Between Reification and Mystification: Rethinking the Economy of Principles

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Contemporary philosophy raises the concern, under the banner of the "end of metaphysics," that the deployment of principles results in theoretical domination that also has serious practical implications. This concern recognizes that theory and practice are always interrelated and that the deployment of principles always involves a dimension of domination. Neither claim should be denied in attempts to think outside the closure of metaphysics. Under the pretext of "discovery," the metaphysical project posits the priority of permanent universal principles meant to account for concrete individuals. In its ancient manifestation, this positing of universals over individuals found its highest expression in the authority of substantial forms; in its modern manifestation, in the hegemony of the subject. In both cases, the principle functions hegemonically within the economy of being it sets in order. Such principles are totalizing insofar as nothing escapes the purview of their influence, and they leave no space from which to be critiqued.

The critique of principles can be traced back at least to Heidegger, if not to Nietzsche. Heidegger often dubs Aristotle the initiator of metaphysics, 

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1. "Individual" here refers only to concrete beings that are not automatically an instantiation of a universal. The term "particular" refers to instantiations of universals, and "singular" to the irreducibly unique.

2. In the "Physics," which Heidegger regards as the hidden source of Western metaphysics, he also sees Aristotle retaining something of the pre-socratic, non-metaphysical approach to being. See Martin Heidegger, "Vom Wesen und Begriff der physis Aristotelis, Physik B, 1," in Gesamtausgabe: Wegmarken, ed. by Friedrich-Wilhelm von Herrmann (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1976), Vol. 9, p. 242.
since Aristotle understood being in terms of forms, i.e., *to on* is thought of as *ousia*, which is presumed to be *eidos*. While Aristotle often tends to emphasize the absolute priority of substantial form over concrete individuals, he also frequently tries to do justice to the individual’s irreducibility. While the first tendency has been criticized as being merely dominoational, and therefore even dangerous, the importance of the second has rarely been appreciated.

In what follows, this second tendency within the history of metaphysics will be traced to undermine two tacit assumptions underlying the rhetoric of the “end of metaphysics”: First, that the hegemonic function of principles necessitates their outright rejection; and second, that the “end of metaphysics” implies the end of the philosophy of principles. To undermine the identification of principles with domination, it is necessary to emphasize a para-metaphysics running alongside the history of metaphysics, by pointing to Aristotle’s ambiguous legacy concerning principles and the way William of Ockham, recalling this tendency in Aristotle, deployed principles *vis-à-vis* individuals. While the positing of metaphysical principles operates under the shroud of pure objectivity, para-metaphysical principles never lose sight of their dominoational nature.

The question of the alleged end of metaphysics can be more easily dealt with by uncovering the para-metaphysical tradition and approaching the problem of the hegemonic functioning of principles in a way different from Heidegger’s. In confronting the history of metaphysics, Heidegger seeks to reveal the inherent groundlessness of all principles. As in the case of the “discovering” of the metaphysical project, however, this “revelation” is a mystified variation of the same approach deployed by the tradition of metaphysics, with the added disadvantage that the principle of

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3. Werner Marx suggests that the beginning of “metaphysics” can be traced to book Z.1 of *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle claims that the question *to on*, “what is being,” is equivalent to the question *is he ousia*, which Marx translates as “what is the essence of a particular being.” See Heidegger and the Tradition, tr. by Theodore Kisiel and Murray Greene (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), pp. 3ff. This translation, however, may not capture the true nature of metaphysics, for it suggests a respect for individuality not typical of the metaphysical tradition.

4. Steven Daniel argues that there is a “paramodern” tradition that is often eclipsed by postmodern critiques of modernity. See his “Paramodern Strategies of Philosophical Historiorhraphy,” in *Epoché*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1993), pp. 44-63. For Daniel, paramodernism is “a modernism within modernism” (59). This “paramodern” tradition, found even in quintessentially modern thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Berkeley, and Kant anticipates some of the concerns of “postmodernity.” The term “para-metaphysical” is used here to identify the thinking of principles within the history of Western philosophy that is not captured by the metaphysical over-determination of the *hegemonic function* of principles.


6. Ibid., 4a14-22.


8. According to Furr: “The relationship . . . is this: they are the same world; however, the *Categories* sees this world in much less depth and detail than do the later works” (Ibid., p. 12).

9. Ugo Gazzoni sees *Physics A* as the place where Aristotle considers individual beings as ontologically grounded. This text is important, because it consists of: “Aristotle’s teaching concerning the principles of becoming as such in its very process of becoming.” See *Grund und Allgemeinheit: Untersuchung zum Aristotelischen Verständnis der ontologischen Gründe* (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1975), pp. 30-32.

10. Ibid., 109b6ff.

through change is no longer the persistence of the individual receiving contrary properties, but the permanence of the form that, as Aristotle puts it at the end of A.7, "is sufficient to produce the change by means of its absence and presence." By ascribing a powerful ontological role to substantial form (eidós), Aristotle goes beyond positing the concrete individual as ontologically primary and raises the question concerning the ontological ground of individual beings—a question with which he deals in depth in the middle books of the Metaphysics.

The question as to whether the primary principle of being is universal or individual haunts the discussion of ousia in the middle books of the Metaphysics. On the one hand, this discussion inherits from the Categories a tendency to give ontological preeminence to individuals; on the other, the introduction in the Physics of a new understanding of eidós suggests that the universal species is better suited to account for the being of the individual. Because of these two competing accounts, for centuries commentators have derived coherent and textually valid solutions from both sides of the universal/individual debate. This problem of interpretation is itself instructive, because it emerges out of Aristotle's attempts to think the ground of being, and opens up the possibility of para-metaphysics.

The case for the universal is based on Aristotle's discussion of the ti en einai or "essence" in Metaphysics Z.4-6, where he suggests that essence is the species (eidós) of a genus, and therefore something to some extent universal. He goes on to argue that, if it is to be knowable, an ousia must be identical with its essence—and it is assumed that if anything is knowable, ousia is. This justifies ascribing universality to the primary principle of being: all knowledge is universal, and if ousia is a mere individual, then it cannot be knowable. Obviously, if ousia turns out to be individual, the possibility of a science (episteme) of being qua being is threatened.

The argument for universals does not depend exclusively on these epistemological concerns, and the universality of essence/form and of ousia is discussed in Z.7-9, where Aristotle is concerned, not with knowledge, but with the generation of composites. This corresponds to the schema outlined in the Physics, where the generation of a composite is understood in terms of the form's embodiment in matter. Here, it is claimed that the form must not be understood to be generated during this process, for otherwise it could not be a ground—a another, ontologically more original form would be required. Thus, Aristotle calls the form a "such," not a "this," and argues that what is generated is a "such this" (tote toiotan). In this manner, he can account for the intergenerational continuity of the form, for the form of the parent is the same as that of the child: "a human being generates a human being." The form can order individually existing beings, because it is both eternal (or at least ungenerated) and universal. This is one strategy deployed to address the problem of grounds.

It is not, however, Aristotle's only strategy. At the beginning of the Metaphysics' investigation into ousia, when he claims that an ousia is a "this something" (tote ti) and "separable" (to choristion), Aristotle posits the ontological priority of the individual. These criteria grow out of his intuition in the Categories that concrete individuals are ontologically primary. Yet, with the introduction in the Physics of the notion of eidos, along with the recognition that the individuals of the Categories are composites of eidos and matter, the question arises as to whether the form or the composite satisfy these conditions best.

One of the arguments in Metaphysics Z.13 against those who want ousia as universal illustrates why Aristotle seeks to posit the ontological priority of the individual. There, he claims that the ousia of something must be peculiar to that being; it cannot belong to another being, for if it did, then two different beings would actually be one and the same.
Thus, because it is common to many beings, something universal cannot
ground separate individuals without reducing them to the same. This
simply reiterates the requirement outlined in Z.6 that the essence of a being
must be identical with the being; if the essence were universal, then it
could not account for individuality. Thus, in the Metaphysics, Aristotle
insists that ousia must be a tode ti, which in its most strict sense denotes a
concrete individual.

Of these two alternatives, the universalizing strategy can account for
continuity through intergenerational change and the possibility of knowl-
edge as traditionally conceived. But it cannot ground the individual’s
individuality, since it turns the individual into a particular — a mere
instantiation of the universal. On the other hand, the individualizing strat-
 egy posits the individual’s uniqueness — its singularity — but cannot
account for continuity and knowledge. In short, the first strategy seems
totalizing; the second, anarchic. There is, however, an undeveloped sugges-
tion that the individualizing strategy may not relinquish its ability to
account for knowledge. In Metaphysics M.10, Aristotle questions the tra-
ditional assumption that “all knowledge is universal: ‘... knowledge,’
(episteme) just as ‘to know,‘ (epistēma) is twofold, being on the one
hand in potentiality, but on the other, in actuality. Potential [knowledge],
like matter, being universal and indeterminate, is of the universal and
indeterminate; but actual [knowledge], being determinate and of that
which is determinate, is ‘this’ and is of a ‘this’.”

Here, Aristotle seems to revise his concept of knowledge by suggest-
ing that knowledge arising directly out of the actual encounter with deter-
nimate individuals may also be considered genuine. This is significant
not only for his individualizing strategy, but also for any critique of “meta-
physics” as a history guided by a fetish for hegemonic principles seeking
to subsume individuals to universals. Here, as elsewhere, Aristotle

foci on determine individuals and grounds his concept of knowledge
in the direct encounter with them. This reorientation of knowledge away
 from universals and toward individuals is eclipsed when the “history of
metaphysics” is couched in terms of the hegemonic operation of universal
principles and their concomitant annihilation of the other. In Aristotle,
there is already a tendency to do justice to actually existing individuals
that persists throughout the so-called “history of metaphysics.”

Taking Sides: Ockham’s Principled Nominalism

The debate between realism and nominalism in later medieval philos-
ophy mirrors these two strategies already present in Aristotle. While the
universalizing, i.e., realist strategy remained viable, because of its ability
to account for both intergenerational continuity and knowledge, the indi-
vidualizing, i.e., nominalist strategy also became popular with thinkers
wanting to maintain that God’s creative power is absolute and absolutely
free. Realism threatens the free creative power of God for the very rea-
sons it is successful: the continuity of being and knowing must ultimately
be traced back to the divine mind. If universal principles are grounds of
beings, then they must also be the grounds of God’s creation. Universal
principles must be ultimately resolved into divine ideas in God’s mind.

On the other hand, the nominalist strategy must confront the question
concerning the possibility of knowledge if it wants to avoid a skeptical
(anarchic) stance toward the world. Thus, for medieval nominalism, the
task is to regard the individual as ontologically basic, while at the same
time recognizing the universality of knowledge.

In this context, William of Ockham reclaims the reading of Aristotle
that gives priority to the individual. For him, all beings that exist outside
the soul are singular, and cannot be thought to be constituted by or com-
posed of a universal principle. Otherwise, either such a universal principle
would have no relation to individuals, or it will ultimately be resolved into
singular things. More importantly, he questions the grounding function
of universality in its relation to an individual. How could an individual be
constituted by a universal principle and still be an individual? As the
essence of the individual, such a universal would make the individual both

23. Ibid., 1031b19-22. For a detailed discussion of Z.13, see Loux, op. cit., pp. 197-
235, who argues that Aristotle only rejects the notion that ousia is a universal qua genus,
but not in other senses. For an argument that Z.13 makes the stronger claim, i.e., that ousia
cannot be universal in any sense, see Frode and Patzig, op. cit., pp. 241-263.
25. Ibid., 1087a14-18.
26. At issue here is Aristotle’s “empiricism.” At the end of Posterior Analytics, he
argues that even scientific knowledge (episteme) derives its universals from experience
with individuals by induction (epagoge) (100b3-5). In the Nicomachean Ethics, he insists
that, although operating with universals, practical wisdom (prōnēsēs) must also know
individuals (1141b14-16). In both cases, direct experience with individuals is decisive.
This strategy also guides Aristotle’s biological work.

27. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologicae Pars Prima, Quaestio 15.
28. Ockham’s notion of the soul is similar to Aristotle’s. Yet, for Ockham, what is
most important is that knowledge is its antikeimenon, i.e., a proper object that the soul, by
its very nature, grasps. Thus, for Ockham and all medieval Aristotelians, knowledge is
analyzed in conjunction with sensation.
The universal is therefore analyzed along linguistic, rather than ontological, lines. Just as a window display in a shop signifies that those items are for sale, so also the concept "human" signifies this and that human, etc. In this way, while the universal is a principle of knowing things, it is not a principle of the being of the thing known through it. In addition, this universal knowledge always presupposes knowledge of the singular, because knowledge is caused by things that are always singular. Thus, Ockham reinterprets Aristotle's statement that "The intellect understands universals, the senses, however, only know singulars," to distinguish the intellect (i.e., nous) from the senses: knowledge can be of both the singular and the universal, while sensation can be only of the singular. He modifies the traditional understanding of Aristotle's nous into a foundational knowledge with the singular as its proper object. The truth of a proposition that contains a universal sign such as "Socrates is human" is determined not because there is some principle of Socrates's being that is humanity, but because "human" will signify a number of individual things, one of which is Socrates. This means that universals are ontologically posterior to existing individuals. As signs, they have a proper function in science (episteme) and in other spheres of human activity. However, since they are signs, they cannot be posited in advance of things. For Ockham, universal principles begin with the sheer givenness of the singular. As posterior to singulars, universals function as principles of knowledge that need to be constantly held in check by singulars.

If Ockham removes principles from the economy of being, he also reorients knowing so that it can deal with the givenness of singularity. Taking its cue from Aristotle's universalizing strategy, realism reserved "knowledge" for universal principles. Ockham's nominalism develops an account of intuitive knowledge that begins with a response to the individual. This kind of knowledge is the basis of all knowledge, including science (episteme). Furthermore, all knowledge deserves that name only to the extent that it can be reduced to this basic kind of knowledge. Intuitive knowledge establishes not only the thing's existence and non-existence,

30. Ibid., 53.
34. Ibid., 31: "Intuitive knowledge of a thing is such knowledge by virtue of which it can be known whether the thing is or is not, such that if the thing is, the intellect immediately judges it to be and evidently knows that it is."
but also the context in which the thing is encountered. This act of knowing remains tied to the context that caused it. Even when it is universal, its semiotic function always responds to the concrete individual(s) that the concept signifies and which caused it.

On the eve of the turn from substantial form to subjectivity, Ockham developed a principled nominalism. Since the soul is not separated from the world, its concept can be traced back to the world in which it finds itself. Caused by the individual, the universal concept signifies the individual and allows the formulation of true statements about it. Yet, because it is a concept, it cannot be the individual’s ontological principle, which is left untouched by universals. The deployment of principles always respects individuals, because it depends on them.

The Problem with Principles: Heidegger

Aristotle’s individualizing strategy and Ockham’s nominalism exemplify the para-metaphysical approach to principles at the heart of the so-called “history of metaphysics.” They illustrate that both domination and its critique belong to the deployment of principles. Heidegger’s “end of metaphysics” eclipses the para-metaphysical account of principles by understanding them one-dimensionally in terms of domination.

Throughout his long career, Heidegger was always concerned with the relation of being (Sein) to rational ground, i.e., the essence of principle. Early on, he realized that the principle of ground, articulated in Leibniz’ principle of sufficient reason, is groundless. In short, beings do not have a ground. For Heidegger, metaphysics has posited the ground of beings in the form of reason. When the principle of ground is questioned, its way of coming to presence — abyss — is revealed. For Heidegger, this abyss is an expression of truth as event. In the 1930s, he saw the truth of beings in terms of their coming-to-presence and withdrawal, i.e., as the abyss. As a result, he brought to language the withdrawal of principles in their very coming-to-presence: “Being is the abyss.”

The mystification implicit in Heidegger’s early thought (including his use of religious and quasi-religious terminology) becomes explicit with his notion of the abyss — an empty concept — as the essence of ground. For Heidegger, ground functions dominationally in giving to things an account (ratio) that forces them to answer to the demands of reason. If in the 1930s Heidegger wants to think the truth of being as the event (Ereignis) of appropriation, then ground or rather grounding will also have to be thought of as appropriation. In other words, ground determines how truth happens, as the truth of being. Ground, i.e., what makes a principle what it is, is to be thought of not as the ultimate foundation of beings, and therefore of truth, but as paving the way for the event of truth. If being (Sein) is thought of as event, then truth will be the clearing of the self-concealing of this occurrence. As this clearing, truth is the “ground as the abyss”: the ground wherein eventuation occurs.

Although Heidegger wants to trace ground back to its own lack of ground, he pays too high a price. Especially for the Heidegger of the 1930s, ground arises from need. Yet, this need is not human, but inheres in being (Sein). Thus, the need for ground is traced back to being (Sein) — being as arrival (Austrag) and event (Ereignis), and therefore as abyss. The danger here is that this appeal to the abyss can function as a groundless ground for any possible economy of principles. Abyss merely names the ways in which being (Sein) occurs, but remains impotent in analyzing the economies in which it has already come to presence. By attempting to think the abyss as the originary coming to presence and withdrawal of being (Sein), which is inherently ahistorical and blind to socio-historical contexts, Heidegger leaves no room in which to engage critically the

35. ibid.: “... intuitive knowledge is such that when some things are known of which one inheres in the other, is locally distant from the other, or ... is related to the other, it is immediately known by virtue of such simple knowledge whether the thing inheres or does not inher, whether it is distant or close, and so on concerning other contingent truths.”

36. See Richard Lee, Science, the Singular, and the Question of Theology (New York: Palgrave-St. Martin’s, in press).

37. Here Sein is not translated as “Being” (with a capital “B”) in order to challenge its ontological difference. To avoid ambiguity, the German word will appear in brackets.


39. Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe: Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis), op. cit., Vol. 65, p. 379. “Abys” for Heidegger simply names the staying away of ground, “Coming to presence” for Heidegger must also be understood, at the same time, as a withdrawing.


41. Heidegger explicitly appeals to the notion of emptiness in his analysis of the abyss in the Beiträge, op. cit., pp. 380f.

42. Heidegger, “Die Geschichte Des Seyns,” Gesamtausgabe, op. cit., Vol. 69, p. 95 (emphasis in the original): “History is the grounding of the truth of Seyn, indeed in such a way, that this grounding as such an eventuation is in the event of appropriation as arrival.”


44. Heidegger, “Beseinnung,” op. cit., Vol. 66, p. 46: “Seyn is the de-ciding for itself as the abyss and thus the ungroundable need of the necessity of all grounding.”
ways in which principles are always already expressions of and determined by the socio-historical contexts in which they come about. To insist that no account of the abyss is possible is to relinquish the possibility of holding the abyss accountable — and this disengagement becomes particularly troubling when the revealing/concealing of being comes about in a politically dangerous fashion. If one sees this posituring of the abyss as the end of metaphysics (recognizing that metaphysics is inherently hegemonic), then all talk of such an end annihilates the possibility of critique.

Critique and/or Principles: Adorno on Heidegger's Ground

These dangers were recognized by Adorno. Although Adorno shares Heidegger's concern for the problem of grounding principles, he recognizes that the question of ground, which arises out of the attempt to think beings, has to do with the very relation of thinking to beings. He insists that philosophy must recognize (in the form of dialectics) that "the objects are not completely absorbed in their concept, that these come into contradiction with the received norm of adequatio." He wants to expose the non-identity that is occluded in the process of thinking with identity. For Adorno, all thinking is identifying. As such, it is "the rigorous awareness of the non-identical" that drives identitarian thinking to recognize "its unavoidable insufficiency, its guilt concerning that which it thinks."

Thus, where Heidegger seeks to evade the guilt endemic to thinking by delegating it to the merely "ontological," Adorno recognizes both the inadequacy and the inescapability of conceptual thinking. He explicitly rejects the ontological difference — "No being (Sein), without being (Seiende)" — and in so doing, he rejects the step back behind the occurrence of being (Sein) as an attempt to push philosophical thinking beyond the conceptual, i.e., beyond itself. To put Adorno's position in Heideggerian terms, the abyss is in fact the truth of being (Sein/Seyn), but only because every economy of principles is unable to capture completely the objects of its concern. Adorno’s "rigorous awareness" of this remainder — of the irreducible non-identity of being and thought — makes possible the critique of any particular economy of principles. In this way, he provides a perspective from which not only to flesh out the critique of Heidegger's abyssal attempt to step back behind the economies of principles to their primordial mode of coming-to-presence and withdrawing (the abyss), but also to deal with the crisis of the end of metaphysics in a way that retains the capacity for critique.

Heidegger's appeal to the abyss has a counterproductive effect. Instead of resulting in the recognition of the inability of thinking to capture exhaustively the being of beings (Das Sein der Seienden), it forces thinking into a realm for which it is completely ill equipped. In so doing, Heidegger enjoins thinking to jettison the concepts with which it operates, forcing it instead to follow the sense [Sinn] of the primordial abyss. The consequence of such an injunction is the mystification of what remains outside conceptual thinking. Heidegger's response to this mystification is to recast thinking in the form of Besinnung. Unable to deploy concepts, thinking naturally mystifies what remains beyond its grasp and infuses it with the aura of the original. According to Adorno, Heidegger's attempt "to come to terms with the inaccessibility of the empirical" loses its way when what does not fit within the determinations of thinking cannot be made transparent, but remains in its pure "thereness," is changed into a universal concept and stamped with ontological worth.

Paradoxically, this sort of mystification turns into reification: "In reaction to the loss [Verlust] of the aura, Heidegger rearranges its function, turning the fact that things point beyond themselves into a substrate and in this way making that fact itself like a thing." To this mystified reification, Adorno opposes dialectical critique, which "respects the concept of the first being (Seins) itself: Heidegger repeats the Hegelian legere demain. Only Hegel does this openly, while Heidegger, not wanting to be an idealist, turbidly shrouds the ontologization of the ontical. The driving force behind

45. This ahistorical thinking of principles is in direct opposition to the historical thinking Heidegger pursues in the 1930's. For Heidegger, history is the history of being, and, as such, stands behind, beneath, or outside of the socio-political, or even ordinary events that are normally seen as constituting history.
47. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, op. cit., p. 15.
48. Ibid.
49. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, op. cit., p. 135.
dressing up the deficiency of a concept as its surplus is in each case the old Platonic error that whatever is nonsensible is the higher.\textsuperscript{54}

The hypostatization of what is beyond the conceptual always amounts to a renunciation of critique. It mystifies what remains after thinking encounters concrete beings by infusing it with unassailable authority. For Adorno, the deficiency of the concept is indeed its surplus, not as something higher, better, more originary, but rather as the point of departure of critique. Thus, by setting dialectical critique against Heidegger's "mindfulness" of the abyss, Adorno recognizes that Heidegger's originary ontological thinking annihilates the possibility of any critique of principles. It does this by leaving the individual behind in thought's pursuit of the abyss.

In order to retain the possibility of critique, two aspects of principles must be recognized: principles are always determined by the socio-historical context in which they are deployed, and the deployment of principles is by nature coercive. While Heidegger seeks to eschew the guilt endemic to the coercion of thinking by appealing to the ahistorical, pre-conceptual originality of the abyss, Adorno, acknowledging that guilt is intertwined with thinking, responds to the coercion of identitarian thinking by pointing to its socio-historical contingency and pursuing the need for self-reflective critique.\textsuperscript{55} Thinking must recognize its guilt and be capable of responding to the individual in the concrete context in which it is encountered.

Principles function coercively both as origins of and within whatever economy they establish. Since, however, they can never completely capture what they are meant to determine, there is always space from which they can be challenged, questioned, and revised. The remainder that is not captured by principles is what makes critical thinking possible. The wish to step back behind the deployment of principles and escape historical contingency has haunted philosophy since Parmenides. Rather than submitting to philosophy's futile attempts to achieve absolute freedom, Adorno recognizes that "all philosophy, even that with the intention towards freedom, carries unfreedom with itself... Philosophy has coercion in itself, but this coercion alone protects philosophy from regressing into the arbitrary. Thinking is able to critically recognize its immanent coercive character; its own coercion is the medium of its emancipation."\textsuperscript{56}

The point Adorno establishes by emphasizing freedom and emancipation can be more effectively recast in terms of justice, understood as the ability to respond to the individual in the context in which it is encountered. Adorno already anticipates this shift from freedom to justice.\textsuperscript{57} This reorientation of thinking away from the possibilities of being toward the actual encounter with concrete, historical beings turns thinking toward justice. Thinking is no longer the pure positing of the subject, nor is it a mystified attempt to think beyond the conceptual. Rather, it is the dynamic response to direct concrete encounters between beings. To be sure, the individual never finds its complete determination in the conceptual, but cannot encounter it without it. To a certain extent, such thinking has already been anticipated by the para-metaphysical elements in Aristotelian and Ockham.

**Principles and Endgames: Towards Critically Transformative Action**

Wrapped in the rhetoric of the "end of metaphysics" is the assumption that the history of Western philosophy can be seen for what it was, precisely because contemporary philosophy, standing at the alleged closure of metaphysics, escapes its determination.\textsuperscript{59} Yet, no mere positing of an end, not even an infinite proliferation of "posts-" can separate the present from the history which determined it. This is why the problem of grounding principles had to be rethought through an historical analysis of the ways in which economies of principles have been established.

This analysis was designed to emphasize another side of the history of Western philosophy that is not cleanly captured under "metaphysics." The polemic attack on metaphysics sees Aristotle as prefiguring the hegemonic way the universalizing strategy of principles functions. This understanding of the role of principles gained influence under medieval realist interpretations such as that of Aquinas and was legitimated in Hegel's account of the history of philosophy as the unfolding of the concept. Aristotle, however,

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p. 58.
\textsuperscript{57} Adorno, "Die Idee der Naturgeschichte," op. cit., p. 355: "the concrete unity [of nature and history] is one that is not oriented by the opposition between possible being [das Sein] and actual being [das Sein], but one that is created out of the determination of the actual being [das Sein] itself. The scheme of history in the new ontology [i.e., in Heidegger] has the chance only to earn ontological worth and the prospect to come to an actual interpretation of being, if it radically directs itself not towards the possibilities of being, but towards being [das Seinendes] as such in its concrete, inner-historical determinateness.

deploy another strategy that seeks to do justice to the individual in the context in which it obtains. This strategy, resulting from Aristotle’s interest in saving the phenomena, suggests a para-metaphysical approach toward the deployment of principles. Ockham’s philosophy manifests this approach when it argues that principles arise out of encounters with individuals, and operate within these contexts. Perhaps more than any other thinker, however, he was aware of the danger of positing these principles as ontologically responsible for individual beings. If this para-metaphysical approach is already operative in Aristotle and Ockham, it may also obtain in other thinkers. Para-metaphysics runs alongside and within the history of metaphysics, calling into question the legitimacy of subsuming such a variegated tradition under a single overarching principle.\footnote{See Stanley Rosen, The Question of Being (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). Rosen argues that Heidegger’s account of the history of metaphysics is misguided when it locates its origins in the so-called “theory of Ideas”; “metaphysics as we know it (but not necessarily as it ought to be known) is a product of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, not of Platonism” (p. 30). For Rosen the science of being qua being in Aristotle is often over determined by categories and predicative assertions — an over determination that has a powerful “metaphysical” history. Rosen also recognizes that “there is no single science of being in the Aristotelian corpus . . . but there is a science of being qua being that has determined the historical destiny of metaphysics” (p. 28). Since Rosen wants to sever the alleged identification Heidegger establishes between Platonic and Aristotelian thinking, his attempt to shoulder Aristotle with the tradition of metaphysics is understandable.}

The rhetoric of the “end of metaphysics” does point to the danger implicit in the hegemonic functioning of principles. However, the para-metaphysical dimensions of the tradition suggest that the hegemonic functioning of principles is not as exclusively pernicious as the critique of metaphysics claims. The real danger lies with the outright rejection of principles. Once all appeals to principle have been abdicated, there is no place from which to critique the hegemony of principles. The fetishization of the hegemonic dimension of principles eclipses its critical capacity. Principles are critical both because they are required for thinking and because they provide a site from which to critically engage the manner in which their application always informs the economies in which they are deployed. Such critical engagement renders theory practical: what critique is to theory, transformative action is to practice.

The hegemonic functioning of principles is never merely a matter of theory, it also always sets power into play and determines the players related by means of that power. What has been thematized from the theoretical perspective as the hegemonic functioning of principles must be recognized from the practical perspective as their inherent normativity.

Principles necessarily establish economies on the basis of values. To deny this normative role to principles by reifying them is to think action as operating within and being limited by social and political structures legitimated by those very objective principles. This conception of action collapses under the critique of metaphysics. However, to recognize the normative functioning of principles and yet to shroud it in an aura of mystery is to relinquish action to the mere play of force. This either fails to appreciate or intentionally obfuscates the transformation of force into the exclusive normative principle of action. When principles are reified, action cannot be transformative. When mystified, action cannot be critical. In either case, critical transformative action is abdicated: what is to be done is always already what has been done.

The legacy of para-metaphysics suggests that to maintain the capacity to critically transform the very structures of power within which principles are always deployed, action must be thought as embedded in and informed by principles. Just as the emancipation of thinking is possible only when it apprehends its own immanent coercive character, so too the transformative capacity of action first becomes possible when its coercive character is recognized. The coercion of action and thinking emerges as an inevitable result of the encounter between principles and the individuals they seek to determine. Both the history of metaphysics and the rhetoric of its end render it impossible to critically engage the hegemony of principles. The para-metaphysics that seeks to do justice to the individual provides a resource for thinking action as critical and transformative. Action is critical only when in remaining accountable to the individual it recognizes its own normative function. This recognition secures action against the arbitrary—the mere play of forces—for critical action can only take place within an economy of already operative principles. Action is transformative when it vigilantly holds open its own normativity to the encounter with the individual. This encounter is the irreducible origin of all principles, the site from which they emerge and to which they must remain accountable. To avoid succumbing completely to its inherent hegemony, critically transformative action must allow itself to be guided and determined by the individuals in the name of whom it acts. Without reference to the individual, critical transformative action becomes totalizing; without principles, it becomes arbitrary.