Dialectics as Critical Practice (Hegel's Negative Dialectics)

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Dialectics is the art of making contradictions productive – it is the art of dialogue. A dialogue is an interaction between at least two interlocutors in which the interlocutors confront each other with their specific perspectives. In a very abstract way, one can use the concept of contradiction to understand the confrontation in question. The interlocutors in a dialogue experience contradictions because they, in principle, cannot foresee what the other interlocutors will say. In a formal sense, this means that something happens which contradicts their expectations. The interlocutors surprise each other and are thus themselves changed through the dialogue. Such an experience of change might be seen as a good example of what constitutes dialectics. Thus, at least superficially, it is easy to see that, from Plato to Gadamer, philosophers have always understood dialectics as something that is realized through dialogue.

If one understands dialectics in this way, an objection seems to make itself heard: Does not an understanding of dialectics conceived of as the art of dialogue bind us to a harmonious understanding of dialectics? Does not dialogue always strive for consent, as Gadamer says? If one takes dialogue to be paradigmatic for the production of dialectical structures, does it not follow that one is forced to understand dialectics as a practice of establishing unity? If one underscores the dialogical character of dialectics, it is easy to fall prey to the idea that dialectics does not do justice to negativity. It thus seems necessary to stress the importance of negativity and critique against dialectics – or at least against a one-sided understanding of dialectics. The very concept of negative dialectics seems to be a warranted reaction against a certain prejudice that plagues the traditional conception.

Our conference celebrates the 50th anniversary of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. It thereby poses the question as to how Adorno's conception of dialectics is necessary for any sufficient understanding of dialectics. In other words, it poses the question as to how Adorno's conception of dialectics remains relevant for a systematic determination of what dialectics is. Adorno developed his conception of dialectics first and foremost in dispute with Hegel. Negative dialectics seeks to provide an understanding of dialectics that

overcomes the issues Adorno diagnoses in Hegel's philosophy, which he viewed as the most important representative of the conception of dialectics that takes dialogue as its paradigmatic form of realization. In a word, one might explain Adorno's basic conception of negative dialectics as follows: Negative is a dialectics that does not yield to reconciliation and does not strive for unity and synthesis. Adorno claims that Hegel's emphasis on synthesis and reconciliation is symptomatic of the false consciousness expressed by his conception of dialectics. Thus, the main goal of a negative dialectics is to provide us with a conception that overcomes the problematic aspects of Hegel's philosophy of dialectics, thus opening up space for philosophy as critique.

In my paper, I want to challenge the presuppositions that inform Adorno's dispute with Hegel. I aim to show that Hegel's conception of dialectics already exhibits the aspects of negativity and critique that Adorno seeks to defend. I will try to show that Adorno's reading of Hegelian dialectics as a 'positive' or 'affirmative' dialectics is mistaken. But my aim is not only to try and settle the dispute between Adorno and Hegel. Systematically, I want to defend the principles behind Adorno's plea for a negative dialectics. In my view, Adorno's conception of dialectics is basically correct. However, I think that using Hegel's philosophy as a starting point for developing the sort of dialectics that Adorno pleas for is the best way to go.

I would first like to summarize the objective of my paper and give you a basic idea of what I will argue for by articulating, firstly, the basic question, secondly, the paper's basic claim, and thirdly, the way in which I rely on the dispute between Adorno and Hegel to develop this claim:

[*Introduction A: Basic question I want to address in this paper*] What would an adequate conception of the negativity inherent to dialectics look like? What is the significance of a dialectics that does not end in synthesis?

[*Introduction B: Basic claim I want to defend in this paper*] The negativity inherent to dialectics consists in the self-reflective self-criticism that is realized in conflictual interactions between individuals. In the course of self-criticism, the norms that govern human practices are made vulnerable to those aspects of the world that resist conforming to them.

With regard to the conception of dialectics this implies that dialectics is, in general, always negative dialectics.

[*Introduction C: Hegel and Adorno*] Concerning the philosophical positions I treat here I make the following claim: The conception of dialectics I am defending was developed by Hegel. It is possible to understand this conception of dialectics by reconstructing important steps within the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This will enable us to recognize that dialectics is generated through a practice of self-criticism and will help us overcome a certain one-sidedness that characterizes Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.

In my discussion of Hegel, I primarily draw on *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. I build on the conception of dialectics that Hegel develops in the introduction, where he reflects on the structure of the shapes of consciousness (*Bewusstseinsgestalten*) that he analyses in his first masterpiece. I will shed light on what I take to be the most important aspect of Hegel's characterization of his own project: namely, that it realizes a self-consummating scepticism (*sich vollbringender Skeptizismus*). According to Hegel, it is important to turn scepticism into a productive means for generating knowledge, whereby scepticism implies negativity and critique. So I will explain Hegel's understanding of dialectics by claiming that it renders the negativity of experience productive. An essential dimension of the structures he analyses pertains to conflicts between individuals. According to Hegel, conflicts sublate the mere destructivity of collisions. In doing so, the negativity characteristic of collisions is made productive. In a further step, Hegel claims that conflicts presuppose practices of self-reflection, which have to be understood as practices of self-criticism. With this material, I will be able to show that dialectical movement is a result of the self-conscious productivity of negativity.

My paper has three parts. In the first part, I will reconstruct the conception of dialectics that Hegel develops in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In this context, it is of particular importance that we conceive of absolute knowing as a practice of self-criticism. The second part is devoted to the question of how practices of self-criticism are structured. Further, it asks how these practices allow one to expose oneself to experiences of aspects of the world that resist one's own norms. The third and last part will address the differences between Hegel's and Adorno's respective conceptions of negative dialectics. As to the form of my paper, it is structured by eight further claims that you can find on the handout (I will read out the capital letters to indicate where I am); I will comment on these claims in the course of my reflections.

1. Self-Consummating Scepticism

The introduction of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not address the concept of dialectics in a very explicit way. Nevertheless, Hegel develops methodological reflections that can greatly help us understand what his negative dialectics might look like. Hegel's *Phenomenology* aims at analyzing the complexity of the constitution of knowledge. It does so by showing that more or less simple conceptions of knowledge are one-sided abstractions of the complex picture one needs to draw in order to reconstruct the constitution of knowledge. For those who defend a more or less simple conception of knowledge, Hegel's analysis provides a "path of despair". They experience the negation of what one might call their claims to knowledge (*Wissensansprüche*). What they take to be knowledge proves to be no knowledge at all. This is a good starting point for our reconstruction of the way Hegel conceives of negativity as the motor of dialectical structures.

> [*A: The negativity of experience*] Experience is generated if claims to knowledge are negated and thereby both the conception of objects and the claims to knowledge related to the respective conception of objects are determined anew.

Hegel famously states that in experience, it is not only our claims to knowledge that change, but the objects as well. I think we should understand his claim as saying that conceptions of knowledge always have two aspects. They combine a conception of objects and a claim to knowledge related to the conception of objects in question. In most conceptions of knowledge these two aspects are not in harmony but contradict each other. Think, for instance, of the conception of knowledge Hegel calls "sense certainty", which claims to gain the most concrete and rich form of knowledge simply by having immediate contact to objects, but in truth conceives of objects in a very abstract way: namely, as the objects of an immediate contact – whatever the objects might be. Thus, Hegel demonstrates that the claim of being able to gain the most concrete and rich form of knowledge contradicts the conception of objects tied up with this claim. A contradiction like this provokes a change of the conception of knowledge, and this change sublates the contradiction. Thus, conceptions of knowledge are negated through experience and change accordingly. They do not persist as they are.

With his reflection on conceptions of knowledge, Hegel comes to ask what a conception of knowledge might look like that is able to persist even though it experiences its own negation. In this vein, Hegel's *Phenomenology* details the search for a conception of

knowledge that is stable in its very instability. Hegel coins a precise formula for such a conception of knowledge by speaking of a "self-consummating scepticism". The developments that conceptions of knowledge undergo are sceptical in nature: They result out of a critical self-assessment of each conception of knowledge, whereby the critical self-assessment may be implicit or explicit. At first sight, the sceptical self-criticism of conceptions of knowledge seems to be destructive. This assessment gives us a first clue of what Hegel means by self-consummating scepticism. It means that the sceptical criticism is made productive. We might say: A conception of knowledge actualizes self-consummating scepticism if it again and again asks itself whether or not its conception of knowledge is adequate. Such a conception of knowledge gains persistence and identity through its sceptical self-criticism. Hegel systematically states that knowledge presupposes a consequent sceptical self-criticism like this. One is only able to gain knowledge if one consequently engages in critical self-reflection.

The lesson Hegel draws from his understanding of experience is that we have to ask how self-consummating scepticism is brought about. Through the different conceptions of knowledge discussed in the course of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel elucidates some necessary aspects of knowledge. Since this is not the place to develop an extensive interpretation of Hegel's text, I will restrict myself to discussing two further steps in Hegel's analysis. The first consists in an important turning point in Hegel's reconstruction: At the beginning of the "Spirit" chapter, Hegel turns his attention to practices within a community. According to him, practices like this allow for a decisively different type of negativity: the negativity that different norms or normative orders represent for one another. This type of negativity comes into play if individuals who belong to different norms or normative orders confront each other with their divergent perspectives. In such a case, the individuals themselves bring negativity forth. It does not only take place within a consciousness itself, but is realized through the interaction of at least two individuals (two self-consciousnesses) within historical-cultural practices.

The second step develops this mode of negativity even further. It consists of reflections on the negativity that individuals mutually confront each other with. If reflections like this are realized, the individuals not only mutually negate the norms that they hold: they also gain the capacity to recognize that others live according to different norms. Such recognition enables the individuals to distance themselves from the norms that they themselves adhere to. To put it bluntly: By reflecting on the fact that their norms realize a particular perspective, the individuals negate the claims to universal validity that are bound up with their own normative practices. The self-negation effects an opening of the individuals towards the world. The reflection on particular normative perspectives allows one to recognize that the norms one adheres to do not do justice to all the aspects the

world confronts one with. Aspects that resist conforming to one's own norms come to the foreground. In this way, self-negation is productive: It prompts a correction of one's own norms by allowing them to be affected by the world. In terms of negativity: The negativity that different perspectives represent for one another is used to produce an openness for the negativity of the world as an essential aspect of the movement of cognitive structures in general.

This is a short summary of the issues I am interested in. I will now give more detail with regard to the two further steps by first summarizing them in a claim that I will comment on afterwards. The claim goes as follows:

> [*B: Conflicts as sublating the structure of experience*] The negativity of experience is sublated if individuals confront each other with different claims to knowledge. If this does not happen in the form of a mere collision (in which the individuals do not realize that they hold different claims to knowledge), but in the form of conflict (which means that the individuals reflect on the fact that they hold different claims to knowledge and try to deal with their differences), then negativity is produced by the individuals themselves.

The next step, which I take to be a decisive one in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is situated at the beginning of the "Spirit" chapter. Hegel relies on Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*. He interprets the tragedy as a collision of two different normative orders, which he calls the "human" and the "divine law". The "human law" is the law of the polis (*Thebes*). Hegel calls it "human" because it is established through historical-cultural developments within human communities. In Sophocles' tragedy, Creon is the representative of the human law. The divine law is the law of the family. Hegel calls it "divine" because it has no historical-cultural basis. Nature is the basis of the normative order which reigns over the members of the family. In the tragedy, Antigone acts as the representative of divine law. I won't go into the question as to what Hegel articulates systematically by distinguishing human and divine law. I'm only interested in Hegel's interpretation of the confrontation between Antigone and Creon.

To understand the confrontation in question it might be helpful to recall how the protagonists act. Hegel is very clear in how he understands the actions of both Antigone and Creon. He claims that the respective laws that they adhere to dictate their respective actions. Both Antigone and Creon stand in a relation of immediacy to the laws that determine their action. They are not able to distance themselves from the normative orders that define their identities. This means that they cannot understand that they act

on the demands of different normative orders. Since they do not grasp the differences of the perspectives that they realize, they are not able to deal with the differences in question. In cases in which contradictions of perspective become relevant – as in the case of Polyneike's death – there is no possibility to defuse them. Thus, the contradictions are uninterruptedly made into reality. A complete breakdown takes place (as at the end of the tragedy). The confrontation of Antigone and Creon is a mere collision. A collision is a confrontation of different normative orders in which these orders are destroyed through the confrontation. In a more extended sense, we might say that the negativity Antigone and Creon experience in their confrontation with one another shows no structural difference from the negativity that consciousness experiences in its confrontation with the world.

The lesson Hegel draws from his interpretation of the confrontation between Antigone and Creon can be articulated by introducing the distinction between collision and conflict. Antigone and Creon are not able to enter into a conflict with each other. Thus, we have to understand what they have to learn in order to develop a conflict. A conflict is a confrontation of different normative orders in which those who confront each other with their different perspectives grasp the differences in play. If a conflict is realized, the confrontation of different perspectives becomes productive. The individuals who enter into conflict with one another establish a form of community (by conflicting). Here, a new form of negativity is developed: it is a negativity that enables those who negate each other's norms to realize that they have something in common. In this way, the negativity becomes part of the community of the conflicting parties. The individuals develop the negativity with their behaviour towards each other. In a conflict, the differences between normative orders are the basis of a generation of a new common order – an order of conflict. Imagine that Antigone and Creon were able to enter into a conflict with each other. If that were the case, they would overcome the differences of the human and the divine law. The result would be an order in which the differences of laws are articulated. This would be an order within which negativity would be essential for the order itself. (It might be noted that in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel explicates the difference between mere collision and conflict along these lines in the discussion of actions and situations in the classical form of art.)

But how is it possible to establish a common order and thus enter into conflict in the strict sense? Thus far, I have only offered an abstract notion of conflict. In Hegel's view, it is important that we account for the particularities that go along with the realization of conflict. Throughout the "Spirit" chapter, he argues that two presuppositions have to be fulfilled for conflicts to be possible: firstly, alienation from the norms one is bound up

with, and, secondly, self-criticism as the practice through which alienation is made productive. Hegel argues that alienation is destructive as long as it is only realized through a criticism of some normative order one wants to overcome. According to him, it is only through self-criticism that one can engage in conflict in the strict sense. Hegel comes to this insight in the last part of the *Phenomenology's* "Spirit" chapter, which is devoted to a seemingly subjective phenomenon: conscience. But, so he argues, subjective conscience is only one way that conscience is actualized. Another way is what one might call objective conscience (and what Hegel later calls "absolute spirit"). Such a form of conscience is realized if consciences commonly reflect on the particularity of their perspectives. Only with the reflection on the particularity or negativity of individual perspectives is conflict realized in the full sense. My third claim seeks to articulate the systematic relevance of self-critical practices in the realization of conflict:

[*C: Practices of self-criticism as essential for the realization of conflict*] A conflict presupposes that a common order is established which allows individuals to articulate criteria that enables them to explore the differences between their perspectives. Practices of self-criticism are the basis for such a common order. They allow the conflicting parties to become self-conscious of the ways in which they negate one another's norms.

Assume that Antigone and Creon were able to enter into a conflict with one another. They would have to reflect on whether there is any possibility for them to decide which of the laws involved is more important with regard to the question of Polyneikes' burial – or whether it is necessary to establish a new law. This would necessitate that the conflicting parties be able to articulate criteria for reaching a decision. For instance, they could argue that humanity necessitates one to grant everyone a burial, whether he be an enemy of the polis or not. In this case, the concept of humanity would be a criterion for how to settle the question of whether one should bury Polyneikes. By invoking the concept of humanity, the conflicting individuals practice self-criticism. They criticize their practices by subordinating them to the concept of humanity. The self-criticism that is realized by establishing such a criterion is essential for rendering the conflict productive and thus for avoiding a mere collision.

Practices of self-criticism thereby reveal themselves to constitute the new common order that is generated through the conflict. In my example, the concept of humanity functions as an element of such a new order. It allows the conflicting parties to find common ground and thus to engage in a real conflict. To be clear about this: That there is a

common ground for conflict does not imply that the conflicting parties reach a point where they agree on how to settle the conflict. It only implies that they are able to dispute with one another. And: What I call the new common order is not necessarily stable. Sometimes the criteria used to settle differences are self-evident to the conflicting parties. In other cases, the conflict can include the act of questioning the criteria themselves. Antigone, for instance, could accuse Creon of having a false understanding of what humanity means. A criticism like this would prompt the conflicting parties to look for other criteria. Thus, they could invoke the concept of dignity as a criterion for understanding what humanity is. In this way, the order that practices of self-criticism rely on can itself become an object of self-criticism. The order does not have to be stable, but can constantly develop in the course of the conflict.

At this point, I would like to give a first account of the conception of dialectics I attribute to Hegel. According to Hegel, dialectics is characterized by the productivity of negativity. But this is only one aspect of Hegel's conception of dialectics. Another important aspect can be grasped by saying that dialectics is a "self-movement" (*PoS*, "Preface"). This is to say that dialectics realizes a specific form of negativity's productivity – one which is constitutively bound up with self-consciousness. One might summarize these two aspects by saying that dialectics is the self-conscious productivity of negativity. Practices of conflict are just this: They are self-conscious because they presuppose reflection on the inner differences of the normative orders in question. The self-consciousness of conflicting parties is formed by establishing criteria that articulate and settle the conflict (if possible). Practices of conflict thus imply that negativity is productive in two ways: On the one hand, as compared with collisions, conflicts make the negativity between two or more different normative orders productive: The mutual negation of the orders is used to establish a new common order of self-criticism. On the other hand, the new order itself realizes a distinct form of productive negativity: It allows one to criticize certain practices and thus to develop them further. In this way, Hegelian dialectics has to be understood as a self-movement realized through practices of conflict.

2. Exposing Oneself to Resistances to Norms

I would now like to further flesh out the conception of dialectics outlined thus far. I will try to provide further explanation by asking how practices of conflict can be understood as a "self-consummating scepticism". I have already discussed the following points: A self-consummating scepticism is a scepticism that realizes itself through conflict. This means that at least two parties negate their particular perspectives together by engaging in practices of self-criticism. Practices of self-criticism develop scepticism in a specific way: They inaugurate a scepticism that one does not fear, but that one understands as forming one's own identity. In other words: They inaugurate a scepticism that is productive. To better understand the productivity in question, I follow Hegel's conception of absolute spirit as providing more detail about the conception of dialectics that I would now like to develop further. First, a short remark about practices of reflection:

> [*D: Practices of reflection*] The realization of dialectics presupposes practices of reflection because practices of reflection are the medium through which practices of self-criticism are realized. It is important that we not limit our notion of what constitutes practices of reflection to conceptual practices, but that we include artistic and religious practices as well, to name just a few.

After the systematic conception Hegel developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he never ceased to emphasise the fact that art, religion, and philosophy all have a common structural place within the realization of spirit. This commonality can be articulated by saying that art, religion, and philosophy are practices of reflection through which a community is constructed. We have already acquainted ourselves with the conceptual tools that allow us to have a better understanding of what this means: Art, religion, and philosophy are practices that allow us to stand in conflict with one another. Although these practices have a common role, they differ in how they allow conflict to take shape. Conflicts are not only articulated through conceptual activity, but also in the form of the sensuous-material thematization of historical-cultural practices, and in the form of religious representations. The criteria that lay the foundations for a conflict between different perspectives within a particular historical-cultural practice are articulated in plural ways.

It would be interesting to go deeper into the question of how critiques that are not realized via conceptual practices should be understood within this framework. But I won't do this here. I only want to stress the importance of art for critique in general. After

Adorno, Habermas initiated an important turn in critical theory (which has interesting parallels with Marx's reactualization of Hegel's philosophy). He pushed art out of the focus of critical theory (and reintroduced religion after 9/11). Honneth followed Habermas in this regard. Contemporary protagonists of critical theory make it seem as if art were not relevant for the realization of critique. In my view, this development of critical theory is deeply problematic. Hegel teaches us that art is an important means for the realization of critique because art allows individuals to articulate criteria for self-criticism in a specific way. Another lesson that one might take from Hegel with regard to the relevance of art for the realization of critique goes something like this: Self-criticism in practices of conflict is realized in various media. Thus, art does not play an extraordinary role in the foundation of critique (as Adorno thought). It is only one medium among others.

It is important that we analyse how practices of self-criticism can have an impact on normative practices, because this will give us a better understanding of how Hegel conceived of the self-movement realized by practices of critique. My fifth claim grasps an aspect I take to be of particular importance:

> [*E: Resistances of the world*] Practices of self-criticism induce a distance from the norms that govern particular historical-cultural practices. In doing so, they direct the practitioners' attention to aspects of the world that resist the simple application of the norms in question.

It might be helpful to return to the example of Antigone and Creon. Let us suppose again that they have successfully entered into a conflict in the strict sense. They discuss the differences of the normative orders they belong to and agree that humanity is a criterion for determining what to do next. The criterion will prompt them to ask whether the normative order of the polis, on the one hand, and that of the family on the other are human in this sense of humanity. This is to say that the self-reflective concept of humanity provokes a distance from the normative orders that our two characters are bound up with. But the distance is misunderstood if one takes it to imply that the normative orders of the polis and the family are relativized. A relativization would take place if the concept of humanity belonged to a new order that the conflicting parties now adhered to. But as I have already explained, practices of self-criticism do not establish normative orders that individuals simply adhere to. It is characteristic for practices of self-criticism that the criteria that are established within them are put into question again and again. Thus, the distance has to be understood in a different way. It enables the individuals to redetermine or redefine the normative orders they belong to.

But how do Antigone and Creon know how to redetermine the normative orders of the family and the polis? Does the concept of humanity as such tell them what shape this redetermination has to take? This is doubtless not the case. As such, the concept of humanity is an empty criterion for self-criticism. Someone who wants to ask herself whether the norms she follows satisfy the criterion of humanity has to look at the world. She has to be attentive to aspects of the world that have bearing on the definition of what constitutes humanity. By distancing themselves from the normative orders of the family and the polis, respectively, Antigone and Creon might gain the capacity to open themselves to the world. Their attention is directed to aspects of the world that resist being subsumed under the normative orders of the family and the polis.

In my view, it is important that we understand practices of self-criticism in such a way that they make it possible for those engaging in them to open themselves to the world, and specifically, to aspects of the world that resist subsumption in the way just outlined. The opening in question can best be explained if one contrasts it with the way Antigone and Creon are basically bound by their respective normative orders. If one strictly adheres to a normative order, the world is formed through and through by the order in question (think of John McDowell's conception of second nature). Individuals who are bound in such a way are not able to ask whether the world has aspects that the normative order does not allow them to grasp.

If individuals engage in practices of self-criticism, however, things are quite different. Practices of self-criticism enable them to distance themselves from the normative orders they adhere to and thereby make it possible for them to differentiate between norms and world. This differentiation is an achievement of practices of self-criticism. Normative orders tend to close the world for those who adhere to them. They tend to become dogmatic. The opening towards the world gained through practices of self-criticism works against this tendency. The distance from the normative orders that Antigone and Creon might have attained would have allowed them to grasp aspects of the world that previously remained out of reach, namely, the aspects of the world they might now recognize were neglected by the normative orders of the family and the polis. As neglected aspects, they are relevant for the determination of norms through which humanity is realized. Thus, the neglected aspects of the world change the norms in question. In short: Through the opening towards the world, the norms that determine the interaction shift, and this shift is generated through practices of self-criticism. The self-movement which, according to Hegel, dialectics consists in works in this way.

This explanation allows us to understand the fact that dialectics as the self-conscious productivity of negativity is not a demiurgic operation. Put straightforwardly:

[*F: Dialectics as criticism through the world*] The criticism realized through dialectics is not only produced by individuals and their practices. If self-criticism is realized in the full sense, it implies that the world itself "criticizes" the norms governing our historical-cultural practices.

My sixth claim should help us avoid falling prey to a common misunderstanding of Hegel's position. Hegel's philosophy has often been mistakenly understood as a metaphysical idealism (as to Adorno: cf. ND, 145). It has been seen as idealistic because people have attributed to it the claim that spirit issues everything out of itself. And it has been understood as metaphysical because it has been read as claiming to grasp the end of history. In this vein, there is a tendency to understand Hegel's conception of dialectics as implying an all-encompassing synthesis. But this, I think, is a mistake. Hegel's conception of dialectics does not say that world spirit issues everything out of itself. If one understands Hegel in this way, it is impossible to do justice to his dialectics of nature and spirit, to take just one shortcoming of this interpretation. Again and again, Hegel insists that nature has to be understood as the other of spirit and as such as being identical with spirit. In other words: Nature is identical with spirit as something that genuinely resists it.

We can understand the resistance in question in terms of an opening towards the world. The self-movement of spirit can only take place if norms established in historical-cultural practices can be disrupted by how the world is. If practices of self-criticism open one towards the world, the world inscribes itself into the norms that have not done justice to certain aspects of it, and thus develops the norms further. In this way, the world is part of the self-movement of historical-cultural practices, but not as something that would always already be integrated into spirit. The world is part of the self-movement as a source of resistance. Thus, self-criticism is misunderstood if one takes it as implying that individuals engage in critical activity only in order to decide who they want to be. Self-criticism is, consequently realized, criticism of norms by the world. It necessarily entails both the realization of practices of reflection through which criteria for critique are articulated as well as an opening towards aspects of the world that help us define the criteria in question and thus redetermine the norms that are relevant for who we are. Only in this way is self-criticism intelligible as a practice through which freedom is realized. If self-criticism alone could determine who one wants to be, it would, in the end, be a practice of domination. Only if it opens those who practice it towards the world does self-criticism mean freedom.

3. Negative Dialectics Reconsidered

Up to now, I have only elaborated on Hegel's conception of dialectics. In the last part of my paper, I want, at least briefly, to compare this conception with the concept of dialectics Adorno developed in *Negative Dialectics*. In my view, the very idea of negative dialectics is decisive for understanding what dialectics is in general. Hegel developed a conception of negative dialectics. As I have shown, Hegel spells out a conception of dialectics as self-movement which entails an irreducible aspect of negativity – a negativity which is not simply sublated in unity. I think it might be illuminating to compare what I have said thus far about Hegel with Adorno's concept of dialectics in *Negative Dialectics*. Before invoking a central claim of Adorno's conception I should explain what I mean by saying that Hegel argues for a negativity that is not simply sublated in unity. A few moments ago, I laid out this idea by saying that in practices of self-criticism, the world is part of the spirit's self-movement insofar as it serves as a source of resistance. Self-criticism as a basis of freedom can only be realized if an opening towards the world takes place, which allows the world to inform and thus change the norms that practitioners adhere to. If this self-movement is to continue, it is important that the world's resistances to established norms can keep coming into play. In this sense, the negativity is not sublated. It is never wholly worked out.

In Adorno's conception of *Negative Dialectics*, the concept of metaphysical experience plays a central role. This concept is a good starting point for comparing Adorno's and Hegel's respective conceptions of negative dialectics, because Adorno, like Hegel, also seeks an explanation of the ways in which the world resists our norms. In comparison with Hegel, Adorno's conception shows itself to be one-sided. Thus my seventh claim:

> [*G: Adorno's abstraction*] The understanding of "metaphysical experiences" implied by Adorno's conception of negative dialectics is abstract. With his understanding of metaphysical experiences, Adorno opens our conceptual activities to the ways in which the world resists our normative, conceptual structures. However, he remains limited to the extent that he only articulates the negativity of these resistances from a theoretical perspective. This is the only way Adorno can think of a negativity that is not sublated.

According to Adorno, metaphysical experiences are experiences of something that transcends the norms established within historical-cultural practices (Adorno speaks of an "excess over the subject" ["Überschuß übers Subjekt"; ND, 368]). The model of an

experience like this is the all-encompassing happiness of a child at a place that means the world to her (like Adorno's *Amorbach*). Characteristic for Adorno's account of metaphysical experience is the claim that the conditions of modern life have made it more and more difficult to have metaphysical experiences, as this life is determined by an all-encompassing structure of norms (cf. ND, 368). I take this claim to say that the power of resistance particular to metaphysical experiences cannot realize itself in modern life. Thus, the negativity of metaphysical experiences has, at least at the historical juncture in which Adorno was writing, no real practical relevance. It can thus only be understood from a theoretical perspective.

These claims imply a sharp distinction between what has the capacity to resist established norms and what does not. The immanence of everyday practices within a historical-cultural form of life does not entail anything that would be able to resist the norms that guide the practices in question. In consequence, what is able to resist is thought as another realm of immanence (which Adorno characterizes with his concepts of "mimesis" and "prevalence of the object"). What is able to resist the norms that guide everyday practices, on the one hand, and the very norms of everyday practices, on the other hand, are conceived of as two realms that are detached from one another. But this means that Adorno simply lacks a full conception of resistance. A full conception of resistance would imply that what is able to resist is the other of immanence.

Adorno's one-sided (i.e. theoretical) conception of resistance has important consequences for the concept of resistance against norms of historical-cultural practices. For Adorno, resistance, in the end, is only a theoretical possibility. It is the possibility of a completely different realization of negativity. But if resistance is understood in this way, it means that the only alternative left for us is to develop a different type of normativity (like "mimesis"). But this is too abstract a notion of resistance. I therefore propose that we overcome Adorno's one-sidedness with Hegel:

> [*H: Overcoming Adorno's abstraction with Hegel*] Hegel's conception of self-consummating scepticism allows us to take a practical perspective on negativity and its productivity. According to Hegel, resistances of the world are an irreducible aspect of the realization of dialectics as critical practice. The negativity of the resistances in question is not sublated, because the practice of self-consummating scepticism continually turns back to the ways in which the world resists our norms.

With his conception of dialectics, Hegel defends the idea that the self-movement of scepticism enables resistances of the world against norms to redetermine these norms in

a productive, and thus practical way. This self-movement presupposes that the world can confront us with things that are neglected by the norms of certain historical-cultural practices; in other words, things that are lost on those who adhere to the norms in question. With that, Hegel defends a conception of resistance within immanence. His conception of dialectics allows us to overcome the abstraction I have attributed to Adorno's conception. Put differently: Hegel offers a conception that can help us better understand how dialectics is in itself negative. The systematic question to which the negative dialectics of both Hegel and Adorno seeks to give an answer can be articulated as follows: How is it possible to develop a criticism of norms from a position which is bound by the norms in question – whereby Adorno has, with good reasons, stressed that normative structures tend to become dogmatic? Both Hegel and Adorno answer the question by invoking the resistance of the world against norms – what we might call a metaphysical resistance. But how can a metaphysical resistance open a dialectic which is not closed or dogmatic? Adorno proposes that we think of such a dialectics as an aporetic interruption. Hegel proposes that we think of it as an endless process of criticism (cf. the final citation of Schiller in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). His proposal enables us to overcome the abstractions that are characteristic of Adorno's position.

Hegel's negative dialectics can best be summarized with his formula of self-consummating scepticism. I have interpreted this formula as saying that scepticism is made productive through the practice of constant self-criticism. Self-consummating scepticism thus means: Every norm can be made into an object of sceptical questioning. This holds for both norms of ordinary practices and for the criteria that are established to critically reflect on these norms. If self-consummating scepticism is realized, critical reflection becomes an essential aspect of the identity of subjects within historical-cultural practices. Negative dialectics is their practical identity – as critical practice (not as critical consciousness). Negative dialectics as such realizes an ongoing process of redetermination of norms. Two aspects are essential for the process in question. On the one hand, practices of self-criticism distance individuals from the norms they adhere to. On the other hand, resistances of the world against these norms are made productive for the constant redetermination of the norms in question. In this way, negative dialectics is a self-movement that is as such a movement triggered by how the world is.