

Theology and Materialism

Julia Jopp and Ansgar Martins
Translated by Lars Fischer

The Frankfurt School stood in the tradition of the Enlightenment critique of religion, especially in its formulation by Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud. In response to the historical experiences of the twentieth century, it radicalized this critique in fundamental ways. For Horkheimer and Adorno, religion was no longer merely 'opium' or the 'sigh of the harried creature'.¹ Their critique went much further. The First World War and the failure of the German Revolution had already rocked the belief in progress and the plausibility of religious attempts to ascribe meaning to reality. These attempts now fell into the rubric Adorno described as that of 'unbelieving belief', maintained only for the sake of adhering to some belief.² Auschwitz aggravated this state of affairs yet further. Reason had tipped over entirely into the irrational and the idea of God itself, which was supposed to guarantee the reconcilability of reason and the world, was no longer just implausible but had become irrevocably unthinkable: it could no longer be conceived

of in a consistent manner.³ To ascribe a purpose to history or even to an individual life amounted at best to a mockery of suffering.⁴ Religion no longer functioned as a form of opium offering some measure of manic compensation. Where it had not been absorbed by the culture industry anyway it amounted to no more than a lustreless reduplication of reality.⁵

THE PROHIBITION OF THE IMAGE (BILDERVERBOT)

Their sociological and cultural diagnosis drove Adorno's and Horkheimer's approach to theological problems, which had been ambivalent all along, towards the ultimate aporia: on the one hand, the great promises of reconciliation and truth associated with theology must not be ceded to the prevailing utter meaninglessness of the reality we inhabit; on the other hand, historical experience flies

in the face of any form of hope. At the same time, it would be cynical to fob off the survivors with a relativistic or nihilistic shrug of the shoulders. Only a concept that 'goes beyond its affirmation by extant facts' could assimilate this contradiction. The potential for both truth and delusion resided precisely in the 'difference between the concept and its [factual] affirmation'.⁶ Given this aporia, theological content could be taken up only *ex negativo*. Hence the much cited prohibition of the image in critical theory, which Adorno, Kracauer, and Löwenthal had already adopted in the early 1920s.⁷ It represented the attempt to sustain the idea of reconciliation negatively, its factual impossibility notwithstanding. In the meantime, only the critique of the delusion could act as a placeholder for the possibility of redemption.⁸ Any attempt to portray redemption in the here and now ignored its own historical contingency, thus becoming delusional and distorting everything.⁹ 'Hence, anyone who believes in God cannot believe in God'. Instead, the 'possibility' associated with the divine name – this 'possibility' will be a recurrent focal point throughout this discussion – is maintained by the nonbeliever.¹⁰ The theological reflections of the critical theorists largely gravitated around this aporia. As opposed to Kierkegaard, who on Adorno's reckoning had 'immobilized and hypostatized' the paradox,¹¹ they did not want to let matters rest there. Yet the possibility of an escape towards some 'other' state of affairs, in which utopia and the absolute would become one, could only ever be formulated by means of radical negation, by portraying reality without the slightest illusion. It was precisely this dilemma that underpinned the prohibition of the image. Horkheimer in particular never tired of emphasizing that 'German philosophy', and especially Kant's critical philosophy, shared 'with Judaism the notion ... that the critical issue is not so much the naming and determining of the absolute but rather the deciphering of the mundane and the

deposition of the idols'.¹² He thus amalgamated ideology-critical activity and the driving force underlying a possible negative theology. It was by revealing the historically contingent nature of the relative and conditional claims perceived of by human beings as unconditional truths that idols were deposed. Horkheimer referred to this approach as the 'awareness that the world is appearance' and therefore does not represent the ultimate reality.¹³ The idea of truth, which can only be determined negatively for the time being, will only be fulfilled when humankind has been liberated.¹⁴

THEOLOGY, METAPHYSICS, REVOLUTION

Neither for Horkheimer nor for Adorno was this selective recourse to a negative idea of God meant to endorse any particular religion. Indeed, on their account, even the metaphysical thought of antiquity had, from its very inception, been the inevitable critique of religious notions. Only philosophical-metaphysical reflection rendered conceivable the 'possibility' that revelation 'imposes and thus defiles' because obedience to it amounts to heteronomy.¹⁵ Metaphysics, then, as philosophy, is by its very nature both a deliberative critique of religion and 'the attempt to salvage categories that are theological in origin'.¹⁶ Philosophy had to reject the dogmatic-authoritarian surfeit of these categories, yet in so doing it passed on some of their potential. The religious notions of redemption had been (quite literally) more full-bodied than the disembodied philosophical concept of the immortality of the soul. As the credibility of institutionally established dogmas waned, modern philosophy gradually subverted its own earlier theological grounding, a development epitomized by positivism.¹⁷ Religion itself, without a 'core of revelation', became little more than a 'mere cultural reminiscence' or consoling

'heartwarmer' at best;¹⁸ or, at worst, a means of direct ideological domination.¹⁹ Enlightenment reason had destroyed the certitude of salvation but failed to offer a substitute. Only a genuine revolution realizing the Enlightenment ideal of the autonomous individual would have facilitated the annulment of the existing order and the fulfilment of philosophy. The Critical Theorists were interested in the hope of redemption once invested in theology that had remained illusive 'because the moment for its realization was missed'.²⁰ Consequently, metaphysical-religious questions continued to be virulent within philosophy. Historically, then, both faith and reason had been equally rooted in the immanence of the factual, rendering history a 'permanent catastrophe' or what Benjamin called a constantly growing 'heap of rubble':²¹ Philosophy 'can do no more than patiently trace in ever new configurations and perspectives the ambiguity of melancholy'. 'Truth' it could attain only if one day 'genuine deliverance were to come forward from these configurations of the unreal after all'.²² Only melancholy, the preconscious certitude that 'something is missing',²³ remained true to the hope that this might occur.

MIGRATION INTO THE PROFANE, OR: INTO THE FIERY NUCLEUS

Horkheimer and Adorno juxtaposed the requisite negative inversion of religious consciousness critically to the extant religious tradition. Horkheimer distinguished between 'religion in the good sense' – the enduring hope that everything will change – and 'religion in the bad sense' – the ideology that 'gilds the scourged reality all the same'. Any attempt to ascribe purpose to human suffering, i.e., any attempt to develop a positive theodicy, resulted in the 'bad' variant. Not only was this form of apologetics alien to the 'good' religious impulse, the latter was

incapable of offering a justification even for itself.²⁴ Positive religion, then, was heteronomous and ideological on principle. Only if the 'yearning for something other than the world' assimilated doubt in the possibility of its fulfilment could it avoid immediately tipping over into ideology.²⁵

Their stance reflected not only an emancipatory critique of religious tutelage but also a vision of secularization in the tradition of Cultural Protestantism and liberal Judaism, which envisaged the abandonment of residual irrational elements in accordance with the standards of bourgeois reason. Accepting the content of revelation after the critique of religion amounted, in Adorno's formulation, to 'playing off the even more out-dated against the out-dated'.²⁶ Hans Mayer recalled a conversation in Montagnola in which Horkheimer 'explained to me that the Jewish service needed to be reformed? In what way? By eliminating Hebrew and most of the rituals. I suggested that this went to the core of this religion ... This did not seem to impress him.'²⁷ Adorno was arguably the member of the inner circle of the Frankfurt School whose critical engagement of religious tradition was the most intense. His notion of what secularization needed to entail was altogether more radical than Horkheimer's. 'No theological content', he insisted, 'will continue to exist untransformed; all its elements will have to pass the test of migrating into the secular, into the profane'.²⁸

The profanation postulate operated on a number of planes. It encompassed partisanship for intra-religious enlightenment and the appropriation of critical impulses within the religious traditions – and, ultimately, of the utopian momentum that supposedly inhered in those impulses. In some of his most audacious moments, Adorno sought not only to address the idea of profanation as a critical demand to religion but also to anchor it within religion itself, referring to the 'heretical theology' of religious mysticism. In this connection, he focused especially on 'the kabbalah', which, on his reading, was a

'heresy' that had been nonconformist from the outset. Drawing on Gershom Scholem, he celebrated its late Sabbatean variant as a precursor of the Haskalah. On Adorno's account, the crucial point was that the 'mystical ... motif, that the tiniest mundane trait is pertinent to the absolute' bound transcendence and immanence together and thus, instead of proclaiming an already redeemed world beyond, incorporated human history.²⁹ The 'historical truth' of this nexus 'can be seized only at the greatest distance from its origin, through complete secularization'.³⁰ It was not in its religious origin or its atheist neutralization that truth could be found, then, but only in its most alienated secular – utopian – forms. In a well-known letter to Benjamin, Adorno called on him – with reference to his Arcades Project – to undertake a 'radicalization of dialectics all the way into the fiery nucleus of theology'. This would also throw the 'societal-dialectical, indeed the economic motifs' into the sharpest possible relief.³¹ Adorno's comments demonstrate just how inextricably Adorno's envisaged 'theology' was linked to the immanent. This forward-directed impulse explains why Adorno conceived of his metaphysics not as a *prima philosophia* but as a tentative, open-ended quest for the *ultima philosophia*.³² Remote as this transcendental long-term objective may have been, the profanation concept had clear implications for the present. *All* positive religious speculation had to be abandoned. Transcendence 'transcends only where it conceals itself'.³³

For Adorno, one way of responding to the demise of transcendence was to 'treat profane texts like holy scripture'.³⁴ In a world darkened by Auschwitz, thought could find 'refuge' only in the 'interpretive immersion' in the great texts.³⁵ They were handed down 'as though they were simply there and had authority'.³⁶ Hence they could serve as a point of departure for reflection even in the absence of objective meaning. A western canon of literature and philosophy was thus enlisted, which, for Adorno, had stored

up historical experience that pointed beyond the meaningless present. On the one hand, this approach led into the field of aesthetic and metaphysical experience. On the other hand, Adorno posited a form of recourse to tradition that brings it into the present as a prerequisite for any form of philosophy not reduced to mere positivism. Contrary to the illusion that the process of insight was transparent on its own terms, 'knowledge of the past' resided and 'pressed on' in every issue.³⁷ Rather than submit passively to this over-determination of the present by the past, one should develop a critical awareness of it in order to render the claims of the past and the demands of the present 'commensurable'. In the 'transition from philosophy to interpretation', the patient rearranging, time and again, of the elements at hand, their implicit historical dimension could suddenly illuminate the present and vice versa. This procedure secularized 'the irrecoverable archetype' of the exegesis of 'holy scripture' that had fallen silent.³⁸

THEOLOGY IN THE PROFANE: TILlich, BENJAMIN, KRACAUER

The antecedents of the idea of a hidden 'theology in the profane' can be traced to Adorno's teachers of the 1920s and 1930s. Protestant theological debates like the 'Discussion on the Task of Protestantism in a Secularized Civilization' on 17 June 1931, organized by Heinrich Frick with Paul Tillich as one of its participants, played a key role.³⁹ Tillich, who supervised Adorno's post-doctoral thesis (*Habilitation*) on Kierkegaard, had himself developed a concept of profanation as 'de-demonization'. For Tillich, 'Protestant form-creation' referred 'expressly religious forms to the profane that questions them'.⁴⁰ To Adorno's mind, this was not radical enough. It was possible that the 'historical function of Protestantism ... has been both fulfilled and

exhausted', and that, as a result, Christian concepts were now merely the 'empty husks' of historically obsolete responses to the world. All those contents that were still topical had already shed their religious form.⁴¹ In a radio eulogy for Tillich broadcast in 1966, Adorno returned to the issue of profanation. Tillich's inexhaustible ability to engage other individuals and positions had matched 'the theological ideal of surrendering oneself': 'I gather in Paul we read, "Lose, so you may win"'.⁴² Adorno's determination to anchor the migration into the profane now went further than it had done in 1931. Originally grounded in the critique of religion, his attempt to associate Tillich's habitus with the indirect theology he envisaged and identify it specifically with Paul now connected this line of argument to a (historically questionable) line of 'heretical' or 'mystical' tradition. Evidently, then, not only Horkheimer's but also Adorno's take on theology too mellowed over time.

Tillich's influence and his own various attempts to paint the profanation postulate, *post facto*, in kabbalistic colours notwithstanding, none of Adorno's intellectual interlocutors shaped his theology more strongly than Walter Benjamin. According to Benjamin's blotting paper simile, thought (the blotting paper) became saturated with the ink (the theology). Left to its own devices, it took up as much ink as possible and thus removed the writing (revelation).⁴³ The latter could now be reconstructed only from the palimpsestic blotting paper. Benjamin's imagery of historical materialism as a chess automaton that won every game yet was in fact secretly operated by a hunchbacked dwarf inside it functioned in a similar manner. Theology, 'which is small and ugly nowadays and in any case may not show its face', was the hunchbacked dwarf. In both instances, theology could survive only where it became the core or engine of materialism.

Adorno had already rejected the religious quest for meaning of his first teacher, Siegfried Kracauer, in the 1920s. With the

benefit of hindsight, the great stylistic and intellectual impact of the latter's essay, 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch' ['The Bible in German'], of 1926 is nevertheless evident. In it, Kracauer played the migration of truth into the profane off against Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig's translation of the Tanakh. Luther's bible translation had still been a political and religious act in one, he argued. Given their claim to make the divine word resonate anew in the present, Buber and Rosenzweig's recourse to archaic and primal modes of expression made their translation a work of neo-romantic literature at best. For the mundane world had long since superimposed itself on, and absorbed, the realm of religion. The latter was no longer able to articulate absolute truth. Only the focus on the imperfection of the profane could do so.⁴⁴ In the 1960s, Adorno's critique of the 'Jargon der Eigentlichkeit' [jargon of authenticity] took issue precisely with the sort of subreption of ostensible meaning by deploying seemingly portentous formulations that had roused Kracauer's criticism of Buber and Rosenzweig's translation. By suggestively invoking theological concepts, this jargon sought to construct immanent-ontological meaning. Its buzzwords were sacred without having a sacred content.⁴⁵ Against this swindle of unity, Adorno defended the notion of a form of radical transcendence without whose theological 'sting' redemption had been inconceivable.⁴⁶ The limits of conceptual synthesis had already resonated within religious notions of redemption. Consequently, as Hegel famously argued,⁴⁷ they also pointed to something extraneous. It was the quest to salvage this idea from the decaying religious-institutional traditions and redeem it for the benefit of this-worldly felicity that determined the critical theorists' engagement with religion.⁴⁸ As the 'unfolding of one single existential judgement', social criticism drew for its claim to truth on the denunciation of the whole as being 'universally irrational and untrue', they argued.⁴⁹

BETWEEN POSSIBILITY AND REALITY: MESSIANIC EPISTEMOLOGY

In contrast to the vague aforementioned jargon, the critical theory of society insisted that the possibility of reconciliation was and is, in principle, always given, no matter how insoluble the contrariety of society may seem. Analogously to Benjamin's account of the way in which pious Jews, while adhering to the prohibition on imagining the future, nevertheless assumed that 'every second could be the slight gate through which the Messiah might step',⁵⁰ the rejection of a fatalistic understanding of the course of the world generated the motivation to engage in criticism.⁵¹ 'Only if that which is can be changed, is that which is not all.'⁵² Yet as long as no practical way out was available, the reference to the possibility of change remained cognition's only source of light.⁵³ This begs the question of why the 'repeated promises of something other ... are constantly broken again'.⁵⁴ Adorno would presumably answer that the way in which those promises had been interpreted to suggest that their practical crossover was a foregone conclusion had perhaps been inadequate.⁵⁵ Adorno was similarly speculative in explaining whence the disastrous state of society might originate. In vague terms, he mused about a 'primeval irrational catastrophe', which superseded the religious narrative of the fall.⁵⁶ Suggestions that guilt reproduced itself *subjectively* 'in each one of us' were juxtaposed to the notion of an *objective* 'unfathomable calamity that occurred in primeval times',⁵⁷ a mishap in the process of creation, as it were, like the 'breaking of the vessels' in Lurianic kabbalah, that required no human participation.⁵⁸ This illustrates how consistently subjective, albeit unconscious, action and objective development were mediated in Adorno's concept of history.⁵⁹ On his account, reliable source material about these beginnings had been lost in the 'fog of primitive history', yet speculation about them was in any case futile since the

crucial issue was not its origin but the future resolution of the contradiction.⁶⁰

For Adorno, the relationship between possibility and reality, as the relationship between thought and being, was of crucial importance. Dissociating himself from the crypto-theological production of ideology, the submissive accommodation to authority or despairing nihilism, Adorno raised the fundamental question of the possibility of metaphysics in a novel way.⁶¹ The driving force here was a motif that he had characterized in a letter to Horkheimer of 1941 as an imperative in engaging theology ('or whatever one wants to call it'): one still needed to try and 'think the secret'.⁶² What he still categorized as theology in 1941, Adorno subsequently subsumed under the rubric of metaphysics. Transcending thought poses the question of whether, all the social catastrophes and the anguish they caused notwithstanding, meaningful life was still possible.⁶³ Metaphysics and the possibility of a meaningful life intersected in the 'secret' as the other of conceptual thought. Philosophy as a form of profane theology (as presented in *Negative Dialectics*) sought to palpate dominant social concepts that shaped subjective thought to trace fissures within them. Having plummeted from its lofty heights, metaphysics was now dependent upon the recesses that remained in a fragile world dominated by heteronomous compulsion. Traces of the other were to be found only in the tiniest and least significant phenomena that conceptual thought had not yet seized. Metaphysics had 'migrated into micrology' to seek 'refuge from the totality'.⁶⁴

Adorno's notion that residual traces of that which is 'right' might be found here drew on the assumption that all conceptual content was stimulated by non-conceptual impulses.⁶⁵ An urge towards the concept inhered in the phenomenon itself.⁶⁶ The concept depended fundamentally on contents, which only became palpable conceptually. Speaking in the lecture theatre in 1965, Adorno exemplified this with reference to

the metaphysical concept of freedom, which one could deploy only 'because its realization is viable', because its fulfilment was possible 'at any point in time'.⁶⁷ This was demonstrated empirically by the fact that the development of productive forces had long since provided the means to eradicate global deprivation.⁶⁸ Yet the potential inherent in the phenomena had barely begun to exhaust its conceptual leeway. Consequently, people failed to comprehend that 'in the world, in which we exist' nobody even came close to being 'what each one of us *could* be'.⁶⁹ 'Immanent critique' sought out instances in which a non-identical surplus revealed how inadequate individual judgements, qua their conceptual unambiguousness, actually were vis-à-vis the material.⁷⁰ It demonstrated how little justice finite identity did to the tangible infinity in its manifoldness and agility, a discrepancy to which the immobilized thought patterns of everyday consciousness were necessarily oblivious.⁷¹ Any attempt, then, critically to transcend what was simply given faced the paradoxical task of taking into consideration 'its own impossibility'. 'For the sake of the possibility', any such attempt had to be aware of its own futility.⁷²

Knowledge, then, had to 'abandon itself, à fonds perdu, to the objects'.⁷³ In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno may have portrayed the cultural process as a permanent tyranny over humans, resources, and internal drives,⁷⁴ but this by no means implied a deterministic philosophy of history. An intrinsic potential for, indeed, an urge toward, self-refutation inhered in the human ability to judge: 'Thought patterns want to transcend that, which is merely given'.⁷⁵ As opposed to the idealistic hope in conceptual and actual progress, based on reason or the belief in a higher being, critical consciousness was thrown back onto itself. All it could do was tirelessly and critically empathize with the given objects and draw truth from their inconsistencies until, ultimately, thought turned 'even on itself' and allowed the principle of identity to implode.

While nominalists abstracted from being and remained non-committal, rationalist dualists, who distinguished between conceptual conceivability and actual viability, contributed to the idealization of corporeal suffering. Adorno, by contrast, dialectically took up the struggle on two fronts. In terms of social theory, the mediation of concept and object established a form of social realism. To inter-subjectively constructed incorporeal institutions like the state, law, or money, Adorno attributed the characteristic of developing an objective life of their own and thus impacting on the thoughts and activities of their agents.⁷⁶

THE ONTOLOGICAL PROOF OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

In the face of Adorno's observations about the tangency of concepts and reality in the social sphere, any strict distinction between them was rendered brittle. Consequently, a number of fundamental questions in the history of philosophy assumed to have been resolved became virulent again. Adorno's exploration of the viability of metaphysics logically raised the question of whether Kant's radical refutation of the ontological proof of the existence of God had 'really solved the problem ... comprehensively'.⁷⁷ Kant's claim that being was not a genuine predicate had suspended a priori the interdependence of concept and object, form and content.⁷⁸ Yet it seemed clear to Adorno that the impact of incorporeal-material institutions could easily be sensed in one's own powerlessness – 'where it hurts?'.⁷⁹ Adorno coined the paradoxical term 'actually governing metaphysics' to characterize this dynamic.⁸⁰ Its hopelessness spread existential fear that pervaded even 'the most subtle layers of behavior'.⁸¹ Late capitalist society, unwittingly reproduced by its subjects, manifestly defied a clear distinction between the sensuous and the conceptual.

On Adorno's account, then, world and ideology were continually converging in the sphere of identity.⁸² This precipitated a loss of individual experience and led to metaphysical indifference and obliviousness to religious questions.⁸³ Horkheimer referred to this 'real metaphysics' – the repressive apparatus of integration – as the 'administered world',⁸⁴ Adorno as a 'context of deception'.⁸⁵ Its efficacy donned the mantle of perpetual laws of nature. Regardless of the odds, Adorno insisted that thought, as long as it was not abandoned, held on to the aforementioned 'possibility'.⁸⁶ It was the scepticism as to whether Kant's delineations really were the last word in this matter that explained this thesis. Thaidigsmann has called this scepticism 'the hidden metaphysical-theological motif' in Adorno's thought.⁸⁷ That said, it is remarkable how little space this fundamental complex took up in Adorno's work, given its systematic significance.

Drawing on his contention that one could not distinguish 'all that radically ... between the utopia to which thought, as concept, feels drawn and reality',⁸⁸ Adorno sought to render the onto-theological argument plausible as a purely negative one. As the affinity between the Non-identical and the *Ding an sich* [thing in itself] indicates, Adorno enlisted Kant against Hegel, leaving the absolute indeterminate, even though it formed a necessary conceptual prerequisite.⁸⁹ Thinking as such primarily referenced an unattainable transcendental ground of knowledge to which individual judgements were connected relationally. Without the 'idea of the absolute' as the necessary condition for truth, thought was effectively impossible, since judgements unrelated to a common generality could only be arbitrary.⁹⁰ In a conversation with Bloch, Adorno noted that 'the force of the concept' must also encompass 'its element of actuality'.⁹¹ While every specific judgement was necessarily erroneous in relation to the whole, all philosophical truth claims, including Kant's own, depended on the successful execution of the ontological proof of the

existence of God in order to ground knowledge in a universal and binding generality.⁹² Hence, in the final meditation in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno expressly equated the concept of the non-identical with the 'absolute, as it was envisaged by metaphysics'.⁹³ While the grey of the sensuous world alone offered no consolation, the dependence of consciousness on the 'concept of another colour' indicated its real, albeit 'dispersed trace in the negative whole'.⁹⁴ While the possibility of the absolute invariably imposed itself in the abstract, critical theory also converged on the corresponding object and the 'secret' of the non-identity between them. This was the source of Adorno's hope that social praxis could be different, that it could shed its inherent relationship of force.⁹⁵ According to Liedke, it was the assumed proximity between potentiality and actuality that prevented *Negative Dialectics* from 'plunging into the abyss', though it did pose the risk of encouraging a form of 'speculative materialism'.⁹⁶

The metaphor of the 'dispersed trace' of 'another colour' underscores the call for mimetic openness to experience that transcends conceptual categories and grasps that which is missing, a form of experience that must accompany all perception. Where Kant's indispensable transcendental subject established absolute identity,⁹⁷ Adorno insisted that absolute non-identity was indispensable. Where concepts falter – in the case of successful aesthetic or physical encounters, for instance – thought fleetingly became aware of its fallibility and contingency. In such moments it moved towards the aforementioned 'secret'. In the face of objective obstacles in the object itself, self-denial rendered the 'last trace of the ontological proof for the existence of God, possibly its ineffaceable dimension', tangible.⁹⁸ The superiority of conceptual subsumption notwithstanding, it transpired that the constitution of the subject was absolutely dependent on something other.⁹⁹ In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno contented himself with

the ‘unverified expectation’ of that other and limited his onto-theological argument negatively to the justification in principle of the possibility that thought could enter into being.¹⁰⁰ Prima facie, theology, stripped down in this way, like all forms of enlightenment thought, sought to approximate the objective. In contrast to the taming of external chaos with blindly posited general concepts that had shaped the history of the species, it drew out the ‘idea of the objectivity of felicity’ through reconciliation.¹⁰¹

Kant had still posited the necessity of the idea of God as a rational, regulative concept that was categorically not subject to justified judgements. In the face of the actual suffering, Horkheimer and Adorno abandoned the moral teleology underlying Kant’s postulate of the existence of God.¹⁰² This raised the question of whether dominant thought patterns could be transcended towards the this-worldly revelation of the ‘secret’.¹⁰³ In contrast to Kant’s conservative position, the critical theorists answered this question in the affirmative.

Adorno focused primarily on the social praxis of commodity exchange as the locus of mediation between consciousness and being.¹⁰⁴ In its current form the identity principle had to be understood in terms of the abstract value form underpinning it. Since the inception of the modern world, as revelation lost its authority, it had been conflating ‘the entire world into the identical, the totality’.¹⁰⁵ The ‘spell’ of the value form was increasingly creating a subjective consciousness whose perception of the world encompassed only a multitude of units of value destined for exchange.¹⁰⁶ At this juncture, Adorno amplified Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism, turning it into a comprehensive epistemological concept: ‘Social criticism is critique of knowledge and vice versa.’¹⁰⁷ In the mediation of being and social consciousness, Kant’s assumption of a timeless objectivity of logical categories turned out to be untenable. Just as prevailing norms were shaped by the material distribution of wealth, so too

factual knowledge was contingent upon historical constellations.¹⁰⁸

Due to Adorno’s negative defense of the ontological proof of the existence of God, objects and things, possibility and reality, thinking and being moved so closely together that they began to morph into each other. To the irrationally interlocked ‘contradictions of reality’, *Negative Dialectics* juxtaposed the successful ‘convergence of all thoughts in an absolute’.¹⁰⁹ Only the latter could transcend the contradictions. Adorno’s hope was inextricably linked to this ‘convergence’, which vouched for God’s existence, understood as the possibility of a social utopia.¹¹⁰ As he noted in 1962: ‘To think this through, with and against Kant, is my task and that of philosophy. The one thing I do know: If this is nothing then everything is but nothing’.¹¹¹

TOTAL CHANGE: THE END OF LOGIC AND THE SELF-SUSPENSION OF EXCHANGE

A statement by Lichtenberg that Adorno quoted in his Husserl study hints at the implications of the notion that the renegotiation of the ontological proof for the existence of God transcended the chasm between thought and being: ‘If one day an angel were to recite from his philosophy ... presumably some sentences would have to sound like 2 times 2 is 13.’¹¹² Theological visions of reconciliation migrated into the attempt to escape ‘the prison of logic’ with logic’s ‘own devices’.¹¹³ For the time being, the extant ‘logic of things’, though contingent, remained valid if thought did not want to cross itself out in an act of misguided abstraction.¹¹⁴ The idea of a divine logic – as a metaphor for a different order of thought and being – helps explain Adorno’s fascination with a ‘Jewish theologumenon’ handed down by Martin Buber that Benjamin, Bloch, and Scholem also discussed.¹¹⁵ It stated that when things were finally put right everything would be ‘just a

little different', yet how exactly was unfathomable.¹¹⁶ Only then would humans and objects be shifted [*verrückt*]¹¹⁷ into 'their proper position'.¹¹⁸ That the frame of reference encompassed both humans and objects implies that this redemption would take place in this world and impact it in its entirety, including its most mundane aspects.

The German term *verrückt* can mean to shift or move from one place to another or, as an adjective, denote madness. Adorno was intentionally playing on this double meaning. Precisely those things that might seem out of place or 'mad' by the standards of the existing order might turn out to be the only ones foreshadowing the proper, truly 'sane' order of things. The dynamics of Adorno's orientation toward the 'ideal of free and just exchange'¹¹⁹ can be clarified by recalling Marx's underlying insight. Marx characterized bourgeois society as a nexus of independent producers of commodities organized in accordance with the division of labour and held together by the constant exchange of commodities.¹²⁰ In *Capital*, he focused particularly on the exchange of the commodity labour between the otherwise propertyless and the owners of the means of production. Insofar as the worker obtained the exchange value of his labour in the form of the indispensable means for the reproduction of his capacity to work, this exchange was obviously entirely just. Yet according to Marx, what distinguished labour from other commodities was its ability to produce additional value.¹²¹ As the vendor, the capitalist obtained this surplus free of charge. With it he was able to cover his own livelihood and pay for additional labour and means of production, which allowed him to remain competitive. Hence, capital constantly increased its wealth through exploitation while maintaining the appearance of an entirely equitable relationship of exchange.¹²² The exchange of labour was precisely the point at which, as Adorno put it, 'everything is in order while at the same time nothing is in order'.¹²³ The fundamental role, which Marx attributed

to the law of exchange in accounting for the persistence of the wrong state of affairs,¹²⁴ returned in Adorno's call to pin down the concept of exchange in order to facilitate the 'realization of the promise of exchange, which, in terms of its concept, is broken time and again'.¹²⁵ This allowed him to elaborate more specifically on his concept of convergence, for instance, when he noted that this realization would 'converge with its abolition; exchange would disappear where it was truly equitable'.¹²⁶ The exchange of equivalents in which equality pertained only to the 'exchange values of the exchanged commodities' would transcend itself, creating truly just relations in which there would no longer be any contradiction between object and concept. Qualities would no longer be abstracted to quantities, and use values no longer to exchange values.¹²⁷ Everything would be in its proper place, then, when the dialectic was reconciled in the demise of exploitation, domination, and violence. History would finally become open to 'the non-identical, which would emerge only once the compulsion of identity has dissolved'.¹²⁸

Note the active form of this dissolution. It indicates a passive role of the finite subject in redemption. The finite subject was reliant upon the utmost 'grace', which 'tempers justice' and 'on which the cycle of cause and effect founders'.¹²⁹ With this 'act of grace'¹³⁰ Adorno circumscribed an additional element, which could not be anticipated qualitatively in extant reality because it had to be of an entirely new quality. From a specific constellation of concept and experience this insight, like a bolt of lightning, pointed beyond particular knowledge.¹³¹ The escape from the cycle of exchange in all its self-contradictory forms and the attendant elusion of suffering depended on a form of transcendence of which thought was unable to conceive under its own steam.¹³² Since this transcendence could be grounded only in an experiencing subject, the messianic perspective Adorno arrived at was fractured. Not least, it was

not some cosmological law but the subject's own social praxis that was supposed to be overcome.

THE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE WORLD AS HELL: GNOSIS AND INVERSE THEOLOGY

As is well known, Adorno vehemently distanced himself from any concept of praxis of the kind postulated by vulgar Marxism.¹³³ Against blind forms of activism, Adorno focused on the disclosure of heteronomous modes of mediation to the individual. Consequently, his intertwining of metaphysics and the material created a hermeneutical proximity to gnostic concepts (as the etymology already indicates, given that the Greek term *gnosis* means knowledge). Prima facie, the notion that the world was 'faulty to its core' indeed recalled a form of cosmic dualism already characteristic of the Gnosticism of antiquity.¹³⁴ According to the Gnostics, the Biblical God was a demonic demiurge and the world thoroughly corrupt. Juxtaposed to this Biblical God was an unattainable God of light revealed to his followers by reason. Yet Adorno's hope of redemption from the corrupted world did not hinge on a hidden God of light. Instead, he saw the new myth precisely in the bright 'deus absconditus' of the principle of enlightenment. As an advancing form of identity, this 'entirely abstract and indeterminate God cleansed of all anthropomorphic-mythological qualities' morphed into a 'fatefully ambiguous and threatening' one. Demythologization turned out to be a form of demonization.¹³⁵ This ostensible God, 'masked by his own contradictoriness',¹³⁶ embodied only the 'repressive and pernicious character [*Unwesen*] of society'.¹³⁷ It represented 'not the divine absolute', then, 'but its ... opposite; if I wanted to put it in theological terms, I would have to say: hell'.¹³⁸

For Adorno, the true God – the sensible organization of society – was concealed in

the non-identical beyond of consciousness. Adorno confronted the 'theological niceties' of the abstract law of value substantiated in the domination of humans not with an otherworldly authority but simply with subjective desire.¹³⁹ Knowledge of the existence of an absolute as the other of logic drove his socio-philosophical inventory beyond itself because 'without the hope in this-worldly improvement ... creation itself would inexorably turn into the work of a gnostic demon'.¹⁴⁰ Yet, in its antinomianism, critical theory by no means turned on Torah or Halakhah, as the Gnostics had done. Instead, it took issue with the unconscious impact of the mythical compulsions generated by the contention that there was no third alternative and the 'magic circle' that contention created.¹⁴¹ The incriminated ideology underpinning the pernicious state of affairs, beholden as it was to conceptuality and the value form, would have to recede before the manifoldness of objects.¹⁴²

In the well-known final aphorism in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno called on philosophy, 'in the face of despair', to look at the world as it would appear 'in a messianic light', in which its 'rifts and crevices' would be revealed.¹⁴³ In his Kafka essay he again drew out this scheme in a gnostic-antinomian manner, describing as the optimum 'light source' one which makes 'the fissures of the world glow hellishly'.¹⁴⁴ Adorno had already presented his interpretation of Kafka to Benjamin in 1934. Kafka's technique created a 'photograph of mundane life from the perspective of a redeemed life'. The photograph thus taken presented a terrible picture, which seemed lopsided and distorted because the camera was recording the absurdity of the wrong world from a 'right' perspective. One might call this 'image of theology ... "inverse" theology'.¹⁴⁵ The inversion in question amounted to a shift in theological perspective. Nothing could be said about the deity, but one could emulate its view of the world's faultiness. This presupposed an extraneous vantage point, which could only be constructed 'for the sake of the possibility'

but never actually assumed.¹⁴⁶ Since this vantage point remained philosophically unattainable, Adorno had to take recourse to Kafka's prose to verify the existence of this possibility. Three years earlier, he had attributed this sort of 'inverse, luciferic theology' to Brecht and Weill's opera *Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* [*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*]. It successfully constructed the whole, the negative totality, from the 'fragments' of 'disintegrating reality'.¹⁴⁷ Through the de-familiarizing inherent logic of aesthetic expression, successful works of art provided a detached representation of the totality as a monad. Idiosyncratically recombining the totality's component parts, they created an alternative world to that of social immanence. For Adorno, this capacity for the virtual refraction of faulty reality allowed art to approximate [visions of] utopia. 'Art owns truth as the appearance of being no mere appearance', he wrote.¹⁴⁸ It represented the possibility of experiencing an alternative order but was by no means a surrogate for praxis. It only provided possible ways of thinking.¹⁴⁹ By looking at the world from the outside, as it were, inverse theology, as determinate negation, was already a placeholder for the other. 'Accomplished negation, once thoroughly explored', revealed like a flash of lightning the 'mirror image of its opposite'.¹⁵⁰ In this sense, Adorno claimed both in his post-doctoral dissertation (*Habilitation*) on Kierkegaard and in *Negative Dialectics* that elements of immanence could become intelligible as bearing a utopian meaning; elements of reality could 'solidify into script', 'fissures of disintegration' become recognizable as 'ciphers of promise'.¹⁵¹

To create this script, Adorno wrote in *Negative Dialectics*, metaphysics needed to 'know how to wish for something', how to integrate desire and thought.¹⁵² For Adorno, desire originated in the quest of the imposed vital needs for conceptual articulation. If the indeterminate suffering created by the violent conditions was consciously reflected upon and sublimated as desire, it would serve as

a source of judgement on the 'accomplished negation'. The wish that things should be different rendered the constituents of that negation legible. The minuscule gap presupposed by the extra-mundane vantage point of inverse theology between itself and faulty reality thus consisted in the corporeal experience of non-identity. Because the idealistic concept of the world's intellectual integrity fragmented at this point, Adorno considered the corporeal 'our stance on theology'.¹⁵³

BODY AND RESURRECTION

So far the content of the position God would hold in the conventional ontological proof for the existence of God has been left undefined. The missing link – the idea of the absolute or the other – was corporeal experience which, on Adorno's account, needed to be reflected: 'The intellect evolves from ... the urges'.¹⁵⁴ The somatic moment was 'irreducible as the not purely cognitive dimension of knowledge'.¹⁵⁵ Since the persistence of suffering was avoidable, it was irrational. Given that it ignored or even justified suffering, the rigid world beyond of traditional metaphysics had turned out to be a lie.¹⁵⁶ Adorno's metaphysics of the tiniest and shabbiest detail hinged not so much on the 'positive' moment of sensual joy but focused primarily on 'the unmeaningful stratum of life', the suffering and frail body. It sprang from the only remaining moral impulse, the universal 'revulsion, turned practical', against physical pain.¹⁵⁷ With it came the minimum demand that there should be no suffering. It culminated in the categorical imperative to arrange one's 'thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz may not repeat itself, so that nothing similar may occur'.¹⁵⁸

Adorno complemented his solidarity with the tormentable body with the 'remembrance' [*Eingedenken*] of one's own human 'naturalness' and mortality. The point was by no means to idealize some infirm *conditio*

humana but to become fully aware of its horror, including the terror of death. For Adorno, the fact that a beloved human being was dead was unimaginable.¹⁵⁹ He paraphrased the attendant sentiments: ‘The sense of unfinished business; things had really only just begun – all the things we should have done ... that one might make good on the omissions and that this miserable and fragmented life does not even suffice to bring one’s own life and that of one’s nearest and dearest to a meaningful conclusion’.¹⁶⁰ Adorno pitted this shock against a frigid culture that depended integrally on the repression of mortality. He thus rehabilitated the notion of the resurrection of the flesh against any form of purely intellectual metaphysics. Hope was hope for the flesh, and the theological notion of resurrection was conceptually more consistent than that of the abstract immortality of the soul.¹⁶¹ The rational ‘gravity’ of the corporeal was juxtaposed to the irrationality of indeterminate and generalizing identitarian thinking. ‘Should theology, which wants to abolish death, die, nobody will feel compelled to constrain death anymore.’¹⁶² The idea of resurrection as the vanishing point of all critique also originated with Benjamin, who defended it against Horkheimer in the 1930s. Against the notion that history was open-ended and the past could be salvaged, Horkheimer repeatedly insisted that ‘the injustice of the past is done and dusted. The slain really have been slain’.¹⁶³ Adorno, by contrast, aligned himself with Benjamin’s motif of the ‘collector’ whose attention focused on the lost causes that had been overwhelmed by history. Indeed, he identified Benjamin’s ‘rescue of the hopeless’, the recording of the history of ‘creaturely suffering’ and of that, which had not come about, as the ‘central motive’ underpinning his own work.¹⁶⁴ The potential reader of those records could only be situated in a better future, in which the suffering and joy of earlier generations would become accessible and be taken up again. Since no inner-worldly rectification of that, which was irrevocably in the past, was possible, a

redeemed humanity was conceivable only in theological terms. The need to conceive of resurrection tells us more about the forms of economically preformed thought than the reality or unreality of redemption. Thus, ‘a caveat was immediately lodged on religious hope again, it was precluded from becoming positive’.¹⁶⁵ The dilemma of being compelled to think theologically against the faulty world, yet unable to do so within it, could not be neutralized. It drove Adorno to the notion that metaphysics was the ‘intellectual effort to salvage that, which it dissolves’.¹⁶⁶ When he concluded his lectures on metaphysics by pointing to a convergence between the inadequacy of his own elaborations and ‘the impossibility of thinking what must be thought’,¹⁶⁷ he was not simply being ironic but also offering a concise outline of his programme. Fallibility was what vouched for the compatibility of the concept of redemption and the experience of its absence. Any suggestion of certitude would be ideology.

METAPHYSICS AND EXPERIENCE

Thought that reached its limits but could substantiate no positive theology depended on other forms of evidence. Even if neither of them was entirely successful in this respect, Adorno’s agreement with Benjamin that one should ‘refrain from any overt usage of theological categories’ reflected this.¹⁶⁸ Against the conclusions of the self-deluded intellect, solidarity with the ‘tormentable body’ insisted on the incorporation of experience. Adorno’s entire ‘critical ... transformation of religious tradition guided by freedom’ culminated in his plea for a critical philosophy of experience.¹⁶⁹ Thought that concurrently dissolved its own conclusions as it proceeded would match the mimetic capacity to devote oneself in precisely this sense to the hopeless aspects of mundane existence so desperately in need of rescue. The ‘ideal of surrendering oneself’ denoted this way of proceeding.

Against the self-referential immanence of the generalized functional context, the subjectively experienced structure of the object would be decisive, and the object would determine whether that experience was successful or missed the mark.

In this context, Adorno referred to experiences that 'accrue or do not accrue' and spoke of a specific 'metaphysical experience'. Mysticism, tied to the object of holy scripture it interpreted, had once been its medium. Adorno's maxim of 'treating profane texts like holy scripture', applied to Proust and Beckett, brought such experiences into the present. In secularized 'metaphysical experiences' like *déjà vu* ('where have I seen this before'), or the juxtaposition of the sites of happy childhood memories and reality, the latter turns out to be altered and manifests itself as contingent.¹⁷⁰ Kracauer had described himself in 1922 as somebody who was waiting, no longer capable of believing, even while his 'hesitant openness' for the absolute betrayed his wish to do so.¹⁷¹ After Auschwitz, Adorno rejected the possibility of positive metaphysical experience altogether and appropriated Kracauer's notion of 'waiting', bringing it to a head with a pessimistic turn. The only way of heightening metaphysical experience was now to wait in vain while wondering in a disillusioned manner whether this was really everything there is.¹⁷² What remained was the alternative of either capitulating in the face of everyday depravity or reflecting critically upon it. The choice, then, as Adorno noted pointedly, was between 'theology' and 'tautology'. Faced with *this* alternative, he preferred the former.¹⁷³ This distinction was no less radical than Horkheimer's earlier juxtaposition of traditional and critical theory. In this scheme, knowledge as the replication of the given state of affairs – what Horkheimer called the conceptual 'duplication of the reality' knowledge 'had set out to comprehend'¹⁷⁴ – was tautological. Theological, on the other hand, was the negation of the 'categories ... that are valid in the existing order'.¹⁷⁵ Theology, then,

consisted in the immanent critique of the tautology whose only transcendent ingredient was the corporeal or metaphysical experience of the inadequacy of self-referential immanence.

The relationship between metaphysics and experience also ran through Adorno's philosophy of the arts. The undivided attention music demanded of the serious listener precipitated devotion to a fleeting object, he noted. 'Mahler's theology', for instance, was 'gnostic like Kafka's'. The only remaining transcendence was that of longing.¹⁷⁶ A similar gnosticism prevailed in Beckett, for whom the world was 'radically evil' so that its negation maintained 'the possibility of another world'.¹⁷⁷ For Adorno, the hopeless state of affairs in Beckett's dramatic art represented 'the only genuinely metaphysical creation since the war'.¹⁷⁸ In contrast to the desolate worlds of Beckett, the utopian contents of the classical arts now constituted no more than missed opportunities. Adorno's theological hope perished in and with Beckett.

AMBIGUITIES IN THE RECEPTION HISTORY: JÜRGEN HABERMAS

There have been various theological attempts to incorporate Horkheimer's and Adorno's ideas. The topic seems to be altogether less popular outside of theology departments. Readers in the tradition of the ideology-critical self-understanding of the Frankfurt School frequently take recourse to the formulations and imagery pertaining to reconciliation, yet without referencing their religio-philosophical implications. Outside of this all too sympathetic coterie, the theological problems of critical theory are generally brushed aside as a dead end and metaphysical ballast. Both strategies are exemplified in the work of Jürgen Habermas. His essay, 'Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen' ['The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers'] of

1961, concluded with a plea that, given the crimes of National Socialism, one should highlight the achievements of Jewish philosophers, though not for their sake but to benefit post-war Germany: 'If there were no German Jewish tradition, for our own sake we would have to invent it today', he wrote. For Habermas, this remarkably candid plea followed from the fact that the 'physical carriers' of this tradition had been murdered and the Germans were now in the process of 'forgiving and forgetting everything in a climate of noncommittal conciliatoriness'.¹⁷⁹ Against this trend, historical recollection needed to be kept alive. 'The Jews' German idealism', Habermas wrote, 'produces the leaven of a critical utopia; their aspiration finds its most precise, dignified, and beautiful expression in the very Kafkaesque final segment of *Minima Moralia*'. Indeed, Habermas concluded the essay with a complete rendition, without any further comment, of the already quoted aphorism, 'Finale', that invoked the 'messianic light' as a hypothetical source of knowledge.¹⁸⁰ Habermas, then, was interested in this aphorism not for its theological implications but as proof of a 'German Jewish tradition' (of which Adorno, incidentally, knew precious little). Among German Jews before 1933, the juxtaposition of 'Germandom and Jewishness' had been a controversial issue. In the volume that contained Habermas's essay, Horkheimer also explicitly touched on this historical debate. He argued, for instance, that Kant's critical philosophy and the Jewish prohibition of the image amounted to the same thing.¹⁸¹ Habermas went further and sought to reactivate these problematic categories 'for our sake', in other words, for the (non-Jewish) Germans' benefit. For him, 'taking up the Jewish Question again without Jews' represented an 'historical irony'.¹⁸² While the harmony of 'Germandom and Jewishness' had been the issue of 'a controversy among Jews from Germany' prior to 1933, it had advanced to becoming a German pet theory after the Shoah.¹⁸³ Habermas's

identification with an 'older' Critical Theory designated as Jewish thus turns out to be characteristic of a generation that 'had entered the university in 1949 with a reasonably clear awareness of the historical magnitude of Auschwitz'.¹⁸⁴ Jewish teachers seemed best suited to act as monuments to the grandeur and vagaries of the German educational tradition.¹⁸⁵ The consequences were evident in Habermas's reassessment of Schelling's 'Weltalter'-philosophy ['Ages of the World'-philosophy], which had been the focus of his dissertation, *The Absolute and History*. Drawing on his engagement of Critical Theory and Gershom Scholem, Habermas interpreted Schelling's cosmogonic notion of the 'contraction of God' not only as an expression of 'dialectical idealism in transition to materialism' but also took recourse to the kabbalistic motifs of *zimzum* and *tikkun olam*, which he had not invoked in his dissertation.¹⁸⁶ He argued that the philosophy of Ernst Bloch, for instance, derived from the same Schellingian philosopheme. It transported 'the legacy of the kabbalah from the spirit of Romanticism to the Protestant philosophy of German idealism', rendering 'the most Jewish elements of Bloch's philosophy concurrently the truly German' ones.¹⁸⁷ Habermas never tired of highlighting Scholem's achievements. Yet his ill-founded enthusiasm for the theological ideas of critical theory as the ostensible proof of a German-Jewish synthesis did not last. It was followed by the demonstrative renunciation of 'the pitch-black totality conception of the philosopher Adorno' in favour of his own utopia of communication.¹⁸⁸ The theological arguments of the 'first generation', which he had previously adopted as a matter of course – albeit not as worthy of philosophical discussion but merely as historical testimony to a productive German-Jewish dialogue – were re-evaluated in the process and interpreted as the illegitimate silver lining inherent in the conception of totality. Horkheimer and Adorno had been unable to develop the idea of a 'mimetic' form of

reason that could take the place of identitarian thought, Habermas claimed. At best, they had been able to point to it 'in the imagery of Judaeo-Christian mysticism'.¹⁸⁹ Apparently, then, their excessive wariness of instrumental reason drove Horkheimer and Adorno to irrationalism. 'An overdrawn promise of redemption and exaggerated pessimism complement each other in this reading'.¹⁹⁰ This polemic notwithstanding, traces of the earlier engagement are still evident in Habermas's religio-philosophical texts. Practical reason missed its 'purpose if it no longer has the capacity to rouse and maintain in mundane minds an awareness of the solidarity that is violated the world over, of that, which is missing, that, which stinks to high heaven'.¹⁹¹ Habermas's notion of the 'verbalization of the sacred', i.e., the translation of its semantic contents into profane reason, reiterated the aforementioned profanation postulate. This allowed Habermas to subscribe to Scholem's and Adorno's discussion of how the turnover from the theological to the profane transpired while nevertheless maintaining an agnostic notion of incomensurability: Adorno's error, Habermas argued, consisted in his idealistic attempt to engage theology on an equal footing.¹⁹²

This accusation of idealism renders the radical critique of religion and all forms of theology impossible. Faith and reason, immanence and transcendence break apart. The establishment of two separate, complementary truths eliminates the idea of the one truth that must exist because 'there is no redemption unless it is all-encompassing'.¹⁹³ A liberated humanity would not be liberated if it coexisted with an unfree one; truth would not be true if it encompassed contradictions. As long as they remain unfree, individuals can only find their own way to salvation or seek to be reasonably happy. While neither the premises of reason nor those of faith can be imposed, theology and materialism must assume that the whole truth will ultimately come into being as the truth of humankind. The concept of theology at stake here is

obviously at odds with the academic disciplines that bear this name. Their contents, if we follow Horkheimer and Adorno – and Habermas's notion of the 'verbalization of the sacred' – can be critically recovered only as catalysts of profane, practical reason. Conversely, the need to hold on to the one truth and the all-encompassing redemption drives profane reason towards theological problems of justification. The constant turnover of this immanent and transcendent motion is critical theory's mode of reflection.

Notes

- 1 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, *Werke* [MEW] vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1956), 378.
- 2 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aberglaube aus zweiter Hand', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 147–76, here 176.
- 3 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 273.
- 4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysik. Begriff und Probleme* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 160.
- 5 See Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), 159.
- 6 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Meinung, Wahn, Gesellschaft', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 573–49, here 577.
- 7 See, e.g., Leo Löwenthal, Siegfried Kracauer, *In steter Freundschaft* (Springe: Zu Klampen, 2003), 54.
- 8 See Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 46.
- 9 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 6 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 345.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 394.
- 11 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kierkegaard noch einmal', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 239–58, here 250.
- 12 Max Horkheimer, 'Nachwort', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985), 175–93, here 182.
- 13 Max Horkheimer, 'Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 7 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1985), 385–404, here 389.
- 14 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Einleitung zum "Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie"', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8, 280–353, here 309.
- 15 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 389.

- 16 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 155.
- 17 See Adorno, 'Einleitung zum "Positivismusstreit"', 285.
- 18 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Blochs Spuren', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 233–50, here 243; 'Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 14 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 169–447, here 333.
- 19 See Max Horkheimer, 'Montaigne und die Funktion der Skepsis', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988), 236–94, here 262–6.
- 20 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 15.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 314; Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I–2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 691–704, here 698.
- 22 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 138.
- 23 Ernst Bloch, Theodor W. Adorno, 'Etwas fehlt...', in Ernst Bloch, *Gesamtausgabe* vol. 16 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), 350–67; Bertolt Brecht, *Werke* vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 349.
- 24 Max Horkheimer, 'Was ist Religion?', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 6, 288.
- 25 Max Horkheimer, 'Theismus – Atheismus', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 7, 173–86, here 186; 'Über den Zweifel', *ibid.*, 213–23, here 218.
- 26 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Vernunft und Offenbarung', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 608–16, here 608.
- 27 Hans Mayer, *Ein Deutscher auf Widerruf* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 184.
- 28 Adorno, 'Vernunft und Offenbarung', 608.
- 29 Second interim typescript of *Negative Dialektik*, quoted in Ansgar Martins, *Adorno und die Kabbala* (Potsdam: Universitätsverlag, 2016), 138.
- 30 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Gruß an Gershom Scholem', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 20.2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 478–86, here 485.
- 31 Walter Benjamin, *Briefe* vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1978), 676.
- 32 Theodor W. Adorno, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Briefwechsel* (Munich: etk, 1991), 11.
- 33 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zur Schlußszene des Faust', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11, 129–38, here 129.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*
- 36 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Der Essay als Form', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11, 9–33, here 29.
- 37 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 63.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 64; see Philipp Wussow, *Logik der Deutung* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 234–43; Martins, *Adorno*, 112–23, 127–30.
- 39 'Diskussion über die Aufgabe des Protestantismus in der säkularen Zivilisation', in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), 345–405, here 355.
- 40 Paul Tillich, *Protestantismus als Kritik und Gestaltung* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1962), 62.
- 41 'Diskussion über die Aufgabe des Protestantismus', 367.
- 42 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Erinnerungen an Paul Tillich', in *Werk und Wirken Paul Tillichs* (Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1967), 11–46, here 25.
- 43 See Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. I–3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 1235.
- 44 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Bibel auf Deutsch', in *Werke* 5.2 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 374–86.
- 45 Theodor W. Adorno, *Jargon der Eigentlichkeit*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 6, 419.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 423.
- 47 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Werke* vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 137–9.
- 48 See Adorno, 'Vernunft und Offenbarung', 613–14.
- 49 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 55; Max Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 4, 162–216, here 201.
- 50 Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', 704.
- 51 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 396.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 391, also 317.
- 53 See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 283.
- 54 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 396.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 57 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 176; Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 279.
- 58 See Gershom Scholem, *Die jüdische Mystik in ihren Hauptströmungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980), 292.
- 59 See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Gesellschaft', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8, 9–19, here 10.
- 60 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 315.
- 61 See *ibid.*, 385.
- 62 Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel* vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2004), 222.
- 63 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 355.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 399.
- 65 See *ibid.*, 23.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 396.
- 67 Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2006), 249.
- 68 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 203.
- 69 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 206.
- 70 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 183; *Einführung in die Dialektik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 304.
- 71 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 190.
- 72 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 283.
- 73 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 43.
- 74 Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 57.
- 75 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 58.
- 76 See Adorno, *Einleitung in die Soziologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 58–61.

- 77 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 112.
- 78 See Immanuel Kant, *Werke* vol. III/IV (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), B: 626.
- 79 Adorno, *Einleitung in die Soziologie*, 65.
- 80 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 343.
- 81 Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte*, 282.
- 82 See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 8, 457–77, here 467–77; *Negative Dialektik*, 18.
- 83 See Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 59; Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 387.
- 84 See Max Horkheimer, 'Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen', 404. On the concept of the administered world see Hans-Ernst Schiller's contribution to this *Handbook*.
- 85 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 365.
- 86 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Resignation', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 794–9, here 798.
- 87 Edgar Thaidigsmann, 'Von der Gerechtigkeit der Wahrheit', in *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 37, 2 (1995), 144–64, here 148.
- 88 Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* vol. 1, 114.
- 89 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 286.
- 90 Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* vol. 1, 114.
- 91 Bloch, Adorno, 'Etwas fehlt', 367.
- 92 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 378.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 398.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 370.
- 95 See *ibid.*, 396.
- 96 Ulf Liedke, *Zerbrechliche Wahrheit* (Würzburg: echter, 2002), 138, 128.
- 97 cf. Kant, *Werke* vol. III/IV, B: 132.
- 98 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Anmerkungen zum philosophischen Denken', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 599–607, here 606.
- 99 See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zu Subjekt und Objekt', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 741–58, here 742.
- 100 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 25.
- 101 *Ibid.*, 347.
- 102 See Horkheimer, Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 108.
- 103 See Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 27.
- 104 See *ibid.*, 149–50; Dirk Braunstein, Julia Jopp, Ansgar Martins, 'Häretischer Materialismus', in Marc Nicolas Sommer, Mario Schärli (eds.), *Unbeirte Negation* (forthcoming).
- 105 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 149.
- 106 See *ibid.*, 337–9; 'Zu Subjekt und Objekt', 744–5; *Negative Dialektik*, 179–80.
- 107 Adorno, 'Zu Subjekt und Objekt', 748.
- 108 See *ibid.*, 745.
- 109 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11, 48–68, here 62; *Negative Dialektik*, 378.
- 110 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Graeculus (II)', in *Frankfurter Adorno-Blätter* vol. 8 (2003), 17.
- 111 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 112 Quote in Theodor W. Adorno, 'Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 7–245, here 48.
- 113 Adorno, *Einführung in die Dialektik*, 305.
- 114 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 313; *Einführung in die Dialektik*, 304.
- 115 For the trope in question see Martin Buber, *Die Geschichten des Rabbi Nachman* (Frankfurt: Rütten & Loening, 1906), 99. For discussions elsewhere see Walter Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. II-1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 409–38, here 432; Martins, *Adorno*, 45–9.
- 116 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 294; *Minima Moralia*, 127.
- 117 See MEW vol. 23, 90.
- 118 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Wozu noch Philosophie', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 459–73, here 472.
- 119 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 150.
- 120 MEW vol. 23, 377.
- 121 See *ibid.*, 208–209.
- 122 See *ibid.*, 562–563.
- 123 Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* vol. 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), 262.
- 124 See MEW vol. 23, 613.
- 125 Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte*, 238.
- 126 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Fortschritt', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 617–38, here 637.
- 127 See MEW vol. 23, 611.
- 128 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 398.
- 129 Adorno, 'Zur Schlußszene des Faust', 136–7.
- 130 Adorno, *Philosophische Terminologie* vol. 2, 287.
- 131 See Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 7, 392–3.
- 132 See Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte*, 137, 238.
- 133 See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Marginalien zu Theorie und Praxis', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.2, 759–82.
- 134 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 41.
- 135 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 10.1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 254–87, here 283.
- 136 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 171.
- 137 *Ibid.*, 278. The usage of the term *Unwesen* here plays on the double meaning of the term. In common parlance it denotes unruly, mischievous and pernicious behaviour. At the same time it denotes the logical opposite of (though possibly also dialectical counterpart to) *Wesen* (meaning being, nature, or essence).
- 138 Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte*, 212.

- 139 MEW vol. 23, 85; Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 30.
- 140 Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte*, 209.
- 141 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 398.
- 142 See Julia Jopp, 'Von Markion zu Odradek', in Dirk Braunstein, Grażyna Jurewicz, Ansgar Martins (eds.), *Der Schein des Lichts, der ins Gefängnis selber fällt* (Berlin: Neofelis, forthcoming).
- 143 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 283.
- 144 Adorno, 'Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka', 284.
- 145 Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, *Briefwechsel* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), 90.
- 146 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 283.
- 147 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Frankfurter Opern- und Konzertkritiken', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 19 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 9–255, here 193–4.
- 148 Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 199.
- 149 See *ibid.*, 338.
- 150 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 283.
- 151 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 399; Kierkegaard, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 2, 198.
- 152 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 399.
- 153 Adorno, Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel* vol. 2, 223.
- 154 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 202.
- 155 *Ibid.*, 194.
- 156 See *ibid.*, 128.
- 157 *Ibid.*, 358.
- 158 *Ibid.*, 202–3, 358.
- 159 See *ibid.*, 364.
- 160 Adorno, 'Erinnerungen an Paul Tillich', 38.
- 161 See Immanuel Kant, *Werke* vol. VII (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974), A: 250–2.
- 162 Iris Dankemeyer, *Die Erotik des Ohrs*. (PhD Dissertation. FU Berlin, 2017), 295.
- 163 Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 16 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1995), 83.
- 164 Adorno, Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel* vol. 1, 53.
- 165 Robert Ziegelmann, 'Das Leid in der Geschichte und die Bedingung der Möglichkeit kritischer Theorie', in Braunstein, Jurewicz, Martins, *Der Schein des Lichts*.
- 166 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 35.
- 167 *Ibid.*, 226.
- 168 See Adorno, Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel* vol. 1, 274.
- 169 Axel Hutter, 'Adornos Meditationen zur Metaphysik', in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 46 (1998), 45–65, here 49.
- 170 See Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 214–23.
- 171 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Die Wartenden', in *Werke* vol. 5.1 (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 383–94, here 392.
- 172 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 224; *Negative Dialektik*, 368. For an account, see Andreas Pangritz, *Vom Kleiner- und Unsichtbarwerden der Theologie* (Tübingen: Theologischer Verlag, 1996).
- 173 Adorno, 'Graeculus (II)', 38.
- 174 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Versuch, das Endspiel zu verstehen', in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 11, 281–321, here 287.
- 175 Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und kritische Theorie', 181.
- 176 Theodor W. Adorno, Mahler. *Eine musikalische Physiognomik*, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 13 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2003), 207.
- 177 Adorno, *Negative Dialektik*, 374.
- 178 Adorno, *Metaphysik*, 184.
- 179 Jürgen Habermas, 'Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen', in Thilo Koch (ed.), *Porträts zur deutsch-jüdischen Geistesgeschichte* (Cologne: DuMont, 1961), 99–125, here 124.
- 180 *Ibid.*, 124–5.
- 181 See Horkheimer, 'Nachwort', and the earlier section on the prohibition of the image.
- 182 Habermas, 'Der deutsche Idealismus', 124.
- 183 See Christoph Schulte (ed.), *Deutschtum und Judentum* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993).
- 184 Jürgen Habermas, *Im Sog der Technokratie* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2013), 14.
- 185 See *ibid.*
- 186 Jürgen Habermas, 'Dialektischer Idealismus im Übergang zum Materialismus', in *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), 172–227.
- 187 Habermas, 'Der deutsche Idealismus', 122.
- 188 Habermas, *Im Sog der Technokratie*, 21.
- 189 Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* vol. 1 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987), 512.
- 190 Marc Nicolas Sommer, *Das Konzept einer negativen Dialektik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 127.
- 191 Jürgen Habermas, *Ein Bewußtsein von dem, was fehlt* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008), 30.
- 192 Jürgen Habermas, 'Vom Funken der Wahrheit', <http://www.zeit.de/2015/15/theodor-w-adorno-gershon-scholem-freundschaft-briefwechsel/komplettansicht>
- 193 Rolf Tiedemann, 'Historischer Materialismus oder politischer Messianismus', in *Dialektik im Stillstand* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983), 99–142, here 135.