

**LANGUAGE, CRITIQUE, AND THE NON-IDENTICAL:
NIETZSCHE AND ADORNO ON THE
ETHICS OF THINKING**

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I certify that the following thesis is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or educational institution. All sources of information used in the thesis have been indicated, and due acknowledgment has been given to the work of others.

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ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of this thesis is the articulation of a philosophical notion of an “ethics of thinking,” a kind of thinking that is receptive to the non-identical character of the world of human and non-human objects. In order to conceptualize such notion of ethical thinking, I turn to the works of two important German thinkers, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). The thesis, however, will not present a conventional comparative study of the two philosophers. I would rather figuratively call my approach an *experimentation with* Nietzsche and Adorno, which is to be done by emphasizing and activating the strong theoretical links between the two philosophers: 1) language, 2) critique, and 3) the non-identical.

In Part One, I first revisit the profound influence of the early German Romantics on the basic philosophical temperament in Nietzsche- and Adorno’s thinking. I highlight the German Romantics’ anti-foundationalist stance and their keen sensibility to the role of language in philosophy. This prefigures a more elaborate discussion of their individual engagement with language and how both philosophers criticize and redeem philosophical language from metaphysics (Nietzsche) and identity thinking (Adorno). I consider Nietzsche’s reinscription of “metaphorical language” and Adorno’s stress on “configurative language” as examples of what Nikolas Kompridis refers to as “receptivity to the new.”

Part Two is an attempt to locate the place of the Nietzsche-Adorno tandem in contemporary critical theory and to argue that their style of critique could be considered instances of “disclosing critique,” a notion I borrow from Axel Honneth and Kompridis. I begin by recounting Max Horkheimer’s basic assumptions in “Traditional and Critical Theory” as ground for discussing the main critical and emancipatory thrust of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Then I respond to the criticisms leveled against Adorno by Jürgen Habermas, arguing that Habermas totally misses the redemptive and emancipatory potential of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I argue for a rehabilitation the notion of mimesis via the notion of disclosing critique: the re-description of social pathologies (Honneth) which requires our receptivity to the particularity and plurality of our experiences (Kompridis) within a given social matrix.

In Part Three, I highlight Honneth’s recent claim that the survival of critical theory partly rests on a revisionist take on the role of Nietzschean genealogy. I use Honneth’s position as a counterclaim against Habermas’ dismissal of the critical and redemptive potential of the genealogical method. I also discuss the profound ethical thrust and utopian vision of Adorno’s negative dialectics and argue that, against the conventional Habermasian position, negative dialectics is exemplary of what I refer to as the ethics of

thinking. Finally, in the last chapter, I articulate more explicitly the nature of the “ethics of thinking.” It is in this juncture where the Nietzsche-Adorno relation comes into full force. I will demonstrate that the ethics of thinking is linked to aesthetic experience inasmuch as the redemptive dimension of mimesis is only gleaned from an emphatic immersion into damaged life. The experience of damaged life brings to the fore the moments of critical disclosure, possibility and creativity, and redemption.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Friedrich Nietzsche (cited by book number, then section number or section number, then page number)

AC	–	<i>The Antichrist</i>
BGE	–	<i>Beyond Good and Evil</i>
D	–	<i>Daybreak</i>
DAR	–	“Description of Ancient Rhetoric”
EH	–	<i>Ecce Homo</i>
GM	–	<i>On the Genealogy of Morals</i>
TL	–	“On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”
GS	–	<i>The Gay Science</i>
HH	–	<i>Human, All too Human</i>
TI	–	<i>Twilight of the Idols</i>
TP	–	“The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge”
UM	–	<i>Untimely Mediations</i>
UW	–	<i>Unpublished Writings</i>
WP	–	<i>Will to Power</i>
Z	–	<i>Thus Spoke Zarathustra</i>

Theodor Adorno (all texts cited by page number, except *Minima Moralia* which is cited by section number)

AR	–	<i>The Adorno Reader</i>
AT	–	<i>Aesthetic Theory</i>

<i>CI</i>	–	<i>The Culture Industry</i>
<i>CM</i>	–	<i>Critical Models</i>
<i>DE</i>	–	<i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>
<i>JA</i>	–	<i>Jargon of Authenticity</i>
<i>LND</i>	–	<i>Lectures on Negative Dialectics</i>
<i>MM</i>	–	<i>Minima Moralia</i>
<i>ND</i>	–	<i>Negative Dialectics</i>
<i>NL</i>	–	<i>Notes to Literature</i>
<i>P</i>	–	<i>Prisms</i>
<i>PMP</i>	–	<i>Problems of Moral Philosophy</i>
<i>TLP</i>	–	“Theses on the Language of the Philosopher”

Max Horkheimer (all texts cited by page number)

<i>BPSS</i>	–	<i>Between Philosophy and Social Science</i>
<i>CT</i>	–	<i>Critical Theory</i>

Axel Honneth (text cited by page number)

<i>PDC</i>	–	“The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i> in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism”
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Nikolas Kompridis (text cited by page number)

<i>CD</i>	–	<i>Critique and Disclosure</i>
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