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Aesthetics for Hypochondriacs: Kantian Illusions, Sex Phobia, and Self-Soothing Philosophy

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On the whole, the more civilized human beings are, the more they are actors. They adopt the illusion of affection, of respect for others, of modesty, and of unselfishness without deceiving anyone at all, because it is understood by everyone that nothing is meant sincerely by this. And it is also very good that this happens in the world. For when human beings play these roles, eventually the virtues, whose illusion they have merely affected for a considerable length of time, will gradually really be aroused and merge into the disposition. But to deceive the deceiver in ourselves, the inclinations, is a return again to obedience under the law of virtue and is not a deception, but rather an innocent illusion of ourselves. / An example of this is the disgust with one's own existence, which arises when the mind is empty of the sensations toward which it incessantly strives. This is boredom, in which one nevertheless at the same time feels a weight of inertia, that is, of weariness with regard to all occupation that could be called work and could drive away disgust because it is associated with hardships, and it is a highly contrary feeling whose cause is none other than the natural inclination toward ease (toward rest, before weariness even precedes). But this inclination is deceptive, even with regard to the ends that reason makes into a law for the human being, it makes him content with himself when he is doing nothing at all (vegetating aimlessly), because he at least is not doing anything bad. To deceive it in return (which can be done by playing with the fine arts, but most of all through social conversation) is called passing time (tempus fallere), where the expression already indicates the intention, namely to

> deceive even the inclination toward idle rest. We are passing time when we keep the mind at play by the fine arts, and even in a game that is aimless in itself within a peaceful rivalry at least the culture of the mind is brought about—otherwise it would be called killing time. Nothing is accomplished by using force against sensibility in the inclinations; one must outwit them and, as Swift says, to surrender a barrel for the whale to play with, in order to save the ship. (Kant 2006, pp. 42–43)

> Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at most, time's carcass. (Marx 1956, p. 59)

> The original task of a genuine revolution . . . is never merely to "change the world," but also—and first of all—to "change time." Modern political thought has concentrated its attention on history, and has not elaborated a corresponding conception of time. Even historical materialism has until now neglected to elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history. Because of this omission it has been unwittingly compelled to have recourse to a concept of time dominant in Western culture for centuries, and so to harbor, side by side, a revolutionary concept of history and a traditional experience of time. The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has thus diluted the Marxist concept of history: it has become the hidden breach through which ideology has crept into the citadel of historical materialism. (Agamben 2007, p. 91)

In the wake of the co-constitutive advent of European Enlightenment, capitalism, and colonialism, 'experience' has been widely structured—the world over—by epistemological systems formulated by European philosophers and the normative regimes of subjectivity, economy, and government with which they have been entwined.[1] The work of Immanuel Kant, and particularly his

[1] For key references on the entwinement of European philosophy, colonialism, and capitalism and its consequences for the scaffolding of subjectivity beyond Europe, see Robert C. Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (Young 1990); Gayatri Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason:*

transcendental aesthetic, is central to this ideological formation within which contemporary being and politics remain largely subsumed. It is with the hope of unsettling this subsumption that I return below to Kant's concept of time in *Critique of Pure Reason* and consider it alongside his uses of time in the management of his own self-diagnosed hypochondriasis, sexual desire, and fear of insanity. By bringing the philosopher's psychic needs and the work of philosophy into explicit interrelation, I attempt to read the latent desire and its phobic inversions embedded in modern epistemology and to trace their persistent operation in subsequent Hegelian and Marxist theorizations of history and revolutionary form.

How much of contemporary theory, political thought, and everyday experience is ultimately an indirect product of a sex-phobic hypochondriac's defenses against desire? What is the relation between transcendental philosophy—with its *a priori* delimitation of experience—and psychic structure as we might understand it through theorizations of obsessional neurosis and psychosis? And what possibility might there be for cultivating subversive possibilities through the very traditions of thought that now supply the means of our own subjectification and domination? These are among the questions motivating what follows.

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Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* has marked time—in philosophical discourse, normative practices of being under capitalism, and state apparatuses—since its publication. Its Introduction famously opens with the declaration that experience is the basis of all knowledge:

Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Spivak 1999); Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Chakrabarty 2000); and Sylvia Wynter's "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation–An Argument." (Wynter 2003)

> There is no doubt whatever that all our cognition begins with experience; for how else should the cognitive faculty be awakened into exercise if not through objects that stimulate our senses and in part themselves produce representations, in part bring the activity of our understanding into motion to compare these, to connect or separate them, and thus to work up the raw material of sensible impressions into a cognition of objects that is called experience? As far as time is concerned, then, no cognition in us precedes experience, and with experience every cognition begins. (Kant 1998, p. 136)

Kant insists upon the tethering of truth to experience, even as the above statement already suggests two disparate uses of experience that complicate its claim.[2] Kant distinguishes between 1) the process by which we "work up the raw material of sensible impressions"—that is, cognitive elements that condition our reception of stimuli; and 2) "a cognition of objects that is called experience," which pertains to our perception of objects themselves following their processing by the mind. His theory of time places it in the first of these frames: it is a property belonging to the workings of the mind rather than to the world external to us. Time cannot be identified as an object. It exists prior to and beneath the object. Time, then, as the counterpart of space, is said by Kant to belong to the transcendental aesthetic—his foundational formulation that both escapes and subtends knowledge as necessarily arising from experience of the phenomenal world.

Time and space are conditions of possibility for Kant's epistemology. They are pure, pre-empirical forms of intuition that provide the conditions upon which our perception of the empirical world reach our cognitive faculties. As Kant writes in the first part

[2] There is an equivocation between two uses of "experience" in the quoted two sentences: the first is that of unmediated sensible impression before interpretation and the second that of knowledge of objects after the transformation of impressions into conceptual, categorical meanings. This is a more complicated issue than I am able to take up here. For a discussion of this point, see Beck 1998, pp. 103-116.

of *Critique of Pure Reason* devoted to the transcendental aesthetic, space and time are not entities that subsist in and of themselves but rather are non-empirical forms of intuition that depend upon the subjective constitution of the mind and are transcendentally ideal—that is, unitary and universal.[3] Time is the precondition for our encounter with the phenomenal:

> Time is not an empirical concept that is somehow drawn from an experience. For simultaneity or succession would not themselves come into perception if the representation of time did not ground them *a priori*. Only under its presupposition can one represent that several things exist at one and the same time (simultaneously) or in different times (successively). (Kant 1998, p. 162)

In order for two different people to be able to share a common experience—or even for one person to have consistent experience at two different points in time—and thus for the possibility of scientific knowledge and rational social organization, there must be a shared pre-empirical basis for processing the material of sensible impressions into knowledge of objects. Time is for Kant the crux of the *a priori* mental apparatus upon which the possibility of common knowledge depends. And he proceeds to erect his critical, moral, and political philosophy on this basis.

Structurally, within the architecture of Kant's critical philosophy, *a priori* time could be said to function as a strategy for

[3] With this theory of time, Kant resolves a long-standing debate between Newtonians and Leibnizians. The former held that time and space are self-subsisting entities that exist outside of objects; the latter explained time and space as properties inhering in objects themselves. Kant refuses both positions, maintaining that time is neither a self-subsisting thing-in-itself nor simply a property of objects; instead, time is a transcendental form of sensibility that underwrites the mind's experience and representation of objects. Thus, as a transcendental ideal, Kant can assign stable, universal characteristics to time that hold across objects and persons without needing to consider time as a thing-in-itself. For further elaboration of Kant's intervention in the Newton-Leibniz debate, see Guyer and Wood 1998 see also Shabel 2010.

outwitting the mind's irrational inclinations and sensibilities. By dismissing the varieties of felt time and non-linearity in being as incompatible with what Kant accords the value of "experience," *a priori* time is, to invoke the above epigraph from Kant's anthropology, a tool by which he "deceives the deceiver" of sensuous existence and produces "an innocent illusions of ourselves" as governable by pure reason.

In this construct of time that is meant to be conducive to Enlightened self-governance and social order, time is a single continuous line. It has only one dimension. It has a single direction and exists as successive instants that move 'forward' at a constant pace, infinitely. All apparent times are in fact part of the same time; there are no simultaneous times. All times are reducible to the dictates of a single line, except that time-points exist only as distinct, successive moments rather than simultaneously as in a visually represented line.

> And just because this inner intuition yields no shape we also attempt to remedy this lack through analogies, and represent the temporal sequence through a line progressing to infinity, in which the manifold constitutes a series that is of only one dimension, and infer from the properties of this line to all the properties of time, with the sole difference that the parts of the former are simultaneous but those of the latter always exist successively. (*Ibid.*, p. 163)

It is this time—unitary, universal Time—upon which scientific knowledge of cause and effect, of the commitment to deliberative reason and stepwise processuality, is predicated. It is this time that arises *at* (historically) and *as* (logically) the basis of a commitment to a certain notion of Enlightenment rationality that will become interwoven with the philosophy of history—a crucial link between time and the political—as it comes through Kant, Hegel, and Marx. It is this time that will underwrite the interwoven emergence of ideologies of the nation-state, law, economy, and social order, and the subordination of interruptive

experience and practice in liberal political theory. It is the time we are still negotiating as a shared default time as we continue to 'make sense' today.

The biographical is no substitute for exegesis, but it can clarify and put into useful relief what is already present—if latent—in a text. And if one takes seriously the notion that time, like all concepts (including those for which their authors claim universal status), always comes from someone situated sometime and somewhere, then a consideration of the character of Kant's own psychic and social relation to his theorization of time may reveal something useful in this foundational moment for post-Enlightenment thought.

Kant wrote towards the end of his life, in one of his last publications, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, of his life-long "natural disposition towards hypochondria" (Kant 1979, p. 189). Hypochondria, a specific kind of paranoia which regards one's own body and feelings as the continual site of threat, operates by continuously constructing phobic objects from which a distance can be marked and maintained. The hypochondriac might be understood as banishing desire and manifesting an obsession with the phobic in its place—phobia as symptom of repressed desire and of the damming up of libidinal energy (Freud 1957). The phobic object protects the subject against the intolerable abyss of desire. This cursory outline of the structure of hypochondria offers us a means of putting into critical relief Kant's own descriptions of how he negotiated his "oppression," and also for examining how this implicates his need for a very particular concept of time.

Kant explains that it is with reason alone that the hypochondriac can "discipline the play of his thoughts, can put an end to these harassing notions that arise involuntarily." He writes:

> A reasonable man vetoes any such hypochondria; if uneasiness comes over him and threatens to develop into melancholia—that is, self-devised illness—he asks himself whether his anxiety has an

> object. If he finds nothing that could furnish a valid reason for his anxiety, or if he sees that, were there really such a reason, nothing could be done to prevent its effect, he goes on, despite this claim of his inner feeling, to his agenda for the day—in other words, he leaves his oppression (which is then merely local) in its proper place (as if it had nothing to do with him), and turns his attention to the business at hand. (Kant 1979, p. 189)

If reasoning from a position of objective distance—one here explicitly subtended by a logic of cause and effect—reveals no "object" or "valid reason" for anxiety or other such affect, then such a feeling is to be disregarded and to be pushed past and left behind "as if it had nothing to do with him." To overcome this "weakness of abandoning oneself despondently to general morbid feelings that have no definite object," Kant asserts the need to "master them by reason." Kant achieves "mind's self-mastery" or the mastery of feeling by reason, he explains, by applying himself to the "agenda for the day."

The daily agenda offers a self-stabilizing tool via the rigid mechanization of activity and thought through micro-calendrics, the confinement of oneself to "the business at hand" in order to leave behind the feelings that persistently threaten to surface if they are given time. Recall that intense regularity attached to Kant: his neighbors are said to have set their clocks by his daily walks. In this attachment to time as the mechanical *tick tick tick* that moves singularly forward, Kant finds a medium to which he can attach himself in order to repress "this feeling [of anxiety], as if it had nothing to do with me." (*Ibid.*)

As he describes his negotiation of hypochondria by force of reason, Kant returns repeatedly to time and to the subordination of affect by regimen.[4] It becomes clear that the concept of time as

[4] Kant's uses of time as means of affective regulation and aesthetic suppression resonate with his reflections on distraction (*Zerstreuung*) as a means of self-control in his *Anthropology*, particularly what he identifies as "voluntary

developed in *Critique of Pure Reason* offers him the possibility of a self-soothing treatment for his phobic obsessions—a condition he explains, despite his extensive familiarity with the emergent field of psychology, as mechanical in origin. He repeatedly insists that his hypochondria has a physiological etiology: a "flat and narrow chest, which leaves little room for the movement of my heart and lungs … this oppression of the heart was purely mechanical … the oppression has remained with me, for its cause lies in my physical constitution" (*ibid.*). Of note, this etiological account of hypochondria is symptomatic of hypochondria itself, as it insists upon physical cause for psychic states while conceding only that medical knowledge at present is unable to discern their interrelation.[5]

Such repetition marks this brief section on hypochondria in the chapter "The Philosophy Faculty versus the Faculty of Medicine." Throughout, repetition and negation are utilized in

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distraction" as means of "dissipation." This is a means of "diverting attention away from certain ruling representations by dispersing it among other, dissimilar ones." As Marijana Vujošević explains, "This involves intentionally taking our minds off some things, whereby, as Kant explains, we create a diversion from our 'involuntary reproductive power of imagination.' This happens, for instance, when we try to get 'rid of the object' that makes us feel sad by diverting attention from the representations that our recalcitrant power of imagination continuously reproduces (by associating different sensible impressions). In this case, we try to make certain representations disappear by 'dispersing' attention to other objects—for instance, by occupying ourselves 'fleetingly with diverse objects in society'… Kant held that being capable of being voluntarily distracted is a precondition of mental health. He often addresses hypochondria as an example of mental illness and argues that hypochondriacs are fantasists who cannot be talked out of their imaginings… This is why Kant writes that hypochondriacs have a diseased imagination (*Einbildungskrankheit*)." (Vujošević 2020, pp. 115-116) See section 3.1 ("Voluntary Distraction: The Rudimentary Level of Self-Control") in Vujošević (2020).

[5] A scene from Woody Allen's film *Whatever Works* (2009) illustrates this point. When Allen's alter ego (Larry David) complains to his girlfriend about an ulcer, she reminds him he doesn't have an ulcer, to which he replies, "I didn't say I don't have an ulcer; I said they haven't found one yet."

Kant's efforts to separate himself from hypochondria and its threat to the rational integrity and autonomy of the "reasonable man." For example, Kant repeats the phrase—"nothing to do with him/me"—twice to describe his relation to the feelings of anxiety associated with hypochondria. Such language provokes thoughts of Freud's short essay "On Negation," in which a patient describes a dream and, unprompted, declares that a figure in it is *not* his mother, leading Freud to conclude that it *is* in fact his mother and to go on to analyze the use of negation as an instrument of unconscious resistance (Freud 1957). Kant's repetitive declarations that his hypochondria and feelings without a definite object have "nothing to do with me" and that they are manifestations only of a bodily defect that by sheer resolution of the rational mind can be left behind echo Freud's analysis of negation. Heard in this way, they suggest that Kant's hypochondriacal anxiety cannot be altogether divorced from the philosophical workings of his mind.

Such a reading of this text, brought into conversation with Kant's broader philosophy, brings attention particularly to the character of his theory of time, which, as Kant acknowledges, is core to his ability to negotiate and subordinate his own 'irrational' feelings. Kant's writings on hypochondria, in which he prescribes means of mastering the condition, show that in his daily life and thought Kant relies at a foundational level upon his transcendentally ideal concept of time as unidimensional, linear succession. It is this constrained, infinitely constant notion of time that makes it possible for Kant to instrumentalize the transcendental aesthetic as *a priori* alibi for the bracketing of all but "definite objects"—as indefinite being, for Kant, is bound up with a loss of mastery and control. Put in terms closer to Kant's own, the transcendental aesthetic offers insurance against the threat to self and certainty posed by the thing-in-itself.

We might read Kant's time, then, as the hypochondriac's temporality. Captive to a fear of the disintegration of the body and self—or, what psychoanalysis theorizes as castration anxiety—it cannot allow for experience in the registers of what Kant derides as

"the deceiver in ourselves, the inclinations": desire, affect, dreams, madness—all that which escapes scientific calculation of cause and effect, linearity and sequentiality. It is the time with which, as Kant writes, one can "discipline the play of his thoughts … [and] can put an end to these *harassing notions* that arise *involuntarily*" (Kant 1979, p. 187). To what degree was modern time formulated to meet a hypochondriacal man's need for self-discipline, mastery, and control? What was it to guard against that the assurance of linear time was so psychically vital for Kant?

Various fragments in his writings and marginal notes to himself suggest that Kant was wary of his felt psychic vulnerability and very deliberately avoided engagement with scenes of 'irrationality' that might threaten his psychic integrity. For example, Kant reflects on the hazards of proximity to irrationality and affective expression in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*:

> …it is not advisable for weak-nerved people (hypochondriacs) to visit lunatic asylums out of curiosity. For the most part, they avoid them of their own accord, because they fear for their sanity. One also finds that when someone explains something in affect to vivacious people, especially something that may have caused anger to him, their attention is so aroused that they make faces and are involuntarily moved to a play of expression corresponding to this affect. (Kant 2006, p. 72)

And in a marginal note he made alongside this text, Kant is even more direct in his warning, clearly directing it at himself: "Do not visit lunatic asylums" (*ibid.*, p. 75).

Freud suggests in "On Narcissism" that hypochondria is tied to the repression of desire via displacement from an external object and re-inscription as inversion into one's own body as phobic object. Within this frame, Kant's own relationship to sexual desire further suggests a connection between his transcendentally ideal philosophy of time and an attempt at systematic repression of desire and its temporal entailments. Kant's writings on the ethics of sexuality, marriage, and masturbation, for example,

unequivocally condemn as immoral any sexual pleasure outside the confines of marriage and any sexual pleasure—even within marriage—that does not conform to "nature's end," which he understands as "the preservation of the species." Not only does Kant judge that a sexual relation outside of the bounds of marriage violates morality, but so too does autoeroticism. In fact, he condemns masturbation as "contrary to morality in the highest degree," and as an activity that "debases him [the masturbator] beneath the beasts." In an addition to the second edition of *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant expressed his views on pleasure and sexuality even more plainly: "carnal enjoyment is *cannibalistic* in principle (even if not always in effect)."[6]

Given Kant's intensely committed positions against pleasure alongside his status as a life-long bachelor devoted to personal practices of rigid time-keeping as a daily defense against the vices of irrationality and affect, might we read his philosophical formulations of time as in part self-soothing exercises responsive to his "oppression" by hypochondriacal paranoia and sexual desire? Did he need, for the most intimately self-interested of reasons, to affirm a philosophy of time in which indiscrete, non-linear temporalities of desire, jouissance, trauma, fantasy, aggression, and dreams are wholly erased? Might it be that the concept of time upon which Kant's philosophy, including his notion of freedom, is built is in fact a symptomatic response to his own deeply felt unfreedom?[7]

With Kant—as with many other thinkers who have followed him—we find philosophy serving in a disavowed role as self-therapeutic aid to an ego felt to be under threat by its irrational

[6] This statement is contained in Remark 3 in the appendix to *The Doctrine of Right*, which, alongside *The Doctrine of Virtue*, comprises one-half of the *The Metaphysics of Morals.* For further discussion of this passage and Kant's conceptualization of the sexual relation, see Jean-Claud Milner's essay "Reflections on the Me Too Movement and Its Philosophy" (Milner 2019).

[7] For some of Kant's writings on sexuality, marriage, and masturbation, see "The Moral Use of Sexuality" (Kant 1980); and "Marriage Right" and "On Defiling Oneself by Lust" (Kant 1999).

oppressor: affect, sexuality, and castration anxiety that provokes fears of descent into detachment from a stably known reality. Kant's hypochondriacal time—as agenda, regimen—emerges as a repressive means of regulating body and mind, militating against "natural dispositions" and supposed psychopathologies, and effecting a closure of feeling in favor of productivity and constant activity.

If time for Kant was an essential means by which to suppress his hypochondriacal fears, to what structure of thought might hypochondria—and the transcendental philosophy upon which Kant relied as a defense against it—testify? Hypochondriasis, which manifests in association with both obsessional neurosis and psychosis, has long presented a nosological problem for psychopathology. With respect to Kant, on the one hand, his uses of time for the management of hypochondria resemble the reliance on sequentiality, regimen, and ritual that appear in classic cases of obsessional neurosis, such as in Freud's patient known as the "Rat Man" (Freud 1957c). Kant's transcendental philosophy could thus be seen as a tool with which to constrain the wandering of an unruly mind that threatens to veer into territory in which intolerable desires might lurk and by which a lack in the other might be exposed—a portrait consistent with an obsessional-neurotic structure. On the other hand, hypochondriasis can represent a psychotic break from shared reality in which the object—typically the body—loses its stability and the symbolic structure by which the subject is propped up crumbles.[8] With Kant, his hypochondria

[8] Another of Freud's patients, the Wolf Man (Sergei Pankejeff), offers an illustration of the possibility for movement from what initially appears as obsessional neurosis into psychosis, with an intervening space of "ordinary psychosis" or prodrome. See (Grigg 2013: 8698) for related reflections on Pankejeff's passage into psychosis. If we approach neurosis and psychosis dimensionally rather than through strictly categorical logics, we might read Kant's hypochondriacal fear of insanity as the psychic terrain on which he sought to deepen his obsessionality and associated straitjacketing of experience so to defend against slippage towards psychotic instability.

repeatedly implicates fears of his own mind: an anxiety that he has either already lost it or soon will. A psychotic fear of psychosis appears to propel Kant towards the elaboration of a philosophy with which to defend against his own reason's dissolution.

In the end, the distinction is largely a matter only of direction: is Kant's war against madness waged from just within the abyss in an attempt to avoid falling deeper into it or from above it as he peers over reason's edge into an unfathomable space?

History's Straitjacket

The time of a sexless hypochondriac has shaped not only modern epistemology and rationality but has also been interwoven with philosophies of history around which contemporary theorization of the political continues to be organized. The rest of this essay traces this imprint from Kant's own philosophy of history and political form, and points to its subsequent imbrication in the thought of Hegel and Marx.[9]

Never directly the subject of his major works, Kant's philosophy of history is developed mostly through several essays, notably "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" (1784), "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" (1786), and "Is the human race constantly progressing?" in *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798). As proponent of the Enlightenment, Kant is committed to the capacity for continual progress through a growing capacity for reason—the ability to subject oneself and the

[9] With the use of "imbrication" I mean to invoke the medical resonance of this term: an overlapping of successive layers of tissue to effect a surgical closure. Kant's philosophy of time is a means of closure, of tying up and sealing off experience in a herme(neu)tically sealed *cogito*/ego intent on maintaining itself against threat of destabilizing self-doubt.

world to rational analysis. As he writes in answer to the question "whether we at present live in an *enlightened* age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of *enlightenment* … the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer" (Kant 1991, p. 58). Man is progressing towards a *telos*: from immaturity to maturity, self-awareness, and reason. But, Kant warns,

> a public can only achieve enlightenment slowly. A revolution may well put an end to autocratic despotism and to rapacious or power-seeking oppression, but it will never produce a true reform in ways of thinking. Instead, new prejudices, like the ones they replaced, will serve as a leash to control the great unthinking masses. (*Ibid.*)

Kant not only promotes a belief in intellectual and moral progress—as is clear, for example, in "Is the human race constantly progressing?"—but, like many other thinkers of the Enlightenment, he also believes that politics can be subjected to rational analysis and constructed according to rational principles. He rejects politics as statecraft or the Machiavellian expression of egotism. The role of political philosophy is, for Kant, to develop universal principles by which justice and right can be established in any given circumstance. For Kant, political justice must be universal; it can and must be established through legal order.

This emphasis on law is foundational to Kant's political philosophy. Recall his praise of Frederick the Great: "Only one ruler in the world says: *Argue* as much as you like and about whatever you like, *but obey!*" (*Ibid.*) This emphasis on obedience to universal laws and to authority is tied to Kant's deep suspicion of "the great unthinking masses" whose rational immaturity—that is, their inadequate subordination of instinct or feeling to rational analysis and deliberation—threatens social and political order. The role of the state authority then is to subdue this anti-social character through law and to facilitate the moral-rational

development of its people. As Hans Reiss writes of Kant's political philosophy, "Political action and legislation ought thus to be based on such rules as will *allow of no exception*" (Reiss 1991, p. 21; my emphasis).[10] It is under such conditions, subtended by state and law, that the history of reason—the basis of Kant's philosophy of history—can find its fulfillment through progression along its teleological arc towards full maturity.

Yirmiahu Yovel's reconstruction of Kant's philosophy of history presents it as driven by Kant's commitment to a history of reason, according to which history is the process of "reason becoming known and explicated to *itself*" (Yovel 1980, p. 6). For Kant, reason is not transhistorical and already formed; it is constituted by the thinking human subject, who carries reason's progression forward through historical development. History has a rational significance as the embodiment of reason and reason's own self-realization. But if reason is not *a priori* itself, in this sense, but depends upon man and history for its own elaboration, it still depends on a transcendentally ideal, *a priori* theory of time. Cause and effect, accumulation of knowledge, the definiteness and specificity of objects and human experience of them—all these elements of Enlightenment reason depend upon time as unidimensional, linear, sequential. Time, like space, is given and wholly without contingency or variability. A temporal order predicated on this time sits as a necessary foundation for

[10] In relation to Reiss' (1991) interpretation and that which I pursue in this essay, Hannah Arendt's reading of Kant's political philosophy provides a counterpoint to an emphasis on the close relation between Kant's emphasis on rational calculus built upon his philosophy of time and political form. Arendt regards Kant's *Critique of Judgment* with its emphasis on aesthetic judgment—on a matter that eludes an objective calculability—as holding the key to his political philosophy. Arendt's argument, although compelling and offering a means of beginning to bridge Kant's stark division between instinct and reason, stands in tension with Kant's explicit emphasis on the universal principles (rather than a structure akin to aesthetic judgment) that are to underwrite law and political form. See Arendt 1982.

reason and its self-directed historical unfolding. Kantian time thus systematically subtends reason and allows its elevation to the organizing principle of history.

On Yovel's reading, Hegel's philosophy of history is not fundamentally a departure from Kant's own but is instead only an elaboration of ideas already present from *Critique of Pure Reason* to Kant's late essays on political philosophy. For Hegel, as for Kant, reason is constituted by the thinking subject. The growth of rationality constitutes the aim of reason, and thus the proper aim of man and history. Reason is thus subject to a process of becoming by which it is moving through time—Kant's time—toward an endpoint of its absolute, eternally true form. Within this frame, rationalism and historicism are resolved into a single frame whereby reason is history and history is reason. As in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the universal is constituted through the particular and the particular through the universal. By this account, Kant's concept of time is carried through as the line along which Hegel's concept of the dialectic moves as the propelling force of his philosophy of history.[11]

The question of revolution is a thematic that further brings out the nature of time and its relation to the philosophy of history and the political for both Kant and Hegel. It also marks a point of difference for Marx in relation to Kant and Hegel. For Kant, revolution is impermissible. Despite his sympathies for the French revolutionaries as carriers of certain principles of Enlightenment thought, Kant falls back on his insistence upon law and incrementalism. History for Kant is the "steadily advancing but slow

[11] The basic interpretation I have presented here is consistent with that articulated by Heidegger, who understands Hegel's time as a linear sequence of successive nows in line with Kant's philosophy of time, which he derides as a "vulgar concept of time" and "vulgar interpretation of the temporal character of history." See Chapters V and VI of Division II of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962). Kojève, by contrast, suggests that Hegel's understanding of time displaces the now in favor of the future. See Lecture 5 of Kojève 1969.

developing of man's original capacities" (Kant 1991, p. 41) that can only be realized *as a species*, such that this end "will require a long, perhaps incalculable series of generations, each passing on its enlightenment to the next, before the germs implanted by nature in our species can be developed to that degree which corresponds with man's intention" (*ibid*., p. 44). To circumvent this slow process of enlightenment through revolution is both bound to fail and also undercuts the universal principles upon which Kant's philosophy is built.

Enlightenment—the progress of reason through time—must develop gradually through a linear process of slow accumulation and dissemination of knowledge and rationality. The state features centrally in this as the means by which the conditions for sociality and enlightenment are made possible as well as an expression of reason itself. Although Kant makes room for "unsocial sociability" as an antagonism that spurs the development of man's innate capacities (*ibid.*), he rejects in absolute terms its formulation as political revolution:

> the power of the state to put the law into effect is also *irresistible*, and no rightfully established commonwealth can exist without a force of this kind to suppress all internal resistance. For such resistance would be dictated by a maxim which, if it became general, would destroy the whole civil constitution and put an end to the only state in which men can possess rights. It thus follows that all resistance against the supreme legislative power, all incitement of the subjects to violent expressions of discontent, all defiance which breaks out into rebellion, is the greatest and most punishable crime in a commonwealth, for it destroys its very foundations. This prohibition is *absolute*. And even if the power of the state or its agent, the head of state, has violated the original contract by authorizing the government to act tyrannically, and has thereby, in the eyes of the subject, forfeited the right to legislate, the subject is still not entitled to offer counter-resistance. (Kant 1991, p. 81)

Kant's rejection of revolution is unequivocal. In a footnote to this passage, Kant stresses that the preservation of the state is an absolute duty while the preservation of the individual is only a relative duty and applies only insofar as it is compatible with law. To disturb the stability of the state would threaten to unsettle the ground of social order upon which well-ordered lives, such as Kant's own with his daily walks, depend. For Kant, revolution is the lunatic asylum of history—the place we must never visit lest desire, uncertainty, and indefinite being threaten to overcome reason's ever-fragile defenses against its others.

Hegel's position on revolution is no less condemning. In the section "Absolute Freedom and Terror" in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel regards the French revolution, "absolute freedom," as having "removed the antithesis between the universal and the individual will" (Hegel 1977, p. 363). This suspension of the dialectic "is the death that is without meaning, the sheer terror of the negative that contains nothing positive, nothing that fills it with a content" (*ibid.*, p. 362). The sole work of the revolution then is "*unmediated* pure negation… *death*, a death too which has no inner significance… the coldest and meanest of all deaths, with no more significance than cutting off the head of a cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water" (*ibid.*, p. 360). Hegel's opposition to the revolution stems from his commitment to the state as the vehicle of the Spirit—that is, of reason. The revolution, as he understands it, produces a purely destructive tumult out of which "Spirit would be thrown back to its starting point" (*ibid.*, p. 361).[12]

Hegel's perspective on the French revolution derives from his commitment to the state as vehicle of the world Spirit—the driving

[12] Of note, in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Hegel's opposition to revolution derives from a different—and less temporally-oriented—concern: ensuring the coexistence of the particular (i.e., abstract, unbounded freedom in civil society) alongside the universal (i.e., the state). Revolution, for Hegel, threatens to subsume the apolitical particular under a totalizing political universal. For a related and far more in-depth discussion of time in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, see Kobe 2020.

force of history. For Kant, the state is both that which conditions and expresses the progression of reason, which exists as the meaning of history. Hegel continues this Kantian prioritization of the state. As Hegel states in his lectures on the philosophy of history:

> It was *Chronos* (Time) who ruled first … and what was produced, the children of Time, were devoured by time. Only Zeus … conquered Time and set a goal to its passing. Zeus is the political God who produced an ethical work, the state. / The universality of a work is itself entailed in its element, as a determinate dimension, the dimension of thought. The highest point in the culture of a people, then, is this thought—the thought of its life and condition, its laws, its system of rights and its ethical way of life, all seen in a scientific light. For in this unity … there is that inner-most unity in which Spirit can be at home with itself. The concern of Spirit in its work is to have itself as its own object. But it is only by thinking itself that Spirit has itself as object in its most essential nature. (Hegel 1988, p. 79)

For Hegel, time, the state, Spirit, and reason are intertwined: the state operates through time as time's goal in that the state serves as the vehicle of world Spirit and its unfolding in its most essential nature, rational thought. This interrelation in Hegel is struck through with ambiguity, as each of these terms—time, state, Spirit, reason—is constituted through its relation to the others. Even as Time "ruled first," it was conquered and redefined through its setting to a goal—the state, carrying forth Spirit as rational thought. Revolution, for Hegel, threatens to disrupt each of the four terms, but none more directly than the state—the most empirically identifiable formulation of the overlapping terms. It is for this reason that Hegel condemns the revolution in *The Phenomenology* as "merely the *fury* of destruction" (Hegel 1977, p. 359).

The contrast between Marx and Hegel on the question of revolution could not be starker. For Hegel, who follows Kant in this respect, the revolution represents the throwing back of the Spirit—of reason, which must be carried through the state—to

begin from a place of nothing, of pure destructive negativity that is without positive content. For Marx, on the other hand, the revolution represents the culmination of self-awareness and rational thought as carried not by the state but by the proletariat. Marx's revolution represents not a threat to historical development but a necessary step in its progression towards the rational organization of a communist society; the revolution inaugurates rather than disrupts the proper flow of history as the movement of time towards the realization of rationality.[13] Marx maintains commitment, then, to a *telos* and to a process associated with Hegel's stagist theory of historical development. The build-up, the historical process out of which the revolution will occur, for Marx also remains caught up in the Kantian-Hegelian notion of time as the successive procession of presents upon which a calculus of scientific knowledge can be built. As Marx and Engels wrote in a draft of *The German Ideology*,

> We know only a single science, the science of history. One can look at history from two sides and divide it into the history of nature and the history of men. The two sides are, however, inseparable; the history of nature and the history of men are dependent on each other so long as men exist. (Marx and Engels 1976, p. 28)

For Marx, history is scientific. It is inseparable from natural science, which is predicated on a specific concept of time. This time, which permits the accumulation of knowledge, technology, and the capacity for prediction and production, is central to Marx's project and associated philosophy of history. Although Marx examines time in multiple registers beyond those present in *The Poverty of Philosophy* and the first volume of *Capital* in relation to the labor hour, as Marx's treatment of time grows

[13] Famously, within Marx's historical materialism, history is the history of class struggle such that disruption, or discontinuity, lies at the core of the continuity of history, which thus inheres in continuous discontinuity.

more complex, he remains committed throughout to a concept of historical-material truth that implicates the time of Kant: a unitary, universal time of linearity, sequence, and progress.[14] Thus, when Marxists begin to play with time in the wake of the revolution's delayed arrival, the still-linear concept of acceleration becomes the focus of the Italian accelerationists (Marinetti 1971) or, in more recent emphases by David Harvey (1989) and Frederic Jameson (1991), for example, the concept of compression that implicates an increasing pace paired with spatial considerations. In such cases, the basic elements of Kantian time as taken up by Marx remain intact.

We can read the inheritance of Kant's time—a time born of psychic demand for the repression of indefinite being—in Marx. Kant's time, I have argued, is tied to a hypochondriacal fear of his own "body"—its dreaded "inclinations" and tendency towards unreason and desire—and the need to avoid a reckoning with it via perpetual deferral through a notion of time as regimen, agenda, and constant movement without pause or return. Similarly, in relation to Marx's time, Jacques Derrida suggests that Marx's temporality is also inflected by a certain fear—not of his own body but of the specter:

> the logic of the ghost [… that] points toward a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, a logic that distinguishes or opposes *effectivity* or *actuality* (either present, empirical, living—or not) and *ideality* (regulating or absolute non-presence). (Derrida 1994, p. 78)

Marx, in his formulation of a scientific history in line with natural science, must banish the ghost that would undermine the possibility of linear temporal sequence and calculability. As Derrida observes:

[14] As just two of many more extensive accounts of the multiple uses of time in Marx's work, see Postone 1993 as well as Osborne 2008.

> Marx thought, to be sure, on his side, from the other side, that the dividing line between the ghost and actuality ought to be crossed, like utopia itself, by a realization, that is, by a revolution; but *he too* will have continued to believe, to try to believe in the existence of this dividing line as a real limit and conceptual distinction. He too? No, someone in him. Who? The "Marxist" who will engender what for a long time is going to prevail under the name of "Marxism." And which was also haunted by what it attempted to foreclose. (*Ibid.*, p. 47)

Marx (or if we are to soften criticism of Marx as Derrida does, "Marxism"), much like Kant, seeks to banish that which would threaten the certainty and fixity—the "actuality"—of definite being and its objects. To this end, although they differ on the question of revolution in the realization of history, both Kant and Marx embrace a confinement of time to that which insists upon forward movement and progress towards the realization of reason—a common *telos*—with which to tie off its outsides: affect, inclination, drive.

An Other Universal

Emily Apter has observed that in contemporary theory, "it's time's time." Theory from queer and trans theory to work on the anthropocene and afropessimism has been renewing critical attention to the question of time. Still, as Achille Mbembe writes in the introduction to *On the Postcolony*: "Social theory has failed also to account for time as lived, not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presence and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change beloved of so many historians" (Mbembe 2002, p. 8). By returning to Kant's key inflections in the history of time, I've sought to show how this failure of social theory has been conditioned by a certain paranoia hellbent on keeping threats to ego stability and universalistic knowledge claims at bay.

In so doing, I hope to join with many others seeking to widen openings for the elaboration of felt time in terms that do not seek refuge against contradiction, singularity, and the potential—for the subject's subversion, collectivity through difference, and abolitional political possibility—of time untethered from subordination to inherited false universals. Rather than contributing to simple denunciations of universality, however, my motivating desire is that we might together formulate a new universalism oriented around difference rather than identity. In this universality that would, in turn, provide a means by which to articulate our responsibility to the other, history would be understood not as homogenizing progress nor as accumulation but as the infinite potentiation of singular forms of being. Our ethical responsibility within this universality would be not to reason, the state, nor to class struggle directly but rather to ensuring that each one is ensured the means—including whatever time they require—to both invent and realize their fullest life possibilities.

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