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IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE MURDER:  
DESTRUCTION OF NATURE AND INTERHUMAN  
VIOLENCE IN ADORNO'S CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

**T**HE DESTRUCTION OF NATURE AND INTERHUMAN VIOLENCE are not only permanent challenges for politics, but also crucial subjects for the social sciences. However, the question whether both problems could possibly be interlinked has so far been widely neglected. Does perhaps domination of nature cause unrecognized resultant costs in social life?

As I am going to show, these questions are the core of Theodor W. Adorno's socio-philosophical thinking. According to Adorno, the domination of man's natural environment made possible by controlling man's inner nature leads to a limitation of the human horizon to self-preservation and power. In addition, the justifying idea of a divine commandment to subdue the earth and to have dominion over all creatures reduces the sensitivity of civilized humans for the conditions of their violent domination of nature organized in and by society. Finally, the internalized violent domination of nature also facilitates the use of force in social life. Adorno's hypothesis with regard to a psychology of civilization means that man's brute force against nature encourages him to use violence against other human beings as well. This radical thesis defended by Adorno must be differentiated from the traditional critique of culture, particularly from its German version. Therefore I propose the term *critique of culture as civilization theory* (*zivilisationstheoretische Kulturkritik*) in order to characterize Adorno's approach. Man's domination of the nature that has been suppressed into the collective unconscious is considered by Adorno as a congenital defect of industrialized, i.e. Western civilization.

Seen in this light, Adorno's approach does not look very much like Western Marxism, Neomarxism or Hegelmarxism as it is usually described. His criticism of society and capitalism as well as his seemingly negativistic critique of reason are merely derived from his critique of culture as civilization theory. Adorno's leitmotif is not the dialectic of relations of production and productive forces picked out as a central theme by Marx but the dialectic of the domination of nature in the sense of the radical hypothesis of a prehistorical connection between the domination of nature

and barbarity in social life. In this respect, Adorno's work is the culmination of the developmental evolution of the critique of culture as civilization theory beginning with Nietzsche, Freud and Max Weber.<sup>1</sup>

In the following I am going to exemplify this by using Adorno's radical transformation of Sigmund Freud's speculation from "Totem and Taboo" that in the beginning of human civilization there was a psychologically momentous murder. Freud traces the socio-cultural taboo of violence between human beings back to its initial violation by the primal murder.

According to Darwin, prehistoric mankind – the so called primal horde – lived under the rule of an omnipotent male. Based on this theorem, Freud recognizes that the decisive step to change "this earliest state of society" was the alliance of young males against the father, whom they overwhelm and kill.<sup>2</sup> The threatening fratricidal war and the ambivalent feelings for the father, however, lead to the remorseful ritual revocation of the murder by prohibiting the killing of the father's symbolic substitute, the totem, and by tabooing incest. According to "Totem and Taboo," the founding act of civilization is thus murder. Freud emphasizes this theorem with the famous quotation from Goethe's "Faust" "that *'in the beginning was the Deed,'*"<sup>3</sup> but I think it is more accurate to say *in the beginning was the murder*, i.e. the patricide.

It is precisely this thesis to which Adorno returns in order to develop his hypothesis of a constitutive connection between the domination of nature and barbarity in social life. By replacing the persons involved, their motives and their psychic reactions, he radicalizes and reverses Freud's theory. Adorno's view of the civilization process is not, like Freud's, a tabooing of violence due to its first use against fellow man and following ritual enclosure. He rather suggests a removal of violence-taboos as the result of the use of violence against creatures. This violence became boundless by its ideological justification.

According to Adorno's reconstruction of the history of philosophy as natural history, aggression against nature is inevitably an artificial result of civilization's emergence from its origins. With this thesis Adorno refers to the psychic mechanism of projection discovered by Freud. In the course of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in detail Karsten Fischer, "Verwilderte Selbsterhaltung," *Zivilisationstheoretische Kulturkritik bei Nietzsche, Freud, Weber und Adorno*, Berlin 1999 ("Self-preservation running wild": Critique of culture as civilization theory at Nietzsche, Freud, Weber and Adorno).

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, London et al. 1983, 141. In "Civilization and its Discontents", Freud states that it is not crucial that the father has really been killed, because the wish to kill him alone causes the feelings of guilt, which are constitutive for civilization. Cf., A. L. Kroeber, "Totem and Taboo in Retrospect," in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. XLV, 1939/1940, pp. 446, 447. Edwin R. Wallace, IV, *Freud and Anthropology. A History and Reappraisal* (New York, 1983) is the most elaborate work on "Totem and Taboo" and the discussion of it.

<sup>3</sup> Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, op. cit., 161.

the rationalization process aiming at the domination of nature, all uncivilized creatures are perceived as evil because of their incompatibility with socio-cultural rationality.<sup>4</sup>

This anthropological scheme, which describes the rationalised self-preservation running wild, is in line with the fundamental thought of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment;" that is to say, the progressive crusade of destruction is directed against anything pre-enlightenment, finally against enlightenment itself, and may even lead to a real destruction mania in relation to nature as well as in social life. Against this backdrop, Adorno's hypothesis of depth psychology on the circumstances conducive to barbarity between human beings is thus derived from disenchantment in the sense of Nietzsche and Max Weber insofar as the boundlessness of the mechanized domination of nature is presupposed in the extraction of any sense and meaning from nature. Freud already pointed out that modern abattoirs have only become conceivable once the customs of primitive peoples to apologize to the killed animals with rituals and repentance ceremonies memorizing the killing as a forbidden exception had become demystified as superstition and finally abandoned. As a result the rational understanding of legitimate quasi-industrial livestock production was able to evolve.<sup>5</sup> The prerequisite for the domination of nature is man distancing himself from nature; at the same time, this represents a psychological act of abstraction.<sup>6</sup>

This assumption that a strong development of the ego is to be regarded as the prerequisite for man as a cultural being to understand the mass "murder" of animals as a legitimate option, rather than as the consequence of this justification, supports Adorno's hypothesis of the projection of hostility towards animals. Without the justification offered by such projection, the unrestrained domination of creatures would not be compatible with the self-awareness of civilization as humanitarian. According to Adorno, this

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<sup>4</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton, London 1973, 22: "The system in which the sovereign mind imagined itself transfigured, has its primal history in the premental, the animal life of the species. Predators get hungry, but pouncing on their prey is difficult and often dangerous; additional impulses may be needed for the beast to dare it. These impulses and the unpleasantness of hunger fuse into the rage at the victim, a rage whose expression in turn serves the end of frightening and paralyzing the victim. In the advance to humanity this is rationalized by projection. The 'rational animal' with an appetite for his opponent is already fortunate enough to have a superego and must find reason. The more completely his actions follow the law of self-preservation, the less can he admit the primacy of that law to himself and to others; if he did, his laboriously attained status of a *zoon politikon* would lose all credibility. The animal to be devoured must be evil."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sigmund Freud: *Thoughts for the Times on War and Death*, in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey, Vol. XIV, London 1957, pp. 273-300, 292-296.

<sup>6</sup> K. R. Eissler: *Death Drive, Ambivalence, and Narcissism*, in: *The Psychoanalytic Study of the Child*, Vol. 26, 1972, pp. 25-78, 74 f.: "In order for a human being to kill in cold blood – or perhaps even to be able at all to kill a fellow creature – the ego must have achieved a considerable development. It may be that the first murder constituted a great discovery: so long as man saw in his fellowman only a mirror image, he was unable to kill what was, after all, his own image."

strategy of justification gathers momentum. Nature must contrast sharply with civilization and is perceived as evil as such; it must be exterminated to preserve civilization, and soon the self-preservation running wild has its dialectic set-back. Initially self-preservation by the domination of nature was an anthropological development which was both necessary and positive. Adorno agrees with Nietzsche's reminder to be grateful for the end of "continual fear of wild animals, of barbarians, of gods and of our own dreams" made possible by the rationalization process.<sup>7</sup> The running wild of self-preservation as a regression of civilization into its former state and antithesis rather results from its ideological justification. This justification demonizes nature and therefore enables its unrestrained, exterminating domination. Adorno does not criticize the domination of nature as such but rather its boundlessness, which leads to its dialectical set-back. This set-back is a dialectical one because, according to Adorno, the absolute domination of nature provokes destructive socio-cultural phenomena, since the domination of fellow humans and the domination of nature are closely related through history in a disastrous way. They cannot be separated from each other.<sup>8</sup>

Axel Honneth has pointed out that this critique of the domination of nature is the determining idea of Adorno's critique of reason.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in my view the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" is not merely a fundamentally negativistic critique of reason, but a relevant analysis of social science.

The question is how should a destructive connection between the domination of nature and social barbarity occur?

Immanuel Kant had connected his apotheosis of the domination of nature by human reason with the hope for the socio-cultural taboo of violence. In his considerations about the conjectured beginning of human history, Kant argues that the idea of the legitimate use of sheep as pure means for clothing includes its opposite, the knowledge of man's responsibility to behave different towards fellow man than towards sheep.<sup>10</sup> As far as this hope is concerned, Freud has already been less optimistic, tracing the socio-cultural

<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche: Daybreak. Thoughts on the prejudices of morality, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, ed. Maudemarie Clark / Brian Leiter, Cambridge etc. 1997, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, Philosophische Terminologie. Zur Einleitung, ed. by Rudolf zur Lippe, 2 vols., Frankfurt/M. 1973 f., Vol. 2, 37; Adorno, Negative Dialectics, op. cit., 289: "The prehistory of reason, that it is a moment of nature and yet something else, has become the immanent definition of reason. It is natural as the psychological force split off for purposes of self-preservation; once split off and contrasted with nature, it also becomes nature's otherness. But if that dialectics irrepressibly turns reason into the absolute antithesis of nature, if the nature in reason itself is forgotten, reason will be self-preservation running wild and will regress to nature. It is only as reflection upon that self-preservation that reason would be above nature."

<sup>9</sup> Axel Honneth, The Critique of Power. Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory, trans. by Kenneth Baynes, Cambridge (Mass.) / London 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant: Conjectural Beginning of Human History, in: id.: On History, ed. Lewis White Beck, trans. Lewis White Beck, Robert E. Anchor, Emil L. Fackenheim, Indianapolis 1981, pp. 53-68, 58 f., 68.

taboo back to the murder of the father and its traumatic consequences. Adorno's approach is still more extensive than Freud's, turning Kant's point of view to mean just the opposite. "The autonomous moral law reverses itself antinomically; pure domination of nature becomes the duty to exterminate, which was always lurking behind it."<sup>11</sup> Adorno accuses Kant's idealistic philosophy of being inhuman in effect.<sup>12</sup> This intense criticism, however, is based on a very complex consideration. Adorno can be interpreted as speaking of a prehistory of traumatic consequences caused by a momentous murder constituting civilization in a different way than Freud, but Adorno uses Freud's terms and theorems of psychic mechanisms. Freud's psychology of civilization, particularly his thesis concerning the origins of the socio-cultural taboo of violence becomes the pattern for Adorno's opposing theory that the rationalization of taboo is the pathology of an ideologically justified domination of nature.

The constantly encountered assertion that savages, blacks, Japanese are like animals, monkeys for example, is the key to the pogrom. The possibility of pogroms is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally-wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze - "after all, it's only an animal" -, reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators having again and again to reassure themselves that it is "only an animal", because they could never fully believe this even of animals. [...] The mechanism of "pathic projection" determines that those in power perceive as human only their own reflected image, instead of reflecting back the human as precisely what is different. Murder is thus the repeated attempt, by yet greater madness, to distort the madness of such false perception into reason: what was not seen as human and yet is human, is made a thing, so that its stirrings can no longer refute the manic gaze.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Freud's hope for a positive effect on the socio-cultural conditions by man's common effort to dominate nature, Adorno analyses the contrasting effect: domination of nature causes barbarity in social life, not as a necessary anthropological constant, but as the result of its rationalization.

Adorno questions civilization's unrestrained justification to dominate nature, which is different from primitive people's conception of the world. The civilized man, unable to repress a residual archaic idea of the unity of all creatures, must force himself to concentrate on instrumental reason, and, according to Adorno, this causes the repetition of violence in social life. This

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<sup>11</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, Vol. 1, New York 1991, 272.

<sup>12</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven. Philosophie der Musik. Fragmente und Texte*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt, 1994), 123: "The ethical dignity in Kant is a differentiation. It is aimed against animals. It tends to exclude man from Creation, and therefore its humanity continually threatens to turn into inhumanity. It does not leave room for pity. The Kantian hates nothing more than the memory of the similarity between man and animal. The tabooing of this similarity is at work, when the idealist gripes about the materialist. Virtually the animals play the same role for the idealistic system as the Jews play for the fascist. Calling man an animal - this is authentic idealism." (My translation, K.F.).

<sup>13</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott, London 1974, 105.

thesis presupposes and broadens several Freudian terms. By referring to a residual archaic idea, Adorno suggests a collective unconscious of all basic behavioural patterns of civilization, whereas Freud always regarded such theorems with caution. Adorno's understanding of the psychic mechanisms is more orthodox. The given quotation from "Minima Moralia" already mentioned projection as the decisive factor in civilization's perception of nature. Another important psychic mechanism adopted by Adorno is denial. According to Freud, a person who denies tries to hide a partially conscious problem from further revelation by denying its existence and importance. Combined with the mechanism of projection, Adorno's use of denial leads to the assumption that hostility towards nature, expressed by Kant as a demand of rationalization, is denied, but that the denial the denial recurs destructively recurs out of the collective unconscious.

Now the question here is, why does Adorno think that this recurrence of the denial leads to barbaric killing of fellow men as a repetition of the killing of animals? Again, Adorno refers to the mechanism of pathological projection. Once mankind invented a hierarchy of the right to live, it requires only a change of criteria to use the violence that has been practised against animals also against fellow man, provided he can be perceived as uncultured, more natural and therefore dangerous. The perception of one's fellow man as an animal, whose mortal agony is usually denied, psychologically enables us to treat him like an animal, too. Moreover, the residual awareness of wrongdoing in killing one's fellow man paradoxically leads to treatment of him that is all the more bestial in so far as it must be denied. Projection enables the perception and justification of the barbarity of killing one's fellow man as protection against aggression and danger.

If we summarize the argument up to here, Adorno's conjecture states that the rationalization of the killing taboo, which originally included animals as well as human beings, results in its repeal, because (according to the psychic mechanism of projection) it is characteristic of rationalization to justify the boundless domination of the demonized nature that leads to its extermination. The fragility of this justification and the denial of the rudimentary memory of the unconditional killing taboo provokes the recurrence of the denial. Once repealed by such rationalization, it only requires a common pattern of aggression, the discrimination of man as animal, to transmit the boundless propensity of violence against nature to social life. Moreover, according to Adorno, the recurrence of the denied taboo initiates a recidivism. The violence committed against the animal must be repeated compulsively against human beings in order to continuously deny the rudimentary idea that the justification "it's only an animal" is not really legitimate. This denial causes excessive violence, which continues this pathological process.

These reflections on the destructive dynamics of rationalization, which initiates collectively unconscious psychic mechanisms, show clearly that Adorno is not mainly interested in the protection of nature. His concern is a theory of interhuman, social barbarity, but he sees it as inseparable from a critique of the human domination of nature. As Adorno's reference to the pogrom as the domination of nature's dialectical set-back shows, there is no doubt that his consideration aims at the ambitious explanation for why interhuman violence did not remain a concomitant of civilization, but developed into a unique force of extermination. In "Notes to Literature" Adorno states: "Insecticide, which pointed toward the death camps from the very beginning, becomes the end-product of the domination of nature, which now abolishes itself."<sup>14</sup> According to Adorno, the collectively unconscious psychic mechanisms appearing with the rationalized and industrialized domination of nature are the adequate condition for the industrialized extermination of human beings by totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. Without questioning the historical and sociological factors, particularly of German crimes during the Third Reich, Adorno intends to describe the preconditions of these concrete factors in terms of a psychology of civilization.<sup>15</sup>

Freud's optimistic expectation that civilization's purpose to dominate nature and to defend man's superiority over all creatures would cause peacemaking effects is turned upside down by Adorno's radical critique of culture as civilization theory. Man's final triumph over his natural environment is but a Pyrrhic victory. This is the meaning of the famous quotation from the "Dialectic of Enlightenment" that "civilization is the victory of society over nature which changes everything into pure nature."<sup>16</sup> Adorno adopts Freud's theorem that civilization started with a psychologically serious murder, but Adorno considers another murder with contrasting consequences. While Freud hypothesises the unique patricide which is immediately ritually enclosed by the socio-cultural taboo of violence, Adorno stresses the rationalized "murder" of animals, which causes interhuman violence because of psychological mechanisms described by Freud. Freud sees a tabooing of destructive tendencies resulting from the primal patricide, while Adorno analyses a justification of destructive tendencies and a removal of their tabooing by the rationalization process. Now it is also clear why there

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<sup>14</sup> Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, op. cit., 270.

<sup>15</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., 366. "A child, fond of an innkeeper named Adam, watched him club the rats pouring out of holes in the courtyard; it was in his image that the child made its own image of the first man. That this has been forgotten, that we no longer know what we used to feel before the dogcatcher's van, is both the triumph of culture and its failure. Culture, which keeps emulating the old Adam, cannot bear to be reminded of that zone, and precisely this is not to be reconciled with the conception that culture has of itself. It abhors stench because it stinks - because, as Brecht put it in a magnificent line, its mansion is built of dogshit. Years after that line was written, Auschwitz demonstrated irrefutably that culture has failed."

<sup>16</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, transl. by John Cumming, New York 1972, 186.

exists a difference between Adorno's critique of culture as civilization theory and Marx' Historical Materialism. In his "Sociological Writings" Adorno says, "All history is called history of class struggle, because it has always been the same: prehistory."<sup>17</sup> This interpretation of Adorno's considerations enables us to draw the following conclusions:

Naturally Adorno's thesis that there exists a constitutive connection between the domination of nature and barbarity cannot be proved empirically, but I believe that in spite of some exaggerations Adorno's psychology of civilization is plausible. In some respects his considerations may be considered as evident. As Herbert Schnädelbach has said, Adorno's theorems explain a lot, even without covering themselves empirically.<sup>18</sup>

Accepting this, Adorno's theorem seems to be important for the understanding of the continuing barbarity in man's social life. Usually the denial of Adorno's radical scepticism is presented as political realism. But Adorno himself once said: "Such realism is unrealistic."<sup>19</sup>

If sociocultural pathologies are to be interpreted by referring to primeval constants of civilisatory evolution, it is important to note that Adorno's approach is not necessarily in conflict with nor particularly oriented towards a theory of the modern age and a theory of rationality converging on linguistics. Jürgen Habermas would later develop it from within the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, and in all it is this theory that presently is most prominent within cultural theoretical discourse. Adorno himself, however, wants to demonstrate the irrationality of the prevailing, modern rationality.

Neither are political and economic conditions crucial for Adorno's thought. Rather, Adorno's critique of culture as civilization theory seems a macro-theory for historically contingent phenomena within the political and economic sphere as for the social in totum.

Hence, in view of his sources Adorno appears far less Hegel-Marxist than widely held. Also, his adopted attitude of reserve towards, even disapproval of the 1968 student movement can be explained from there. Adorno's critique makes it clear that philosophy must not become an instrument of actionism since "it creates change precisely by remaining theory"<sup>20</sup> and he consistently takes a negative view of holistic utopia but is sympathetic towards a

<sup>17</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Soziologische Schriften," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann et al., Vol. 8 (Frankfurt, 1972), 373ff. (my translation, K.F.). Cf. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, op. cit., 234; Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op. cit., 320.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Schnädelbach, "Philosophieren lernen," in *Geist gegen den Zeitgeist. Erinnern an Adorno*, ed. by Josef Früchtl / Maria Calloni, Frankfurt, 1991, 54, 58.

<sup>19</sup> Adorno, "Soziologische Schriften," op. cit., 10 (my translation, K.F.).

moderate reformism: "However, in a historical moment, where practice seems cut off everywhere, which would be directed at the whole, even pathetic reforms may assume more right than they deserve."<sup>21</sup> As Adorno saw it, the alternative to a policy merely pretending to be realistic is by no means the adoption of equally apparent radical-revolutionary slogans, but, on the contrary, the overdue reflection of the cognitive, psychological and ethical conditions of the process of civilization which continues unquestioned and, in that sense, turned into ideology itself. Adorno does not expound the problems of civilization in terms of the domination of nature, which could be challenged only at the price of romantic utopian dreams of an unrealistic paradisiacal reconciliation between man and beast. The socio-pathological consequences that Adorno is looking at are not established there, but rather within the ideological self-authorization of man to a quintessentially boundless domination. The priority is then to subject such an autocratically auto-destructive understanding of culture to critique. Regarding this, there is at first glance an astonishing proximity to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who, from his structural anthropology, came to a realisation which corresponds remarkably to Adorno's train of thought described above:

What I am rebelling against and what I think is damaging, is that shameless humanism, which, partly emerging from Judeo-Christian tradition, partly from Renaissance and Cartesianism, makes man the lord, the absolute master of Creation. I believe, all the tragedies we have seen, first with colonialism, then with fascism and finally with the extermination camps, are not in conflict with nor contradictory to the apparent humanism in the specific form, in which we have been practising it for several centuries, but instead they are [...] almost its natural consequence. It comes to the same thing, when man draws up borders between oneself and other species first and then moves them to the inside of his own, solely accepting certain categories as human and contrasting it with others, characterized as inferior, according to the very same pattern as when distinguishing between man and other creatures. This is the actual original sin; it drives mankind to self-destruction. The mutual respect between people cannot be based on a special kind of dignity, mankind credits itself with, for then a part of mankind can always claim to possess this dignity to a greater extent than all others. On the contrary, we need to start from fundamental humility: If man respects other life forms, he is also protecting himself from running the risk of not equally valuing all human ways of life . [...] Care for mankind without simultaneous solidary care for all other life forms, that means, whether one likes it or not, leading mankind to self-suppression and self-exploitation.<sup>22</sup>

As for psychopathological cases, there has been evidence for this mechanism. Criminologists observed that most serial killers at first vent their rage on animals. On the basis of these findings the state of California in 1998 passed a law permitting the courts to force persons sentenced for acts of cruelty

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<sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Vermischte Schriften," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, loc. cit., vol. 20 (Frankfurt, 1986), 408 (my translation, K.F.).

<sup>21</sup> Adorno, *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, op. cit., 458 (my translation, K.F.).

<sup>22</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythos und Bedeutung. Fünf Radiovorträge. Gespräche mit Claude Lévi-Strauss*, ed. by Adalbert Reif (Frankfurt, 1980), 247ff., 250 (my translation, K.F.).

against animals to undergo psychotherapy. Yet, Adorno and Lévi-Strauss question the supposed "normal" social relationship with nature altogether. The cattle disease BSE is a fitting example. After having caused the problem by feeding to herbivores animal meal in a fully industrialized animal production process, man then considered and executed the prophylactic eradication of all potentially infected animals and with it also the killing of many uninfected, healthy ones. It did not occur to those responsible that this entailed ethical problems, the lack of regard of which could substantially damage the credibility of moral argumentation as well as the cultural self-perception of man as humane.

Consequently, Adorno's approach is interesting for the ecological discourse which is changing between an anthropocentric perspective that justifies the protection of the environment only with man's own interest on the one hand, and a biocentric perspective that claims rights of nature on the other hand. The biocentric naturalism is not any more convincing than anthropocentric thought is without insufficiencies, especially since the latter cannot present arguments beyond the extremely fragile aesthetic popularity of endangered species. Adorno evades the problems of both concepts. His theorem suggests that there is a direct human interest to behave in a considerate manner towards other living creatures, because otherwise man would search for a peaceful social life in vain. Hence, the protection of animals and nature alike seems indicated out of immediate human self-interest. In this respect, Adorno confirms the interest of biocentric theories in conservation, compared with sheer environmental protection, without falling a victim to the errors of ecological naturalism. It is his thesis of an inherent connection between the domination of nature and excessive interpersonal violence, at first glance the most irritating part of Adorno's theory, that undermines an entirely unsatisfactory line of thought. It claims that the objectives of environmental protection and conservation are to be weighed against other objectives, such as the aiding of underdeveloped countries. Often it is very difficult to reconcile development aid with issues of conservation. As far as development policy is concerned, Adorno's assumption rather recommends a reflective cultivation of nature as a condition for permanent peaceful social evolution instead of the illusionary hope for social development by a boundlessly progressing, violent domination of nature.

The notion that Adorno's critique could be reduced to purely ecological motives is therefore wrong insofar as he is concerned about interpersonal, social barbarity that results from the progressively increasing degree of human self-authorizing ideologies. Rather, one could call it a socio-ecological viewpoint, which emphasises the indissoluble connection between ecological conduct towards nature and the social behaviour of man.

This viewpoint again suggests certain convergences of Adorno and

Habermas. After persistently differentiating himself from the critique of reason of the so-called first generation of the Critical Theory by developing his own concept of reason based on communicative rationality, Habermas later reformulated the idea of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment." In his latest, important reflection on genetic engineering<sup>23</sup> Habermas asks how our moral self-perception and our motivation for moral action can be maintained if we undermine the identity of our species by dissolving the difference between coincidence and free choice through genetic engineering. Habermas, brilliantly elaborating Adorno's approach further, thinks that the change from domination of nature to self-authorization damages the pre-conditions of a universal understanding of morality.

But Adorno's perspective on the problem of social barbarity is also of astonishing relevance for political practice. At least it must set us thinking that Adorno's dark prognosis, made about fifty years earlier on the occasion of the adoption of the General Declaration on Human Rights by the just refounded United Nations, summarizes the political experience of the last decade:

By elevating genocide to a concept, the possibility of genocide is, so to speak, recognized: an institution which is prohibited, rejected, discussed. One day there might be negotiations in the forum of the United Nations, whether any new atrocity can be defined as genocide, whether nations have the right to intervene, which they do not wish to use in any case, and whether the term genocide needn't be removed from the statutes in view of unforeseen difficulties with its application in practice. Soon after there are medium-sized headlines in the newspapers: genocide measures in Eastern Turkestan nearly carried through.<sup>24</sup>

Exchanging Eastern Turkistan for Kosovo, Somalia, Rwanda, or recently Sudan shows that the question of a new world order (George Bush) or a new world disorder (François Mitterand) is tightly linked with the question of Evil and its social determinants.<sup>25</sup>

In this respect the interpretation of Adorno's critique of culture as civilization theory can demonstrate some actual relevant social science aspects of his thinking, which is therefore not only a negativistic critique of reason.

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<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, loc. cit., vol. 4 (Frankfurt, 1980), 287 (my translation, K.F.). This aphorism belongs to an appendix with texts that have not been published by Adorno himself, which is omitted in the English edition.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought. An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2002).

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Fischer, Karsten. "In the Beginning Was the Murder: Destruction of Nature and Interhuman Violence in Adorno's Critique of Culture." *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 6 no. 2 (Spring 2005): 27-38. PURL: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/06.2/fischer.pdf>