

# Theodor W. Adorno

## Lecture 2 (The lectures on Negative Dialectics)

11.11.1965

### NOTES

*Next<sup>1</sup>: 1) In Hegel the dialectic is positive. Remind of minus plus minus equalling plus. The negation of the negation is supposed to be the affirmative. Critique of the positive by the young Hegel. To be demonstrated by the critique of abstract subjectivity through the institution: V49<sup>2</sup>Ins[ert] 2a*

*[Insert:] The positive, which there results from the negation of the negation, is itself that positivity criticized by the young Hegel, a negativity as immediacy.*

*contrainte sociale*

*The institution acts, correctly, as Hegel had shown, as a critique of abstract subjectivity, i.e. is a necessity, and indeed also for the Subject, for its own survival.*

*It destroys the illusion of autonomous subjectivity as experienced by the subject, which is itself a moment of societal objectivity – however, it [the institution] is, with regard to the subject, by no means something higher, but instead remains, with regard to the subject, as it's always been, external, coercively collective, repressive – The negation of the neg[ation] does not result, as a matter of course, in positivity. Today, in the face of a general situation that is, tacitly widely regarded as highly problematic, what predominates is a concept of abstract positivity. „Herr Kästner.“<sup>3</sup>*

*With the dissolution of everything that is substantial and 'given', all ideologies become increasingly threadbare, abstract; as can be seen amongst emigrants under pressure.*

*What is positive („positive attitude to life, actualisation [Gestaltung]“, positive critique) is an sich already true, i.e. the movement of the concept is being arbitrarily arrested. Positivity as fetish i.e. what it is that is affirmed*

1 Re 'next': i.e. to go on now to deal with the objection, discussed at the end of the previous lecture, which holds negative dialectics to be a tautology.

2 Meaning of the siglum could not be determined.

3 Allusion to the oft-quoted line by Erich Kästner: „Herr Kästner, wo bleibt das Positive?“ [„Herr K., what's become of the positive?“] c.f. above, p. 30, and below, note 15.

*is not further examined. With that however it is the negative, i.e. that which is subject to critique.*

*It is this in the end which brought me to the conception and the terminology of a negative dialectic. [End of insert]*

*This has now come to hold for the whole [das Ganze]: the totality of all negations turns into positivity. „Everything real is reasonable“.<sup>4</sup>*

*This has now ended. Just as the positive assumption of meaning is no longer possible without duplicity (- who's prepared to venture, after Auschwitz, that life is meaningful!) so the theoretical construction of a positivity from the essence [Inbegriff] of the negations is no longer possible.*

*2) The dialectic becomes, as a result, in essence, critical. In several senses:*

*a) as critique of the claim which holds to the identity of concept and object*

*b) as critique of the hypostatization of the intellect [Geist] contained therein. (Critique of Ideology) The power of this thesis requires the most strenuous effort.*

*c) as critique of the antagonistic reality and its inherent tendency towards self-destruction.*

*This critique is directed also at dia[lectical] mat[erialisms] inasmuch as this presents itself in the guise of a positive science. Hence negat[ive] Dial[ectic] = relentless critique of everything existing.*

*11 November 1965*

## Lecture Transcript

In the last lecture, as you will recall, I made a start of examining the following question: what it is about the notion of a negative dialectic that should be so compelling, and whether such a notion – considering the decisive role which negativity plays in the dialectic in any case – would not be in effect tautological. And I started off presenting, rather summarily, those moments which could be invoked in support of such an objection, namely those which – in the Hegelian conception of the dialectic – regard thought itself to be equivalent to negativity. Let me try, provisionally at any rate, to answer this undoubtedly significant objection. You should be aware however, that the theory of Hegel – which not quite coincidentally has acquired,

4 Hegel's notorious sentence from the „Philosophy of Right“, c.f. above p. 33, and below, note 14.

in the history of philosophy, the name of objective idealism – does not accept this notion of negativity qua subjectivity; that in the Hegelian dialectic this conception of negativity is by no means the last word on the matter, but that the Hegelian dialectic is, rather, if I may use this clichéd term, a positive dialectic. One must bear in mind here, to start off with, something rather simple and straightforward (I'm pretending that you are all freshmen, that the male student, the female student coming straight from school approaches these things thus), the fact i.e. which one learns in arithmetic, that minus times minus equals plus – or, to put it differently, that the negation of the negation is the positive, the affirmative. This is indeed also one of the fundamental assumptions underlying Hegelian philosophy. And when you begin to delve into Hegel, starting at the superficial level, starting with that triplicity about which, as I mentioned in the previous lecture, Hegel himself had said such unkind things, then you will come across this idea that the negation of the negation is the affirmative. What is meant by this is something which is perhaps best demonstrated by examining Hegel's critique of what he calls abstract subjectivity, which he confronts with the institutions and the forms which make up societal objectivity. This idea – which is already anticipated in several respects in the 'Phenomenology' (although the accentuation placed upon it there is in many ways still quite different) and then, in the very crass form, along the lines I've just mentioned, most especially in the *Philosophy of Right* – this idea runs as follows: that the subject, which as thinking subject criticizes existing institutions, that this subject embodies, to start off with, the moment of the emancipation of the spirit. And that, as such, this moment of the emancipation of the spirit, on its way from 'in itself' to 'for itself', represents the really decisive stage. In other words, this stage here reached, in which the spirit opposes the objective world, starting with the societal aspect thereof, in an autonomous and critical guise, this is, to start off with, recognized as a necessary moment. But this same spirit is chided, by Hegel, in that, in doing so, it becomes backward and hidebound; in that it elevates what is a specific moment – namely spirit in its abstractness – to the only true moment, and in so doing fails to realize that this abstract subjectivity – modeled for instance on the subject of Kant's pure practical reason, but to a certain extent also on the free act of Fichtean subjectivity – that this subjectivity, while being no more than a moment, instead absolutizes itself: that it hence fails to appreciate how much it owes its own essence, forms, its very existence, to the objective forms and the objective existence of society; and that it really comes to its senses only to the extent that it is able to recognize itself in the apparently extraneous, even repressive institutions with which

it is confronted; to the extent that it perceives these institutions themselves as subjectivity, perceives them in their necessity. So that in other words one of the decisive turns (not to say: one of the decisive tricks) of Hegelian philosophy consists in this, that the merely autonomous (i.e. the critically thinking, abstract, negative) subjectivity (this is where the notion of negativity is crucially important) is supposed to negate itself, i.e. become aware of its own limitations, as a way of sublating itself – in the positivity of its negation – in the institutions of society, in the institutions of the State, in the objective, finally in the absolute spirit.<sup>5</sup> This is hence, as a first approximation, the model of that positive negativity: the negation of the negation as a new position, created as a model by Hegelian philosophy. It must be counted, by the way, among the most characteristic features of Hegelian philosophy – and I would say that this is something the significance of which is by no means adequately reflected in the Hegel literature – that it is on the one hand indeed a most dynamic form of thought (taking the categories it uses not as fixed entities but rather as formed and hence transmutable) but that it does contain, on the other hand, de facto, all this notwithstanding, vastly more unchanging conceptual structures, containing incomparably more invariants, than it is itself prepared to concede. And these invariants then manifest themselves – as it were in spite of itself, against the will of this philosophy – time and again in this respect, that specific types of argumentation (if I may put it this way) keep returning in Hegel’s ‘Logic’ – as they do for that matter already in the *Phenomenology*. I would regard it as a most important task (and you will allow me to say this with an eye to the future professional philosophers amongst you – it seems to me I have referred to this before) to work out, for once, these invariant elements within Hegelian philosophy, those manifesting themselves in the repetition of certain argumentative strategies. And that moment which I’ve just mentioned is one of those invariants which you will find time and again in the most varied guises in Hegel – most especially there where the Hegelian philosophy deals with substantive matters, i.e. there where it is not dealing for instance with the mere categories of logic or of the *Philosophy of Nature*. It is something quite odd, a historical fact (which at the same time is of central importance with regard to what it is that I would like to explain to you today) that this negation of the negation, which Hegel then treats as positivity, is criticized in the sharpest possible way by the *young* Hegel,

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5 On institutions as critique of abstract subjectivity c.f. also Adorno’s essay „Aspects“ in: (ibid.) *Hegel: Three Studies*, (1993) trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson, p. ? [GS 5.289]

under exactly the same name, under the name of positivity or the positive – in the „Theologische Jugendschriften“, as Nohl called them<sup>6</sup>. These early writings are in their central intent nothing less than an attack upon that positivity – especially the religious, the theological positivity – in which the subject is seen as lacking autonomy, in which the subject is confronted by something strange and reified. A positivity which, inasmuch as it is something reified and superficial and particular, couldn't possibly be that absolute which these selfsame categories do after all lay claim to – a notion by the way which the later Hegel by no means gave up or abjured, but simply re-interpreted. In general it must be said that he gave up or rejected very few of his motifs – choosing instead to change the emphases, in such a way however that the meaning of these motifs would often become quite antithetical.

The abovementioned argumentation is something you will find repeated even in the substantive program of the whole of the later Hegelian Philosophy, in the so-called *Differenzschrift Über die Differenz des Schelling'schen und Fichteschen Systems*,<sup>7</sup> along the lines I have just indicated. According to this critique the positivities (which in the *Philosophy of Right* are defended against the negativity of the merely cogitating and isolated subjectivity) in other words are really what today we would call coercive situations, an expression of what in the terminology of Émile Durkheim would be called *contrainte sociale*<sup>8</sup>. Hegel had shown persuasively that the objective institution is a critique of criticizing and abstract subjectivity, i.e. that this critique of abstract subjectivity is a necessary one – also in the sense that it is a necessity if the subject is going to maintain itself at all. This pure

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6 C.f. *Hegel's Early Theological Writings* (1971), trans. T.M. Knox.

7 C.f. Hegel: *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy* (New York, 1977) p. ?, translated by ? (deutsch: S.9ff.)

8 A concept adopted by Adorno from the sociology of Durkheim, with which the specific class of 'social facts' are defined: „they consist in specific types of acting, thinking and feeling, imbued with overwhelming force, which exist outside of the individual and impose themselves upon him on this basis.“ (Émile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 8 th ed., trans. Sarah Solovay and John Mueller, New York 1966, p. 89.) In his introduction to Émile Durkheim, „Soziologie und Philosophie“ Adorno characterizes the *contrainte sociale* as follows: „The societal fact tout court is for him [i.e. Durkheim] the *contrainte sociale*, the all-powerful social coercion far beyond anything susceptible to subjective empathy. It is not contained in subjective self-consciousness and no subject is able, without further ado, to identify with it. The ostensible irreducibility of the specifically social is grist to the mill [of this coercive moment]: it helps turn it increasingly into an entity which is 'in itself' – something absolutely autonomous not only with respect to the knowing subject but also with respect to the individuals integrated by the collective.“ (G.S. 8, p. 250)



‘for itself’, this immediacy of the subject fondly imagining itself to be autonomous, this is indeed pure illusion. Human beings are indeed *zoon politicon* in the sense that they have been able to survive because of that self-same society, those self-same given societal arrangements which they then oppose as autonomous and critical subjects. And Hegel has made a decisive contribution – this is something which really must be emphasized here – to an understanding of society and to an understanding of the relationship between the individual and society: through his critique of the illusion that that which is seemingly most immediate, one’s very own self and consciousness, the illusion that makes it appear to us as if this is indeed the most fundamental and primary. A theory of society in the sense in which we mean this term today would for that matter have been quite impossible without this Hegelian insight. It was Hegel who – I maintain – destroyed the illusion of the immediacy of the subject, and shown that this subject is itself a moment in the societal objectivity. And he had, furthermore, on the basis of this, seen the necessity of the societal moment in the end being the stronger – in the face of this abstract subjectivity – and the one in the end which ultimately prevails. But – and this is precisely the point, I would say, at which those considerations which are critical of Hegel must come into their own, considerations upon which the justification of the formulation of a *negative dialectic* ultimately depends – the question must be raised whether this objectivity (which has now indeed been shown to be the necessary condition for the abstract subject subsumed under it) is in fact the higher; or whether, on the contrary, it does not rather remain what the youthful Hegel once reproached it with: namely that it remains as something external, as a coercive collectivity. Whether recourse to this ostensibly higher agency does not mean a regression of that subject which attained its freedom only after endless suffering and effort. It is not obvious why insight into the coercive mechanism which binds subjectivity and thought to its opposite, to objectivity (and in view both of the dependency which exists, and in view of the logic of facticity – if I may put it this way – which then leads to the triumph of objectivity) should mean that this objectivity must of necessity retain the last word. There’s a moment of moral coercion contained therein, the strongest instance of which I experienced in the debate with a Hegelian Marxist, i.e. in our younger years with Georg Lukács, who had back then just emerged from a conflict with his Party, and in that context told me that his Party was – with regard to him – in the right, even though he was, in his thoughts and arguments, in the right against the Party, since the Party after all embodied the objective historical situation, whereas his own advanced position (based only on himself and the mere logic of

thought) had trailed behind this objective situation<sup>9</sup>. I take it that there is no need for me to sketch out what that would imply. It would simply mean that that which is the more successful, that which prevails, that which is generally believed, that this, helped along by the dialectic, would enjoy a higher level of truth than that consciousness which sees through the hollowness of it all. De facto the ideology in the East is very widely determined by this motif. The situation to which this would lead in the end is one in which consciousness truncates itself – abandoning its own inherent freedom, simply conforming instead to the stronger social forces [die stärkeren Bataillone]. Something which in my view is quite unconscionable.

That is the reason why, I would say, in general (I've exemplified this for you today on the basis of only *one* such model) the thesis according to which the negation of the negation is the positive, the affirmative, that this thesis is untenable. That the negation of the negation is *not* – or at any rate is not automatically, not as a matter of course – something which results in positivity. Today, – in a [historical-political] situation which people experience, in their heart of hearts, as deeply ambivalent, a situation which at the same time is so overwhelming that they believe there's nothing to be done about it (or perhaps because they really are, de facto, powerless against it) – there predominates, in the spirit of our epoch [allgemein verbreitetes Bewusstsein], something akin to the ideal of abstract positivity – in contradistinction to that abstract subjectivity or abstract negation which Hegel once criticized. An abstract positivity which will be familiar to all of you through the now rather venerable but nevertheless still potent joke of Kästner, who wrote in a poem: „Herr Kästner, what's happened to the positive [side of things]?“<sup>10</sup> I don't want to deny that that which is really

9 Adorno is referring here to his first meeting with Lukács, which took place in Vienna in June 1925, and which he described to Siegfried Kracauer in a letter of 17.6.1925. c.f. NaS IV.7, p. 383 f., note 194.

10 C.f. the poem „Und wo bleibt das Positive, Herr Kästner?“ from the 1930 volume „Ein Mann gibt Auskunft“ [A man provides information]: „And time and again you keep sending me letters,/ in which you write thickly underlined: /'Herr Kästner, what's become of the positive?'/ Yes the devil knows what's happened to it“ (Erich Kästner, *Gesammelte Schriften für Erwachsene*, vol. 1: *Gedichte*, Munich, Zurich, 1969, p. 218). C.f. to this theme also Adorno's essay entitled „Kritik“, from his late period: „Quintessentially German (although come to think of it less characteristic than one would assume if one has not had the opportunity to observe something analogous in other countries) is an anti-critical bent which, originating in philosophy – the anti-intellectual kind — degenerated into twaddle: the invocation of the positive. Time and again one finds the word critique – there where it cannot be avoided, or even when applied to one's own critical activity – qualified by the word constructive. The imputation is that one is only allowed to criticize if one has something better to put in its place – some-

questionable about this notion of positivity is something which became apparent to me most of all during the emigration, where people who were forced to conform under the most extreme situations of social duress, then – to be able to carry through this adaptation at all, to do what was coercively demanded of them – [tended to] say, encouragingly (and one really feels then, how much they need to identify with the aggressor<sup>11</sup>), yes, such-and-such, he or she, he's really so positive ... When in fact what is really meant here is that an educated, discerning kind of person is required to roll up his/her sleeves and wash dishes – or carry out whatever other form of ostensibly useful societal labor was demanded there. The more of that substance upon which consciousness depends disintegrates – the less there is, as it were, from which the ideologies can draw their sustenance –, the more abstract do all ideologies necessarily become. Amongst the Nazis it was still race, which nowadays not even the dumbest still takes seriously. It seems to me that at the next stage of regressive ideology it then simply becomes the positive in which people are supposed to believe – in the sense for instance in which one finds it expressed in the formulation, [to be found] in the marriage advertisements, of a “positive orientation to life”, where this is held up as something most especially praiseworthy. There is an institution that I know of that goes under the name of „Association for the positive organization of life“ [Bund für positive Lebensgestaltung]. This really does exist – I haven't made this up, in case you may wonder. And this „Association for the positive organization of life“ does of course in reality boil down to a training, in the course of which people for instance lose their bashfulness and learn to present and enjoy themselves as proficient salespeople before God and humanity. This is what the notion of positivity has turned into. Behind this is the belief that positivity is *as such* already something positive, without the question being raised at any point at all as to *just what it is* that is being accepted there as the positive; and whether doing so is not simply based on the fallacy that that which exists (and which is positive in the sense of being staidly settled, extant) that this

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thing which, in Aesthetics, Lessing poured scorn on two hundred years ago. By imposing the positive as a condition, critique is domesticated right from the outset, its vehemence deflected. In Gottfried Keller there's a passage in which he calls the demand for the constructive a gingerbread-word.“ (GS 10.2, p. 792)

- 11 The ‘identification with the aggressor’ – plausibly documented by Anna Freud (Anna Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, London 1948, p. 109 ff.) – is something which according to Adorno is a ‘special case’ of the repressive and regressive mechanism (GS 8, p. 76); it is something he frequently invoked in the context of a theory of contemporary society (c.f. e.g. above, p. 119, p. 168, and p. 251).



is clothed because of its ineluctability in the garb of the good, the lofty, the affirmative – all those attributes which are invoked by the word ‘positive’. There is here – if you will allow me to engage in a bit of homegrown metaphysics of language for a moment – something most significant and most interesting, in that in the notion of the positive itself there is contained this ambivalence. For positive means on the one hand that which is given, established, existent – in the sense for instance in which one speaks of Positivism as that philosophy which sticks to the facts. On the other hand positive is also supposed to be the affirmative, the good, in a certain sense: the ideal. And I would think that this semantic constellation of the word expresses something to be found in the minds of countless people in an extraordinarily precise way. Also for that matter, in practice, for instance when one is told that ‘positive criticism’ is required; along the lines of what happened to me a few days ago, when I asked a hotel manager in the Rhineland – in a hotel which was appallingly noisy, but in other respects very good – why he did not have double glazing put in. Upon which, after explaining why, for whatever impeccable reasons, this was quite impossible, he then said: „But I am of course always enormously grateful for positive criticism.“ When I speak of negative dialectic then, it is not the least of what I have in mind that I want to distantiate myself in the clearest possible way from this fetishization of the positive as such – on the subject of which I am for that matter of the opinion that it has ideological consequences, which are related also to the progress of certain philosophical currents, which hardly anyone even dreams of.<sup>12</sup> It must simply be asked what it is that is being affirmed – what is supposed to be affirmed and what is not to be affirmed – instead of the yes in itself being elevated to a value, in the way in which this is already anticipated unfortunately in Nietzsche’s pathos of the affirmation of life. (Which is certainly just as abstract as that negation of life in Schopenhauer, against which the relevant passages in Nietzsche are directed<sup>13</sup>) And for this reason then one could say, to put it

12 In the *Jargon of Authenticity*, carrying the subtitle of „On the German Ideology“, Adorno named names: in the praise of positivity are united all those who have mastered the jargon, from Jaspers downwards. Only the circumspect Heidegger, avoiding an all too openhearted affirmation for its own sake, fulfills his quota indirectly, through his tone of obsequious authenticity. Jaspers on the other hand writes unabashedly: „Living truthfully in the world [Wahrhaft in der Welt bleiben] is possibly only if one is living out of a positive, which in any case is realizable only through human relationships.“ (GS 6, p. 427 f.)

13 So for instance in „Ecce Homo. How one Becomes what one is“: [quote to be added from Nietzsche: „The birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner“, translated by ?, New York, 1967.]

dialectically, that it is exactly this positive demeanor which is essentially negative, which is subject to critique. That is the central idea, the essential motif, for the conception and the terminology of a negative dialectic.

What I have demonstrated to you now on the basis of that model (which is characteristic of the Hegelian structure in general), is something which is valid also in a very specific sense for his philosophy as a whole: namely – how should I put this – it is the secret or the highlight of this philosophy that the embodiment of all of its inherent negations (taken not as the sum of these negations but as the process which they constitute with one another) is supposed to turn into a positivity in the sense of that famous dialectical sentence which will be familiar to you all, that everything which is real is reasonable.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely this point, i.e. this positivity of the dialectic as the totality of things (this idea that the rationality of the totality is discernable right down to the irrationality of its individual moments, and that for this reason the totality is supposed to be meaningful) that seems to me indeed now to have become untenable. The positivistic trivialization of Hegel had already, in the 19th century, rejected this aspect. For it must be conceded that this countermovement, however shortsighted it may have been (even if it never got beyond the misconception which regards this positivity of the totality as simply this idea: everything is just hunky-dory, whereas this supposedly positive totality is infinitely mediated within itself), that the critique of this general thesis of Hegel which the positivistic philosophies of the 19th century articulated<sup>15</sup> has something about it which is justified. Today however this positive imputation (that what is real is meaningful, i.e.: that reality is meaningful) is no longer possible. That in other words the epitome of reality is to show itself to be meaningful in any *other* sense than in this respect, that everything is explicable on the basis of a specific, unified principle, namely that of the domination of nature, this has simply become impossible. I don't know if it is still defensible to say

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14 C.f. the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: „What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational.“ (Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, translated by T.M. Knox, O.U.P. 1969, p. 10.)

15 The lecture series *Hegel und seine Zeit* by Rudolf Haym (Berlin 1857) could be regarded as a case in point, in which Hegel's dictum of the rationality of the actual is denounced as the „classical expression of the spirit of the Restauration [Restaurationsgeistes], the absolute formula of political conservatism, quietism and optimism.“ (ibid. p. 365). Adorno on the contrary always defended Hegel against such simplification, as for instance in *Aspects*: [Adorno quote to be added from Hegel: three studies, MIT Press, 1993. „Die fragwürdigste und darum auch verbreitetste seiner Lehrer...]

that after Auschwitz it is no longer possible to write poetry.<sup>16</sup> But that after Auschwitz one cannot seriously speak of a world in which that was possible, and in which the threat of a repetition in some other way looms daily, and in some comparable guise – I remind of Vietnam – is probably happening this very second, as being meaningful; i.e. to maintain that this world in which we live [Gesamtverfassung der Realität] is supposed to be meaningful, that seems to me to express a cynicism and a frivolity which is, simply, in terms of pre-philosophical experience, no longer justifiable. And a philosophy which – imbued with a foolish arrogance of the spirit refusing to take cognizance of this reality – turns a blind eye to this and which insists, come what may, that there is meaning, that seems to me to be an exaction which cannot be imposed on anyone not entirely stupefied by philosophy; for philosophy can, without question, amongst the many other functions it fulfills, stupefy with success. I recall in this context most vividly that, in a pro-seminar which I held with Tillich shortly before the outbreak of the Third Reich, a woman student once spoke out most emphatically against the notion that there is a meaning to existence, and that, when she said: life doesn't seem to me to have meaning, I don't know if it's meaningful, that the Nazi-minority which already then made itself noticeable in the seminar objected to this idea with the most agitated shuffling. Now, I don't want to maintain that the shuffling of the Nazis proved or disproved anything, but it is for all that most significant. It is a neuralgic point, it seems to me, with regard to the spirit's relationship to freedom, whether it can endure the insight that a given reality is meaningless – that i.e. in this reality spirit does not find itself – or whether consciousness has become so feeble that it can no longer dispense with the constant self-reassurance that we live in the best of all possible worlds. It seems to me that on these grounds the theoretical construction of a positivity as the essence of all negations is no longer possible – except, that is, if Philosophy were really to live up to its bad reputation of otherworldliness, which it deserves most when it

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16 Adorno refers here to what is probably the most well-known, if also the least understood, of the lines he ever wrote: „Even the most extreme awareness of impending doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.“ (*Prisms*, London, 1967, p. 34, translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber). On an interpretation of what Adorno meant with this dictum c.f. Rolf Tiedemann: „Nicht die Erste Philosophie sondern eine letzte“. Anmerkungen zum Denken Adorno's, in: *Theodor W. Adorno, Ob nach Auschwitz noch sich leben lasse. Ein philosophisches Lesebuch*, Frankfurt am Main, 1997, p. 11 f.

becomes especially chummy with a world which it simply glorifies with something akin to a positive meaning.

It will have become clear to you, on the basis of what I have said, that the concept of the dialectic, the negative dialectic, – and that is something which was not unimportant in the choice of the term negative – becomes *critical*; that i.e. the kind of dialectic which does not insist, the way the later Hegel did, on seeking out the affirmative in all negations – but rather on the contrary –, that such a dialectic needs to be *critical*. And I want to state, as an axiom, right at the outset, that the negative dialectic – on the topic of which I am to develop elements and ideas – is essentially the same as a Critical Theory. The two terms Critical Theory and Negative Dialectic<sup>17</sup> indicate, it seems to me, the same thing. Perhaps with this one difference, to be precise, that Critical Theory is really just the subjective side of thought – that it refers i.e. to the *theory* – whereas Negative Dialectics indicates not only this moment but includes in addition to this just as much the *reality* which is covered by this theory; that i.e. the process is not just a process of thought but, – and this is good Hegel – is at the same time a process within reality itself. This critical character of the dialectic is to be taken apart in a series of moments. First of all there is that moment which I sought to expound during our previous lecture – perhaps you will recall this – on the basis of the relationship between the concept and its object. We shall return to this. We shall come across the following, that the thesis of the identity of the concept with its object is really the life-nerve of idealist thought altogether – one could say: of traditional thinking as such – and that this claim concerning the identity of concept and object is interwoven in a most intimate way with the structure of reality itself. And negative dialectics as critique means, in the first instance, the critique of this claim to identity, which is of course not to be carried out everywhere in [an attitude of] bad

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17 While Hegel characterised the Socratic debate in Plato's Dialogues as [a] „negative dialectic“ (c.f. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p.?) the notion in its emphatic sense was in all likelihood coined by Adorno and used for the first time in his 1966 book of the same title; Critical Theory on the other hand is, since the essay „Traditional and Critical Theory“ by Max Horkheimer, a designation for the thinking of the circle around the Institut für Sozialforschung – to a large measure, for political reasons, also a ‘code word’ (Gershom Scholem) for Marxism. The Horkheimer formulation ‘Critical Theory’ is not intended – according to Adorno – to make Materialism agreeable, but rather to bring to theoretical self-awareness what it is about Materialism that distinguishes it from dilettantish world-views no less than from the ‘traditional theory’ of Science. As dialectical, theory must be – as in wide stretches is the case for the Marxian type – immanent, even if in the end it negates the entire sphere within which it moves. (GS 6, p. 197)

infinity, but most certainly is to be carried through on those essential structures with which – also mediated by the subject matter of Philosophy itself – the philosophical interest is confronted. Dialectics as critique means, furthermore, the critique of the hypostatization of the intellect as the absolutely prior [schlechterdings Ersten] and absolutely foundational. [schlechterdings Tragenden] I remember once expounding this idea – that it were high time for philosophy to take this task seriously – to Brecht, during the emigration, and that Brecht reacted to this by saying that this discussion (and he was simply thinking, when he said this, of the materialist dialectic) had long since been settled, and that, by harking back to it, one is forcing the intellect [das Denken] back to a controversy which had long since been overtaken by the real course of historical events. I cannot agree with this. On the one hand it seems to me that the work which he invoked, namely Lenin's book on Empiriocriticism<sup>18</sup> – taken as a philosophical critique of the hypostatization of spirit or of Idealism – doesn't in the least carry out the task it had set itself, remaining throughout a dogmatic work simply positing, by means of endless invective and variations, a thesis the defense of which [Begründungszusammenhang] is nowhere attempted. And the fact that the materialist dialectic has become, in such a problematic sense, a world-view [Weltanschauung], instead of being that which it had once set out to be, namely science in a higher sense – in fact the most advanced stage of knowledge – seems to me to be linked to this dogmatism. Over and above this it seems to me that there are so many good grounds for dwelling on this moment of the philosophical critique of the hypostatization of the intellect because for Philosophy – whose own medium is the intellect, which for its part moves constantly and incessantly only within this medium of the intellect – this hypostatization is something irresistible. I think that every person who has even once ever really experienced what great Philosophy is, will have experienced the force of this thesis of the primacy of the spirit, as it is contained in the so-called prima philosophia. And a thinking which withdraws from this experience (which instead of weighing up this experience, after it has become questionable, in its own medium [that of thought], harnessing its power for itself [mit ihrer

18 C.f. W.I. Lenin, *Materialism and empirio-criticism; critical comments on a reactionary philosophy*, Russian first ed. Moscow 1909, first English ed., Moscow 1920. C.f. also the text „Über Lenins ‘Materialismus und Empiriokritizismus’“ by Horkheimer, who for that matter comes to a quite different conclusion than Adorno on Lenin's central philosophical work (in: Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ibid. [note 9], vol. 11: *Nachgelassene Schriften* 1914-1931, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, Frankfurt am Main 1987, p. 171 ff.).



eigenen Kraft in Bewegung setzen]), such a thinking would be quite impotent. Do not forget that thought, which is conducted by means of concepts, for this very reason maneuvers the organon of the concept<sup>19</sup>, consciousness, into a kind of privileged position right from the outset; and that, when one for once – however tentatively – has conceded it the priority of spirit (whether in the shape of the facts [Gegebenheiten] which are given to the intellect as sense data, or in the sense of the priority of the categories), when one has extended to this principle only the smallest finger, that there is then indeed no escaping from it. The colossal force of Hegel – that force which still impresses us so much today, by which, God knows, *I* am so impressed, that I am fully aware that of the ideas which I am developing here there is not a single one which is not, at least implicitly, already contained in Hegel's Philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

### *Editor's postscript*

In the last of the four lecture[-serie]s which Adorno, between 1960 and 1966, held concurrently to the writing of the *Negative Dialectics*, he dealt with those themes which in the book, which appeared in 1966, are taken up in the first section, and are there – probably in an allusion to the *Phenomenology of Mind* – to be found under the 'Introduction'. That Hegel's introduction deals, just as much as the book as a whole does, with the „experience of consciousness“ (or rather: with the 'science' thereof) is something which finds an echo, it seems, in Adorno's own terminology, inasmuch as

19 This central idea of his philosophy is something Adorno had already noted down in May 1965: „All philosophy has, [tacitly,] by virtue of its procedures, taken a preliminary decision in favour of Idealism. For it must of necessity operate with concepts, cannot glue materials, non-conceptuals, into its texts (perhaps in Art the principle of collage is, unbeknownst to itself, precisely the protest against this; also Thomas Mann's pasting technique.) Once this decision has fallen however, concepts, as the material of philosophy, have been accorded precedence. Even matter is an abstraction. But philosophy is able to recognize its own ineluctable pseudos [ihr notwendig gesetztes pseudos], to call it by its name; and when it seeks to think things through from this point onwards, is able – if not to dispense with this – to restructure itself so that all of its statements are dunked in the self-consciousness of its own mendacity. This is, exactly, the idea of a negative dialectic.“ (GS 6, p. 531) While Adorno did not ever elaborate on this note, which he'd intended to do in the introduction to the *Negative Dialectics*, comparable formulations are to be found in the *Aesthetic Theory*, c.f. GS 7, p. 382 f.)

20 At the end of the 2nd lecture the manuscript is annotated with: „(from here onwards loud noise drowns out the voice, almost nothing understandable; about 10-12 lines are missing.)“

he for a time considered giving the introduction to the Negative Dialectics the title „On the theory of intellectual experience“ [Zur Theorie der geistige Erfahrung]. It is at any rate a text which he himself characterized as one in which the concept of philosophical experience is expounded. (G.S. 6, p. 10) Adorno tended to use „intellectual experience“ [geistige Erfahrung] synonymously with comprehensive, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection, and in this formulation one could perhaps see a first outline of that philosophy which he had had in mind for such a long time (c.f. above, p. 115). A „theory of intellectual experience“ of the kind sketched in the introduction to the Negative Dialectics and in the lectures held concurrently could hence be regarded – to the extent that one could call it that – as something in the way of a methodology of his philosophy. Adorno himself called the Negative Dialectics as a whole a methodology of his substantive work, only to qualify this in almost the same breath with: according to the theory of Negative Dialectic there exists no continuity between the former and the latter. What certainly is discussed however is this discontinuity itself, and what’s to be gleaned from this in the way of precepts [Anweisungen] for thought. The procedure is not grounded, but justified. The author places, inasmuch as this is in his power, his cards on the table; that’s by no means the same as [giving away] the game. (G.S. 6, p. 9.) These determinations, applied to the text of the Negative Dialectics, are peculiarly inadequate. Adorno himself emphasized time and again – which is in any case abundantly clear from the texts themselves – that his substantive work simply cannot be subsumed under a fixed ‘method’; that they are not to be applied arbitrarily to other areas, independent of their content and their subject matter. What else could the Negative Dialectics possibly be but an ensemble of ‘substantive texts’: on ontology, on the philosophy of history, on the philosophy of morality, on metaphysics; or to put it differently: on Heidegger, on Hegel and Kant, or on the possibility of Philosophy after Auschwitz? At most the middle part of the book, that dealing with the concept and the categories of a negative dialectic, could perhaps pass muster for what is conventionally called methodology. Or for that matter, as far as the feeble ‘instructions for thought’ [Anweisungen fürs Denken] are concerned: not even the most baleful of Adorno’s opponents could have matched him in the way he himself plays down his own chef d’œuvre to such noncommittal ‘instructions’. Finally: what else could that ‘game’ be, if not the treatment of the discontinuity of substantive and ‘methodological’ philosophizing? Only if one were to stick to the literal meaning of methodology (if one were to think of the logos intrinsic to every method; if one were to expect not so much a specific method as the justification of a

multiplicity of methods – in effect the different methodologies [underlying] all of Adorno's individual works) does the notion explicated in the 'Preface' to the *Negative Dialectics* come to make sense. Perhaps it would be better to speak – as he himself does in the essay on Hegel's *Content of Experience* [Erfahrungsgehalt] – of 'models of intellectual experience' which 'motivate' his thinking, in which its 'truth content' inheres (c.f. GS 5, p. 295). – The line quoted in the *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, „Herr Kästner, what's happened to the positive“ (c.f. above, p. 30) was on a par, at the time – as it probably still is – to the no less insipid 'What then is your method, Herr Adorno'. It would seem that, while he may once have intended to make some minor concessions in the direction of such [conventional] ideas on method, the realization thereof, in effect: the constriction of his own thought in such a methodological corset, continually undermined his own purpose, so that it kept ending up in substantive philosophizing all over again – even if it turned out to be that kind which deals with the antinomy of method and intellectual experience.

The formulations with which (following the [Kantian] precept of 'the last route still open is the critical one') Adorno sought to express what it is that is so thoroughly inadequate about all traditional philosophy – so inappropriate to its object, so inappropriate to the real course of historical events – vary [depending on the context]: as a thinking about what is primary [eines Ersten], as a thinking about origins [Ursprungsdenken], as a primacy of subjectivity, as an all-powerful principle of domination. And indeed: as a thinking constituted by method. 'Method in the concise sense [of the term]' was for him a procedure of the intellect, the universal and reliable applicability of which depended on its ability to relinquish itself to the object of knowledge, to externalize itself in the relationship to the material [den Gegenstand]. (G.S. 5, p. 19) [At the heart of] this procedure lies the ubiquity of mathematisation – as indeed the ideal of every emphatic methodology has based itself throughout the ages on mathematics, raising itself as a Platonic heaven over the lowlands of empirical reality. Adorno thought that he had already made out a 'triumph of mathematics and a triumphalism in general' in the Socrates of Platon's „Menon“, which sought there to relate virtue to that inherent in it which is eternal, hence however abstract. (ibid.) Abstraction is the procedure of which every method – starting off with conceptualisation itself – needs to avail itself; [and that means] turning away from what is distinctive about the matter at hand; the procedure of making it manageable and hence: manipulable. They were mistaken, those methodologists and logicians who believed that the universal – as the Other to what is distinctive, finite, existent – could be rendered manageable in

this way. Just as mathematics is a gigantic tautology whose writ extends only over that which it has itself deformed, has shaped in its own image (ibid. c.f. also above, p. 45), so methodologies are continually concerned only with themselves – with that most jejune, abstract, residual, which is all that remains of the world once they are done with it – by maltreating everything without exception as something abstract-conceptual, rather than seeking therein that which is specific and concrete. From such necessity Idealism then made the virtue of deducing every non-I from the I, of determining every object as subject, or – as the idealists are wont to put it – of letting the former be ‘placed’ [setzen] by the latter: thus and only thus does Idealism regard this relationship between subject and object, and in so doing subordinates itself to that subjectivity it has been beholden to from the outset. In the end methodologies in the above sense reveal themselves for what they are in their model of society – in exchange-society’s equivalence principle, in which use-values are regarded only from the quantitative aspect, as exchange values, comparable only through money, rather than through discrete qualities. This route traversed by both the intellect and reality (which despite Kant and much which followed in his wake has remained ‘uncritical’) is something which Adorno traced out with a kind of detached attentiveness in the ‘introduction’ to the much underrated *Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* – a piece of genuinely philosophical history of philosophy which is at the same time a literary stroke of luck in the linguistic wasteland which since Nietzsche official cogitation in the German-speaking world has become. Adorno’s ‘second introduction’, that to his *Negative Dialectics*, represents the continuation to that first one in as much as it pursues what had there been an essentially critical-negative impulse further in the direction of a negative-dialectical procedure.

Against the fetishism of methodology Adorno holds up philosophical – or, more generally intellectual – experience; what is meant by this is that it takes its departure from the concrete particular, from the *individuum ineffabile*, a leasurably lingering at and a trustful immersion therein, without however exhausting itself in that trust. In contrast to the abstractive method, intellectual experience is interested in the differences within that which is being experienced, rather than in those aspects which render it identical to other objects of experience; what is ‘meant’ by negative dialectic [is] dialectic not of identity but of non-identity (c.f. above, p. 9). Adorno’s emphatic use of the notion of experience doubtlessly accentuates its kinship both to the Aristotelian *empeiria* and to that which English empiricism understood under *experientia* and experience: that that thought with which the negative dialectician is concerned is subordinated to the pri-

macy of the concrete; that it is said to involve the gaze of an individual upon individuated being [individuelles Seiendes], or is at least supposed to take its point of departure from there. For this reason Adorno could say that the ‘turn’ which he strove to initiate includes also, in a rather oblique, dialectical way, a rescue of empiricism; i.e. that the type of knowledge under consideration here is always, in principle, a knowledge from below to above, and not one [which moves] from above to below; one which involves an immersion in the material [Sichüberlassen] and not a deduction (above, p. 115). The ‘also’ here is decisive: Adorno’s empirical turn is also a rescue of empiricism, although by no means the old or a new empiricism. Just as, in Hamann (so antagonistic to Adorno and yet so akin to him), there was once, according to Isaiah Berlin, „an alliance of mysticism and empiricism against rationalism“ (c.f. Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the origins of modern irrationalism*, London 1993; c.f. also NaS IV.13, 412 f.), so Adorno’s thought could be called an alliance of rationalism and empiricism against mysticism. – Strictly speaking the thinker doesn’t think at all, but turns himself into an arena for intellectual experience, without disentangling it: thus Adorno (GS 11, p. 21) on what is characteristic about the ‘Essay as Form’, about the ‘essayistic thinker’, who – however close he may be – is for all that no philosopher. For the philosophical thinker on the contrary sees his purpose precisely in this, that the experience which he follows is to be ‘disentangled’ in the course of this pursuit; for him thought consists rather in the ‘disentanglement’ of his experience from the *facta bruta*. Experience is one thing, the intellect [Geist] something else; if with Locke all thought is based on experience, then for all that Leibniz’s doctrine of ideas [Ideenlehre] must be added to this: *nihil est in intellectu, quod non fuerit in sensu, nisi intellectus ipse*; for experience to become intellect, the intellect has to both penetrate and transcend experience. That doesn’t work however, as Adorno, with Hölderlin, knew full well. Intellect [Geist] is not that Other – that transcendent in its purity – to which it has enthroned itself, but, rather, also a piece of natural history [...] The spell cast by reality over the intellect restrains it from doing what it, in accordance with its own concept, wants to do in the face of the merely existent, namely to fly. (GS 10.2, p. 633) Experience alone, experience in itself is not enough; only there where experience becomes intellectual (it also a ‘supervenience’ which negative dialectics cannot dispense with) is existence capable of relinquishing those frail ‘traces of the Other’ – fragile indication that ‘that which is, is for all that not everything’. The irrational moment which is up to this task is for all that far removed from placing its trust in irrationalism – quite the contrary: to think philosophically is to corrob-



rate intellectual experience in the face of the same discursive logic [Konsequenzlogik] the polar opposite of which has been mastered. Otherwise intellectual experience would remain rhapsodic. Only in this way does thought become more than a merely repetitive depiction of what has been experienced. (GS 10.2, p. 160) This is however tantamount to saying that intellectual experience cannot be allowed to install itself in a lax relationship to conceptualization, but instead needs to prove itself all the more stringently according to the demands placed upon it by discursivity and rationality.

If it is not possible to compare Adorno's negative dialectic to a 'philosophy of difference' in the sense of Derrida – who juxtaposes the nonsensical *diff é rance* next to *diff é rance*, and would have us believe that such a conjuring trick enables us to escape this fate of being caught in the spell cast by conceptuality –, it is also not possible, after the end of Idealism, to speak of an existing or an incipient identity of object and subject. The object and its concept no longer conflate in such a way that the content of the latter is able to masquerade as the former. 'The object itself' [die Sache selbst] is, for negative dialectic, by no means a product of thought; [it is] rather, the non-identical after it has accrued identity (GS 6, p. 189) To reach objective certitude with regard to the matter at hand [die Sache] what is needed is greater, not less exertion on the part of the subject; what is required is a more sustained subjective reflection than those identifications which, according to Kant's venerable teaching, consciousness carries out quasi automatically, unconsciously. That the activity of the intellect – and most especially that activity which Kant assigns to the constitution problematic [Konstitutionsproblem] – is something different from that involuntary action which Kant equated it with, is what constitutes that specific intellectual experience which Idealism, upon discovery, immediately castrated. (ibid.) If the object of Philosophy has now become that sphere of the pre-conceptual which Hegel disregarded and excluded as that of 'lazy existence', it is also true that it is only the medium of conceptual language which can do justice to that which has been repressed, spurned, and discarded by concepts (GS 6, p. 21) Negative dialectic can hardly want to abolish conceptuality and abstraction and replace it with some other kind of knowledge, which in its turn would just as inevitably and feebly recoil from reality. It is hence not a reflection of the object directly, but rather a reflection upon that which stands in the way of such a perception of the object; a reflection upon the societal conditions of knowledge which in its turn can be carried out only through abstraction, through discursive language. It is not so much that such reflection wishes to escape from discursivity, as that it

seeks to break open with concepts that which through concepts has not found expression (GS 11, p. 32) There is a passage in which Adorno did not shy away from defining that type of knowledge which he advocated in such a way that it is for all that indissolubly bound to the concept: The utopia of knowledge would consist in making the pre-conceptual accessible through concepts, without at the same time forcing it into conformity with the latter. (GS 6, p. 21) This pre-predicative however (this material in itself, this non-identical or unintentional – to use the terms with which Adorno sought to circumscribe that which would be more than merely a particular falling under its universal [Exemplar seiner Gattung]-) is not something somewhere already given or already existing, which knowledge has as yet not managed to encompass; it would in the first instance come true in the development of its societal, historical and human meaning (GS 3, p. 43) – something however already contained, potentially, in the abstract concepts themselves, forcing them beyond their own rigid, finalized fixation. It is this compulsion which negative dialectic seeks to give its due – and in so doing once again open up those categories, which on the face of it have classified and immobilized reality once and for all, for what is new and novel.

The non-identical however is not something to be made accessible by an isolated concept – it is precisely this which motivated the critique of ‘mere’ conceptuality in the first place. Inasmuch as this is possible at all it is achievable only through a multiplicity, a constellation of different individual concepts: It is true that the classificatory concept does not open up the particular which the concept subsumes under it, but this is certainly done by the constellation of concepts which constructive thought brings to bear on it. – Comparison with a safe combination. (Above, p. 160 f.) Thus Adorno in his key words for the present lecture-course. The ideas on constellative or configurative thought belong to those which Adorno pursued the longest and the most intensively. Already in the lecture *Die Idee der Naturgeschichte* of 1932, a kind of first program of his philosophy, he gives vent to a deep dissatisfaction with a thinking which avails itself of universals, which excises, from that existence which it is supposed to discern, that in it which is best, that which makes up what is specific to each singularity. In this way, in order to do service as an instrument, the concept retains of the object it is supposed to hit upon, only those abstractions which it shares with the many. In contrast to this procedure based on universal concepts [allgemeinbegriffliches Verfahren] Adorno wants to establish one which is ‘of a different logical structure’: It is that of the Constellation. This is not a matter of explaining concepts by means of other con-

cepts, but rather of the constellation of ideas [...] These are not invoked as if they were ‘invariants’; it is not seeking them out which is the primary focus [Frageintention], but rather that they congregate around the concrete historical facticity which manifests itself in the context of the moments of its singularity. (GS 1, p. 359) The sole object of his philosophy was for Adorno the ‘singularity’ or the ‘concrete historical facticity’ – to this he adhered right through to his last works, even if he did not ever present a detailed theory of constellative knowledge which was internally consistent or even unambiguous. Not even the individual parts of which the constellations and configurations are made up or to which they assemble were always the same; concepts, ideas, moments, ta onta: constellative thought had to prove itself against all of these. The certitude of Philosophy as a configuration of moments is qualitatively different from the unambiguousness of each [of these individual moments] even when part of the configuration, since the configuration itself is more and [at the same time] something different than the embodiment of its moments. Constellation is not system. It is not so that everything is reconciled within it, nor is it all-encompassing, but one moment throws light on the others, and the shapes made up by the individual moments taken together as a whole are definite symbols and legible script. (GS 5, p. 342) However unsatisfactory the numerous epistemological-methodological statements concerning the notion of the constellation found in Adorno’s œuvre might be: the theory of the constellations was conceived in direct opposition to the conventional theory of knowledge. Only in Adorno’s material works – which without exception represent definite descriptions, interpretations of that script, of those symbols, in which the constellation coalesces the existing world – is this notion really implemented. Negative dialectic is held to be the dialectic of non-identity: that is to say, the truth content of the intellectual experience in which this comes to fruition is a negative one. This [truth content] not only registers the way the concept never does justice to what it denotes, but also that Being [das Seiende] does not – has not as yet – correspond(ed) to its concept. In the state of irreconcilability nonidentity is experienced as negativity (GS 6, p. 41), – it is this which determines the historical-philosophical signature of the negative dialectic and the form [Gestalt] of its intellectual experience.

The ‘Introduction’ to the Negative Dialectics as well as the renditions and variations thereon to be found in the Lecture on Negative Dialectics are late works not only in the literal sense that they were written and delivered when the manuscript of the Negative Dialectics had already been completed, but also in the wider sense that Adorno’s death placed them at the

end of his work, turned them into late works in the biographical sense. Above all both belong to that ‘final philosophy’ which Adorno regarded as ‘fitting to the times’ [an der Zeit], after the collapse of civilization and culture in the first half of the 20th Century inaugurated an era of barbarism which has persisted ever since.

The unfortunately fragmentary edition of the current lecture course is based – at least as far as the first ten lectures are concerned – on the transcriptions of tape-recordings which were made at the Institut für Sozialforschung and are now stored at the Theodor W. Adorno Archive under the catalog number Vo 10809-10919. In preparing the text for publication the editor has sought to follow rules similar to the ones which Adorno himself adhered to – to the extent that he would release them at all – when publishing a lecture which had been held extemporaneously; special care was taken to remain true to the character of the spoken word. The editor has corrected the text which has been preserved as little as possible, although there where this was necessary it has been done. In doing so he has – guided by the experience he has been able to gather in previous editions of Adorno’s lectures, both this one and the previous one on *Ontologie und Dialektik* – felt somewhat freer to retouch the existing manuscript, which after all Adorno had neither authorized nor intended for publication. Anacoluthons and elliptical formulations, as well as other contraventions of grammaticality were tacitly corrected. Beside the careful deletion of those repetitions which were particularly troublesome there is the occasional correction of syntactic constructions which were unclear. Not infrequently Adorno, who tended to speak rather rapidly, misplaced specific words; wherever the location of such words could be adduced unequivocally, according to their meaning, the syntax was corrected. Superfluous words, especially the particles now, so, indeed, also an occasionally almost inflationary actually, were deleted where they tended to reduce to mere empty phrases. In the handling of the punctuation, which in the nature of things had to be inserted by the editor, the latter had a free hand, which he used – without regard to the rules which Adorno adhered to in written texts – to arrange the spoken word as unequivocally and unmistakably as possible. Nowhere however was an attempt made to ‘improve’ Adorno’s text – the purpose was always to restore his text, to the best of the editor’s abilities.

Adorno’s key-words to his lecture-course, which for the lectures 11 to 25 is all that has been preserved, are to be found in the Theodor W. Adorno Archive under the catalog number Vo 11031-11061. Although these key-words enable a quite accurate reconstruction of the course of the lecture, they usually allow very little to be made out of Adorno’s argumenta-

tion; this can however often be reconstrued when the relevant passages of the manuscript on which he based his lecture are consulted, which are reproduced to the left of the key-words. The key-words themselves reproduce Adorno's handwriting as faithfully and judiciously as possible. Four words which were not decipherable with any certainty by the editor were identified with a [?].

In the text commentary the sources of Adorno's quotations are documented wherever possible, as well as quotations of passages to which he referred, or at any rate could plausibly have referred to. Over and above that, text passages from other parts of his work were occasionally added when this could clarify points raised in the lectures, although this was also done to demonstrate the manifold ways in which the writings and the lectures of the author are interconnected. – One needs to develop a faculty for discerning the emphases and accents peculiar to a specific philosophy in order to uncover their relationships within the philosophical context, and thus to understand the philosophy itself (*Metaphysics – Concepts and Problems*, p. 51): a reading which adopts this precept of Adorno is one of the things to which this text commentary is dedicated. It is meant to help bring to mind that cultural ambience [*Bildungssphäre*] within which Adorno's lecturing activity took place and which in the meantime can no longer be taken for granted. The commentaries to the four lecture[-serie]s which make up the context of the *Negative Dialectics* comprise – taken together – an elucidation of the more important concepts of Adornian philosophy.

The editor expresses his gratitude to Michael Schwarz for his assistance with the edition. To his friend Hermann Schweppenhäuser who steadily accompanied him with his immense knowledge he remains deeply indebted. Since with this work the editor presents the final volume of the edition for the Theodor W. Adorno Archive he wants to avail himself of the opportunity to express his thanks to the Hamburger Stiftung zur Förderung von Wissenschaft und Kultur and its board, especially Jan Philipp Reemtsma, which have made his work possible these last seventeen years.

24th September, 2002



## Translator's Notes

Under 'Negative Dialectics' it seems necessary to distinguish between the intellectual procedure, the name of a philosophical position, and the title, in English, of Adorno's book. This has been done by rendering the book in italics, (always in the plural) the position in capital letters, and the procedure in lower case letters.

Greek words have been transliterated.

Literally: that that was of course, for reasons beyond his control, quite impossible...

not rendered: – let me put it this way -

[transl. Frederik van Gelder]