

Protocol, Graduate Seminar – Adorno and Heidegger**Class Session: 3 - Date: September 16, 2010****Minute taker: Christian Lotz****Topic: Adorno's *Subject and Object*, Reification, Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?***

“When we think through what this is, that a tree in bloom presents itself to us so that we can come and stand face-to-face with it, the thing that matters first and foremost, and finally, is not to drop the tree in bloom, but for once to let it stand where it stands” (WCT 44)

Thinking “means to bring the matter forth and leave it where it belongs. This sort of disposing is called thanking” (WCT 146)

Abbreviations

ND = Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*; AP = Adorno, *The Actuality of Philosophy*; TH = Heidegger, *The Thing*; NPT = Adorno, *Notes on Philosophical Thinking*; EF = Adorno, *The Essay as Form*; IM = Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*; LH = Heidegger, *Letter on Humanism*; SO = Adorno, *Subject and Object*; MTP = Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*; WCT = Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*; WSP = Adorno, *Why still Philosophy?*

Announcements

Lotz received \$20 from the following students: Wallace, Johnson, Ivanovic, Brown, Malavisi, Byrd, Giunta, Murdock, Echterling, Woodson. Lotz recommends reading the following introduction to Adorno, if seminar participants are still confused: Schweppenhäuser, Gerhard, *Theodor W. Adorno: An Introduction*, Duke University Press 2009 (S. was one of Adorno's main students); Lotz also recommends talking to Prof. Hedrick, the Critical Theory guru in our department. Finally, the collection *Critical Models* is very well translated and edited by Pickford (Columbia UP 2005). Almost all of the essays collected in this volume were public lectures and address public concerns. In addition, it demonstrates nicely the art of Adorno's short lecture writing. In addition, Honneth's essay on the introduction to Adorno's ND in his *Pathologies of Reason* is an excellent piece. Please read the essay if you intend to write your paper on Adorno.

Recapitulation

Lotz (again) gave an overview of the main motivations and questions of this seminar. In this connection, we read again one of the central paragraphs in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* as well as a paragraph from Heidegger's *The Thing*. Adorno writes:

“Such philosophical subjectivism ideologically accompanies the emancipation of the bourgeois I as its foundation. It draws its tenacious power from the misdirected opposition against the existent: against its thingliness. By relativizing or liquefying this, philosophy believes itself to be beyond the primacy of commodities and beyond its subjective form of reflection, the reified consciousness. In Fichte that impulse is unmistakable as the drive towards hegemony. It was anti-ideological insofar as it saw through the being-in-itself of the world, which was confirmed by conventional, unreflective consciousness as something artificially made, something badly self-preserved.”

In this central passage in the *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno explains two important aspects of reification: [1] German Idealism, especially Fichte, has its true core in its attempt to liberate the subject from the “objective” (=commodified, according to Adorno) world, but [2] by turning the objective into something subjective, Idealism falls back onto the opposite of what was intended (=enlightenment turns into

mythology); namely, the attempt to explain objectivity as the result of subjective reason leads to a “hegemony” of reason and to the destruction of what Adorno calls the *non-identical*. He goes on:

“In spite of the preponderance of the object, the thingliness of the world is also appearance [Schein]. It misleads the subjects into ascribing the social relationship of their production to things in themselves. This is developed in Marx's chapter on fetishism, truly a piece of the legacy of classic German philosophy.”

What Adorno has in mind here is the well-known claim that Marx's doctrine of reification and the commodity fetishism is in its core still an idealist conception, for what appears *objectively* as exchange is nevertheless turned into a subjective category, namely, “false consciousness.”

Even its systematic motive survives therein: the fetish-character of commodities is not chalked up to subjective-mistaken consciousness, but is objectively deduced out of the social a priori, the process of exchange. Already in Marx the difference is expressed between the preponderance of the object as something to be critically established and its remnants in the existent, its distortion by the commodity-form. Exchange has, as something which occurs [Vorgaengige], real objectivity and is nevertheless objectively untrue, violating its own principle, that of equality; that is why it necessarily creates false consciousness, the idol of the market. The natural-rootedness of exchange-society is only sardonically a law of nature; the primacy of the economic, no invariant. It is easy for thought to imagine as consolation that it possesses the philosopher's stone in the dissolution of reification, of the commodity character. But reification itself is the reflection-form of false objectivity; to center theory on it, a form of consciousness, makes critical theory idealistically acceptable to the dominating consciousness and the collective unconscious.” (ND 190)

Consequently, a theory that focuses *solely* on reification (takes it to be the philosopher's stone) turns out to be what it does not want to be: false consciousness. Making reification the center of everything would lead to a mythological conception of the reality, inasmuch as *this* theoretical consciousness would itself just be the subjective form of what is objectively determinable as exchange (see also SO 253).

“In contrast to the possibility of total catastrophe, reification is an epiphenomenon; all the more so is the alienation coupled to it, the subjective state of consciousness, which corresponds to it.”

According to Adorno, the mistake traditional Marxism commits is to transform the concept of reification into an absolute category; instead, he argues, reification belongs to a broader horizon of the “total catastrophe,” such as the possibility of destroying the earth, Auschwitz, conceived as the total commodification of life, quantification of thinking, instrumentality, etc. What he tries to “save” here, in other words, is the reified moment itself! In order to conceive thinking and the social process as a dialectical process, one should not argue for the total overcoming of all reified moments; for, as Adorno points out, the non-identical as that which transcends the concept and rationality should leave the preponderance of the object intact. In sum, though reification taken as an absolute category turns out to be false consciousness, reification taken as that what transcends the grip of thinking, is a *positive* moment.

“Those who regard the thingly [*das Dingliche*] as what is radically evil; who would like to dynamize everything, which is to say, into pure contemporaneity, tend to be hostile towards the other, the alien, whose name does not resound in alienation for nothing; to that non-identity, which would need to be emancipated not solely in consciousness but in a reconciled humanity.”

Reading this page carefully reveals much about Adorno's usual way of arguing: he always shows how theories that he attacks are “partly” correct, and he demonstrates how his own thinking is able to relate everything to each other. Accordingly, he tries to *reconcile* those positions without turning them into a unity or resolving one into the other.

Subject and Object

We proceeded with our discussion of Adorno's *Subject and Object* in relation to the concept of reification. Lotz pointed out that the question of language will be postponed to a later point in the semester, though language shows up in both Adorno and Heidegger whenever they discuss "thinking" and "thinghood." In regard to *Subject and Object* we discussed several paragraphs. According to Adorno, the subject-object relation is both "real and semblance" (SO 246). [1] It is real, because Adorno assumes that its distinction is tied to the "natural history" of subjectivity and objectivity throughout which the separation of subject and object is translated into the emancipation of the subject from nature (for this, also see the central passage in ND 11). The historical process, accordingly, can be laid out as a process of subject domination (in both the passive and active sense). Adorno claims that the assumption of an absolute unity of subject and object is "romanticism;" thus, in the context of our modern exchange society, it is a "lie" (ibid.), since it affirms a unity that remains outside of our reach. He draws a distinction similar to one that Heidegger draws between identity and sameness: whereas identity means the sublation of a difference into a higher unity, sameness, or, in Adorno's terms, "undifferentiatedness" (ibid.), does not sublimate the difference into something different than itself. Consequently, the utopian core of negative dialectics is not the transformation into a higher or primordial unity; rather, it is the "communication of what is differentiated" (SO 247; see also first protocol). The "potential for an agreement [*Einverständnis*] between human beings and things" lies in the "state of differentiation without domination" (SO 247). Philosophies that are opposed to negative dialectics, accordingly, are forms of false consciousness and domination, for they either give preference to the object or the subject. In this connection, please be aware that the topic of "domination" is also prominent in Heidegger's attempt to think about the "communication" between humans and things. Indeed, both Adorno and Heidegger claim that certain forms of thought are forms of domination. Domination, hence, is not necessarily taken to be a *practical* or social-political concept, as thinking is itself a form of praxis. In regard to the subject-object distinction, Adorno writes:

"As soon as it is fixed without mediation, the separation becomes ideology, its normal form. Mind then arrogates to itself the status of being absolutely independent – which it is not: mind's claim to independence announces its claim to domination" (SO 246)

[2] The subject-object distinction is "Schein," because the claim that the subject-object relation is "absolute" would itself lead to a fixation of this relation as well as to the independence of it. Adorno tries to escape this contradiction through a constant self-overcoming of positions and what he calls the "self-reflection" of his theory. The main claim against the transcendental tradition is presented on pp.248-250. Adorno here argues that the transcendental subject itself is the "reflective form of the reification of human beings that has objectively occurred in the conditions of society" (SO 249). Kant's error, he claims, is that he abstracted even the empirical subject from the "living individual person" (SO 248) and turned what is the result of an abstraction into the real. He thereby turns the objective social conditions on its head, given that within an exchange society it is precisely the other way around:

"If the standard structure of society is the exchange form, its rationality constitutes people: what they are for themselves, what they think they are, is secondary. They are transformed at the outset by the mechanism that was then philosophically transfigured into the transcendental" (SO 248)

This claim, taken from Lukacs, repeatedly returns in Adorno's work. Adorno, however, cleverly avoids his own trap, since he also notes the positive moments in transcendental philosophy, including its fundamental claim that something remains "outside" of the sphere of subjectivity. Instead of abstractly positing the object in opposition to the subject (which he takes to be the claim of positivism and a scientific philosophy), Adorno claims that the "non-identical" turns out to be outside the reach of the

subject whenever it attempts to turn it into something subjective. This structure is present in real history as well as in intellectual history.

Adorno's *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*

The demonstration of this thesis can be found in his essay *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*. In this piece, Adorno demonstrates (on the background of the student protests in Germany at the end of the 60s) how ambivalent the call for a revolutionizing praxis ultimately is. As a far echo of the Hegelian analysis of the terror of the French Revolution, Adorno not only claims that a praxis without theory remains bound to the "pleasure principle" (MTP 163), as the subject experiences the praxis as a "final" living out of its desires (to use all others – including the resisters – for its own pleasure), but also that theory in our societies is the *real* resistance (MTP 263), especially if we take into account that "praxis" in our distorted societies either becomes a form of "actionism," or becomes commercialized and commodified (with "actions," "pseudo activity" (MTP 269, 270), authority thinking, media presence, advertisement, etc.). In addition, the call for praxis itself is in danger of falling back onto naïve Marxism, inasmuch as the *object* of praxis, namely, society, is taken to be something that can simply be turned into something subjective (what the revolutionizers have in mind). The extreme call for acting for every prize is itself dependent upon the following condition:

"Where experience is blocked or altogether absent, praxis is damaged and therefore longed for, distorted, and desperately overvalued" (MTP 260)

The call for ending "theory" and becoming practical itself overlooks the nature of thinking:

"Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis; already the ideology of the purity of thinking deceives about this. Thinking has a double character: it is immanently determined and rigorous, and yet an alienably real mode of behavior in the midst of reality" (MTP 261).

Whereas "spontaneity" seems to be on the practical side, the real spontaneity can be found in thinking itself (the claim of which also returns in the culture industry chapter in regard to imagination). In addition, thinking should be recognized as the real resisting activity. In sum, the essay nicely demonstrates Adorno's ability to maneuver through extreme positions (and to depict his enemies as belonging to those extreme positions). For example, the goal, as he underlines, cannot lie in *destroying* the coldness of civil society (see MTP 274); rather, the utopian core is to be *internally* "near" to things *despite* the conceptual and reflective distance to things (see last protocol about the distance from suffering; see also ND 361-365).

Thinking in Heidegger's *What is Called Thinking* (1956)

Similar to Adorno, Heidegger describes the current age as one in which the traditional concept of thinking has been replaced by quantitative thinking, computing, calculation, and the mathematization of beings: "logistics," as he puts it, "today is developing into the global system by which all ideas are organized" (WCT 163). The objective distances and differences between all things have been abolished, for the Being of beings became identified with the calculable and the representable. In contrast to this framework, Heidegger tries to uncover an alternative way of thinking outside of traditional metaphysics. Thinking is here, as in Adorno, conceived as a praxis. In part II of his lecture course Heidegger presents three moves to "displace" the traditional concept of thinking as a subjective activity: He interprets [1] the essence of thinking as calling, [2] the essence of language as listening, and [3] the essence of memory as thanking. Heidegger proceeds in a very simple manner: Heidegger's strategy is a mix of argument and what could be called linguistic "shifting:" not only does he replace a "word" with another "word," he also explains the meaning of "thinking" in terms that we usually do not connect to it. Put

differently, Heidegger *translates* terms and thereby clarifies their meaning. According to Heidegger, there is standpoint outside of language that would allow us to find a word or the meaning of a word independently from what these words say in language. Heidegger's demonstration seems to be based on two assumptions: in order to say something about thinking [1] we need to *describe* it as a phenomenon, and [2] we need to *interpret* the *meaning* of the word we use. Accordingly, his assumption that thinking has something to do with "calling" [*nennen*, naming] is applied to his own reflections. He seems to assume that we need to "unlock" the word thinking again if we want to find a way out of the contemporary distortions.

[1] Thinking as calling (thinking as response)

The preponderance of the object is indicated in Heidegger's claim that thinking is something that is directed by something else (WCT 115). Accordingly, the question of "what is called thinking?" is turned onto its head. It now means "what calls us into thinking." It is *us* who are "called" and *named* by what is thought in thinking:

"But the 'call' does not necessarily imply demand, still less command; it rather implies an anticipatory reaching out for something [*and letting arrive*, CL] that is reached by our call, through our calling" (WCT 117)

What Heidegger wants to say here is simple: thinking is an inviting "act" (though "act" is not entirely correct, see next section) that lets what calls us into thought *be* what it is and thereby allows *itself* to be receptive.

"And that the old word 'to call' means not so much a command as a letting reach [*Gelangenlassen*], that therefore the 'call' has an assonance of helpfulness and complaisance, is shown by the fact that the same word in Sanskrit still means something like 'to invite'" (WCT 117)

The German term "Gelangenlassen" is important in this context since the portion "lassen" indicates a letting go of activity; it appears in Heidegger's work at two important points: [1] in his "Discourse on Thinking" [*Gelassenheit*, releasement] and [2] in BT, pp. 85 [*seinlassen*, letting be]. "Letting be" in BT refers to the condition for the possibility of encountering a being in its Being. Thus, "letting go," and this seems to be decisive for Heidegger, is neither an act of the will nor an intentional act; rather, it is a form of *acceptance* and an affirmation of the *opening up of* the possibility of encounter. Consequently, what Heidegger tries to do in lectures I-III of WCT (part II) is to describe thinking as the condition for the possibility of any "relatedness" of a subject to an object. It is as if we need to presuppose an *ethos* and an attitude – a happening – within which everything else *can* take place in its essential form.

"'To call,' in short, means 'to command,' provided we hear this word, too, in its native, telling sense. For 'to command' basically means, not to give commands and orders, but to commend, entrust, give into safe-keeping, keep safely. To call means: to call into arrival and presence; to address commandingly" (WCT 118)

The aspect of "entrusting" [*Anvertrauen*, giving over, handing over] refers both to a fundamental passivity in thinking and to *care*, the latter of which seems to be the most important. Whereas in all instrumentality, calculation, logistics, & etc., humans try to install themselves as the masters over the objects (see Adorno!), here, we find instead the idea that thinking should be conceived as a form of *taking care of and as protection*. What is thought in thinking is something that has to be brought to *its* unfolding and in this sense, it must therefore be "safe-guarded."

Note on language

This also implies a certain *carefulness*: it requires that we (a) use words *carefully*, (b) wisely use expressions, and (c) try to find the right word for what we want to say; for, as Heidegger himself puts it, “to name is clothe something with a word” (to call something *into* the word, WCT 120). Here we find the direct connection to the question of why in both Adorno and Heidegger the topic of language cannot be disconnected from the topic of thinking (and thing): indeed, for them, the highest form in which someone can take care of thinking (=to allow language to exist in its highest possibilities) is poetry (see section on rhetoric at the end of the introduction to ND). (At this point, I shall not further explore the language issue, as we will address this at the end of our seminar). In this connection, here are a few passages that we will need for our weekend retreat: Heidegger, WCT part II, lecture II; Adorno, ND, pp. 52-61 and pp. 108-117. So, please keep this in mind.

[2] Thinking as listening (thinking as radical openness)

Heidegger’s reflections on “listening” follow coherently from what he developed before: if we take into account that thinking is a form of taking care of what *comes into* thought (=arrival), then we must pay attention to what and how thinking is called for. What thinking thinks is not simply something present, inasmuch as this would mean that what calls for thinking would already be determined (in the logical sense). What calls for thinking “arrives” because it cannot be determined beforehand and it gives itself (=event). What Heidegger has in mind here is simply the non-intentional nature of what is thought in thinking. Heidegger describes this further as “listening:”

“Is it playing with words when we attempt to give heed to this game of language and to hear what language really says when it speaks? If we succeed in hearing that, then it may happen – provided we proceed carefully – that we get more truly to the matter [*Sache*] that is expressed in any telling [saying] and asking” (WCT 119)

The question of language turns into a twofold question: [1] it asks for a specific form of speaking on the side of the philosopher, because [2] the relation between thinking and being is itself a form of “speaking” [*calling*]. Every call and calling is a form of asking for something that comes to presence.¹ Accordingly, since what is thought in thinking is always coming and a form of arrival, as we *do not know* what to think (=thinking is not intentionality), we need to be *totally open* to it. Put differently, we need to *listen* [*hören*]. In this way, listening is radically passive, since we will never find out what is being said to us (what we are called for) if we try to hear something specific or if we only want to hear what “fits to our pre-conceptions.” Listening is rather a form of receptivity within which we (mimetically) *give ourselves over* to the object. Compare this with what Adorno says in his *Negative Dialectics*:

“In philosophy we literally seek to immerse ourselves in things that are heterogeneous to us.” (ND 13)

Accordingly, what Heidegger has in mind, is not really an “object” of thought; rather, he tries to determine thinking as a radical form of *openness* and receptivity and as something that is located between activity and receptivity, making both possible. When this openness happens, we can receive what is thought in thinking as the unexpected happening of what *is given* to us (see WCT 121). Heidegger’s reflections on the “gift” have two aspects: [1] gift is something non-calculable, and [2] the term “gift” refers to a *capacity*. The second aspect is difficult for English language speakers, as Heidegger tries to indicate by referring to the term “*Vermögen*,” which is usually translated with “faculty.” For example, “*Denkvermögen*” in Kant is translated with “faculty of thought” or “faculty of rational concepts.” “*Denkvermögen*,” though, also indicates a likening capacity, since the term “*mögen*” comes from “liking” and from “*vermögen*,” which means “can” and “being able to.” Accordingly, what

¹ See also Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s *The Ister*: “Jetzt komme, Feuer” [Now come, fire!]

Heidegger tries to tackle here is our idea that we “are able” to think and that we have the “possibility” to think.² So the fact that we *can* think is the real gift! Moreover, if we think appropriately (authentically), we simply *receive what we are essentially able to*. Here is what Heidegger says in this regard:

“We *are capable* of thinking only insofar as we *are* endowed with what is most thought-provoking, gifted with what ever and always wants to be thought about” (WCT 126)

We should understand the term “gifted” here in a literal sense. To be capable of thought means for Heidegger that something has been given to us and that we received what is thought in thinking as that which called us into thinking. Being, in other words, is here something that we cannot willingly bring about. In addition, our attempt to be appropriate to being and to be appropriate to thinking (= to dwell) includes a radical passivity and receptivity. We might ask whether Adorno has (ultimately) the same thing in mind when he calls for a human life that “deals candidly and freely with the objects” (ND 369).

[3] Thinking as thanking (thinking as receiving the non-calculable)

A real gift is something that we neither expect nor calculate. A real gift comes “over us,” cannot be demanded, asked for, and is not tied to a form of exchange.³ What is the “natural” response to something that is given to us, brings us into our essence, and comes unexpectedly? It is thanking. It seems that Heidegger – once he has set up his semantic shift from thinking as an activity to thinking as being called for – is consequent and coherent, insofar as he acknowledges that thankfulness is neither a “reaction,” nor an activity; rather, it is the *positive* affirmation and “celebration” of having received something for one’s own and essential appropriation. Thanking here refers, thus, to the simple acknowledgement that something came to present itself to us – without our knowledge and without our calculation. Consequently, Heidegger tries to develop a description of thinking that is opposed to instrumental rationality and which belongs to *basic* experiences of human beings. Put in the words of Dieter Henrich, in thanking, “life can gather itself together in its spontaneity.”⁴ Thanking is connected to Being and *being* alive is connected to being capable of thanking. As Heidegger puts it (though he does not have life in mind), “original thanking is the thanks owed for being” (WCT 141). In contrast, ingratitude as an attitude of persons implies a self-centeredness, the consequence of which is that the subject does not acknowledge what is prior to itself. Instead, the subject puts itself into the center. Thanking, accordingly, points to an *ethos*. The connection that Heidegger focuses most on, however, is the relation between memory and thanking (wherein memory is conceived as being closely connected to the mind):

“The root or originary word says: the gathered, all gathering thinking that recalls” (WCT 139)

By “originary word” Heidegger does not mean the empirical-historical root; rather, since words have something to do with naming, the root is identical with what is *named* and *called* by a word. Recalling has here the sense of *calling something out of something else*. When we recall a passage from our past life we need to presuppose an original keeping of what has-been. For the mind could not be a unity and something “gathered” if it would not keep and recall what we experienced. If we take into account that everything that is has to be recalled by us and somehow “kept,” we can more easily understand Heidegger’s train of thought. Instead of thinking memory as an act or an activity of a subject, he points

² Hegel was the first philosopher who criticized Kant’s terms as a form of psychologism.

³ Check Derrida’s reflections on the gift. See also my contribution to the gift/forgiving issue: Lotz, Christian, “The Events of Morality and Forgiveness: Kant and Derrida,” in *Research in Phenomenology*, 2006, 255-273.

⁴ Henrich, Dieter, *Bewußtes Leben*, Stuttgart: Reclam 1999, 153.

out that the mind itself thanks because it is only what it is as being gathered (being a unity in past, presence and future):

“‘memory’ means devotion [*Andacht*]: as constant concentrated abiding with something – not just with something that has passed, but in the same way, with what is present and with what may come. What is past, present, and to come appears in the oneness of its own *present* being.” (WCT 140)

Every specific relatedness to objects, accordingly, is already based on what is gathered beforehand and makes specific relations possible (see WCT 144). Put in mentalist language: the unity of consciousness is prior to and the condition of the possibility of the experience of objects. What we find here, therefore, is a certain “preponderance of the object” in the higher sense. Thinking remains dependent upon (=is thankful for) and “responds” to something by being radically opened up and receptive. We should note, though, that this does not mean that we are open towards God. God is for Heidegger “something” that is not beyond Being and can therefore as *a* being only “appear” *within* what calls for thinking.

To be continued next week

Questions

Nope. Everything is crystal clear. Descartes would have loved this...