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Critique Without Normative Foundations: Response to Vogelmann and Prusik

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I was grateful to read the commentaries on my article offered in this forum by Charles Prusik (2022) and Frieder Vogelmann (2022), both of whose earlier writings were influential for my thinking about progress in critical theory. Despite our broad agreement—concerning a commitment to materialism, and the attendant need to shift away from a critical theory project concerned with the justification of normative principles—a few clarifications are in order. Accordingly, I will address the two biggest issues Vogelmann identifies in my article (Sections 1 and 2), before turning to an important question about the relationship between suffering and critique raised by both authors (Section 3). I close by reflecting on Prusik’s most serious objection, which alerts me to the need to further clarify the relationship between the two kinds of progress outlined in my original article (Section 4). If critical theory involves an interdisciplinary critique of capitalist society, the way to relate the experience of learning this criticism to contemporary political-economic conditions remains an open question.

Section 1: “Progress in History” and the Critique of Political Economy

In *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Allen 2016), Amy Allen argues that we ought to do away with the conceptions of historical and moral progress used to ground the normative claims of critical theory since the Frankfurt School’s “second generation.” Arguing that these versions of normative critique often depend on a victorious narrative of historical advancement, Allen draws on the critical theory of Theodor W. Adorno and the genealogy of Michel Foucault to secure the normative perspective of critical theory through a forward-looking conception of progress. Since Allen’s forward-looking conception of progress concerns the promise of moral improvements to come, it makes possible a thoroughgoing renunciation of narratives of past historical progress that tend to support a Eurocentric project of colonial domination.

The problem I located in Allen’s project did not concern its disavowal of grand narratives of moral progress, nor still its desire to decolonize critical theory. It lay rather in the fact that Allen enlists the work of the early Frankfurt School to ends that are basically opposed to those of their project. Viewing critical theory as normative critique, I argued, is specific to the turn taken by Frankfurt School critical theory after the work of Jürgen Habermas. Bringing Adorno and some projects of anticolonial thought into this kind of project poses fundamental problems, both for our interpretation of these authors, and for the broader project of critical theory itself. With regard to the former, I argued that the question of the “normative foundations” of critical theory does not occur in Adorno’s work, and that the social theory offered by Adorno is at odds with a project of normative critique.¹ As the combination of first-generation Frankfurt School critical theory with the post-Habermasian project of normative critique is an uneasy one, I claimed that Allen’s strategy distorts the more general project of a critique of society. In fact, in our readiness to unburden our normative accounts of colonial baggage, we risk losing sight of (at least) two forms of

¹ Normative critique, following this argument, is a form of traditional theory. This point has been made by Chris O’Kane: “Adorno and Horkheimer ascribed normative criticism to traditional theory and drew on the critique of political economy to critique the negative totality of capitalist society from the perspective of its abolition” (O’Kane 2021, 214).

backward-looking progress that we can find throughout the work of the early Frankfurt School. These forms of progress are not used by these theorists to ground normative foundations, and they are not part of a positive historiography of human improvement, but they are nevertheless important for critical theory to recognize. The first is the progressive development of capitalist societal relations and forms of domination, and the second is the cultivation of criticism as a form of experience in critics. My article thus largely agrees with Vogelmann's previous work in which he argues that critical theory ought to do away with the search for normative foundations (Vogelmann 2021), as well as the work of a few others (see Reynolds 2021, 10 n. 4). Despite this agreement, Vogelmann raises questions about a few dimensions of my argument, which I will address now.

The first issue raised by Vogelmann has to do with my "underdeveloped" reading of Allen (Vogelmann 2022, 27). This shortcoming is present in the way I apparently overlook Allen's distinction between "historical progress" and "progress in history" (Vogelmann 2022, Section 1; Allen 2016, 32-3). In this part of her text, Allen seeks to distinguish metaphysical narratives of historical progress from contextually-grounded and local instances of improvement that we might more readily be inclined to admit. We might say, using this distinction (and an example that is my own), that the abolition of slavery in the United States was a form of "progress in history," since it no doubt opened a new moral horizon and an improvement of the situation of millions of individuals. But Allen would argue that to inscribe this event in a broader story of historical progress involving a great march towards justice is to re-enforce the problematic narratives of enlightenment that allowed for the justification of slavery and colonialism in the first place. The progress represented by the abolition of slavery is a matter of a contextually understood, limited improvement within a certain historical moment, and not the victory of a transhistorical idea of freedom.

In my defense of forms of backward-looking progress in critical theory, Vogelmann infers that I am merely describing Allen's "progress in history."² This evaluation runs into problems, however, because the type of backward-looking progress I described—the progressive expansion of capitalist social forms and their domination over every dimension of life—³cannot be similar to Allen's "progress in history." Although it is always realized locally, capitalism's development is not merely "local" or "contextually grounded," and it does not represent a positive moral improvement in even Allen's limited sense. When Adorno, like other Marxist theorists of political economy, describes this expansion and domination, he is talking about an increasingly global and context-generating form of development with the capability of coopting even the rare moments of "progress in history" into its development. To return to our example, in describing the evolution of capitalist social forms as a progressive development, we are not talking about the temporary success of the abolition of slavery but about the ability of newly-ascendant financial capital after this historical moment to consolidate its power over the political system in the North and South

² "As far as I can see, Reynolds's claim amounts to nothing more than that we can and maybe must be able to understand certain trajectories of our social practices as "progress in history" in Allen's sense" (Vogelmann 2022, 28).

³ "Critical theory is... obliged to retain a backward-looking historical progress, in order to apprehend the expansion of capitalist social forms, and their increasing domination of social, cultural, and global reality" (Reynolds 2021, 6).

alike.⁴ Seen from the standpoint of capital accumulation, the latter was a form of progress, even though it was hardly a moral victory for humankind.

In its expansion and development, capitalism exhibits progressive development not reducible to temporary and contextual moral victories, nor still to a metaphysical story of inevitable historical improvement. This kind of development is highly ambiguous, as it is inevitably intertwined with regression, as I believe Adorno describes in his essay on “Progress” and his lectures on history. The importance of retaining this backward-looking notion of capitalist expansion—whether we describe it as the valorization of value, the domination of labor, or the expansion of colonial exploitation—⁵is that it allows us to develop an historical account of the social structure and the possibilities available within it. Conversely, if we eliminate capitalism’s meta-contextual form of historical development from our critique of society, we might lose sight of the goal of critical theory as a critical *social theory*, in order to facilitate a more limited epistemic and moral project. We might be inclined, in the latter case, to view colonization and the struggle against it as a project of moral and epistemic clarification, rather than one of changing the material conditions of society. Adorno and Horkheimer’s works in early critical theory, as I have argued, are more clearly aligned with the latter aim.

This concern of mine is related to Robert Nichols’ critique of Allen’s text, in which he points out that Allen’s selection of decolonial theorists is inclined towards those who see imperialism as an epistemic and moral problem, rather than as a historical and material reality to be analyzed with the tools of social theory.⁶ Departing from the authors discussed by Allen, who view the harms of colonialism through more of an epistemic lens, Nichols argues that there is another tradition of thinking about colonialism, found variously in Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin and Gurminder Bhambra.⁷ The social theory offered in these works is different from a normative or epistemic critique: “Notwithstanding the important differences between them, [these thinkers] are social theorists: they are attempting to analyze a set of social processes that are not reducible to the normative or epistemic claims held by the individuals within them” (Nichols 2018, 783). The important realization here is that, for a project of anti-colonial thought that views colonialism as a development of capitalist societal relations, there is no need to reject progress as a theoretical term, because this term does not name a form of moral historical improvement but rather the expansion of capitalism’s domination over the social world. Social theory in this mold is less concerned with decolonization as an epistemic aim of philosophical texts, than with describing the “inner logic of *expansion* and *integration*”

⁴ This history is outlined in W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880* (1998 [1935]), particularly in Chapter 14, titled “The Counter-Revolution of Property.”

⁵ The way that we describe the development of capitalism is a matter of debate, but we need not agree with Adorno’s interpretation to see the more general point about concepts of development in critical social theory.

⁶ Nichols particularly criticizes the influence of Edward Said on Allen’s understanding of imperialism: “The point is that in this Saidian formulation, the central problem of imperialism is a set of explicitly or implicitly held propositions about the world, especially about the universality or superiority of one’s own way of life. This framing of the problematic dovetails in unexpected ways with the later Frankfurt School thinkers with whom Allen grapples, since it is formulated from the standpoint of epistemology and/or moral philosophy: rooting out false claims that have normatively problematic consequences” (Nichols 2018, 782).

⁷ We might also add W.E.B. Du Bois, Walter Rodney, and Frantz Fanon as theorists of political economy for whom the resistance to colonialism does not involve the rejection of the concept of progress.

of capitalist and colonial social processes (784), so that they might be understood, and eventually interrupted.

At this point, we might be inclined to argue, with Allen, that this line of criticism merely faults her for not writing a different book.⁸ After all, Allen is careful to distinguish moral narratives of historical progress from the question of technical-scientific progress (Allen 2016, 10)—and we might (albeit with some difficulty) expand the latter category to include the progressive development of capitalist societal relations.⁹ It seems plausible that a normatively grounded critique and the critique of political economy each have a role to play in an overall view of society, and that it is wrong to hold a book concerned with the first to the standards expected of the second. But my argument proceeds from the—increasingly widespread—recognition that the normative and epistemic focus of later Frankfurt School critical theory has overshadowed the importance of the critique of political economy.¹⁰

Moreover, the apparent compatibility between these different projects overlooks the core of Adorno's treatment of capitalist society. As we have seen, in the subordination of life to capitalist value, we find an increasingly global process which creates our theoretical contexts themselves. It is precisely Adorno's point that the development of economic rationality and its material relations has conceptual and normative implications, but *not* that these conditions directly or immediately facilitate a rational account of justice.¹¹ Although the progressive development of the capitalist social totality is not a process of moral improvement, it is only by grasping the nonidentity of the concepts and norms produced by this social whole with their social content that we might commence a fundamental critique of capitalist society. While the progressive domination characterizing capitalist society as a totality is not utterly separated from the normative wrongness of life under capitalism, then, discovering the moment of normativity within this totality is a matter of dialectical reflection, and not one of justification and application.

The retrieval and distillation of norms from within society and its institutions presumes the basic self-identity of society, in the sense that it assumes that society's moments of negativity and its normative principles are capable of rational reconciliation. But it is precisely this identity of society with itself—and the possibility of this reconciliation—that Adorno

⁸ See Allen 2018a, 795.

⁹ This kind of argument has been made by Feenberg, using his concept of the "technosystem" (Feenberg 2018). In her reply to Feenberg, Allen defends her Weberian-Habermasian separation of technical and scientific progress from normative progress, by noting that her text aims only to criticize the prominent ways of grounding critical theory's normative foundations (Allen 2018b, 539). Rejecting the latter project might allow us to develop a different conception of modernity, in which techno-scientific and normative development are understood as aspects of a capitalist social totality whose wrongness is not a question for a specialized branch of philosophy but can only be understood through a reflection on the whole.

¹⁰ As well as Chris O'Kane, cited above, Christian Lotz points this out, describing the later Frankfurt School's abandonment of questions of capitalism and ecological devastation: "I (especially) think that the turn of critical theory to the issue of normativity was a bad turn, and, as such, it is time to engage in fresh reflections on some insights that got lost in the aftermath of Habermas, Honneth, and their Anglo-American followers. From my point of view, this reflection necessarily contains a return to Marx, even if some will interpret this as return to battles that have already been fought" (Lotz 2014, xiv). For more work attempting to reverse this change of focus, see Bonefeld (2014) and Prusik (2020).

¹¹ Prusik puts this well in his commentary: "[Adorno's] negative dialectics should be grasped as a process of immanent critique that expresses—and requires—moral, normative, and experiential concepts that belong to the capitalist social object" (Prusik 2022, 12).

consistently opposes.¹² From this perspective, we can see that a normatively oriented critical theory risks producing an ideological account of life under capitalism based on the standards of this society, without attention to the way in which every appearance of this society is related to the development and expansion of capital. Through the project of critique as the rational securing of normative foundations, we not only enlist Adorno's help for a project with which it is very hard to square with his social theory, but we further the broader deemphasis on political economy in critical theory. The latter is a project dependent on forms of backward-looking development bearing no immediate relation to a normative theory of justice, but nevertheless of more urgent theoretical importance.

Section 2: The Cultivation of Criticism

In the third section of my paper, I reviewed a few of Adorno's occasional references to the cultivation of critique, offering an argument that this process makes critical theory possible. In the development of critical sensibility and an openness to philosophical experience, critical theory also depends on a backward-looking notion of progress. In his criticism of this element of my paper, Vogelmann argues that my approach to critical theory attempts to replace Allen's "normative foundations" of critical theory with a "parallel" grounding via self-reflexivity (Vogelmann 2022, 30). Vogelmann worries that grounding critique on self-reflection overburdens the latter, since it is "too idealistic and individualistic" to serve this role (30). My understanding of critical theory, if we follow this argument, attempts to ground it through vague imperatives on individuals to change their minds, rather than on something like a systematic understanding of ideology in capitalist society, and the attendant impossibility of such an individualistic ideal transforming the whole.

To respond to this objection, we must first recognize that I have not argued anywhere that the cultivation of self-reflexivity grounds critique. On the contrary, I meant to show that there is a form of progress in Adorno's work that doesn't have to do, immediately, with the project of critical theory as a search for normative foundations. In the development of critics and their theories, we can speak of progressive processes of development, even if these processes (like the conceptual and material development of capitalism) are also shot through with the possibility of regression. Theoretical development itself, if we take this more "subjective" dimension of critique seriously, is a progressive historical process, even if we would struggle to cast it in a metaphysical and historicist narrative. There is a real sense in which we discuss theoretical insight as a matter of "progress"—and this sense underwrites our claims about the ability or inability of certain theoretical perspectives to give us an adequate perspective.¹³ By outlining this second kind of backward-looking progress, I merely meant to say that the development of theoretical consciousness is also a dimension of the progress discussion, and if we want to understand how it works, it would be helpful to go back and see how Adorno and his colleagues talk about this cultivation process. This brings

¹² Society for Adorno is self-contradictory (Adorno 1976b [1961], 109), or an "antagonistic totality" (Adorno 1995 [1966], 10). See also Adorno's essay "Sociology and Empirical Research" ([1957] 1976c).

¹³ See, for example, Titus Stahl's (indirectly related) recognition: "It is clear that progress in these debates can only be made if we succeed in showing that there is a form of nonexternal critique that does not simply underwrite socially accepted norms" (Stahl 2022 [2013], 4). I would argue that a similar sense of theoretical progress is also present in the project of decolonizing critical theory's normative foundations.

us to Adorno's consistent descriptions of the cultivation of critique, in which a backward-looking notion of progress (albeit not a stadial or linear form of progress) is present in the concepts of education and formation.¹⁴

The importance of learning and development for critical theory—when we disabuse ourselves of any claims regarding “grounding”—is that it allows us to make sense of a process whereby the moments of particularity not subsumable under the concepts of capitalist society are able to become a historical force. In this sense, this form of cultivation is not merely individualistic, although it certainly takes an individualist form in some of Adorno's work, where the possession of resistant sensibility is sometimes described in terms of the luck of a single individual.¹⁵ Quite like Vogelmann on this score, and apart from Adorno, I think that we need to recognize the social and material conditions making critique possible, and to move from this to a consideration of “what social and material resources critical theory can enlist” (Vogelmann 2022, 30). This “interdisciplinary materialism” (30), which would recognize the possibility of a critical education of sensibility, would find us asking about the forms of collectivity, educational arrangements, and political institutions through which the criticism of society can be progressively developed. In this way, it would also constitute a project of critical political education.¹⁶

Section 3: Normativity and Suffering

As we have seen, the early Frankfurt School thinkers have two different conceptions of backward-looking progress that we would do well to remember. In no way are these forms of progress univocal or transhistorical and in no way are they meant to normatively ground critical theory, *because the project of normative critique is different from that of the early Frankfurt School*. In Adorno's work more specifically, we find an attempt to criticize society from the standpoint of redemption. But this criticism, and this standpoint, cannot be rationally secured once and for all. This means that the precepts guiding critique in Adorno function differently than the normative principles of the later Frankfurt School. As Prusik writes of the standpoint of redemption in Adorno: “Adorno's utopian concept of redemption is not a foundational principle, but a reflexive standard of dialectical criticism, a position that holds the wrongness of present society against a possible future” (Prusik 2022, 19). Prusik is thus right to point out that the kind of education outlined in the last section of my paper and the present article possesses a normative impulse, and it would have been helpful to make this connection clearer in my work. But it suffices, for now, to note the difference between a

¹⁴ Prusik agrees: “... the notion of education as political practice is everywhere in Adorno” (Prusik 2022, 19). For more on this, see the discussion in my original paper, at Section 3.

¹⁵ See, for example: “If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms—a stroke of luck they have often enough to pay for in their relations with their environment—it is up to these individuals to make the moral and, as it were, representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it cannot see or, to do justice to reality, will not allow themselves to see” (Adorno 1995, 41). See also, similar remarks from Adorno's discussion with Hellmut Becker (Adorno and Becker 1999 [1969], 22–23).

¹⁶ The notion of political education underlying the early versions of critical theory make it easy to see why I agree with the impulse of Prusik's criticism when he argues that I come close to suggesting that capitalism will inevitably overcome itself (Prusik 2022, 18 and n. 15). The transformation of capitalist society is not at all guaranteed by its contradictions. The theoretical significance of political education is that it provides a way to work towards this transformation.

principle meant to *ground* a rational account of normativity, and a reflexive standard aiming to *express* an impulse of suffering humanity.

When it comes to critical theory's relationship to experiences of suffering, both Prusik and Vogelmann have articulated a helpful objection to my article. This stems from the way I describe Adorno and Horkheimer as relying on the obvious wrongness of certain experiences, such as pain and misery (Reynolds 2021, 3, 10 n. 5). Vogelmann once again repeats the reading we found in the last section, taking this claim of mine to imply that critical theory is "grounded" on suffering that does not require any theoretical elaboration, and points out that such negative experiences cannot normatively ground critical theory in a satisfactory way (Vogelmann 2022, 31). Vogelmann's problem disappears if we see the need to avoid suffering not as the unquestioned ground of critical theory, but rather as its starting point. My point is not that these experiences of suffering are immediate wrongs whose causes must remain a mystery but which nevertheless assure the rationality of our orientation, but rather that we need not spend our theoretical attention justifying exactly *why these conditions are wrong*. While this latter project might serve a supporting role in struggles for social change—helping to consolidate, for example, Northern voters during the period leading up to the U.S. Civil War—a theory of society departing from "traditional theory" ought to aim for more: for an understanding of the material conditions causing this harm, and the contradictions in the social order that they index. While the experiences of suffering giving Adorno's social theory its impulse do not provide conceptual grounding, it is clear that this critical theory still rests on these experiences, and on their obvious wrongness.

In a few passages of my paper, I went so far as to suggest that these elementary experiences of suffering resist conceptualization. As Prusik rightly notes, however: "Although Adorno refers to a moment of immediacy in all mediation, it is too strong to say that the experience of suffering is free from conceptualization" (Prusik 2022, 18). Indeed, while Adorno is clear that the wrongness of suffering is not an urgent theoretical question, he clearly holds that all suffering is mediated (Adorno 1995 [1966], 202; Prusik 2022, 18). To claim that pain and suffering resist theoretical elaboration indeed carries the risk of positing a false immediacy, especially if we look to suffering to "ground" our theoretical investigations.

In light of this criticism, I want to slightly qualify my claim that suffering resists theoretical elaboration by recognizing that critical theory necessarily begins by encountering experiences of social suffering and seeks to uncover the mediations conditioning them. In their works, Adorno and Horkheimer respond to suffering not by developing a theory of justice through which its wrongness can be rationally assured, but rather by discovering its causes and their conceptual correlates in capitalist society. This materialist research program is not a straightforwardly moral or ethical project in the sense that we might use these terms today, since it relates negatively to prevailing moral and ethical conceptions and institutions. As Horkheimer writes in "Materialism and Metaphysics": "The materialist view has the negative significance that it rejects a metaphysically grounded morality. But in addition it has always meant to materialists that man's striving for happiness is to be recognized as a natural fact requiring no justification" (Horkheimer 1993 [1933], 44). If "the condition of all truth is to lend a voice to suffering" (Adorno 1995 [1966], 17), and if suffering is thus "the moving force of dialectical thinking" (202), then the expression of this truth will draw on human

misery as an incitement to theoretical elaboration—meaning an incitement to the critique of political economy—but need not need to concern itself with the foundations of its moral claims. In Adorno and Horkheimer’s repeated claims that the wrongness of suffering ought to be taken at face value, I see an argument against the project of securing normative foundations for critical theory.¹⁷

Section 4: Methodological and Substantial Critique

The final point I want to speak to is Prusik’s argument against my framing of the critique of political economy as a form of progress with “methodological” importance. As Prusik writes, we ought to remember that negative dialectics, at least as conceived by Adorno, is not a *method*: “Adorno’s presentation of dialectics... refuses the functionalizing of dialectics as a method of critique...” (Prusik 2022, 16). Dialectics cannot be a method because the conceptual work undertaken by this project is not *merely* conceptual. We can see this, for example, in Adorno’s characterization of negative dialectics as a process of “developing a consistent sense of nonidentity” (Adorno 1995 [1966], 5).

The moments of particularity frustrating identity’s claim to totality also challenge the possibility of a purely or systematically theoretical knowledge, even while thought must work through the medium of identification. Since society’s relation to itself is one of nonidentity, the theoretical reflection adequate to grasping this nonidentity will not be exhaustively expressible as a relation of concepts, but will also depend on the development of sensibility, to an openness to otherness incapable of being subsumed under the concept. As Prusik writes: “Adorno’s wager is that the concepts of the totality are immanently self-critical, that negativity lives in the abstract stability of identity, and negative dialectics can reflect on the historical contents of concepts by unsealing the reality that comes into contradiction with them” (Prusik 2022, 16). While Adorno’s social theory involves a strong methodological critique of positivism, the critique of political economy found in his work is not *only* a methodological intervention.

Adorno’s refusal to spell out negative dialectics as a method of social theory is the reason that the second section of my paper—in which I discussed the critique of political economy—does not directly describe his approach to critical theory as a method. At the same time, at the outset, I did frame the two conceptions of backward-looking progress discussed in my paper as pertaining, respectively, to the methods and objects of critique on the one hand and to the substantial development of its possibility on the other.¹⁸ I want to clarify that my distinction between the methodological and substantial dimensions of critical social theory comes from my broader project, and is not meant as an interpretation of

¹⁷ This is most clear in Adorno’s claim that a call to justify the demand of avoiding Auschwitz would be “monstrous” (Adorno, 2005a [1966], 191). While the need to avoid Auschwitz is the impetus of critical reflection, it is clear here that any attempt to conceptually justify its wrongness (as if accepting this wrongness is a matter of rational discussion) is proscribed. Rocío Zambrana (2013) and Justin Evans (2022) provide further discussions of what critique without normative foundations—or critique recognizing neoliberalism’s “logic of normative ambivalence” (Zambrana 2013, 116)—might look like.

¹⁸ “Since this project must abandon the possibility of a fixed perspective from which they can be resolved, oppositions such as the one between progress and regression are understood to pertain not only to the theoretical systems of social research—conditioning its methods and objects—but also to the subjective conditions allowing for the formation and cultivation of critique” (Reynolds 2021, 1).

Adorno. The aim of the broader project is to show that critical theory requires conceptions of educational development that speak to both the (inter)subjective possibility of critique, and its objective area of concern. It might well be, in the light of critiques such as Prusik's and Vogelmann's, that this distinction will ultimately prove irrelevant. After all, as a more thorough study of this issue would have to recognize, one of the defining features of Adorno's social theory is that society is both subject and object—and that this duality of society is the expression of its self-nonidentity.¹⁹ Provisionally distinguishing the methodological and substantial (or objective and subjective) sides of critique might indeed be idealistic; and in the final analysis, we might determine that the critique of political economy and that critique's possibility in a critical collective are not meaningfully different. But the path out of idealism is long, and the final analysis is still the object of much striving.

I do want to raise, however, one definite way in which this juncture—between the critique of traditional theory and “methodologically unmethodical” development of critical consciousness (Adorno 1991 [1958], 20)—raises questions for future research. This lies in the way that we conceive of the social group articulating critique, and either allow or disallow ourselves from viewing the constitution of this social group itself as a social problem. While Adorno's reflections on sociology helpfully raise this issue, particularly in his debate with Popper, they by no means illuminate an easy path forward. In the constitution of a critical collective, and here we must also understand this collective as an educational group, we might realize the possibility of critique in ways that speak to both dimensions—the methodological and the substantial—that I provisionally separated. But how do we conceive the social and objective distinctiveness of this collective? How can the critique of political economy become the knowledge produced by an expanding, and increasingly self-critical group within society? What are the institutions capable of supporting this project? In the difficulty of reconciling the two forms of progressive development outlined in my paper, we can see the way in which a departure from critique as a rational securing of normative foundations might bring us to a consideration of the educational work of political movements, and the mode of critique specific to their struggle.

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¹⁹ See, for example: Adorno (1976a [1969], 33; 1976c [1957]). For a helpful exposition of Adorno's sociological thought, see the work of Matthias Benzer (2011).

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