

PER LA RINASCITA  
DI UN PENSIERO CRITICO  
CONTEMPORANEO

Il contributo degli antichi

a cura di Francesca Eustacchi e Maurizio Migliori

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## FRANCESCA EUSTACCHI PRESENTAZIONE

### *La strettoia della contemporaneità*

La nostra contemporaneità «vive un disorientamento non solo teorico, ma che ha un evidente riscontro nei modi in cui si conducono le esistenze, personali e di gruppo. È diffusa la convinzione che non esistano criteri oggettivi del giusto e dello sbagliato, del bene e del male, che si possa solo dar conto di preferenze e atteggiamenti soggettivi, magari modellati dalla cultura in cui si vive e dall'esperienza di vita, essa però si accompagna a posizioni normative assolute rispetto a questioni come ad esempio la politica, le relazioni internazionali o i temi ambientali. Ad uno spontaneismo astratto, che accetta di riconoscere nell'autonomia la sola sorgente di dignità delle scelte, si accompagnano presunte evidenze e indiscutibili certezze che reclamano interventi risolutori e senza tentennamenti». Così Carla Danani (p. 38) sottolinea la contraddizione tra relativismo e assolutismo che ingabbia il pensiero e la prassi nel nostro mondo: una realtà complessa e in rapido mutamento, in cui emergono questioni sempre nuove, che, in un gioco di relazioni variabili, spesso mettono in crisi le nostre capacità di analisi. Così, ad esempio, le nuove forme di comunicazione di massa da un lato facilitano la diffusione delle informazioni, dall'altro aumentano le false notizie, consentono il libero sfogo di opinioni infondate e confronti non basati su argomenti ma su "abilità teatrali", che a volte si rivelano capaci di spostare anche l'opinione pubblica.

Sarebbe facile, quindi inutile, moltiplicare gli esempi di queste tensioni e delle conseguenze che spesso provocano. Quello che invece va sottolineato è che bisogna rifiutare i due poli opposti, quello del "liberi tutti" e quello del recupero di certezze "filosofiche o fideistiche": bisogna dirlo perché sono questi i vicoli ciechi che la contemporaneità sta percorrendo da tempo, in «un silenzio che urla: quello degli intellettuali che hanno del tutto rinunciato al loro ruolo. Nella crisi precedente si può dire che non ci fu filosofo che non fu direttamente o indirettamente impegnato in quello scontro, da una parte o dall'altra (Heidegger, Gentile, Sartre, Jaspers,

manual profession, neither that of the unified order of the three classes, nor the inner unity of the individual person entirely dedicated to knowledge – even this last sort of unity proves to be deficient, insofar as it is deprived of actual ruling.

The critical approach reveals justice as an analogical term which can be applied at various and mutually graduated levels of reality. In the most proper sense, however, it refers to a dialectical combination of at least two types of unity: (1) the inner unity of a self-controlled person who integrates not only three parts of his soul, but also his two most important tasks: thinking and governing the polis; (2) the unity of a group which is based on the community of male and female guardians. The philosopher is supposed to rule insofar as he combines both types of unity: he rules both because of his knowledge and because of his affiliation to the others as his friends. The combination of the two models seems to have a systematic significance for Plato: philosophical knowledge of the ruler is a basis for social hierarchy, but it also opens the possibility of social and individual improvement and thus – as the simile of the cave illustratively shows – of *freedom*; the group affinity is an element of *equality* (though limited to the highest class). This combination of the two unities that comprise two fundamental values of freedom and equality is an outcome of the critical approach that makes politics and ethics irreducible. It is this very same combination of freedom and equality that stands at the roots of our modern democracies.<sup>33</sup>

MANUEL KNOLL

## CRITICAL THEORY AND HEDONISM: THE CENTRAL ROLE OF ARISTIPPUS OF KYRENE FOR THEODOR W. ADORNO'S THOUGHT

### 1. Introduction

For some decades the vast German literature on Adorno could be distinguished according to two prevailing lines of interpretation of his philosophy. The first line, which was dominant in the early 80s, was based on the theological motives in Adorno's thought. It claimed that Adorno must be understood as a messianic philosopher or a thinker inspired by eschatology. This line of interpretation holds the core of his thought to be theological.<sup>1</sup> The champions of this line understood themselves as critical of Adorno. For them, the theological motives of his thought were a consequence of the irresolvable aporias of his analysis of rationality. Other interpreters, however, such as Friedemann Grenz and Jürgen Habermas, emphasized that Adorno saw himself all his lifetime as an atheistic thinker.<sup>2</sup>

The second line of interpretation, which prevailed in the 1970s and 80s, claimed that Adorno's thought culminates in aesthetics. Wolfgang Iserl designated Adorno's philosophical position with the formula "aesthetics as first philosophy"<sup>3</sup> and Gerhard Kaiser claimed that Adorno holds aesthetics

1 For summaries and discussions of this line of interpretation and literature see H. Gripp, *Theodor W. Adorno. Erkenntnisdimensionen negativer Dialektik, Schöningh*, Paderborn 1996, p. 9, and M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno. Ethik als erste Philosophie*, Fink, München 2002, pp. 188-200. This line of interpretation still has some supporters in the more recent literature: U. Kohmann, *Dialektik der Moral. Untersuchungen zur Moralphilosophie Adornos*, zu Klampen, Lüneburg 1997, p. 188ff.; M. Wischke, *Kritik der Ethik des Gehorsams. Zum Moralproblem bei Theodor W. Adorno*, Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main 1993, p. 5.

2 F. Grenz, *Adornos Philosophie in Grundbegriffen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1974, p. 212; J. Habermas, *Theodor W. Adorno wäre am 11. September 66 Jahre als geworden*, in H. Schweppenhäuser (eds.), *Theodor W. Adorno zum Gedächtnis. Eine Sammlung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 36.

to be the "summit of theory."<sup>3</sup> In analogous ways Jürgen Habermas criticized the "transfer of the responsibility for knowledge to art" and Rüdiger Bubner the "emigration of theory to aesthetics."<sup>4</sup>

Since the 1990s a third line of interpretation has developed. Several writings have appeared that investigate the role of moral philosophy and ethics in Adorno.<sup>5</sup> Behind this new research interest was the renaissance of practical philosophy since the 1960s and in particular the latest "ethics boom" that has kept growing since the 1990s. The advocates of this interpretive direction focus on the ethical and moral contents of his thought and attempt to show his relevance for the contemporary debates in ethics.

In line with this third direction, this paper focuses on the ethical contents of Adorno's works. It demonstrates the central role that hedonism, and in particular the philosophy of Aristippus of Kyrene, plays for Adorno's thought. The literature has already noted Adorno's self-conception as a hedonist philosopher.<sup>6</sup> However, this observation has not been used to shed light on key elements of his philosophy. As a first step this paper shows the similarities between Herbert Marcuse's and Adorno's endorsement and criticism of hedonism. A second step introduces and interprets Adorno's explicit statements about Aristippus and Epicurus, which are little known because they are part of lecture courses given in the early 1960s published only starting in the 1990s under the titles *Philosophische Terminologie* and *Problems of Moral Philosophy*.<sup>7</sup> For hedonists like Aristippus and Epicu-

rus, pleasure is the aim and good one should strive for, and pain and suffering the bad that needs to be avoided in order to have a good life. The main difference between the two hedonists is that Epicurus defines pleasure as the absence of pain and the tranquility of the soul (*ataraxia*) while Aristippus focuses on instant bodily pleasures and defines happiness as the sum of all such pleasures. In a third and last step this paper shows that Adorno adopts Aristippus's ethical position and substantiates the thesis that a materialist and utopian hedonist ethics constitutes the core of Adorno's thought and his whole philosophy.

## 2. The Influence of Marcuse's Endorsement and Critique of Hedonism on Adorno

Adorno's thought on hedonism is influenced by Herbert Marcuse's important article *On Hedonism (Zur Kritik des Hedonismus)* that appeared 1938 in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung (Studies in Philosophy and Social Science)*, edited by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. In the article, Marcuse advocates an objective and true conception of happiness and investigates its relation to pleasure and hedonism. He goes back to Aristippus of Kyrene and Epicurus who he understands as the representatives of the two different types of hedonism: «the Cyrenaic and the Epicurean trends.»<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, Marcuse criticizes both types of hedonism as the German title of the original article clearly indicates. On the other, he states that hedonism is «linked with the interest of critical theory.»<sup>9</sup> The reason for this link is that by "identifying happiness with pleasure" the hedonistic trends "were demanding that man's sensual and sensuous potentialities and needs (*Bedürfnisse*), too, should find satisfaction."<sup>10</sup> For Marcuse, this demand equals both «the demand for the freedom of the individual» and a «materialist protest» against a society that suppresses the satisfaction of sensual pleasures.<sup>11</sup> Like Adorno, Marcuse had the self-image of being a materialist philosopher. In his lecture courses, Adorno stressed the tight connection between hedonism and materialism. Materialism has «a very deep connection to the dimension of pleasure and pain, in particular pain,

- 3 W. Welsch, *Adornos Ästhetik: eine implizite Ästhetik des Erhabenen*, in C. Pries (ed.), *Das Erhabene. Zwischen Grenzerfahrung und Größenwahn*, De Gruyter, Weinheim 1989, pp. 185-213, 212 (transl. by M.K.); G. Kaiser, *Theodor W. Adornos, Ästhetische Theorie*, in G. Kaiser, *Anthesen. Zwischenbilanz eines Germanisten. 1970-72*, Koch, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 275 (transl. by M.K.).
- 4 J. Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns I*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1981, p. 514 (transl. by M.K.); R. Bubner, *Kann Theorie ästhetisch werden? Zum Hauptmotiv der Philosophie Adornos*, in B. Lindner, W.M. Lüdke (eds.), *Materialien zur ästhetischen Theorie Theodor W. Adornos. Konstruktion der Moderne*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1980, pp. 108-137, 131 (transl. by M.K.).
- 5 M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit.; U. Kohlmann, *Dialektik der Moral*, cit.; G. Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz. Adornos negative Moralphilosophie*, Argument-Verlag, Hamburg 1993; G. Schweppenhäuser, M. Wischke (eds.), *Impuls und Negativität. Ethik und Ästhetik bei Adorno*, Argument-Verlag, Hamburg 1995; M. Wischke, *Kritik der Ethik des Gehorsams*, cit.
- 6 G. Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz*, cit., p. 197; R. Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule. Geschichte-Theoretische Entwicklung-Politische Bedeutung*, DTV, München/Wien, 1989, p. 381.
- 7 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 1 and 2, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1992, 7th and 6th ed.; T.W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. by T.

8 Schröder, transl. by R. Livingstone, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2001.

9 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, in H. Marcuse, *Negations. Essays in Critical Theory*, transl. by Jeremy J. Shapiro, MayFlyBooks, London 2009, p. 121.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.* (italics and German term inserted by M.K.).

which usually are strikingly neglected by philosophy.»<sup>12</sup> For Adorno, «materialism is manifoldly intertwined with hedonism» and «has a decisive connection to the dimension of both bodily pleasure (*Organlust*) and its opposite.»<sup>13</sup> In line with his materialism, he attributed to the body priority over the mind and understood pleasure and pain primarily as bodily phenomena. The liberation of the body and its sensual pleasures from oppression was a key aim of critical theorists like Marcuse and Adorno. Aristippus was their forerunner, who Marcuse quotes after Diogenes Laertius: «... bodily pleasures are far better than the mental pleasures, and bodily pains far worse than mental pains.»<sup>14</sup>

Marcuse nevertheless criticizes the «inability of hedonism to apply the category of truth to happiness» and «its fundamental relativism.»<sup>15</sup> For Marcuse, hedonism is unable «to distinguish between true and false wants (*Bedürfnisse*) and interests and between true and false enjoyment. It accepts the wants and interests of individuals as simply given and as valuable in itself.»<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of a critical theorist of society, the blind spot of hedonism is that it does not recognize that human wants and interests are not autonomous, but socially preformed and thus already the product of a repressive class society that should be negated. In order to achieve an objective and true conception of happiness, «true and false pleasure» must be recognized and contraposed.<sup>17</sup>

Although Adorno agrees with Aristippus, as will be shown, that pleasure, and in particular sensual and bodily pleasure, should be the main goal of a good life, he shares Marcuse's social criticism of hedonism. For Adorno, not all enjoyments and pleasures – e.g. the ones derived from the products of culture industry – are valid and true enjoyments and pleasures. In the light of a true and objective conception of pleasure and happiness, not even all forms of physical and sexual joy are justified. As a commodity, sexuality can easily be integrated in the capitalist system and its need for consumption. Adorno criticized that the “*healthy sex life*” that industrial society encourages «by all sectors of the economy, from the cosmetic industry to psychotherapy» is not «true, instinctually erotic life» in which genuine pleasure is realized.<sup>18</sup>

He criticized Freud for both the «repressive traits» in his writings and his «unenlightened enlightenment» and declared – in line with his general criticism of rationality – that only pleasure «could prove the means, reason, to be reasonable.»<sup>19</sup> In a passage that clearly shows that Adorno has no relativist understanding of happiness and thus pleasure he pronounces: «He alone who could situate utopia in blind somatic pleasure, which, satisfying the ultimate intention, is intentionless, has a stable and valid idea of truth.»<sup>20</sup> Like Marcuse, Adorno aims at a true and objective conception of happiness.

For Marcuse, the second type of hedonism, the Epicurean, differs from the Cyrenaic type mainly because it distinguishes between different kinds of pleasures: «The identification of the highest good with pleasure is retained, but a specific kind of pleasure is, as ‘true’ pleasure, opposed to all others.»<sup>21</sup> Epicurean hedonism establishes a hedonistic calculus that compares instant pleasures with later pains and vice versa. It also establishes reason – the agency of the hedonistic calculus – as the highest pleasure. The “true” pleasure and goal is the tranquility of the “sage”.<sup>22</sup> According to Marcuse's well-known characterization of Epicurean hedonism, it «is a *negative hedonism*. Its principle is less the pleasure to be striven for than the pain to be avoided.»<sup>23</sup> From the perspective of a critical theorist, the Epicurean conception of pleasure is a reaction to the repressive class society. Both the Epicurean definition of pleasure and method to achieve it express «fear of the insecurity and badness of the conditions of life, the invincible limitation of enjoyment.»<sup>24</sup> Such a negative and moderate conception, Marcuse criticized, diminishes pleasure and deprives it of its true meaning.

Both Marcuse and Adorno share another criticism of hedonism, which is linked to the already mentioned critique of its relativism. Both types of hedonism are individualistic and unaware of the unavoidable social dimension of a good life and society's formative influence. For Epicurus, happiness can be achieved removed from society and politics by a group of friends in a garden. His famous motto is: «Live hidden!» For Adorno, this is quite naïve. He claimed that a «consequent individualistic hedonism»

Press, New York 2005, p. 75 (Adorno's italics).

19 T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life*, transl. by E.F.N. Jeffcott, Verso (Radical Thinkers), London/New York, 2005, p. 60.

20 *Ivi*, p. 61

21 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 126.

22 *Ivi*, p. 126-128.

23 *Ivi*, p. 127 (italics by M.K.). Adorno takes up the term “negative hedonism” and applies it to Marx (Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 254).

24 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 127.

12 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 178 (transl. by M.K.).

13 *Ivi*, p. 180, 178 (transl. by M.K.).

14 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 122; Diogenes Laertius, Book II, 90.

15 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 126.

16 *Ibid* (German term inserted by M.K.).

17 *Ivi*, p. 131.

18 T.W. Adorno, *Sexual Taboos and Law Today*, in T.W. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*, transl. by H. W. Pickford, Columbia University

is flawed and cannot be realized because every individual is affected in manifold ways by the society he or she lives in. Epicurus's motto is dialectically opposed to Hegel's phrase that the norm of a good life is to be a citizen of a good state.<sup>25</sup> In line with this criticism, Marcuse declared: «The truth of hedonism would be its *abolition by and preservation (Aufhebung)* in a new principle of social organization, not in a different philosophical principle.»<sup>26</sup>

### 3. Adorno's Endorsement of Aristippus's "Radical Hedonism"

In his published works, Adorno mentioned Epicurus only in passing. In his lecture courses, he talked about Aristippus several times and devoted a longer section to Epicurus.<sup>27</sup> As a source, he named only Lucretius. In *On Hedonism*, as demonstrated, an important text for Adorno, Marcuse refers to both Aristippus and Epicurus through Diogenes Laertius.<sup>28</sup> Although Adorno shares Marcuse's criticism of both hedonists, he affirms Epicurus's materialism and in particular Aristippus's conception of pleasure as bodily pleasure. However, he is critical about Epicurus's conception of happiness. In the colloquial style of his lecture courses in 1962, he lamented:

It is one of the saddest and bleakest observations in the history of philosophy that all kinds of philosophers agree on this hostility towards happiness. And even if one looks at so-called hedonists like the old Epicurus – that is, one cannot look at him but only at the didactic poem of Lucretius – one will find that even there the affair of happiness is rather a modest one.<sup>29</sup>

Like freedom and justice, happiness is one of the main values that all critical theorists have been committed to. In a lecture course from 1963 on *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Adorno talked about morality's demand for the renunciation of instincts and compares the conceptions of happiness of Aristippus and Epicurus:

Thus we find it in the genuine, radical version of hedonism, in Aristippus's theory with its rejection of postponement and its insistence on the immediate gratification of desires, on happiness here and now. A moderate, restrained he-

25 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 231, 234.

26 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 130 (German term inserted by M.K.).

27 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 207-238.

28 H. Marcuse, *On Hedonism*, cit., p. 217.

29 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 1, cit., p. 172 (transl. by M.K.).

donism is not worthy of the name. The moment a thinker does indeed acknowledge happiness and pleasure – Epicurus is a case in point – but then defers it or sublimates it in favour of the pleasure to be found in knowledge or the like, we know that moral philosophy has drifted into the great, and I am tempted to say murky mainstream of official philosophy. The heretical tendencies I have mentioned have always opposed this, albeit feebly since as forces of civilization they were relatively impotent.<sup>30</sup>

Adorno juxtaposes a "radical" and a "moderate" type of hedonism. The former is represented by Aristippus, the latter by Epicurus. In the quote, Adorno suggests that he endorses the former and spells out that he is critical of the latter and in particular of Epicurus's conception of happiness. In a lecture course, delivered one semester earlier in 1963, Adorno expressed his agreement with Aristippus more clearly. In the context of explaining his understanding of materialism and its tight connection to hedonism and in particular «to the dimension of both bodily pleasure and its opposite», Adorno declared:

Most materialist philosophers are therefore well-disposed towards pleasures of all kinds. Aristippus simply proclaimed that what matters is the immediate satisfaction of sensual pleasure now, here, instantly, without adjournment. The most nuanced and powerful doctrinal systems of dialectical materialism develop the conception of a world in which hunger and also fear, and in the end austerity can no longer exist. Materialism, so to speak, places the cut through the whole world under the perspective of this per se already matter-like bodily pleasure (*Organlust*) and its concept of matter is the objective correlate.<sup>31</sup>

It is questionable whether Aristippus can really be interpreted as a materialist philosopher. However, the quote demonstrates that Adorno agrees with his philosophical position that sensual and bodily pleasure is *the good* and pain and suffering *the bad*. Adorno's agreement is in line with his revaluation of the body against its Christian devalorization that has precursors in Nietzsche and Feuerbach.<sup>32</sup> Adorno's agreement with Aristippus and his endorsement of "radical hedonism", which he voices also in other sections of his lecture courses, are essential elements of his philosophy that allow for a better understanding of his whole thought.

30 T.W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, cit., p. 140.

31 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 179 (transl. by M.K.).

32 For Nietzsche's significant influence on Adorno see M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit.

## 4. Adorno's Materialist and Utopian Hedonist Ethics

Suffering and injustice are central topics of Adorno's philosophy. For him, suffering corresponds to unpleasure and pain.<sup>33</sup> He understands these phenomena not primarily as unchangeable elements of the human condition, but rather as the result of the whole civilization process that failed because it was based on the rational domination of nature. This process, which is inextricably linked to enlightenment «understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought», has not led to a «truly human state», but to an unjust world full of suffering.<sup>34</sup> For Adorno, human suffering is mainly the consequence of deprivation, renunciation of instincts, class domination, exploitation, violence, and the destructive forces of unjust societies. He observed that suffering is a topic that was usually neglected in the history of philosophy.<sup>35</sup> In his *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno stressed the importance of suffering for his own thought: «The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth. For suffering is the objectivity that weighs upon the subject; its most subjective experience, its expression, is objectively conveyed.»<sup>36</sup> The subjective experience and evidence of suffering is conveyed through the objective social reality that generates it. This evidence is, for Adorno, the necessary and sufficient condition for philosophy to discern and express the truth about suffering and thereby unjust societies. In line with this, he declared that philosophical thought's «measure is what happens objectively to the subjects, as their suffering.»<sup>37</sup> For a critical theorist, the critique of suffering caused by unjust societies is an ethical task: «Not the good but the bad is the subject matter of theory. [...] Its element is freedom, its theme oppression. [...] There is only one expression for truth: the thought which repudiates injustice.»<sup>38</sup> Adorno assigns this critical and ethical task also to genuine art. For him, modern art is capable of achieving and expressing the truth about suffering and to enable its recipient to experience it. How close and essential Adorno conceives the link between genuine art and suffering becomes clear from his speculations

about «the form of art in a changed society». In a just society «it would be preferable that one fine day art vanish altogether than it forget the suffering that is its expression and in which form has its substance.»<sup>39</sup> For Adorno, the expression of the truth about suffering and thus the critique of unjust societies is the ethical task that is not only essential for philosophy but also for genuine art.

Adorno's agreement with Aristippus allows for a better understanding of his focus on suffering and its repudiation. The negation of suffering is an essential part of Adorno's radical hedonism and is connected to his materialism. It is part of his «hedonist ethics» that, according to his own definition, holds pleasure to be the highest good and pain to be the «absolute evil (*unbedingtes Übel*).»<sup>40</sup> Suffering and pain are «the moving forces of dialectical thinking» as he pronounced in a section of the *Negative Dialectics* titled «Suffering Physical»:

All mental things are modified physical impulses [...]. The supposed basic facts of consciousness are something other than mere facts of consciousness. In the dimension of pleasure and displeasure they are invaded by a physical moment. All pain and all negativity, the moving forces of dialectical thinking, assume the variously conveyed, sometimes unrecognizable form of physical things, just as all happiness aims at sensual fulfillment and obtains it objectivity in that fulfillment. A happiness blocked off from every such aspect is no happiness.<sup>41</sup>

In this quote, Adorno addresses once more the connection of his materialism – that prioritizes body over mind – and his radical hedonism. And he makes again clear that his conception of happiness is borrowed from radical hedonism. While the affirmation of sensual and bodily pleasure is the positive part of his hedonism, the repudiation of suffering is the negative part. Physical suffering is the essential reference point of Adorno's whole critical theory and critique of unjust societies: «The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. 'Woe speaks: 'Go.' Hence the convergence of specific materialism with criticism, with social change in practice.»<sup>42</sup>

- 33 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton, Routledge, London 1996, p. 365; T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 176-178.
- 34 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, ed. by G. Schmid Noerr, trans. by E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, pp. XIV, 1.
- 35 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 178.
- 36 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 17-18; cf. M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit., p. 33-44.
- 37 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 169-170.
- 38 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, cit., p. 181.

- 39 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by G. Adorno and R. Tiedemann, trans. and ed. by R. Hullot-Kentor, Second Edition, Continuum, London/New York 2002, p. 260. For Adorno's views on the link between genuine art and suffering see M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit., pp. 45-75.
- 40 T.W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie*, Vol. 2, cit., p. 224 (transl. by M.K.).
- 41 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 202.
- 42 *Ivi*, p. 203. Model of Adorno's thought that pleasure and pain prompt and impel cognition is Nietzsche's philosophy of the body and in particular his aphorism *On*



The hedonistic goal and practical interest of Adorno's critical theory is the abolition of suffering that can only be achieved by a changed society. Society's

purpose – and this alone makes society a society – calls for it to be so organized as the productive forces would directly permit it here and now, and as the conditions of production on either side relentlessly prevent it. The *telos* of such an organization of society would be to negate the physical suffering of even the least of its members, and to negate the internal reflective forms of that suffering.<sup>43</sup>

Like Marcuse, Adorno derives from hedonism the demand for a future society that abolishes pain and suffering to the highest possible degree and allows for true pleasure, which cannot be attained in the existing capitalist societies. Both critical theorists reject a relativist conception of pleasure and an individualistic type of hedonism that claims that a good life devoted to pleasure can be realized in all kinds of societies: «In the false world all *ήδονή* is false.»<sup>44</sup> The attainment of true pleasure presupposes the achievement of a true society. While physical suffering is the negative reference point of Adorno's critical theory, its positive reference point is true pleasure and therefore the realization of a true society.

Contrary to Marx and later Marxist thinkers, Adorno had no hope for a revolutionary change of the existing societies. Beginning in the 1940s, he lamented «the desperate fact that the practice that would matter is barred.»<sup>45</sup> For Adorno, the only right practice that was left for an unpredictable amount of time is critical theory. Therefore, his goals of abolishing suffering, realizing true pleasure, and satisfying all desires amount only to a hedonist social utopia. In line with this, Adorno's thought has been characterized as a «utopian hedonism».<sup>46</sup> Although Adorno refused to picture a true society, his writings contain a rough draft of his hedonist social utopia.<sup>47</sup> In a utopian society a “true human being” would exist whose ego

*the Despisers of the Body* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. For Nietzsche's revaluation of the body and for a comparison of his and Adorno's concepts of pleasure see M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit., pp. 141-144.

43 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 203-204 (Adorno's italics).

44 T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, cit., p. 13.

45 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, cit., p. 245; cf. p. 242, and M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit., p. 161-169.

46 H. Schädlebach, *Dialektik als Vermittlungstheorie. Zur Konstruktion des Rationalen bei Adorno*, in L. v. Friedeburg, J. Habermas (eds.), *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1983, p. 91 (transl. by M.K.).

47 Cf. M. Knoll, *Theodor W. Adorno*, cit., pp. 171-200.

would not suppress its internal nature, its drives, in Freud's language its “id (*Es*)”. Rather, the ego would be «reconciled with the unconscious (*Es*), knowingly and freely following it where it leads.»<sup>48</sup>

48 T. W. Adorno, *Presuppositions. On the Occasion of a Reading by Hans G. Helms*, in Adorno, *Notes on Literature*, Vol. 2, Columbia University Press, New York 2002, p. 106 (German term inserted by M.K.).

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