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The Education of Kanzi and the Notion of Progress: Reza Negarestani's *Intelligence and Spirit*

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I.

Published a decade after his philo-fictional extravaganza *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials*,[1] Reza Negarestani's *Intelligence and Spirit* draws upon a wide range resources, philosophical and otherwise, in an attempt to 'think a thought as grand as the universe itself' as Ken Lui once framed the task placed upon any finite, intelligent species 'worthy of the name'.[2] More precisely, Negarestani describes 'intelligence' in such a way that its capability of thinking a thought this grand (one that transcends space, time and death itself) is rendered explicit. In order to accomplish

[1] Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia: Complicity with Anonymous Materials* (Melbourne: re-press, 2008).

[2] 'The universe is full of echoes and shadows, the after images and last words of dead civilizations that have lost the struggle against entropy. Fading ripples in the cosmic background radiation, it is doubtful if most, or any, of these messages will ever be deciphered. Likewise, most of our thoughts and memories are destined to fade, to disappear, to be consumed by the very act of choosing and living. That is not cause for sorrow, sweetheart. It is the fate of every species to disappear into the void that is the heat death of the universe. But long before then, the thoughts of any intelligent species worthy of the name will become as grand as the universe itself'. Ken Liu, 'An Advanced Readers' Picture Book of Comparative Cognition' in *The Paper Menagerie and Other Stories* (New York: Saga Press, 2016), pp. 193-207 (p. 206).

this, the work eschews the traditional question of what intelligence *is* and instead adopts a functionalist approach outlining what intelligence *does*: How it navigates an intelligible world it does not map onto by way of a given, pre-established harmony, and how intelligence is capable of cultivating a mind that 'becomes the artefact or object of its own conception'.[3] Mind is something made and remade in accordance with autonomously selected ends, a process made possible through the work of intelligence. Intelligence and Spirit is deeply philosophical and deeply Hegelian. Further, it pays no attention to the division between analytic and continental philosophy in its attempt to provide a synoptic and non-dogmatic account of what intelligence does. Consequently, Intelligence and Spirit defies straightforward classification. For these and other reasons, those unfamiliar with Negarestani's publications in the interim period between this most recent work and Cyclonopedia will assuredly experience an intellectual whiplash when first opening the book. However, this dense and challenging book is well worth the time put in by the attentive and patient reader.

The following accomplishes two tasks. The first is to present what I take to be the narrative of *Intelligence and Spirit* in broad strokes. I focus on the work's main character, Kanzi, and the battle waged against the Myth of the Given throughout Kanzi's education. The second task is to interrogate what *Intelligence and Spirit* does when situated in dialogue with the aspirations of the Enlightenment project, understood broadly in line with Foucault's minimalist take on Enlightenment as 'defined by a modification of the pre-existing relation linking will, authority, and the use of reason'.[4] In order to bring to the fore the novelty of *Intelligence and Spirit*'s contribution to this Enlightenment project, I stage an encounter between the text and Amy Allen's recent work on the pernicious role the notion of 'progress' can play in contemporary critical theory's inheritance of Enlightenment ideals. In particular, I argue that the 'catastrophic

[3] Reza Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit* (Folmouth and New York: Urbanomic/Sequence Press, 2018), p. 2.

[4] Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' trans. by Catherine Porter in *The Foucault Reader* ed. by Paul Rabinow, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984) pp. 32-50 (pp. 34-35).

rationalism' of *Intelligence and Spirit* - that is, a use of reason as a revisionary tool for breaking with past and present constraints - allows the work to further the Enlightenment project while sidestepping some of the more destructive aspects isolated by Allen. The explicitly stated goal of Negarestani's text is to articulate a theory of artificial general intelligence defined as 'an artificial intelligence that has, *at the very least*, all of our competencies for theoretical and practical cognition'.[5] However, approaching *Intelligence and Spirit* from the broader perspective of its relationship to the Enlightenment project shows that the text accomplishes more than it explicitly sets out to.[6]

II.

Despite its complexity, *Intelligence and Spirit* has a relatively straightforward plot. The story focuses on the process by which the protagonist, an 'embodied automaton'[7] named Kanzi, comes to formulate a sophisticated, conceptually laden awareness of the opening sequence of Stanley Kubrick's *2001*: *A Space Odyssey*. Kanzi's journey is thus a thoroughly Hegelian one insofar as it provides a 'detailed history of the *education* [Bildung] of consciousness itself to the standpoint of Science'.[8] The German here, *Bildung*, is crucial insofar as it simultaneously signifies education and formation. As Kanzi's education progresses, Kanzi does not

[5] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 93.

[6] This does not go unnoticed by Negarestani: 'AGI, nonparochially conceived does not step outside of the meaning of the human. Rather it marks the maturity of the human that has finally recognized its meaning not in virtue of its contingent constitution but in spite of it. This is a conception of the human as an all-encompassing collective project of self-conception and self-transformation whose veritable consequence is the reinvention of the human through the modification of its structure and the expansion of its universally necessary abilities'. (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 123). I have chosen to highlight this later element of the project in fear that it might go unnoticed among less charitable readers.

[7] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 145.

[8] G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 50.

just acquire new knowledge; Kanzi becomes otherwise, formed anew in accordance with novel affordances. Put otherwise, what Kanzi knows intimately overlaps with what Kanzi can do, and this in turn changes what Kanzi is. In order to detail Kanzi's education, Negarestani (both in theory and in the jovial illustrations of Lego constructions that populate the pages of the work) builds what he calls 'toy models', Kanzi being one of these. The purpose of the toy model is to accommodate 'a wide range of theoretical assumptions for the purpose of organizing and constructing overarching narratives (or explicit metatheories) that change the standard and implicit metatheoretical interpretations according to which such theoretical items are generally represented'.[9] The toy model is distinct from an example insofar as it makes its theoretical presuppositions known at the start. Further, whereas the example attempts to show something, the model attempts to *do* something. The ultimate end goal of Negarestani's toy models is to generate from the ground up the discursive space of reasons in which mind is able to be the 'artefact of its own conception' instead of presupposing this space of reasons in advance. By extension, though it draws upon the work of Robert Brandom (most notably the notion of deontic score-keeping, the game of giving and asking for reasons as well as the explicit elaboration of one's commitments[10]), *Intelligence and Spirit*

[9] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 124.

[10] See Robert Brandom: 'to treat a performance as an assertion is to treat it as the undertaking or acknowledging of a certain kind of *commitment* – what will be called a 'doxastic' or 'assertional', commitment. To be doxastically committed it to have a certain social status. Doxastic commitments are normative, more specifically *deontic*, statuses. Such statuses are creatures of the practical attitudes of the members of a linguistic community – they are instituted by practices governing the taking and treating of individuals *as* committed. Doxastic commitments are essentially a kind of deontic status for which the question of *entitlement* can arise. Their inferential articulation, in virtue of which they deserve to be understood as propositionally contentful, consists in consequential relations among the particular doxastic commitments and entitlements – the ways in which one claim can commit or entitle one to others (for which it accordingly can serve as a reasons)'. Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 142.

is not satisfied with remaining in his authoritative shadow.[11] Further, the toy model approach allows Negarestani to create a space of methodological pluralism in which distinct practices can contribute to the model without overriding or drowning one another out. He explains *a propos* artificial general intelligence that '[a]n AGI big toy model should be able to coherently accommodate different models derived from physics, evolutionary biology, neuroscience, developmental psychology, multi-agent system design, linguistics, logic, and computer science'.[12] Negarestani proceeds to draw upon all of these fields in his description of Kanzi's education. This pluralistic modelling respects the complexity of the account developed while simultaneously and self-consciously limiting the descriptive scope of its particular claims.

Throughout the work and throughout Kanzi's *Bildung*, Kanzi is granted multiple minimal capacities, such as the instantiation of 'diffuse and recurring goals centred on the maintenance and preservation of the system qua agent'[13]; the tendency to 'engage in activities that increase the

[11] See, in particular 'Keep it in Focus: A Dialogue in Eight Acts' pp. 364-376. This section begins with a discussion of Jean-Yves Girard's ludics '[d]efined at the intersection between linear logic (a substructural logic capable of capturing the duality of intersection and the interchange of roles), proof theory, game semantics, and computer science' that 'introduces a logico-computational framework in which, at the *deepest level*, the distinction between syntax and semantics collapses' (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 365). Negarestani then concludes that 'unlike the pragmatic theory of meaning as use – even in its Brandomian version, which significantly differs from its original Wittgensteinian form – for ludics there is not preestablished space of reasons into which one graduates. The generation of rules and the capacity to reason are inconceivable without interaction, and are inseparable from the complex contexts that arise throughout its course. However, contra Sellars, this interaction is not a matter of acquaintance with norms as a matter of cultural evolution; and contra Brandom, it is not an index of a substantive sociality of reason. It is rather the very formal condition of language and meaning – a logico-computational dynamics that realizes the syntax-semantics interface. The substantive sociality of reason is built upon this formal condition, not the other way around' (*Ibid.*, p. 376).

[12] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 126.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 145.

probability of goal-fulfilment'[14]; sensory receptors capable of generating reliable differential responsiveness; a 'sufficiently complex and functionally flexible memory capable of encoding, retrieval, consolidation, discarding, and transfer of sensory impressions'[15]; and eventually the capacity for the production of 'quasi-continuous sounds'.[16] From these minimal capacities in combination with occupying a 'multi-agent system' which is 'designed to enable interaction between automata/agents as a way of increasing the probability of goal attainment'[17] Kanzi eventually becomes a fully-fledged, socially situated, concept wielding agent. This enables Kanzi to transition from the observation that 'the mass of grey reaches the heap of black, moves away, makes contact with it and then moves away, again and again' to the judgment that '[o]nce the monkey finds the monolith, it starts examining it, screams, panics, runs away, and comes back to touch it again'.[18] Kanzi goes from reporting spatial relationships between blobs of distinct coloration to attributing intentional acts and attitudes to agents. The content of Kanzi's awareness moves from indeterminate happenings to the complex, conceptually determinate experiences of a self-conscious subject that is embedded within a community of language users. Eventually, Kanzi no longer passively takes in a chaotic flow of blobs and occurrences but instead actively shapes this initially inchoate experience alongside other agents. Once educated to a sufficient degree, Kanzi no long merely occupies a world; *Kanzi makes a world.*

Like any good origin story, *Intelligence and Spirit* likewise has an antagonist: the Myth of the Given. Wilfrid Sellars initially developed his criticism of this myth in order to further dismantle philosopher's misplaced trust in immediacy by targeting the larger problem of 'givenness'.[19] Sellars'

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 145.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 149
[16] *Ibid.*, p. 250.
[17] *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 156.
[19] As James R O'Shea explains, '[a]s thus independently knowable, the given would be fit to serve as *datum*: a secure basis or starting point on which to build an account

Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind begins by attacking the empiricist assumption that self-authenticating, non-verbal episodes can be taken to be either a) epistemically authoritative *in isolation* or b) foundational for inferential, conceptual knowledge while being themselves non-inferential.[20] He expands his critique of the Given to include not just the empirical givens of empiricism, but also what he calls the Myth of the Categorical Given, which applies to philosophy more broadly. Sellars explains that 'to reject the Myth of the Given is to reject the idea that the categorical structure of the world – if it has a categorical structure – imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on wax'.[21] In both cases, either empirical or categorical, the error is that 'givenness' is taken to be 'a fact which presupposes no learning, no forming of associations, no setting up of stimulus-response connections'.[22] Put otherwise, proponents of the Myth of the Given deny the temporal, social and therefore historical nature of our ability to take things as 'thus and so'. For example, in the case of Kanzi, to take a monkey *as* a monkey and not just 'a grey mass' is neither a given feature of consciousness, nor a cognitive capability achievable by an isolated individual. The same applies to the capacity to attribute intentional attitudes; descriptions such as 'finds' and 'examines' demand

of our knowledge of other things. Let us call the idea that there is any such independently knowable datum the idea of the *epistemic given*. Sellars wants to show that this widespread idea is a myth: we have no such knowledge'. James R O'Shea, *Wilfrid Sellars: Naturalism with a Normative Turn,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p.107.

[20] Sellars captures the incoherence of the doctrine of 'sense-data' in the following 'inconsistent triad': the sense-data theorist attempts to hold that 'A) *X senses red sense contents s* entails *x non-inferentially knows the s is red*. B) The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired. C) The ability to know facts of the form *x is* ϕ is acquired'. Sellars' point is that one cannot consistently hold A, B, and C to be true all at once. In fact, 'A and B together entail not-C; B and C entail not-A; A and C entail not-B'. Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 21.

[21]Wilfrid Sellars, 'The Lever of Archimedes' in *In the Space of Reasons*, ed. by Kevin Scharp and Robert B. Brandom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 229-257 (p. 237).

[22] Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 20.

more than the observation that one mass 'makes contact, and moves away'. In short, acquiring such reliable reporting capacities is not a given feature of consciousness, and instead takes time, work and help.

The centrality of Negarestani's assault on the Myth of the Given is most clearly evidenced in his brief yet crucial discussion of metaphysics. Though 'metaphysics' is not entirely the slanderous word it once was, open endorsements of metaphysical inquiry in Continental philosophy (broadly understood) remain somewhat rare. For example, Markus Gabriel rejects metaphysics in favour of ontology because the former, he claims, speaks of a 'unified overall reality' that does not exist, it speaks of 'nothing'.[23] Meillassoux, whose critique of correlationism served as a rallying cry for a return to realism in continental philosophy, also rejects metaphysics understood as 'every type of thinking that claims to be able to access some form of absolute being'.[24] Negarestani, like Meillassoux, attempts to unbind the restraints placed upon thought's reach largely in the wake of 20th century Heideggerianism in order to 'reconcile thought and absolute'.[25] Consequently, Negarestani's project can be considered 'speculative' in Meillassoux's sense, that is a 'type of thinking that claims to have access to some form of absolute'.[26] However, while Meillassoux's investigation into the reaches of thought and the capacities of rationality leads him to embrace an extreme form of irrationalism grounded in intellectual intuition, Negarestani correctly seeks to open up thought's reach by articulating the conditions and constraints that allow rationality to operate as it does. Further, and in fact by extension, for Negarestani the end

[23] 'Metaphysics takes many shapes, but all metaphysical theories arguable agree that there is a unified overall reality, the world, which is at least unified by the fact that everything that exists co-exists in that domain […] I defend *meta-metaphysical nihilism*, that is, the view that metaphysics literally talks about nothing, that there is no object or domain it refers to'. Markus Gabriel, *Felids of Sense: A New Realist Ontology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), pp. 6-7.

[24] Quinten Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. by Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 34.

[25] *Ibid.*, p.128.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

goal of rejecting the metaphysics of the given 'is not to be quietist when it comes to metaphysics'.[27] Against the metaphysical quietism which leads to unacknowledged dogmatism, Negarestani proposes four principles according to which we can demarcate a 'robust metaphysics', the third of which testifies most explicitly to his inheritance of Sellars' project.[28] Negarestani explains that an essential criterion of a robust metaphysics is to 'suspend the prima facie correspondence between the dimensions of reality and the characteristics which our experiences of the world prima facie appear to have'.[29] As Sellars argued, the structure of reality does not actively press itself upon a passive mind as a seal would upon wax. Further, any veridical mapping between mind and world – or intelligence and the intelligible – takes work. Sundering the preestablished harmony between thinking and being is a necessary precondition for the philosophy of intelligence. In this sense, metaphysics, and any worthwhile philosophy, is for Negarestani deeply Sellarsian. Further, the aforementioned connection to Meillassoux's speculative project displays the phoenix of rationalism that has risen from the ashes of the speculative realist 'movement'. Though, as Ray Brassier has pointed out,[30] 'speculative realism' was never a fully cohesive philosophical position, it must be acknowledged that it emboldened a new generation of philosophers to reengage with themes

[27] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 232.

[28] The full list runs as follows: 'For a metaphysical system to be identified as robust, it should: (1) be open to systematic *theoretical* assessment in the sense of the qualifier defined in chapter 1[see in particular pages 51-54 in which Negarestani discusses the relation between, a) 'language', b) 'structure', and c) 'a universe of discourse', which combine to articulate a rigorous theoretical framework]; (2) proceed via the dimension of *conceptualization* of structure rather than via the positioning of an account of reality deemed to be *already structured* independently of mind; (3)suspend the prima facie correspondence between the dimensions of reality and characteristics which our experiences of the world prima facie appear to have; (4) develop a notion of mind, Idea, or geist whose finitude is suspended since it is sufficiently differentiated from life (*bios*) or the natural (which is finite in so far as it is subject to temporal time)' (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, pp. 232-233).

[29] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 232.

[30] Ray Brassier, 'Postscript: Speculative Autopsy' in Peter Wolfendale, *Object-Oriented Philosophy: The Noumenon's New Clothes*' (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), pp. 407-422.

largely excised from mainstream philosophical discourse, such as the material conditions for the emergence of self-conscious subjectivity and the scope of rationality. Recent works such as *Intelligence and Spirit* that embrace a certain type of rationalism display how 'speculation' has been refined and specified, and thereby ought no longer to serve as a carte blanche catchall justification for unbounded philosophical production.

The discussion of robust metaphysics takes place in the fourth chapter titled 'Some Unsettling Kantian News, as Delivered by Boltzmann (An Excursion into Time)'. As the title suggests, this chapter largely centres upon dispelling longstanding philosophical dogmas regarding time and temporality. However, elements of this analysis yield insight into the methodology of *Intelligence and Spirit* as a whole. In this chapter, Negarestani draws upon the work of Ludwig Boltzmann to argue that the order and sequencing of macro-states and processes cannot be assumed to correspond to the order and sequencing of the micro-states of which they are composed. For example, the temporal structuring of experience to which we as embodied *homo sapien sapiens* find ourselves confined cannot be taken to be structurally determinative of the processes that undergird experience itself. It must be emphasized that Negarestani's conclusions in both this chapter and others are not to be taken as eliminative: to claim that the temporal structuring of experience cannot be generalized without reason is not to deny the reality of this particular temporal structure within the larger systems in which experience is enmeshed. As Negarestani explains 'a robust model of time should be an expression of a reality that constitutes local temporal perspectives without being reducible to them. Thus, reencountered within this model, our temporal perspective should be seen as a local self-expression of an absolute (atemporal) reality, rather than being dismissed as a complete illusion'.[31] Just because the temporal experience to which we are confined cannot be generalized without justification, this does not mean that it is unreal or insignificant.

We ought to expand this refusal to dismiss localized instantiations of temporality as false or illusory and apply it to the notion of intelligence deployed throughout the text. Negarestani's goal of articulating an artificial

[31] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 243.

general intelligence cannot be taken as an attempt to eliminate the particular instantiation of intelligence in which we find ourselves participating. Instead, Negarestani's goal is to contextualize this intelligence that is instantiated by us within the larger frame of what intelligence could be and could become. To this end, Negarestani levels an attack against upon what he characterizes as 'greedy scepticism', understood as a form of scientistic verificationism or scientific eliminativism which denies (philosophical) self-knowledge while simultaneously championing the neurosciences by way of philosophical argumentation.[32] On one level, the greedy sceptic commits a kind of performative contradiction: on the one hand, he believes that neuroscientific discourse grinds the philosophy of mind (and philosophy more generally) into antiquated dust, while on the other hand, he engages in philosophical speculations about what a non-human intelligence to come might be like. To be even more specific, on the one hand, R. Scott Bakker dismisses the intentionality of consciousness insofar as consciousness only 'seems intentional *from the standpoint of consciousness*', while on the other hand he dismisses 'normativity' as nothing but a 'second-order chimera'.[33] According to Negarestani's functionalist account, the

[32] Negarestani explains that the 'greedy sceptic may valorize neuroscience to remind us that what we call knowledge is just a figment of our blind brain, or that our talk of a priori and semantic content refers only to neurological hallucinations or pedestrian metaphysical fantasies. He may believe in science as that which discredits not only our concepts but conceptualization in general, but will at the same time dismiss mathematics, its epistemological status, and the a priori application of mathematical concepts in the sciences to another pseudo-semantic absurdity. In our case, the greedy sceptic of mind is the one who believes there is not and will never be a knowledge of human mind or intelligence, but who nonetheless goes on to put forward a theory of super intelligence or disconnected posthuman intelligence, or a panpsychist account of mind' (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 152). For further discussion of a similar 'paradox of eliminitivism', see Ray Brassier's discussion of Paul Churchland in Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmilan, 2007), pp. 3-31.

[33] R. Scott Bakker, 'The Last Magic Show: A Blind Brain Theory of the Appearance of Consciousness', (https://rsbakker.wordpress.com/essay-archive/the-last-magic-

intentionality of consciousness is not and cannot be explained by the causal machinations of a single brain alone. To ask 'how is the *brain* intentional' is simply to ask the wrong question because it is not the brain in isolation that is intentional: instead as Negarestani explains 'linguistic interaction is the fabric of thought, rather than a means for its transmission, a mere medium of communication'.[34] Any account of intentionality and self-consciousness must include the social embededness of language using, minded beings. Simply put, the greedy sceptic preforms a perverse circus act in which he cuts off his hands and then attempts to clap.

Returning briefly to the case of time provides a concise picture of Negarestani's antidote to this error, as well as an insight into *Intelligence and Spirit*'s broader anti-eliminativist intention: 'Liberation from a model of time restricted to a particular contingent constitution does not rob the subject of its cognitive and practical abilities, but releases it from the shackles of its most entrenched dogmas about the necessity of the contingent features of its experience' Negarestani writes.[35] Put more generally, eliminativism is unable to do justice to the complex of intertwining functional systems that render intelligence possible. Though these functional systems include the biological apparatus of the brain under investigation from the neuroscientific point of view, they are not reducible to it or worse eliminated by it. Against the greedy sceptic, Negarestani emphasizes that '[d]iscursive apperceptive awareness involves a specific type of cognition: it operates via normative judgments that are both *linguistically oriented* and *linguistically driven*'.[36] Further, quotes such as these begin to point towards the fact that the endeavour undertaken here cannot be reduced to an epistemic investigation. It is instead a practical elaboration through and through. The Myth of the Given is not just a theoretical error which undergirds any empiricism that takes (perceptual) experience to be epistemically foundational while simultaneously non-inferential. It is not just a philosophical error that assumes that the

show-a-blind-brain-theory-of-the-appearance-of-consciousness/ [Accessed 31/10/2018)), pp. 21-22.

[34] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 155.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

categorical structure of the world is given to the mind independent of time, work and help. Instead, the Myth of the Given is a cage that traps intelligence, thereby forestalling its own self-reformatting. Because of this, the consequences of the Myth are felt not just theoretically, but practically as well. To paraphrase Kant's famous adage, one must dare to know beyond the Myth of the Given if one is to attain maturity against their self-induced tutelage.

After dispelling the notion that the temporal structuring of experience can be universalized as the necessary structuration of the whole of reality, Negarestani explains in reference to robust metaphysics that '[t]he true object of such a metaphysics is the infinite and thus the atemporal'.[37] He continues

> Metaphysics properly understood is the apprehension of the infinite without any of the static or fixed contradictions that arise from the limitations of the features of our experience or understanding which, in contrast to reason, can neither accept the identity of opposites nor forgo the representation of the Absolute or unconditioned.[38]

Following Hegel, Negarestani is here emphasizing the inability of both experience and understanding to think past given constraints.[39] Reason

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 233.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] There is no strict analogue between the two but to be a bit more precise about the work's Hegelian affinities: though at times *Intelligence and Spirit* more closely resembles the unfolding of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which spirit overcomes its one-sided instantiations, it also folds into itself the perspective of the thought of thought for itself with which the *Phenomenology* concludes and *The Science of Logic* will begin. Negarestani himself makes this clear when he cites the following from Hegel's *The Science of Logic*: 'The concept (*Begriff*) of pure science and its deduction is therefore presupposed in the present work in so far as the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is nothing other than that deduction. Absolute knowledge is the *truth* of all the modes of consciousness because, as the course of the *Phenomenology* has brought out, it is only in absolute knowledge that the separation of the *subject matter* from the *certainty of itself* is completely resolved: truth has become equal to certainty and this certainty to truth' [G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. by G. Di Giovani (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 29)] Commenting on this passage Negarestani

alone can suspend the seemingly intransigent oppositions present in experience and the understanding; reason alone can reject the idea that the Absolute is representable, that is constrained within the spatio-temporal structure of experience. As Negarestani explains 'reason suspends finitude in order to arrive at knowledge of Absolute Idea. This suspension is nothing other than the adoption of a resolutely atemporal viewpoint'.[40] The adoption of a speculative rationalism, understood as a commitment to reason's ability to think the Absolute by way of supervening upon and suspending the conditions of experience and understanding, is a necessary commitment if one is to battle against the Myth of the Given. Further, this speculative rationalism must also be a catastrophic rationalism insofar as it is willing to constantly question and modify its own commitments.

This view from nowhere and nowhen is central to linking the education of Kanzi with the larger practical project of *Intelligence and Spirit* to which we will turn shortly. At the conclusion of the automata's education - after they have become self-conscious, concept wielding, discursive agents - Negarestani provides us with the moral of their tale:

> their striving for the better, together with their thought of the future as the possibility of going beyond all manifest or achieved totalities, coincides with the thought of bringing about something that goes beyond the totality of what they take themselves to be or appear to themselves to be. It is characteristic of any form of intelligence endowed with a history – a sequence of self-conceptions and self-transformations – and the consciousness of such a history, that it will begin to seek and ask for more intelligence. And the logical consequence of this tendency is inexorably the thought of making something better than itself.[41]

writes 'this notion of a struggle for the unities of mind remains a fruitless quest and an unintelligible toil unless we posit a Science of Logic through which intelligence see itself in terms of a regulative and necessary form conceived *from nowhere and no-when*' (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 21).

[40] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 236.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 399.

Again, the cultivation of intelligence and the struggle against the Myth of the Given is not some reductive, epistemic enterprise of which the sole outcome is the expansion of theoretical knowing. As a consequence, *Intelligence and Spirit* cannot be confined within the scope of so-called 'right-wing' Sellarsianism that takes science to be the measure of all things in accordance with the '*scientia mensura*' found in § 41 of *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*.[42] Instead, Negarestani's theoretical labour is intimately bound with a practical endeavour of liberation, of becoming more than what we are, of becoming better than we are by expanding the scope of intelligibility. By launching this all-out assault on the Myth of the Given in various forms, Negarestani seeks to expose the contingency of what we take to be necessary; he engages in a practice quite similar to what he has previously nominated 'ungrounding', that is the 'process of degenerating a solid body by corrupting the coherency of its surfaces'.[43] These contingent conditions, these 'manifest or achieved totalities', when left unchallenged, in turn become constraints which lead us to believe that intelligence can only be as it appears at a specific point in time. As it dispels these manifest necessities through disrupting their assumed coherence, intelligence liberates itself from the conditions upon which it had previously become reliant. This in turn connects to Negarestani's understanding of freedom, insofar as he is careful to emphasize that freedom is not reducible to a freedom from constraint. Instead, it is 'a freedom to do something'.[44] It is the freedom to acknowledge, modify and reject its constraints. It is 'the ability of geist to constitute a history for itself

[42] '[T]o put it less paradoxically […] in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what it is that it is, and of what is not that it is not' (Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 83). Further, it could be argued the *Intelligence and Spirit* defies the division between left and right Sellarsianism more generally. For a discussion of these two strands of Sellars reception see Robert B. Brandom *From Empiricism to Expressivism: Brandom Reads Sellars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[43] Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia*, p. 43.

[44] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p.47.

rather than just a past or nature'.[45]

III.

At this point it should be clear that much like any good work in the tradition of German idealism, Negarestani understands the deep inseparability of theoretical and practical reason. Negarestani writes of what he calls the 'order of reason' that it can be 'loosely characterized as a system of essentially revisable thoughts and challengeable actions, i.e., thoughts and actions enabled by the constraints imposed by reality in its otherness'.[46] Reason, for Negarestani, is a combination of thoughts *and* actions. Further, it is not an abstract, context independent force. Reason, thoughts, and actions are responsive to the constraints to which they are tied and upon which they are enacted. Reason is therefore not just an abstract practice of thinking; it is more precisely a contextualized practice of doing something with and to something. One of the things that reason does, the one upon which I will focus, is to serve as a function of the Enlightenment, insofar as one of the things it does something with and to is authority. In the present section, I detail the connection between the construction of artificial general intelligence as it relates to the larger question of *Intelligence and Spirit*, namely opening a space for freedom's future. In tandem with this, I consider a possible objection to *Intelligence and Spirit*'s inheritance of the Enlightenment project by following Amy Allen's careful analysis of the role 'progress' plays in contemporary critical theory. We will see that Negarestani's work has embedded within it the tools for following in the footsteps advocated by Allen through the stance of openness and the practice of unlearning.

In his response to the question 'What is Enlightenment?' Kant observes that '[o]ne age cannot bind itself, and thus conspire, to place a succeeding one in a condition whereby it would be impossible for the later age to expand its knowledge (particularly where it is so very important), to

[45] *Ibid.*
[46] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

rid itself of errors, and generally to increase its enlightenment'.[47] The past can at times conspire to reduce the future to the present. Intelligence serves as a function of the Enlightenment insofar as it seeks to unearth this conspiracy, and subsequently to free itself from the tutelage it has previously incurred. Thus Negarestani's 2014 essay 'The Labor of the Inhuman' sets forth the task to be taken up by *Intelligence and Spirit*: 'Seen from a constructive and revisionary perspective, *freedom is intelligence*. A commitment to humanity or freedom that does not practically elaborate the meaning of this dictum has already abandoned its commitment and taken humanity hostage only to trudge through history for a day or two'.[48] The question set forth is consequently *how can freedom have a future?*

The struggle of reason in which intelligence strives to become more than what it was by rejecting the acquiescence to contingent constraints which had once been taken as manifest necessities characterizes *Intelligence and Spirit*'s program of liberation. The work wrestles with the authority of the past and present in an attempt to make a future for freedom. It is here that we can return to the words of Liu with which we began: 'It is the fate of every species to disappear into the void that is the heat death of the universe. But long before then, the thoughts of any intelligent species worthy of the name will become as grand as the universe itself'.[49] Lui's challenge here helps highlight the scope of *Intelligence and Spirit*'s aspiration. For freedom to have a future, it is not a matter of curbing the aspirations of intelligence or limiting knowledge in order to make room for faith. Instead, to make a future for freedom, intelligence must strive to become as grand as the universe itself; it must accept the task of becoming equal to the infinite in order to provide a view of 'us' and our world from nowhere and nowhen. The future for freedom can only be won by denying submission to what is given by putting in the time and work it takes to

[47] Immanuel Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: "What is Enlightenment"' in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, trans. by Ted Humphery (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), pp. 41-48, (pp. 43-44).

[48] Reza Negarestani, 'Labor of the Inhuman' in *#Accelerate: The Accelerationist Reader*, ed. by Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), pp. 425-466, p. 465.

[49] Liu, 'An Advanced Readers' Picture Book of Comparative Cognition', p. 206.

know. This allows the knower to become equal to what can be known, that is, for finite instantiations of intelligence to become infinite through the augmentation made possible by their participation in the ungrounding voyage of reason. Due to its infinite aspirations, the future of freedom can be won only in a battle with the Gods themselves. Drawing upon Plato, *Intelligence and Spirit*'s culminating chapter 'Philosophy of Intelligence' closes with precisely this battle. 'The Good begins with the death of God' Negarestani writes, 'Intelligence as the craft of the Good is that which elaborates the consequences of the death of God, the retroactive and prospective cancelation of all given totalities in history'.[50] For freedom to have a future, one must first dispel the myth of historical totality precisely insofar as these totalities are *historical*. What was once falsely taken to be necessary must come to be understood as contingent before it can be left behind.

However, and this thought marks the true novelty of *Intelligence and Spirit*, this battle with the Gods does not result, as it may seem, in a pessimistic nihilism that wallows in ambivalent despair at God's funeral. 'True nihilism is the beginning of reason, not its end' Negarestani explains.[51] Contrast this to Nietzsche's oft cited tale of the 'clever beasts' in the corner of the universe who 'invented knowing'.[52] These beasts face the inevitable threat of their star's death, and this catastrophic event reveals 'how shadowy and transient, how aimless and arbitrary the human intellect looks within nature'.[53] Nietzsche's parable entices us to humble ourselves in a kind of pessimistic recognition that all our thought, all our philosophy, has been for nothing. Negarestani, on the other hand, takes up Lui's challenge. 'The practical elaboration of the death of God is not a matter of a quibble between the jaded atheistic cult of humanism and the theistic crowd' writes Negarestani, 'but a precondition for voiding the conditions

[50] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 505.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 496.
[52] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in a Non Moral Sense' in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870s*, ed. and trans. by D. Breazeale, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1979), pp. 79-97 (p. 79).
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

of injustice throughout history, a requirement that we become gods who, in their death, give rise to something better'.[54] The task of intelligence is a project of universal liberation not just from the shackles that bind us in the present, but additionally from being these so easily bound beings that we presently are. This thought constitutes the catastrophic humanism of *Intelligence and Spirit*. This humanism is catastrophic insofar as it refuses to recoil from the rupture with past and present demanded by reason's revisionary approach to its own history. Due to the work's focus on themes of automata and artificial intelligence one might think that the text embraces a pessimistic anti-humanism or a vacuous post-humanism. Yet, as Negarestani argues, '[t]he nontrivial meaning of the human lies in its ability to revise and transform itself, its ability to explore what the human is and can become', while further, and at the same time, '[t]he nonparochial conception of AGI is simply the continuation and realization of this meaning in its pure and autonomous form'.[55] Negarestani's real contention against humanism in its contemporary iterations unfolds on two fronts. First, humanism insofar as it is understood as a commitment to an abstract vitalism, is but another valence of the Myth of the Given. 'Life' in some abstract sense can provide neither the categorical structure of the world to the mind, nor can it demarcate the normative parameters of that world. Second, to assume that any artificial intelligence worthy of the name must take the form of the human further hypostatizes the human in its current form as an unsurpassable limit. Both take the human as it is to be the ahistorical manifestation of the measure of all things. Here we can again refer to Hegel. As he writes in 'Absolute Knowing', the closing section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 'to know one's limit is to know how to sacrifice oneself'.[56] For Hegel, this sacrifice is of the *negative* of 'self-knowing spirit' and not of spirit itself. Similarly, for Negarestani, the content of this sacrifice is not the human as such; it is instead the contingent features of the humanity that is, which are in turn the limits imposed upon what humanity could become.

[54] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 506.
[55] *Ibid.*, p. 119.
[56] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 492.

These ideas bring us to some serious questions we must ask. First, can we take the aspiration to become more and better than what we are as an inherent good? And relatedly, is this merely another articulation of an old idea with a pernicious past? Are these gods of philosophy invoked above still just sovereign masters over nature in the same way that Adorno and Horkheimer once attacked?[57] Are they not just a further articulation of the opposition between reason and nature such that reason bends nature to its will through instrumentality and exploitation? Against this challenge one ought to emphasize that Negarestani is careful to demarcate between the 'gods as objects of philosophy' and the 'gods as objects of religion'.[58] He explains,

> Having disenchanted the intellectual intuition of the divine through the powers of discursive rationality, having dismissed the myth of completeness as a fleeting historical illusion, philosophical gods are only gods insofar as they conceive themselves as moving beyond any condition given as the totality of their history, in so far as they can reinvent themselves as the inhabitants of the worlds which they themselves have made.[59]

The gods described by Negarestani are concerned with the creation of new worlds, and not the reductive mastery of the worlds that are. *These worlds that exist have failed*. They creep towards destruction, while consuming those who inhabit them, be this by way of the climate catastrophe resulting in epidemic levels of starvation, forced migration and disease; the omnipresence of depression, addiction and suicide; or genocidal campaigns that receive little attention at all. The disorder of these worlds is ordered by systems of oppressions, too long to list, that benefit the few

[57] I'm thinking specifically of their claim that '[i]n their mastery of nature, the creative God and the ordering mind are alike. Man's likeness to God consists in sovereignty over existence, in the lordly gaze, in the command'. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 6.

[58] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 506.

[59] *Ibid*.

at the expense of the many. Sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, nationalism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and so many more brand us and break us every day. Factors such as these allow us to understand why Negarestani would claim that 'we are living in the prehistory of intelligence'.[60] To attempt to recuperate these worlds, to fix their flaws, is to give up on a future that could be otherwise. We have yet to begin the task of voiding the conditions of injustice for we are still learning how to be the kind of intelligent beings capable of doing so.

Yet, to frame things this way is merely to engage in the 'blackmail of the enlightenment' as Foucault called it.[61] In an attempt to do otherwise, let us take another approach. Amy Allen's *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* avoids the reductive positions of 'for' or 'against' in the Enlightenment debate by interrogating the role progress plays in contemporary critical theory's inheritance of the Enlightenment project. Allen rejects what she calls 'backward-looking' progress understood as

> a judgment about the developmental or learning process that has led up to 'us,' a judgment that views 'our' conception of reason, 'our' moral-political institutions, 'our' social practices, 'our' form of life as the result of a process of sociocultural development or historical learning.[62]

This notion of progress universalizes a particular historical trajectory, that

[60] *Ibid.* p. 492.

[61] Foucault's definition of this blackmail is worth quoting at length: 'that does not mean that one has to be "for" or "against" the Enlightenment. It even means precisely that one has to refuse everything that might present itself in the form of a simplistic and authoritarian alternative: you either accept the Enlightenment and remain within the tradition of rationalism […] or else you criticize the Enlightenment and then try to escape the principles of rationality […]. And we do not break free of this blackmail by introducing "dialectical" nuances while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the Enlightenment'. Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', p. 43.

[62] Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016) p. 12.

of the colonialist West, and enforces it as a normative standard against which all other historical trajectories are measured and judged as 'backward' or 'barbaric'. Recall Negarestani's rejection of non-revisionary humanism discussed briefly above. Worse than taking 'the' human as the measure and standard of all things, backward-looking progress would be to take 'a' human - generally a white, Anglo-American, heterosexual, cisgender, upper-middle class male - as the universal standard. Against this pathologically narcissistic understanding of Enlightenment and progress Allen correctly insists that to 'inherit the Enlightenment project is to draw upon its tradition of critique but to deploy critique in service of criticizing and undermining Enlightenment's own Eurocentrism and thus its ongoing entanglements with the coloniality of power'.[63] Put otherwise, 'realizing Enlightenment morality means transcending it, and transcending it means realizing it'.[64]

One of the more concrete and significant worries that comes to the fore when we interrogate *Intelligence and Spirit* while drawing upon Allen's analysis of critical theory is the former's reliance on the notion of the 'space of reasons' in which agents exchange reasons and justifications in order to elaborate the entailments of their normative commitments. In her reading of Reiner Forst, Allen observes that 'insofar as he defines power as rule *in* the space of reasons, Forst clearly does not understand it as rule *through* the constitution of the space of reasons'.[65] The problem is not just that power can operate within the space of reasons, but instead that this very space itself can be constituted by systems of power and oppression. Certain reasons may not be taken as reasons; certain justifications may be seen as less authoritative than others.[66] I'd suggest

[63] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 208. This is Allen's gloss on Christoph Menke's reading of Adorno in 'Genealogy and Critique: Two Forms of Ethical Questioning of Morality' in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. by Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 302-327.

[65] Allen, *The End of Progress*, p. 150.

[66] See, as an example, Miranda Fricker's work on testimonial and hermeneutic injustices in which certain speakers are not taken as authoritative in the accounts that they

that Negarestani distances himself from this form of critique in his turn to theoretical computer science and game theory instead of 'classical philosophy of language or social-communicative philosophy of rationalism à la Habermas'.[67] Thus, if there are forms of power at play in Negarestani's account of the genesis of the space of reasons, these are not the same forms of power Allen uncovers in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Forst.

It is possible that despite *Intelligence and Spirit*'s explicit difference from certain central elements of Allen's criticism, the work still falls within the purview of the larger trend she criticizes. This is in part because of Negarestani's fidelity to Hegel, a central figure in the problematic Allen frames.[68] Yet, Negarestani resolutely rejects any notion of progress as necessary or guaranteed: '[s]elf-consciousness, once attained, may be lost; or it may never be fully realized' he explains.[69] Self-consciousness, for numerous reasons, is a voyage fraught with contingencies. Its future and even its present are never certain. Self-consciousness is never safe from failure and it is precisely this risk that makes its task worthwhile. In order to open up a space for the de-colonizing of critical theory, Allen emphasizes a stance of 'openness' and the process of 'unlearning', a concept drawn from the work of David Scott. These concepts are also present in the project put forth by *Intelligence and Spirit*. For example, Kanzi's education explicitly centres upon cultivating a kind of openness. Negarestani explains,

> The role of its [Kanzi's] educators is not simply to issue guiding imperatives. It is rather to cultivate its practical autonomy by assisting it to navigate this recognitive space and to facilitate new encounters with the world through which the child can stumble upon

give of themselves and their experiences of wrongdoings due to various institutional and historical factors that constitute the spaces in which these testimonies are given. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[67] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 4-5.

[68] Not necessarily Hegel per se, but the caricatured version of Hegel's philosophy of history as a relentless and progressive march forward to the end of history.

[69] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, p. 21.

> rewarding surprises. In short, the primary task of the educators is to stimulate and reinforce the child's openness so as to expand the range and diversity of such encounters, thereby incorporating objectivity – that is, external reality – into its consciousness.[70]

To be educated is not to follow uncritically the path taken by one's educators. Furthermore, to educate is not a process of indoctrination. The cultivation of receptivity to 'new encounters' lies at the core of what 'progress' means for Negarestani. He explains that the 'task of philosophy, science, technology, art, politics, and every other cognitive field should be rethought in terms of the role they play in the construction of a collective productive imagination that permits a larger field of experience – be it historical, social, scientific, or psychological'.[71] The invocation here is not primarily of a 'better' field of experience understood as a step forward on a predetermined trajectory, but instead a 'larger' one. Progress is understood as the constitution of a broader and more open field of possible experiences. Only in this field's openness to more possibilities can it be described as 'better'.

This openness links us back to the central characteristic of the philosophical gods discussed above. Recall that their function is to move 'beyond any condition given as the totality of their history'.[72] These given historical totalities include among them the totalities of Western Imperialism as well as the institutions of racism, sexism, nationalism, heteronormativity, etc.. To quote Scott, this expansion (the movement beyond these totalities and the voiding of the conditions of injustice) would involve '*unlearning* the presumptive privilege of one's own moral-intellectual traditions'.[73] This unlearning can be linked directly to the third principle of robust metaphysics discussed above. If one were to assume that the categorical structure of the moral-intellectual sphere was given by any currently existing, historical totality, then they would fall short of

[70] *Ibid.*, p. 276
[71] *Ibid.*, p. 500
[72] *Ibid.*, p. 506.
[73] David Scott, 'The Traditions of Historical Others' in *Symposium on Gender, Race, and Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2012), p. 3.

intelligence's demand to unground the familiarity of this given in order to understand its inherent contingency. Put otherwise, if we are to further the function of the Enlightenment we must understand that 'the reality of time is not exhausted by the origin or by what has already taken place; instead, it is a destiny that forces one to revise its positions and orientations as it unfolds'.[74] Transcending these given totalities by understanding them as contingent - including and especially the contingent totalities commonly labelled 'the Enlightenment' - is, as Allen put it above, crucial for realizing what is essential about that very moment. Perhaps paradoxically, intelligence must be willing to forget if it is to accomplish its grand task.

All of this is not to suggest that *Intelligence and Spirit* completely bypasses Allen's intricate criticisms regarding critical theory's coloniality. For example, perhaps the view from nowhere and nowhen so central to the aspiration of Negarestani's text remains too close to a kind of objectivity deeply entwined with the often criticized Enlightenment ideal of objective universality. Or maybe the theoretical computer sciences that Negarestani draws upon in the latter chapters of the work are not in fact value-neutral enough to avoid the Eurocentric elements of Habermas' project identified by Allen.[75] Though these remain serious worries, I will not delve deeply

[74] Negarestani, 'Labor of the Inhuman', p. 451.

[75] A further issue ripe for investigation regards the possibility of Negarestani responding to Robert Pippin's criticism of Brandom on the topic of what Pippin calls 'conceptual authority' in relation to spaces of contestation. Pippin writes '[t]he issue is most obvious in cases where the main problem Brandom tracks – the problem of conceptual determinacy, conceptual content – intersects with the question of conceptual authority: cases where everyone understands what the concept is about, purports to be about (the putative content is determinate), but where serious disagreement has arisen about whether that clear purport is *fulfilled*, justified, legitimate, whether the concept *really* picks anything out. […] This distinction most interests Hegel when the issue is change or partial breakdown with respect to fundamental, paradigmatic normative principles, *what scorekeepers rely on* when they distinguish between what another takes to be authorized to do and what he is really authorized (forbidden or ought) to do, cases like divine and human law, the claims of faith and of Enlightenment, the claims of natural right, moral freedom, revolutionary political authority, or moral purity' [Robert B. Pippin, *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy*

into them here. However, to begin a response, we must grasp that if we answer affirmatively the question 'is reason *as such* the culprit in this cataclysmic failure of world building in which we find ourselves?' we *prima facie* dismiss the revisionary structure Negarestani takes to be central to what reason does, and most importantly what it does to itself. This impulse toward self-reformatting is reason's catastrophic core. It is this catastrophic core that provides intelligence with its immanent, normative criteria for the evaluation of its present and future: 'For our present as humans only matters in the light of a better future generation, whoever and whatever it might be' Negarestani explains.[76] He then adds that '[t]he criteria of this betterment is its capacity at once to craft a satisfying life for itself and to entitle all minds to that life'.[77] Again, the evaluative criteria built into the striving of intelligence is one of universal liberation. Intelligence seeks not only to articulate what a good life is, but also to render this good life possible for all. The project of intelligence is life affirming not in some indeterminate and vacuous vitalist sense, but in relation to concrete and actually existing lives. Consequentially, this project is not trans-historical, but instead deeply contextual. When coupled with its constitutively revisionary nature, this universal liberation is not merely the liberation of what is but also the redefining of what could be. Consequently, rejections of the Enlightenment project and the capacity of reason for liberation are premised upon reactions to a particular historical instance of reasoning, and not reason itself. If the form of rationality dominating a particular epoch does not serve the liberatory goal of intelligence, if it does not demand of authority that it either justify itself or step aside, then it is up to intelligent beings worthy of the name to challenge

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 50-51]. The question is one of adjudicating disputes of justification in the debates that agents engage in, particularly the debates that matter most to us, our lives, our world and its inhabitants. I believe a detailed treatment of this topic is outside of the already broad scope of *Intelligence and Spirit* but it would be worthwhile to cache out if and how the general criteria of intelligence's 'capacity at once to craft a satisfying life for itself and to entitle all minds to that life' (Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, pp. 506-507) would attempt to answer Pippin's challenge.

[76] Negarestani, *Intelligence and Spirit*, pp. 506-507.

[77] *Ibid.*

this deficient form of rationality and ultimately change it. And, we must always remember that this change can only come by not merely thinking otherwise but by becoming otherwise as well.

IV.

Intelligence and Spirit sets forth a bold philosophical task in its wake, and this task, like any worth pursuing, is by no means one without its risks. If we are to take up the *Aufgabe* of intelligence, we must relentlessly keep in mind that this project of universal liberation is not a project of universalization, that is, of taking a particular, given case and generalizing it. This is because the cultivation of intelligence is about the generation of what could be and not merely the description of what already is. The mission of intelligence becomes that of wrestling the conspiracies of history in order to shed the historical vestiges that buttress and perpetuate structures of oppression. The normative parameters of intelligence are established by engaging with in order to disengage from that which ought to be left behind. The task of intelligence becomes the demarcation of these contingent features in such a way that carves a space for its own universal aspirations. The duty of intelligence is to become Gods who are unafraid of self-sacrifice and are therefore capable of living beyond life and death. Only down this path lies a thought as grand as the universe itself.