

THREE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE NECESSITY OF CRITIQUE IN THEODORE ADORNO'S WORKS

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Introduction

The diversity and complexity of Theodore Adorno's works is well noted, and often creates difficulties for his readers and interpreters. He fluidly shifts from topic to topic, from one set of concepts and terminology to another and into another. There are certain common themes, however, that Adorno consistently returns to throughout his works. This paper confines itself to a few of these themes that appear in his major works *Against Epistemology* and *Negative Dialectics*. First, it considers three diads or polarities that Adorno considers to have been neglected by philosophy during Modernity: Society and individual; subject and object; and entity and concept. Then, from that ground, it explores the necessity for philosophical critique, both of others and of oneself carried out through the equivocal concept of thought. Of course, in writing on Adorno, one's work is forced to take on some of his characteristics, in this case, the interrelatedness of the moments of the critique; clearly, none of these can be considered in stark isolation. They presuppose each other, or, to take an expression from Adorno, they are in constellation. ¹

Adorno could be criticized for being solely a critic, a disgruntled anti-philosopher who gives us nothing in the end to work with. To complain thus is to show explicitly that one has chosen to misunderstand him, for Adorno's method of critique ² educates both by giving a rich model of criticism and by pointing beyond itself in warning against any strict application of his idiom and concepts which would seek to freeze these into a hermetically sealed living practice. To use Adorno thus would be to make him into nothing more than a skeptic, a player of linguistic games. To the contrary, in the criticisms of Transcendental Phenomenology cast in the image of Husserl lie the central moments of Adorno's living practice of philosophy; the refusal ever to rest, contented or discontented, with cognisance of the truth. In this way, one preserves the possibility of doing justice to the truth, which is the dreamed-of aim of philosophy. It is necessary and not merely ironic that the one absolute directive which can be offered by Adorno's philosophy is to criticize well.

Adorno's critique is historical in two senses: first, he argues that attempting to lay a foundation for *prima philosophia* owes its illusory clarity to what has been displaced, and thus worse than denied, the living practice of philosophy as thought in historical situation; second, Adorno's criticism is itself a contingent moment in history and cannot then be taken as replacement or mere supplantation of what he criticizes. The positive in his philosophy is that he brings back awareness to the fact that more has been lost in first philosophy than one could simply discount. Philosophy unconscious of its own mediation becomes philosophy in name only. "The metacritique of epistemology requires constructive reflection upon its structure as one of guilt and punishment (Schuld und Strafe), necessary error and futile correction" (AE 25). ³ Adorno places himself willingly in that fundamentally insecure area.

Diads of Dialectic

The very concept of the dialectic presupposes that it deals in the manner of conversation between two different things, and, that something comes out of it which is greater than the simple opposition of those two things. In Adorno's critique, we can observe three complementary dialectical pairs: individual and society; entity and concept; object and subject. Of all three, Adorno points out that neither pole of the diad can be reduced to the other, that to do so involves one in contradiction and loses grasp over both poles; he also makes manifest the why's behind the urge in the circumstances of our modern times to disregard one half of the diad and to think that one can enunciate the whole by charting the entirety of the other half.

Every analysis requires a method, which seemingly requires a fixed point of origin. So, whoever would begin to do what is considered that most general work starts under the shadow of the demand to clarify everything from the beginning. And, the *apparati* are already there in place for that; that is, naivete is not a commodity hard to come by. Only by opening one's eyes to the various meditations could one move toward the ascribed aims of epistemology, but in our time, most philosophy does not do that, but rather echoes the idols by which we are deceived.

That society could not exist without individuals seems a trivial fact, much like a scientist's saying that a glass could not exist without the atoms which composed it; that the individual does not exist unmediated in turn by society is the stumbling block of epistemology. The problems which plagued Descartes so, "What can I know for sure?", "What can't I doubt" both phrase themselves not coincidentally in the first person singular. There is no escape either in the equivocal "one". A "we" to that perspective is an aggregate of "I"s, but not even that, for it must comprise itself of one "I" and many "he" and "she"s. Judging by how much energy and ink have been spilled over the mind-body problem, even that illusory solution to the problem of the composition of society leads nowhere but to alienation.

The individual can only exist as a concept or an entity in society, that is, as a mixed batch of expressions that the society uses in its internal speech, or as the thing to which these expressions can never do justice. Even to require that society be constituted out of monadic individuals presupposes that those individuals be comparable to the others by nature, that is, it requires particulars to be commensurable. This requires in turn a common language and practice, which requires society. To patiently look for the end of the chains of mediation so that we can call that end the beginning or the origin involves philosophy every time in antinomies and worse, lies.

For Adorno, the individual, from whom the texts that one will call philosophy come, must become and remain conscious of his or her own mediation through the vastly larger domain of society; this requirement itself, however, is not a stable concept. Every time will have its own distortions of perception and language, and the degree of self-consciousness will never be able to be quantified. But, in choosing one thing as fundamental, and then using the individual entity as the source for conceptualization, no justice is done to the others, the world, and the society of which the individual is a distorted reflection. Then, "[w]hat is antithetically developed, however, is not, as one would no doubt currently have it, the structure of being in itself, but rather antagonistic society" (AE 4).

Phenomenology, beginning, as a course and consequence of its method, with consciousness, comes to recognize and investigate the social only after the structures of individual consciousness has been described and delineated. It is for this reason that, in *Against Epistemology*, while Adorno explicitly criticizes in particular the Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, implicit in this is similar criticism of movements in philosophy that ignore the role of social mediation, in particular Positivism, whether it be the methodological Positivism of Comte, Ayer, or the Vienna Circle, or a less explicit positivism that simply takes the individual for granted as the privileged unit and perspective, such as the other heirs of British Empiricism. Since Phenomenology, which functions as paradigmatic for Adorno as Epistemology (*Erkenntnistheorie*), would begin with the consciousness of the individual, Adorno criticizes it through the concepts proper to the society, making extensive implicit and explicit use of the relation of barter and the principle of the division of labor.

The relation of barter is not identical to but is intimately related to the aim traditionally implicit in thought, of making everything commensurable. In mathematicization it finds its purest form, yet even in structures of language, this relation holds great sway. The mere fact that we can communicate at all requires that there be commensurability between some things, and we could not exist as humans without some trade, without some commodities being exchangeable for others. But, Adorno points out, these relations of exchange are not fixed and in-themselves, as "vulgar economic thought" would have it; rather, what can be exchanged for what is determined "through social relations" (AE 65).

No exchanges are perfect. The sign of equality, the mark of mathematics, syllogism, and symbolic logic, conceals in itself that what is being exchanged never match each other. If they did, if the copula of trade was a mere sign of identity, there would never be any reason for the trade in the first place, since what would be possessed would be the very thing traded for. Swapping is necessary because of the division of labor in society, the condition of society itself. And, the effects of this division of labor do not extend merely into the abstracted plane of material goods.

We can, conscious of the fact that here we are abstracting necessarily, talk of other planes of labor: the creation of texts and institutions, the administration of rules that are societal "givens", even the return of love in the unit of the family from child to parent. All of these are, of course, interrelated, and parts of the, ultimately, barter economy which never allows an equal trade to be made. However, some of the individuals are privileged over others. This occurs historically with the dominance of classes, but philosophy mirrors this as well, partly residing in the nature of language and thought. Thought, the play with concept, is constantly tempted to overreach itself by presenting itself as an object, saying what thought must be like. "Socially, however, the split of method from things in its constitution appears as the split between mental (geistiger) and physical labor" (AE 12). The worker who sells her labor and comes home at night to expend her wages on sustenance and entertainment, the invalid, the marginalized, the lower caste, those who are unable to fully realize the use of society's productive forces, tell their story and create text only at the behest of those who hold the power. Even in the case of revolution, we can always say that the fatal flaw of the world, and of the language through which we must live in that world, is that there is not enough value for every person to exist as a human being, not enough space for every story to be told, not enough time for all to be comforted; yet that is the imperative of philosophy, reconciliation.

Those who do create the signs of philosophy by thinking, then, labor under that unclear responsibility to be true to the society that they act within. But the mere fact of writing immediately makes one different, and the temptation is to think that one as an individual can speak, not only for more than an individual (which is possible as the condition of language itself), but for all individuals in general, like Husserl's Transcendental Ego assumed to be the general form underlying all conscious life. This neglects the fact that there is no central moment, no individual center of absolute gravity in society. The danger is of neglecting difference:

A classless society presupposes universal currency of the life of consciousness of all its members and just that is excluded by Husserl's understanding of essence [graspable by the transcendental ego]. Husserl's theory must bear the responsibility for philosophemes of this sort. However harmless and formal it may appear, it can never sustain the claim of an "unvarying structure of pure consciousness" since it arises out of psychological observations in specific persons in specific situations, it refers back to them. The 'non-currency' of men depends on the reification of the world in which they live. They congeal in the congealed, and if congealation is their own product, they are ultimately reproduced by it. (EA 220-1)

In this overlaying of structure from one life to life in general and then to all particular lives, even the creator of this text is himself lost. We shall see this more clearly with the opposition of subject and object and entity and concept.

Thought is subjective, but it is of objects, and when thought would reduce itself to either pole in order to make itself more clear in the preserved symbology of a philosophical text, it loses itself discontentedly in the preserved and repeatable signs. Adorno criticizes the impulse towards categorization of either pole, for truth "is a constellation of moments which cannot be reckoned as a 'residuum' of either the subjective or

the objective side" (AE 72). To reduce to either pole is to ignore the essential and asymmetrical connection of subject and object.

Due to the inequality inherent in the concept of mediation the subject enters into the object altogether differently from the way that the object enters into the subject. An object can be conceived only by a subject but always remains something other than the subject, whereas a subject by its very nature is from the outset an object as well." (ND 183)

Yet this is what philosophy, called to be philosophy of origins and thus to make perfect sense of existence, is required to do; otherwise, it must confess that it does not proceed scientifically in scientific times, and thought will be met with distrust.

But, thought as trying to be true to thinking cannot do without either the subject or the object. The subject, the synthesizing moment of consciousness, must be present in philosophy to afford experience the very possibility of claiming that it is a whole. Yet the whole which experience would like to be cannot be without content, even that of the logical laws; for these laws themselves are objects of a thought. We cannot do without either pole, for ". . .the concept of the subject can be so little emancipated from existence or the 'object' from subjective functions of thought. In empty confrontation, neither fulfills the purpose for which it was devised" (AE 117).

To exalt the side of the object, to demand that subjectivity ultimately be nothing more than a composite moment of the objects of which it is aware, is, for Adorno, to chose the weaker of the two wrong positions. For, in empiricism, "[b]y humbly deferring to sheer existence, thought fails to come to grips with it and thus abandons the moment of freedom and spontaneity" (AE 24). This is to give up the aim of philosophy with a noncommittal shrug from the very beginning; "[t]hrough empiricism as an epistemology tracks down the conditions of all knowledge in factual-psychological consciousness which it regards as an underlying principle, this consciousness and what is given in it could always be different, according to empiricist ground rules" (AE 24). Everything becomes contingent, and the theory is not able to live up to its name as such.

Without the mediation of the subject, the objects cannot have any meaning. We know, before we do anything that we call philosophy, that some objects do have meaning for us. We are not simply presented with them, as it were, brutally. Indeed, without the mediation of the subject, the meanings that the objects lend to each other in another form of mediation, could not occur. More dangerous is to do as Husserl, to make the subject the center of all production of meaning. Instead of being simply confronted with brute inchoate existence from which not even truths about oneself could be derived, the derivation of object from subject produces a seemingly gentle illusion: that of complete knowledge both of subject and object. This turns out to be nothing more than the alienation of the subject from itself. Adorno observes: "[n]o object is wholly known; knowledge is not supposed to prepare the phantasm of a whole" (ND 14). The subject in the act of constituting the object mediates it, instead of simply being presented with it, as Husserl would have it.

In fact, knowledge of the object not only rightly presupposes the subject, but is also conditioned by the ways in which the subject gains and categorizes that knowledge. There is no simple perception of objects; for Husserl, they are intended as being this sort of object or that in this or that modality of certainty. This, however would chain the object, the "hyletic data", into a permanent orbit around the subject, which is assumed to be itself for all time: "[t]o yield to the object means to do justice to the object's qualitative moments. Scientific objectification, in line with the quantifying tendency of all science since Descartes, tends to eliminate qualities and to transform them into measurable definitions" (ND 43). The facticity of the object is, for Husserl, and indeed for any who would reduce object to subject, wholly linguistic and presentable. The object has been made interchangeable, a spare part in the logical machine, any denomination of various coinages which are mutually comprehensible.

But, objects are not so reducible. In order to be as objects, they require the subject and other objects. That is to say, they require the world which, although it cannot make sense of them, can lend them sense:

Just as no lived experience is 'singular' but rather interlaced with the totality of individual consciousness, and thus necessarily points beyond itself, so there are no such things as absolute senses or references (Bedeutungen). Any sense, of which thought becomes aware at all possesses, by dint of thinking, an element of universality, and more than just itself. (AE 93)

The subject, by participating in this reduction of all other things to the intentional structures of itself, becomes estranged from itself, just like the factory boss who can never, by grace of his position, know who he is because he can never get a true answer from his workers. By interrogating the things themselves in moments of our own power, all we get are the answers they think we want them to give. But, no matter what the imposed structure is, there is always noise, residue; the nonidentification of a self to the world, a self which blindly believes in that identification, is always there like a unreconciled memory, waiting for the moment when it can show itself: "[t]he more recklessly the subject insists on identity and the more purely it strives to establish its mastery, the more threateningly looms the shadow of non-identity" (AE 83).

If it were merely a case of the subject not being aware of itself, of it mistaking itself while only playing a game, this would not be such a great matter. The philosopher thinks for others; she is a producer of text, a relation to and of society. We are all of us estranged from the Transcendental Ego, which we call ourselves to be like, an Ego that would be everything and therefore, in the end, nothing. It calls us to self-abnegation, to not be either the subjects or the objects that we are, and to think the same of every other person, that they are not the suffering beings they seem to be, or worse, that that is all that they are. The taking of the individual subject of itself as being the sole constituter of the world and its contents is prefigured in our language; we find this in Adorno in the discussion of the last pole, that of entity and concept.

Adorno charges Husserl with having reduced entity to concept. This is not so difficult an act to understand. Language itself, and the principle of exchangeability that language seemingly exemplifies, pulls any thought magnetically towards that pole, that of concept-formation and manipulation. To give in to this urge, however, is to ignore that concepts themselves are contingent and to push the contingency off like a waste product onto the entities which are the condition for the concept meaning anything at all.

Experiences, which were the first to determine the noema at all, are trivialized into accidents, which play into the content as its sheer 'quality' and, so to speak, recur contingently while, as in scholasticism, the quiddity of the object, the sheer form of predication, is granted autonomy." (AE 168)

Entities are pushed behind the scene where concepts glibly play out against each other. Yet, every concept is contingent, for it is only through its constellation with entities, including the entity of the subject, that it exists, as an entity privileged above others, an entity in the form of a sign.

The fact that we have extensive practices which allow us to juxtapose the signs that we call concepts to each other leads us to make those the criteria for real existence. After enough indoctrination, only what is commensurable with the system is good; everything else is just noise, illusion, smoke. Adorno concedes that we cannot make entities into concepts: "[i]n fact no philosophy can drag in the *facta bruta* and present them like cases in anatomy or experiments in physics; no philosophy can paste the particulars in the text, as seductive paintings would hoodwink us into thinking" (ND 11). Our inherent inability as contingent and societally bound beings requires that entities be mediated by concepts for us: "[b]ut no matter how hard we try for linguistic expression of such a history congealed in things, the words we use will remain concepts. Their precision substitutes for the thing itself, without bringing its selfhood to mind; there is a gap between words and the thing they conjure." (ND 52-3)

But, if we are to think thoughts that aspire to truth, we cannot simply throw up our hands and concede that, since we cannot bring out the history of suffering, since that we cannot give to entities the value that they mutely demand, we are justified in merely cataloging the concepts which we use, regarding them as absolute and necessary. Adorno would have us realize that the process of thought working against its own reification must strive to do the impossible, to do justice to the entities tied to the concepts, to not forget

them by resting content with thought that substitutes them indiscriminately: "[t]hat a something could stand in for the infinity of its possibilities, may be valid for mathematical manifolds, but is hardly so for anything material whose participation in a *totum* and its qualityless permutability is not defined beforehand" (AE 118).

Husserl's method would absolve the debt which the concept owes to the entity. The philosopher should be able to conceive of a red that has no connection to society or history (that can only come in for Husserl once essences have been constituted), even to the historical position of the philosopher as a being created out of the manifold contingent moments of her past. Adorno argues: "[y]et one can speak meaningfully (sinnvoll) about identity only in relation to multiplicity. There is 'identical red' at all only for several objects which are red in common with each other" (AE 98).

Only through an interconnection with other concepts and entities can red have any sort of sense. Even the sense of something that I have never seen, some entity that belongs to the distant past or lies half a world away, is not given to me by a process of imagining fictions, but through the process of education, mediated by social factors, given to me through the mediation of my own and perhaps several other languages. Adorno calls on us not to desiccate our concepts for the sake of academic propriety, but rather to be as aware as we can of the processes by which they were mediated to us, the entities we would so easily let them disown.

However true it may be that the species is not exhausted in the process of abstraction, since identical moments must be at hand for a concept to be formed at all from abstraction from the diverse, nevertheless these identical moments cannot be separated from the abstracting operation and discursive thought." (AE 101)

When we reify our concepts, we do so not only for us, but for others as well. Voltaire ironically pointed this out in his history of Charles XII of Sweden, who, of great courage, endurance, and resistance to the elements, killed off a great part of his countrymen and squandered the wealth of the kingdom in wars of glory; his soldiers, entities to which cold was a private concept and only dimly grasped by him, died in thousands of that cold. Refusal to rest content, the spark of critique, becomes imperative to us as those who would think as humans: "[t]he name of dialectics says no more, to begin with, than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy" (ND 5). For us today in a world which provides us with carefully written, greedily administered, and zealously guarded texts which claim to be thought, this is where thinking starts.

Thought as an Equivocal Concept

All three of these diads of mediation point towards a central problem; in each case, thought has crippled itself by identifying itself with one of the two poles and by seeking to bring the other pole forcibly into line as merely composed out of the pole taken as primary. Adorno calls us to critique this but not to condemn. In this critique, we find the explanation of how so many brilliant lights could go out, how so many thinkers could write things so wrong. Of Husserl making the concept of red independent of its moments he writes: "Only language, which denotes both the singular red moment and the species red, entices one to the hypostasis of the latter" (AE 98). Language, however, is an intimate part of our practice of life as humans in society. We cannot escape using it. Then, we must critique what language requires of thought. Every thought must be framed to another, and very often even to oneself, in language; this results in reification, however, in more than one form. To begin with, the speech act, the text, or the artifact laden with significance must have a form, and for that form to be understandable, the meaning of the form must be fixed. The concepts which apply to the object, in time, become the significance itself. Yet this is only one level of reification, of thought being called upon to give once and forever a reckoning of itself. The forms of thought which lend themselves easily to implementation in a given society, and thus to the continuance of domination, of the certainty of self-identity, are those which will be immediately seen as thought and as philosophical proper: "[T]he appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify. Conceptual order is content to screen what thinking seems to comprehend.

The semblance and the truth of the thought intertwine" (ND 5).

Even the quixotic attempt to remain true to an entity can be misinterpreted. We can see Husserl as sincere in his call to go "back to the things themselves", but still, his approach confines itself to the realm of concepts. "Givenness itself is in Husserl sublated in the possibility of being given – in a way not so unrelated to Kant's theorem of pure intuition; thus the factual is sublated in the ontologically pure determination of essence 'being factual'" (AE 132). Husserl does not notice that he has merely specified ways in which objects can be presented to a subject instead of truly describing how they are presented to a concrete human subject. Yet even the drive to description, once it has become instituted as thought, is no longer thought, but the structure that thought has left in its wake. Once it has been decided what is to count as thought, that is, what is to count as describing reality, any thought that does not fall under that concept will be attacked as nonsensical: "[h]ence the fanatical intolerance of the method and its total arbitrariness against any arbitrariness as deviation" (AE 13).

In our historical case, this problem takes definite form in the problem of scientificization of philosophy. The sciences reign on two levels, countenanced by the forms of domination in western society. To the powerful who are able to live full lives because they are the ones who administer the production of value and thus preserve the prerogatives of keeping it for themselves, the sciences are not usually threatening. If they do pose moral problems, such as the proliferation of more advanced technology of killing, these problems, eventually set in black and white cases, are assimilated by the reigning power structure and, except in rare cases, serve to solidify their control. To the dispossessed, those whose surplus labor allows their administration, anything nonscientific, any thought which denies them certainty and being able to say it is this way or that, seems only to be a form a debility and not thought at all. It is just something other, madness, hysteria, sour grapes, or perversity. People want answers, but that is not what immanent critique provides: "[I]f philosophy were to stoop to a practice which Hegel already mocked, if it were to accommodate its kind reader by explaining what the thought should make him think, it would be joining the march of regression without being able to keep up the pace." (ND 32)

There are several options immediately available. A philosophy celebrating the irrational, or at the very least the non-rational, is one, and, characteristically, Adorno sets up Bergson as a representative of this tendency. In *Against Epistemology*, Adorno criticizes the intuitionism of Bergson on two counts. First of all it merely displaces thought to another realm, leaving the reified structure of society exactly in place, while thought loses itself in impotence and resentment against "ordering conceptuality – which Bergson blames for all the mischief, though it is itself merely a derivative of mercantilist society" (AE 45). Second, and worse, intuitionism leaves a radical split between intuition and discursive thought, ceding the field to what it could have appropriated to strengthen thought: "Intuition is not a simple antithesis to logic. Intuition belongs to logic and reminds it of the moment of its untruth. As the blind spots in the moments of cognition – from which they still cannot escape – intuitions prevent reason from reflecting upon itself as a mere form of reflection of arbitrariness, in order to prepare an end for arbitrariness." (AE 46-7)

But, to go to the other extreme, to make philosophy the handmaiden of the sciences, putting her in a pleasing mask that deforms the face underneath until there is no longer any need of a mask because the face has taken on all of the rigid lines, that too is to call for an end to thought at the very moment that one pretends to open the field for it. Yet this is what Husserl, in a search for the soothing security of the language of the sciences does to philosophy by casting his in the image of a science. "Theory appears risky. Hence the nostalgia for the theory-free. Phenomenology remains theory since it necessarily reflects on cognition and does not 'directly' judge, so to speak, empirically. It wants to be theory-free, for its ideal is to transform every ideal into givenness and thus avoid the possibility of false conclusions as well as that of critique." (AE 135)

When all that is left for thought to do is to fill out the forms properly, to decide whether it has put in an honest days work by checking to see that all of the phenomenological descriptions have been properly carried out, then the only relation that philosophy has to life is either that of a refuge for those who don't want just to work and don't want to be scientists, or as a training school for apologists of the reified

society. But, in the time of the lordship of the sciences as thought, there are still moments of negativity, unplanned moments where thought writhes free its bonds. No crystallization left behind by a thinker can be fundamentally secure. There is always the possibility that, to use Adorno's metaphor, that in the landscape, parts suddenly reveal themselves as the creations of humanity; and, this possibility is realized in a critique motivated by the moments of such realization which has not yet become itself a method: "[D]ialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint" (ND 5). Indeed, immanent critique relies itself on two principles, the second of which allows the first to be true: first, it must be thought through texts, and thus constantly seem to speak from a lie just as much as the reified structure one critiques does; second, one must be willing at every point to abandon or change the text of critique, so that the critique would be at most of its points incomplete, piecemeal, and historical.

Despite the fact that philosophy as a practice produces these texts which, even as they call for changes in the structure of society, obscure the faces of most of its members and thus give the lie to themselves, as thinkers we cannot do without these texts, for it is only through them that one has any sort of voice. There must first be a making-commensurable of entities and language before one can search about for ways to do justice to those entities. We are stuck with a faulty tool, but it the only one we have got: "Theory does not contain answers to everything; it reacts to the world, which is faulty to the core. What would be free from the spell of the world is not under theory's jurisdiction" (ND 31).

At the same time, what preserves immanent critique from degenerating into merely justification of a new brand of repression is that it is conscious of itself as limited and contingent, as being fragile and provisional. Thought regrettably cannot be done in one great work: "The dismantling of systems, and of the system at large, is not an act of formal epistemology. What the system used to procure for the details can be sought in the details only, without advance assurance to the thought: whether it is there, or what it is" (ND 33). Thought forever remains the equivocal concept: the twin senses of the product of thought and of the process which can never be permanently given fixed form lest it become only what it leaves behind.

There is no solution to the question of how we are to think. We cannot order a definite scheme. We cannot simply say that we don't know. The only satisfactory answers that can be given are those which do not satisfy, answers conscious of their birth in contingency:

If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms...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. Direct communicability to everyone is not a criterion of truth. (ND 41)

Indeed, thinking that attempts not to fall into ideology is not likely to be regarded by more than a few as thinking. In any case, it can easily be disregarded or put away. It will always labor under the trouble of trying to make the case that it is to be taken seriously as philosophy. But, we cannot at this point in time, or at any on the horizon, do without this fragile thing that we call thinking. The genius of Adorno is to bring these problems before our eyes, suggesting that they are irresolvable at the same time that he struggles to resolve them not just for himself, and not for all humanity, but still for and out of respect for others. He hints at the outlines of such a movement of thought:

Traditional philosophy thinks of itself as possessing an infinite object, and in that belief it becomes a finite, conclusive philosophy. A changed philosophy would have to cancel that claim, to cease persuading others and itself that it has the infinite at its disposal. Instead, if it were delicately understood, the changed philosophy would be infinite in the sense of scorning solidification in a body of enumerable theorems. Its substance would lie in the diversity of objects that impinge upon it and of the objects it seeks, a diversity not wrought by any schema; to these objects, philosophy would truly give itself rather than use them as a mirror in which to reread itself mistaking its own image for concretion. (ND 13)

This changed philosophy, on paper, would not be able to answer the question of how one would live it without falling into the mystification of universalization it criticizes. But that is a problem mainly on paper; a changed philosophy allows room for the thought that would be required to implement it. In this way, philosophy could make an attempt at reconciliation with the other. The possibility is of thought

speaking for the other while preserving the distance required for respect and the sense of its own contingency. Without lapsing into self-imposed quietism, thought could criticize the aspects of society that allow agony to never be given voice, suffering to be made policy, while at the same time staying true to the realization that the oppressors are themselves human beings: "Dialectical reason follows the impulse to transcend the natural context and its delusion. . . without forcing its own rule on this context – in other words, without sacrifice and without vengeance" (ND 141).

NOTES

1. Adorno takes the term and concept "constellation" from Walter Benjamin, but both widens its range and tightens its meaning. In Adorno's works it signifies a relational and historical structure between things, words, and concepts (the greatest emphasis being on the first and the last here). A constellation is, roughly speaking, the structure that gives the various constituents involved determination both in the ranges of significance and the ranges of materiality. There is no absolutely necessary "star" in the constellation, but the constellation is not itself simply contingent, whether in its components or its structure. In the last analysis, it must be conceded that "constellation" is a happy metaphor to be used in order to understand and express the historical relationship between things, concepts and words in a way that escapes some of the limits of other metaphors for such unities.

2. In order to avoid misunderstanding of this loaded term, let us make a few preliminary remarks. "Critique" has come, in many circles to be used as a synonym to "criticism", and even to signify any sort of thematic polemics. Adorno has something more specific and historically rooted in mind than this. In the strict sense, "critique" signifies an enquiry into and a subsequent description of the condition(s) of the possibility for a given phenomenon. In the case of Kant, the various "Critiques" were to delineate fundamental structures that were the transcendental grounds of the possibility of the phenomenon. In Marx's case, the critique of Political Economy similarly aimed at showing the grounds required and presupposed by Political Economy, with a great difference, however, that will also characterize Adorno's use of "critique". For Kant, the fact that the grounds, that which the critique uncovered or displayed, were transcendental meant that these grounds, strictly speaking could never be known within experience, but only through the use of reason. Likewise, what Marxist critique uncovers cannot be displayed empirically *per se*, but its indices, its traces, its shadows can be indicated by reference to empirical, material, historical entities, e.g. through historical investigations of the correlations of land-rents with other sets of figures. For Adorno, critique will function to show what is hidden under, repressed in favor of, presupposed by, and even set to work in secrecy in the service of, what is evident in a process, thing, or theory.

3. All references are to the texts *Against Epistemology* (Cambridge: MIT Press), 1st ed. 1983. Trans. Willis Domingo, and *Negative Dialectics* (New York: Continuum), 1995. Trans. E. B. Ashton, henceforth noted as AE and ND, respectively.

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