



Adorno and the Problem of Systematicity

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is twofold: first, to argue that Adorno is one of the few to answer Nietzsche's call to a philosophical revolution; and second, that if we view Adorno in this way, as a disciple of Nietzsche, it will aid in refuting the common criticism of Adorno that he fails at his critical project because of his lack of systematicity.

In the first argument, I will establish Adorno's criticism of traditional metaphysics. This criticism argues that systematic philosophy, or what Adorno often refers to as idealism (probably with the German Idealists in mind), attempts to build an explanation that can exhaustively explain all of reality. Adorno argues that due to the ever changing and heterogeneous nature of reality, this project is impossible. This is because the generalizing tools that philosophy makes use of, such as words, concepts, and systems cannot capture the varied nature of reality. Thus, Adorno argues, these philosophers' motivation must be something other than truth, it must be a craving for control and certainty.

I will illustrate how this view answers Nietzsche's claims at the beginning of *Beyond Good and Evil*, that metaphysics has always been motivated by subconscious desires that philosophers' have chosen to ignore. Or, in other words, that the Will to Truth is in fact deluded, for nobody is ever aiming at impersonal truth but looking for some personal gain. Adorno takes this challenge a step further and illustrates how these subconscious, hidden, motivations keep us from being free. He then carves out a new role for philosophy that can free us from these subconscious patterns. Finally I hope this argument, that Adorno's view of philosophy is a practical application of Nietzsche, will dispel criticisms of Adorno for being unsystematic. For if we are to take Nietzsche seriously, to be systematic, to claim to have the truth, would be to ignore the subconscious motivations for our actions. Thus, in taking Nietzsche seriously, Adorno must carve out a new, unsystematic role for philosophy.

Introduction

In the first section of his work *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche poses a challenge to philosophy that, if taken seriously, would drastically change the methodology, aims, and the very intention for undertaking philosophical work. The main challenge Nietzsche ushers to philosophy consists in an unveiling of what he believes actually underlies what he calls the "Will to Truth." Philosophers traditionally have engaged in metaphysics in order to arrive at the true ontological make up of reality. A successful metaphysical picture would be objective, universal,



and impersonal. It would in no way be influenced by the particular constitution of the philosopher, for then it would not apply to the whole of reality. Nietzsche questions this impersonal nature of metaphysics. He writes, “The greater part of the conscious thinking of a philosopher is secretly influenced by his instincts, and forced into definite channels. And behind all logic and its seeming sovereignty of movement, there are valuations, or to speak more plainly, physiological demands, for the maintenance of a definite mode of life” (Nietzsche, 4). Here, Nietzsche points to the impurity hiding within the motivation to practice metaphysics, within the Will to Truth. The fault of the metaphysicians of the past lies in their inability to pierce beyond the surface of the mind. What manifests at the surface of the mind, in conscious thinking, as conceptual or logical truth seeking, is actually motivated by an instinctual drive for a certain way of living. As he later writes, “Indeed to understand how the abstrusest metaphysical assertions of a philosopher have been arrived at it is always well (and wise) to ask: What morality do they aim at?” (Nietzsche, 5). If we take Nietzsche seriously there are no pure truth claims. To view a metaphysical claim as merely an explanation of the world would be to ignore the depths of the mind, which contain the true motivation for any truth claim, a drive for a certain way of being. Thus, if Nietzsche is correct, all philosophy, or at least all metaphysics, is and has been but an expression of the ethical dispositions or subconscious desires of particular philosophers.

Clearly, accepting Nietzsche’s challenges to philosophy is a tall order. These challenges ask us to reassess everything we know about the motivation and the purposes for undertaking a philosophical project. Thus, while some thinkers have worked with Nietzsche’s insights, many have ignored them or brushed them over, continuing the pursuit of “truth.” One philosopher who I will argue has taken Nietzsche very seriously is Theodor Adorno. More specifically, I believe we can look at Adorno’s outline of the function of philosophy as an attempt to not just take Nietzsche seriously, but also as a way of applying Nietzsche’s ideas in a practical way. Adorno applies Nietzsche’s claims to a practical project: liberation from cultural coercion. He shows us how surface level philosophical or metaphysical claims conceal habitual patterns of cultural conditioning. Adorno also suggests that if we can use philosophy to reveal these concealed aspects of experience, rather than cover them over, we can use it to liberate us from this conditioning. Looking at Adorno’s view of philosophy as an application of Nietzsche’s ideas will have two main benefits. First, it will be helpful in understanding Adorno’s project and his new task for philosophy, and second it will make sense of, and I believe, dispel the main criticism of Adorno, that he is not “systematic” enough, or never comes up with a final theory or framework.¹

Adorno on Theoretical Philosophy

Before we can sufficiently argue that Adorno’s view of philosophy is an answer to Nietzsche’s criticism, we must have an in depth picture of his philosophy itself, both at the theoretical level, what exactly philosophy is for Adorno, and at the practical level, in what ways it can be used to liberate us from cultural coercion. To get an initial feel for Adorno’s conception of philosophy, we can turn to his explanation of music and the analogy he draws between the structure of the two. He writes, “In music the impulse animating the first bar will not be fulfilled at once but only in further articulation...music is a critique of phenomenality, of the appearance that the substance is present here and now. Such a mediate role befits philosophy no less” (Adorno 16).



A musical piece is never complete in the present moment. What is graspable never exhausts the musical experience. This is because music is a movement. The piece always extends to what it is not; yet that future that it has not been or the past which it was before are still intimately related in some way to what we are currently experiencing. Similarly, for Adorno, philosophy must be a movement, like music, it can never be “complete,” at one instant in time. It must constantly respond to new information that we receive as our present experience unfolds in unpredictable ways. As we will see in more detail in the following section, traditional systematic philosophical thought cannot accomplish this task because it does not stay open to changing experience. Rather, the traditional philosophical system takes a set of concepts as exhaustive in the explanation of the world and thus they act as a filter. All experience is filtered through these concepts and if there are certain bits of information which cannot fit within this particular conceptual scheme, they get repressed or ignored. For this reason, philosophy must always remain malleable and never complete. In Adorno’s own words, “Its’ course must be a ceaseless self-renewal, by its own strength as well as in friction with whatever standard it may have. The crux is what happens in it, not a thesis or position” (Adorno 33). As we will see in more detail later, for Adorno, any type of final, fixed view is a bondage, for it necessarily obscures the changing nature of reality. To be free is to be in line with this ever changing nature as best we can. Philosophy must be a process, for getting stuck in a concept, or in a system, will only increase the weight of our bondage.

Adorno’s Opponent: Idealism or the System

Some questions may arise at this point; how can one do philosophy in a non systematic way? Is not the nature of philosophy to explain the world in a positive sense? Do not the very tools philosophy uses, words and concepts, suggest a rigidity of explanation? These questions will be addressed in the sections below. We can begin the process by looking to what Adorno says specifically concerning his opponent: systematic philosophy, or what he often refers to as idealism. Of the philosophical system, Adorno writes, “Every system was such an order, such an absurdly rational product: a positive thing posing being-in-itself. Its origin had to be placed into formal thought divorced from content; nothing else would let it control material” (Adorno 21). Here, Adorno points out two important qualities of the philosophical system, one that it is merely formal, and two, that as a merely formal system, it stands independent of any content in the real world which may have spurred its creation. To understand this one may consider certain systems of mathematics. Initially, they can be seen as mapping and categorizing objects found in concrete experience. We see a number of similar objects, put them in one to one correspondence with certain signs, and call these numbers. Manipulating these numbers can help us understand how to manipulate the objects in certain ways. However, as this system of numbers become more and more abstract, let’s say we start adding in negative numbers, and infinity, it starts to become more difficult to locate the link to our actual experience. Systematic philosophy for Adorno is similar, it may start grounded in dynamic, lived experience, but it eventually runs away with itself, multiplying itself through leaps of logic that reference only components within the system itself.

We next come to Adorno’s last comment in this quote, “nothing else will let it control material.” Here, we can remember Nietzsche’s suggestion that subconscious motivations underly all metaphysical claims. Adorno asks us to look for what the hidden motivation for creating such a



formal system could be. He claims that the motivation for creating such a philosophy is not truth or liberation but rather control. To further explain this point Adorno actually cites Nietzsche. He writes, "According to Nietzsche's critique, systems no longer documented anything but the finickiness of scholars compensating themselves for political impotence by conceptually construing their, so to speak, administrative authority over things in being" (Adorno 20). The motivation for the conceptual or formal system is a desire for control. The philosopher describes the world with concepts that she can understand and make sense of. Thus, if this system and these concepts are taken as encompassing all of reality, the philosopher can rest content, knowing that nothing lies beyond her grasp. She believes she has nullified the danger of unpredictability in life by fitting all that she experiences into her formal filter. As Adorno writes elsewhere, "Whenever something that is to be conceived flees from identity with the concept, the concept will be forced to take exaggerated steps to prevent any doubts of the unassailable validity, solidity and acrimony of the thought product from stirring" (Adorno 22). We can look at the motivation for idealism as a type of neuroticism of identity, an attempt to pin down a world and an identity which is stable, which is "mine." Of course, to liberate ourselves from our bondages, we must truly understand them, not hide them underneath metaphysical concepts. So we must always be on the watch for new forms these bondages may mask themselves as. For this purpose, a system that reinterprets differences as the same, and blocks out new information, trying to force it again and again into the same mold will not do. We need a method of philosophy which is open ended and attentive to change in form, constantly reassessing.

Adorno's Positive View

As one may predict given his caution when engaging with systematic thought and exhaustive explanations, Adorno's positive view is less a philosophical system itself and more the carving out of a new role for philosophy. We see that Adorno is critical of philosophy as a cohesive, constructive force, a type of world builder. He writes, "Criticism of systems and asystematic thought are superficial as long as they cannot release the cohesive force which the idealistic system had signed over to the transcendental subject" (Adorno 26). Adorno suggests here that philosophy traditionally gives the power of world creation to the transcendental subject. As an example of this we can look to Kant and his "I think," which builds the world through the Forms of the Intuition. For Kant, some transcendental subject uses certain logical forms to turn the manifold of sensation into a comprehensible, intelligible world. In more simple language, the subject uses certain logical relations to build a world out of a formless mass of stimuli. For the systematic idealists such as Kant, concepts or logical relations, whose meaning are taken at face value and completely given for the subject, structure the world. This leaves reality easily accessible, explainable, and identifiable for any subject who cares to engage in conceptual analysis. However, Adorno wants to point to a new world "glue" by which the world is constructed. He writes,

"To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn towards nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics. Insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would end the compulsive identification which the concept brings unless halted by reflection. Reflection upon its own meaning is the way out of the concept's seeming being-in-itself as a unit of meaning." (Adorno 12).



Here, Adorno is suggesting that the view of the system or the concept as constructive of a completely transparent, understandable world is an illusion. This becomes clear as we look at the nature of the concept, or what Adorno refers to as its “constitutive character,” its origin. We further see that true insight into this “constitutive character” will take a turn towards nonidentity and will reveal the falsity of looking at the concept as a “being-in-itself” as a unit of meaning. Or more simply put, it will reveal the impossibility of taking the concept at face value. A simple way to understand this is that the concept is not transparent, we can never grasp it all at once, because it is partly constituted by that which exceeds our grasp. Once we understand its true constitution we will see that by its very nature, the concept cannot save the philosopher from her fear of nonidentity. In other words, philosophy’s true role cannot be constructive, it cannot be to reveal to us the structure of the world.

To understand why philosophy’s role must be something other than a revelation of the true world for Adorno, we must understand in depth why it is the case that any concept or system cannot totally reveal the world’s structure to us. We must delve into this idea that the concept always contains that which it cannot express. Adorno writes, “The double meaning of philosophical systematics leaves no choice but to transpose the power of thought, once delivered from the systems into the open realm of definition by individual moments” (Adorno 25). Here, Adorno comments that in order for philosophy to succeed we must move away from the idea that the transparent definition, the concept, governs thought. We must realize that it is “individual moments” that have the true power. I believe the way we can understand these “individual moments” and how they relate to the birth of the concept is quite simple. Individual moments can be seen as direct experience; sensation, feeling, drives, a seething mass of desires etc. (what exactly this preconceptual experience consists in is a whole different philosophical discussion) The concept is used to categorize these experiences by fitting qualitatively different experiences into general groups by which they can be called the same. For example, I may call all emotional experiences that lead to passionate outbursts anger, even though all these experiences have different bodily sensational content. Thus, the concept has the result of monotonizing experience, making the different into the same. At the theoretical level, this monotonization occurs because there is no true symmetry between these individual moments and the system or the concept. The system cannot be a substitute for the them. The concept seeks to generalize and the object, or experience, is heterogeneous. This leads to a necessary gap between explanation, which always works in generalizations, and that which is being explained, which is always specific and never general. Thus, a philosophical system must always leave out bits of information, it necessarily creates a gap or an asymmetry between its explanation of reality and reality itself. It is for this reason, as we saw earlier, that metaphysical systems often run away with themselves, and cease to refer to anything in the actual world, discussing only their own formal content.

Adorno’s Practical Project

Before we can truly see what role Adorno has for philosophy other than this, in his opinion, futile constructive project, we must also get a sense for his practical picture, what a genuine philosophical work may look like and how it would liberate us from cultural coercion. We have seen that for Adorno, the comprehensible world is built through inaccurate generalizations. These generalizations are what keep us from being free and can manifest in a number of ways.



At a personal, non theoretical level these generalizations manifest as learned responses to stimuli that have been ingrained in us by what Adorno commonly refers to as “The Culture Industry.” We can look at an obvious example, advertisements. If we are particularly susceptible to television commercials, and we constantly see a commercial of people wearing Old Navy jeans who are happy and healthy; whenever we go to the store and see those jeans on sale, that feeling will arise in us. Quite possibly without even being aware of it, we will buy those jeans because they have conditioned within us that expectation of happiness and health. Of course, Old Navy jeans are not going to bring us any kind of lasting happiness or health. This is just an ingrained, irrational, very likely subconscious habit pattern. This is a very gross example, but hopefully we can see the similarity to systematic philosophy, another way in which these generalizations can manifest. Let’s say we are Hegelians, and are convinced that everything is Absolute Spirit. Initially when we are convinced of Hegel’s point we may come to some wonderful, mystical, feeling of the connectedness of all things. Then let us say we leave our office, get in our car and someone cuts us off. Anger arises, yet we tell ourselves, don’t worry this person is also Absolute Spirit, that mystical feeling comes back and represses the anger. Of course, this also is a simplistic example, but like this, systematic philosophy can be used to actually drown out reality. By connecting certain concepts with certain feelings through conditioning, we apply these concepts to the endless variety of experiences of life, homogenize them, and repress or ignore how we actually feel or how things actually appear, in favor of the security of categorizing them under a familiar concept.

The role for philosophy for Adorno then cannot be a constructive role, it cannot build a world, because to build an identity which extends over space and time is to limit and ignore the ever changing nature of space and time. Philosophy must be able to fight both these forms of subconscious conditioning and repression, personal, as with the advertisements, and conceptual, as with systematic philosophy. To see how this can be done let us look to a quotation. What philosophy can do, Adorno calls reconciliation. Of this he writes,

As the subject-object dichotomy is brought to mind it becomes inescapable for the subject, furrowing whatever the subject thinks, even objectively-but it would come to an end in reconciliation. Reconciliation would release the nonidentical, would rid it of coercion, including spiritualized coercion, it would open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them...Dialectics serves the end of reconciliation (Adorno 6).

Here, Adorno points out the only possible solution to this puzzle. If the concept or the system is necessary to hold the subject up as in individual existent, then, to reach what is beyond the concept and to stay with “the multiplicity of different things”, the subject must be dissolved. Adorno calls this dissolution of the subject/object distinction reconciliation and names it the goal of Negative Dialectics, his name for this new method of philosophy. Through reconciliation we reach the heterogeneous which is unidentifiable, and we free ourselves from the tyranny of systematic philosophy and of cultural conditioning, which both constantly yet futilely try to categorize reality into something we can exhaustively comprehend. Thus, philosophy must serve a deconstructive purpose rather than a constructive purpose. It must reveal the contradiction which lies within any system or any explanation.

Reconciliation: A Phenomenological Picture of the role of Philosophy for Adorno

In parts of his paper *The Culture Industry*, Adorno parallels for art what the introduction of *Negative Dialectics* does for philosophy. He outlines how art usually functions to propagate ideology, and then carves out a new, critical role for art. The main difference is that in this paper, Adorno moves away from the purely theoretical and describes what kind of direct experience could lead to reconciliation and what this process would look like. Thus, I believe an exploration of the experience induced by a truly critical work of art will be helpful for getting a concrete phenomenological picture of how reconciliation could be achieved.

Adorno describes traditional artistic pieces as based on a harmonious, unified style. However, the problem with this “feel good” type of art is that it ends up harmonizing the subject with the specific coercive patterns of the time period. For example, Adorno writes, “The unity of style not only of the Christian Middle Ages but of the Renaissance expresses the different structures of social coercion in those periods” and more generally, “By claiming to anticipate fulfillment through aesthetic derivatives, it posits the real forms of the existing order as absolute. To this extent the claims of art are always also ideology.” (Adorno 103). Here, we see that the hidden function of this work of art is to harmonize us with the existing social order. The work of art which unifies style, which harmonizes, and makes us feel good does all this within the context of our current, comfortable, yet socialized identity. An example of this could be pop music in a club setting. Social coercion has influenced us to think that to have fun we must go pay exorbitantly expensive cover charges at clubs and buy equally expensive drinks. When we get into the club we hear some rap song where the artist raps about how much fun they are having in the club. The rapper may be technically skilled and the beat may be harmonious. Thus, the song affirms these ideological behaviors by pairing them with aesthetically beautiful elements. Our socially constructed identities are reified through artistic experience.

Hopefully, we can see the parallel here to Adorno’s view of traditional philosophy. Just as the stylized, harmonious, work of art reifies our socially constructed identity, the philosophical system does the same. When we identify with a certain philosophical system or set of concepts, we become complacent in the identity which these suggest. Thus, as Hegelians, we can rest content knowing that we really are Absolute Spirit, or as Fichtean that we really are the Absolute I. Sufficiently comforted and numbed by these concepts, we can absentmindedly settle into a set of behavior patterns given to us by The Culture Industry.

If the ideological work of art harmonizes us with a socially constructed sense of identity, then the true work of art must challenge that sense of identity. As we have seen the “feel good” elements of art are not capable of this. They make us happy, complacent, and affirm the comfortable, coerced behavior patterns by ennobling them with a beat, a rhythm, or some other pleasant aesthetic element. Thus, Adorno writes, “The moment in the work of art which transcends reality...does not consist in achieved harmony, in the questionable unity of form and content, inner and outer, individual and society, but in those traits in which the discrepancy emerges, in the necessary failure of the passionate striving for identity” (Adorno 103). The true work of art is not harmonious, is not aesthetically pleasing. The music that pleases the ear tells us that all is as it should be, everything is in order. However, real art wants to tell us viscerally that something is wrong, that somewhere in our identity there is a contradiction, a disharmony; essentially, that the striving for harmony between self and society, between subject and object, the striving for identity at all is a failed project from the start. For examples of this type of art let



us look at how most music that is pleasing to the ear works. Usually a certain chord progression is associated with a certain emotion. So notes are strung together into a progression that stimulates the rising and falling of a particular emotion. In the genuine work of art, notes would not be strung together in a traditional progression. Maybe this work of art would take one note from the progression that usually induces joy, one from the sadness progression, one from the fear progression, and string them right in a row. Thus, the listener has no usual emotional reference points for interpreting this experience. She has no choice but to be with her visceral response as best she can, without categorizing or understanding it, because it is so unusual. We see this genuine work of art is unpleasant, is abrasive, it clashes with our structured way of interpreting the world. By conditioning an experience that cannot fit into our comfortable habits, that we cannot narrativize into our personal world systems, this work of art shows us that these comfortable systems and these identities are ultimately illusory.

Just as the ingenuine work of art had significant similarities to systematic philosophy, the genuine work of art is very similar to Adorno's view of true philosophy. Real art must always be negative, must always provide us with an experience that is so jarring and alien that it cannot be fit into our identities and socially constructed habit patterns. It reveals aspects of experience which were repressed or brushed over by our conditioning. Adorno's method of negative dialectics must do the same. Although we cannot say exactly what this type of philosophy would look like, for what serves the end of reconciliation will be contingent on a particular time and a particular space, we can point to how this work of philosophy may look. Again we can use the example of an unnatural chord progression. What philosophy usually does is establish conceptual reference points. It tells us that this particular phenomena means this, this other phenomena means this, and this is how they are connected. Just as an unnatural chord progression may force us to experience a type of emotion we cannot categorize, real philosophy must break down, or show us the illusory nature of these connections and categorizations and force us to experience a reality which we cannot categorize or explain.² Both real philosophy and real art must serve the end of reconciliation, of the breaking down of the harmony of dualities: subject/object, individual/society, inner/outer, to name a few. While the stylistic work of art and the systematic philosophical system affirm these dualities and try to point to a harmony between the two, Negative Dialectics and its artistic counterpart show the futility of this project by making clear there is always an experience or a component of the system which eludes any sort of identification or systemization. Thus, philosophy, if successful, ends in a type of existential death; one sees the impossibility of one's identity, one's world picture, and it crumbles; bringing down with it all the ideology which it was based on.

Adorno, Nietzsche, and Anti-Systematicity

This view of philosophy as a destruction of identity leads to an implication which is new for philosophy as a discipline. Under this picture, philosophy is never finished. Philosophy cannot be a truth or a system arrived at, but must be a process of negative response to the social and ideological condition at the time. We need only look to history to see that this is true. As a new order arises, it get incorporated back into the mainstream. For example, the counterculture of the 60's arose. Yet by the 70's psychedelic imagery was used for capitalist ends,

² Examples of this type of philosophy are few and far between. It would also take a good bit of



argumentation to illustrate that any work does in fact fall into this category. That being said, I believe a few promising places to look are Adorno's Negative Dialectics, Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* placed on products to make them seem hip. Similarly, a work of philosophy may initially be revolutionary, be alive. At one moment in time it may reveal hidden motivations and habits in us which we before did not allow ourselves to see. However, over time this new identity, this new system will solidify and become stale, lifeless. We will need to see things from a fresh perspective once again. Of course, we cannot throw out systems and conceptual analysis completely, for we need structure to exist as subjects and get about in the world. However, the system must never be final, it must stay open to constant change. For even if our philosophy is successful, reconciliation is reached, and identity is annihilated, a new one must spring up; for we need dualities, we need subject and objects in order to have a world at all. Thus, once the new world, the new identity, and the new ideology is born, philosophy begins again within this new structure to break this down as well.

Adorno's view is often criticized on these grounds, that he views philosophy as purely negative, as Critical Theory scholar Bunber puts it, "never lays claim to theoretical status" (Bunber 44). There is no theory here, no set of standards which critics and philosophers alike can work with, no real progress, just an arguably pessimistic picture of a, maybe noble, yet endless struggle against the relentless forces of coercion and ideology. Adorno sought to free us from cultural coercion, critics say, yet failed. He was not able to provide us with a standard or set of standards by which we can always critique culture and thus clearly see where our bondages lie. It is in this spirit, that the next generation Critical Theorist, Jurgen Habermas, comes up with the Ideal Speech Situation. We will not go into the details of this theory here. It will suffice to say that for Habermas, the Ideal Speech Situation serves as an a priori standard by which we can judge every situation. If the situation meets this standard, the participants were acting in an uncoerced way, free of any hidden conditioning. If not, we must work to meet this standard. We see Adorno has no standard or system such as this. So how can we use his thinking to free ourselves?

If we look at Adorno as expanding on Nietzsche's project, we will see the fallacy of this criticism. To summarize, Nietzsche believes that metaphysical claims or systematic philosophy have not really been motivated by a pure Will to Truth, but rather by subconscious intentions for certain ways of being, or certain comfortable identities. Similarly, Adorno takes the motivations for most of our actions as hidden from our conscious mind. Cultural conditioning associates certain responses with certain general categories of stimuli. However, these responses are artificial and tend to gloss over or repress actual experience. So, at the surface, though it may seem that buying a new pair of jeans is making us happy, this is only a constructed, artificial response, covering up an ocean of sensations and emotions occurring at the depth of the mind. Systematic philosophy, for Adorno, serves this same end of covering up the deeper truth. It uses broad conceptual claims to generalize over a varied, ever changing experience, hiding us from the truth of transience. Thus, for Adorno, cultural conditioning and systematic philosophy work together in different spheres to make experience digestible but monotonous, comprehensible but shallow.

We see that if Adorno was to systematize, to set up some consistent standard like the Ideal



Speech Situation, he would be ignoring Nietzsche's insight. He would be explaining only the workings of the surface of the mind, not penetrating the depths of subconscious motivations and conditioning. This would be to mistake neurotic craving for stability and consistency for transcendental truth. Adorno does not want to solidify and normalize these subconscious motivations but wants to reveal them. Furthermore, as we have seen, once they are exposed, they come back in a new form. Thus philosophy must be a process, it must never be final, constantly searching for the new forms these intentions may be hiding under.

Conclusion

In Nietzsche's work, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra is a wise prophetic figure. He has amassed a band of followers who hope to absorb some of Zarathustra's wisdom. At one point Zarathustra banishes these followers saying,

Verily, I advise you: depart from me, and guard yourselves against Zarathustra! And better still: be ashamed of him! Perhaps he hath deceived you. The man of knowledge must be able not only to love his enemies, but also to hate his friends. One requiteth a teacher badly if one remain merely a student. And why will ye not pluck at my wreath? Ye venerate me; but what if your veneration should some day collapse? Take heed lest a statue crush you! Ye say, ye believe in Zarathustra? But of what account is Zarathustra! Ye are my believers: but of what account are all believers! Ye had not yet sought yourselves: then did ye find me. So do all believers; therefore all belief is of so little account. Now do I bid you lose me and find yourselves; and only when ye have all denied me, will I return unto you. (Nietzsche, 113).

In the spirit of Adorno as one of the few true disciples of Nietzsche, we can look at any philosophical system as Zarathustra encourages his followers to look at himself. No matter how much wisdom or truth the system contains, it means nothing if one has not done the work of criticism themselves. The goal of philosophy is not to arrive eternally at some truth, for this is to stagnate. Rather, it is to remain engaged in an endless project of self analysis and self criticism; again and again bringing to the surface the hidden depths of reality. This is really the spirit Adorno is trying to keep alive. He is telling us to always be skeptical, always be critical, even of our own conclusions. What liberated us one day may be hiding some unknown conditioning or motivation the next. Thus, we must constantly be on the watch, not condemning philosophy, but never letting it be finalized. Adorno urges us to use philosophy in the best way we can, even as a generalizing force, to be more open to the multiplicity of life, and to reveal pieces of that multiplicity that, remaining hidden, have kept us from true liberation.

Note

1 For examples of this specific criticism see Rudiner Bunber's Habermas' Concept of Critical Theory, Adorno and Mead: Micheal Hoover's Toward an Interactionist Critique of Negative Dialectics, and Peter Hohendal's The Dialectic of Enlightenment Revisited: Habermas' Critique of the Frankfurt School

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