.

Sociological consciousness knows the antinomies of law as society and the individual, or as social determination (necessity) and autonomy (freedom). Sociology can exhaust itself in the reflective infinite regression of the illusions of society and the individual. But sociology does not exhaust itself when its sociological consciousness is social substance, or self-determining presupposition of social conditions of possibility. It is not a reproduction of the abstract universal of mastery. It is an experience of the universalism of the self-destruction of such mastery. It is a different social relation. And it presages a different kind of communal life, but still one that can be violently suppressed by refusing the experience of the illusions of the totality of social substance, or more simply, by removing every possibility of an education for and the development of sociological consciousness. Social substance or the

³⁶ Kant, *Pure Reason*, A51/ B75.

³⁷ Hegel, *Logic*, 401.

³⁸ Hegel, *Logic*, 400.

actuality of social conditions of possibility, is where Hegel, *contra* neo-Kantian sociology, can be called on as *pro* sociological consciousness, offering a new conception of universal or social life.

Moreover, if Hegel's logic of illusion anticipates the sociological consciousness, it is also able to demonstrate the illusions of recent shapes of abstract free-market consciousness including the shapes of experience (universal, particular and singular) that critique them. As has been discussed, *abstract universalities* are the totalities of empire, gender or race or anthropocentric hierarchies, authoritarianism, and capital. This is the universalism that claims possession of everything for itself and disqualifies any beyond or excess or otherness outside of its controlling classification. Critique of such exclusivity that appeals to pluralism and local self-definition claims possession of nothing except itself, giving sovereignty to difference and heterogeneity. There is also the *abstract particularity* of sovereign reflection detached from universality altogether, while *abstract singularity* claims detachment from universality and particularity. Being neither totalitarian nor pluralist, it is messianic, wholly other to any determining narrative, grand or otherwise. It is variously an excess, a remainder, or a remnant, one that never coincides with itself. It is an event beyond worldly events.

The abstractions of universal, particular and singular absorb the sociological consciousness. As such, social determination is totalitarian if it is universal, nugatory if it is particular, and neither social nor determinative for the messianic singularity. Under this domination by abstraction sociological consciousness is either over-determination, under-determination, or non-determination, and it is unthinkable as a critique of abstraction, or as the thinking of the antinomy of property law.

Retrieving universalism in 'identity'

Faced with such domination of abstraction philosophy often prefers to yield universalism altogether rather than seek to retrieve philosophy's sociological consciousness. Rose did not like the term postmodern, but it was a convenient shorthand for her to describe the dissolving of sociological consciousness. Yet the consciousness continues to commend itself wherever freedom and necessity clash. For example, again around Covid, abstract freedom demanded no legal impositions, while necessity required universal protections from such (often openly violent) abstractions. Both are represented at the tribunal, and both fail to secure outright victory. Similarly, one of the so-called culture wars that presently characterize social life is that between the freedom of speech and equal rights to protection from prejudice, discrimination and persecution. The demand of abstract freedom that it be able to say whatever it wishes to whomever it wishes about whatever it wishes, runs counter to the universal protection of people from abuse and hatred for what they are or how they define themselves. The consciousness that the free-market currently seeks as its actuality is that which recognizes no necessity, no society and no universality. It is perhaps more powerful as a form of consciousness in the USA than for many decades. The privately owned gun is the actuality of the privately defined master whose thinking is abstracted from everything. The USA is currently facing the possibility of the triumph of the abstract in ways that will change the social dramatically.

Identity politics, the politics of difference, carries much of the weight of current radical philosophy, challenging and resisting the power and prejudice of white male political power. It stands against the prejudices and persecutions of identities that are still judged within modern versions of the great chain of being. But if such philosophy has no concept of the universal interest within the totality that is false, then as Adorno and Horkheimer's dialectic of enlightenment made clear, it can only challenge the domination of particular interests with other particular interests.

It is perhaps the sociological consciousness of the kind found previously in critical theory that can place the question of identity back into the ambiguities of its social conditions of possibility and retrieve a more comprehensive picture of how the concept of identity carries presuppositions of property law that condemn it to interminable contradictions regarding definition and fluidity. Indeed, this might well be its most potent form of activism, for what the abstract master fears at its deepest level is that its own lack of certainty, the vulnerability of its identity to the conditions of its possibility, and its consequent failure in the rational tribunal to prove anything except its own violence, will be exposed to its truth in social determination, or as the sociological consciousness. This is why the master acts so violently not only against the fluidity of identity, but also against everything that smacks of social determination.

Identity politics, if it is to protect itself from the subterfuges of free-market freedoms, could retrieve the social determination of identity in a sociological consciousness that can carry the equivocality of identity—its fluidity in a culture of universality—as a different universalism to that of the rhetoric of abstract choice. This does not mean that all identities should not seek legal recognition. Far from it. People need universal legal protection from the abstract freedoms that dominate and persecute them, just as they need universal rights to choose to live in their own bodies. But it requires further vigilance to ensure that such abstract legality does not, once again, dissolve the antinomical experiences of freedom and necessity that offer identity politics the universality of its sociological consciousness. Without the conception of the universal, in the presupposition of social conditions of possibility, philosophy is all-too easily led away from the social substance of freedom and into a jargon of authenticity alongside an abstract and un-sociological notion of merely individualised self-definition. Rose makes the following telling observation from Weber. The 'increase in individual rights in modern societies may be accompanied by an increase—not a decrease—in domination.'³⁹ Without the experience of social substance in sociological consciousness, there is no universality, or even a concept of collective interests, to challenge this increase.

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³⁹ Gillian Rose, 'Jewish Ethics and the Crisis of Philosophy' in *Jewish Philosophy and the Academy*, edited by Emil L. Fackenheim and Raphael Jose (London: Associated University Presses, 1996), 168.

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