

# Negativity and critique in Adorno and Derrida

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that there is a tradition of philosophical critique which starts with Hegel's dialectics and was developed, each time in a slightly different direction, by Marx, by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School and reaches its most compelling contemporary articulation in the work of Derrida—the primary exponent of poststructuralist philosophy. This tradition of critique turns on a certain negativity: operations of negation and the recognition of difference. It is argued that this approach represents an attempt at coming to terms with contingency. While it is true that negativity and negation provide the driving force of the Hegelian dialectic, difference is ultimately reduced to a mere internal moment of a greater and more original unity, and is thereby robbed of its originary significance. In Adorno's philosophy, however, negativity is developed away from the totalising re-appropriation of non-identity with an ever greater emphasis on difference, in which the dialectical movement amplifies the dimension of negativity in a 'negative dialectics' rather than arresting it in reconciliation. In this sense, Derrida's work can be read as a continuation and radicalisation of Adorno's project, with *différance* as the notion that embodies this negativity most directly.

Difference is the negativity which reflection has within it.

—Hegel, *Science of Logic*

[T]he unity of the system derives from unreconcilable violence.

—Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*

## Introduction

This paper takes as its point of departure the idea that there is a tradition of philosophical critique which starts with Hegel’s dialectics and was developed, each time in a slightly different direction, by Marx, by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School (principally Horkheimer and Adorno) and reaches its most compelling contemporary articulation in the work of Derrida—the primary exponent of post-structuralist philosophy. This tradition of critique turns on a certain negativity: operations of negation and the recognition of difference. ‘Negativity’ is a term with multiple associations that, even when used in the strictly theoretical sense in which it is used here, can be confusing. For example, to some it denotes a philosophical attitude, one of pessimism or even of nihilism. However, negativity can be understood in what I hazard to call an affirmative sense, as what Belmonte (2002:19) terms “an active differencing that opens up the possibility of experience, language, decision and judgement.” Negativity allows philosophy to come to terms with contingency. From a poststructuralist perspective, enlightenment thinking’s inability to do so is its primary shortcoming.

Why do I focus on Adorno and Derrida? While it is true that negativity and negation—what Hegel calls determinate negation—provide the driving force of the Hegelian dialectic, difference is ultimately reduced to a mere internal moment of a greater and more original unity, and is thereby robbed of its originary significance. In Adorno’s philosophy, however, negativity is developed away from the totalising re-appropriation of non-identity with an ever greater emphasis on difference, in which the dialectical movement amplifies the dimension of negativity in a ‘negative

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dialectics' rather than arresting it in reconciliation. In this sense, Derrida's work can be read as a continuation and radicalisation of Adorno's project, with *différance* as the notion that embodies this negativity most directly. By continuously focusing on the dimension of non-identity, both Adorno and Derrida tease from Hegel's speculative system its most negative and critical impulse.

This recognition of difference is what allows both Adorno's and Derrida's philosophy to cope with contingency. Negativity, understood in the 'affirmative' sense described above, becomes a central moment in the 'founding' of the social (and the political). But, at the same time, by recognising contingency at the heart of this very founding, it is also what dislocates it and renders impossible any completion or exhaustion of thereof. Conceived as simultaneously the condition of possibility and the condition of impossibility of the founding of the system, negativity becomes indispensable to any sophisticated understanding of systemic stability and change. Negativity is therefore both theoretically valuable and indispensable to any hopeful politics—i.e. one that keeps alive the hope of a different future, of Derrida's *l'avenir*.

#### Towards a reformulation of the dialectic: from determinate negation to *différance*

While the debt to Hegel of critical thinking in general, and that of the Marxist variety in particular, is clear to most observers, it is less common to consider Derrida's 'deconstructive' practise from a Hegelian perspective. Even more unfashionable would be an attempt to rehabilitate Hegel as a thinker of difference—after all, is Hegel not the ultimate unifier in Spirit [*Geist*]?

The thinkers of the Frankfurt School (and particularly Adorno) found in their (re)turn to Hegel the inspiration for a new and arguably more radical negativity that allowed them to escape the essentialist claims of orthodox Marxism and that became the engine of their entire critical project. Adorno believed—and on this point Derrida would surely have agreed—that if Hegel is 'taken seriously' or 'taken at his word' then, despite his ultimate betrayal of negativity, he remains the most revolutionary of thinkers.

A reading of Hegel that emphasises the negative moment can result in a Hegel that is most fundamentally a thinker of difference rather than of identity.

Belmonte (2002:25) approvingly cites Jean Hyppolite's (1997) characterisation of Hegel's philosophy as one of negation and negativity: "Indeed, Hegel's very notion of identity . . . and the dialectical movement it engenders all depend on an original and productive differencing-from."

This is the Hegel in which Adorno is interested. But critique for Adorno is not a purely theoretical activity—critique is always political, an intervention in a social field that is marked by the overwhelming affirmative power of the capitalist relations of production. This political motive is glimpsed again and again in his work, even the most theoretical, and will also be encountered in what follows. Says Adorno (1963/1993:30): "Hegel's philosophy is indeed essentially negative: critique."

In *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (a seminal text not only for the Frankfurt School, but arguably spawning the broad theoretical movement of which Derrida's post-structuralism forms part), Horkheimer and Adorno—as the title implies—provide a dialectical interpretation of Enlightenment, in which the emancipatory power of enlightened thought is acknowledged, but which nevertheless sees in Enlightenment itself a regressive or recidivistic [rückläufige] moment, in which Enlightenment turns against itself and threatens to introduce a new age of enslavement and barbarism. It is an attempt to explain how the rational process of enlightenment could turn into "forms of political, social and cultural domination in which humans are deprived of their individuality and society is generally emptied of human meaning" (Bernstein, 2004:21)—i.e. the reified, dehumanised existence they considered advanced industrial capitalism to represent. Incidentally, it is to this regression that they attributed the rise of fascism in Europe, the spectre of which must at the time still have seemed to loom large over the Western world.

Horkheimer and Adorno appropriate Hegel's concept of 'determinate negation': "[it] discloses each image as script. It teaches us to read from its features the admission of falseness which cancels its power and hands it over to truth" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:18).

Yet, they show that while negativity and negation provide the force and drive of Hegel's dialectic, final reconciliation ultimately robs it of its originary significance and critical power. Reconciliation in one final, totalising moment is a betrayal of Hegel's own most radical insight.

With the concept of determinate negation, Hegel gave prominence to an element which distinguishes enlightenment from the positivist decay to which he consigned it. However, by finally postulating the known result of the whole process of negation, totality in the system and in history, as the absolute, he violated the prohibition<sup>1</sup> and himself succumbed to mythology. (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:18)

‘Determinate negation’ is described as the “faithful observance of [the image’s] prohibition”—i.e. the refusal to equate the image with the thing, the concept with its object (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:18). However, “negation . . . is not abstract;” it does not simply negate from a detached position, from some sort of Archimedian point, but rather “emerges out of and is specific to what it negates,” (Nicholsen & Shapiro, 1993:xiii). One could say that determinate negation is respectful of what is negated, in a certain sense even affirmative of it, at the same time that it negates. In this way determinate negation, as Horkheimer and Adorno conceive of it, exhibits the same ‘double gesture’ as deconstruction—which deconstructs a ‘text’ or tradition in terms of its own resources, and is in that sense affirmative of it at the same time as negating it—handing it over to truth, as Adorno might have said.

Nor does determinate negation reveal the ‘whole truth’ obscured by the actual, contingent reality. Instead, it is itself a local and contingent negation which reveals the untruth of the ‘image’ and thereby allows—in a piecemeal, always incomplete fashion—a closer approximation of a truth that is never arrived at, but that, through the dialectic, is nevertheless unfolding. Hegel’s mistake and betrayal of his own insight lies precisely in arresting the dialectic<sup>2</sup> and interrupting the process of determinate negation which is its motor by “postulating the known result”

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<sup>1</sup>In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, determinate negation is equated analogically with the Jewish religion’s prohibition on uttering the name of God: “It places all hope in the prohibition on invoking falsity as God, the finite as the infinite, the lie as truth. The pledge of . . . knowledge in the denunciation of illusion” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:17).

<sup>2</sup>The dialectic being arrested is not simply a theoretical error that occurs in philosophy—it can be a profound historical tragedy. According to Bernstein (2004:30–31), Horkheimer and Adorno diagnose the dialectic of Enlightenment as a dialectic which has come to a standstill. Marx’s expectation that the dialectic of class would inexorably lead to revolution (and therefore delivery from the nightmare of class society) is thus invalidated and society arrives at the impasse that is the cause of Adorno’s pervading pessimism. A key question for Adorno, and for the Frankfurt School generally, is why the dialectic of class had come to a standstill; this, in turn, calls up the

of the process: the absolute.

Against positivism and instrumental reason that they identify with Enlightenment, Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/2002:20) maintain a model of thought in which the “determining negation of whatever is directly at hand” allows a penetration by thought which sees things in their historicity and their social context, allowing thought to grasp their meaning (see Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:20). This kind of thought avoids the trap of positivist reflection which “arrests thought at mere immediacy” and, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, renders things meaningless except as objects for manipulation. Rather, it allows the possibility of a critique that escapes the perpetual repetition of the same.<sup>3</sup> The central difference between positivist and critical thought is therefore the evacuation of the negative from the former. In this, they are already in direct conflict with the ‘scientific’ approach to history and society of the Marxism to which they are the nominal heirs.

Horkheimer and Adorno link Enlightenment’s rejection of all thought that is not abstract, formal, ‘scientific’ in the positivist sense—i.e. modelled on formal logic and mathematics—to the capitalist mode of production (and the division of labour in particular<sup>4</sup>); to the principle of utility: all thought must be useful, productive, must aid man in his conquest of nature. Worse, it is related to social domination: “The distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstrac-

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normative question: How can the immobile present be set in motion? Adorno’s entire oeuvre can be read as, if not an answer, at least a serious engagement with this question.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/2002:20):

Knowledge does not consist in mere perception, classification, and calculation but precisely in the determining negation of whatever is directly at hand. Instead of such negation, mathematical formalism, whose medium, number, is the most abstract form of the immediate, arrests thought at mere immediacy. The actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology. The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape. For mythology had reflected in its forms the essence of the existing order—cyclical motion, fate, domination of the world as truth—and had renounced hope.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/2002:16): “Even the deductive form of science mirrors hierarchy and compulsion. . . . the entire logical order, with its claims of inference and dependence, the superordination and coordination of concepts, is founded on the corresponding conditions in social reality, that is, on the division of labour.”

tion, is founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:9). In striving for objectivity and impartiality, “scientific” thought dispensed with “ideas”—i.e. deprived thought of its critical and substantive character, reduced it to a concern merely for means and became thereby an alibi, if you like, to the existing order. In other words, the victory of instrumental reason over substantive reason is what inaugurates an age of “purposiveness without purpose” (cf. Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:69). Its pretence of neutrality is but a mask for its complicity with the existing order.<sup>5</sup> The very term ‘positivism’ indicates that they consider the central feature of this type of thinking to be the absence of negation.

The moment of reflection in thought, which is also the moment of negation, is more than an epistemological operation to ensure greater ‘truth’ or validity, it is the central task of philosophy, if philosophy is to prevent the reversion of Enlightenment to barbarism, of thought to violence.

Horkheimer and Adorno’s rejection of the totalising moment in Hegel’s thought prefigures Adorno’s even more radical reformulation of the dialectic in *Negative Dialectics*, in which Hegel’s negativity is developed away from the totalising re-appropriation of non-identity. One could consider this a rehabilitation of Hegel’s more originary ‘pure negativity’ or *Negativität* in contradistinction to ‘determinate negation.’<sup>6</sup>

Adorno’s reading of Hegel is at once respectful and transformative. Bernstein (2004:20) calls Adorno’s philosophy the articulation of what it is to be Hegelian

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Horkheimer & Adorno (1944/2002:16): “The impartiality of scientific language deprived what was powerless of the strength to make itself heard and merely provided the existing order with a neutral sign for itself. Such neutrality is more metaphysical than metaphysics.”

<sup>6</sup>The ‘pure negativity’ that I argue both Adorno and Derrida attempt to revive lies for Hegel, as Belmonte (2002:47) points out, at the very heart of reflection as ‘self-related difference.’ But difference itself is for Hegel subject to this paradoxical logic, resulting in a negativity that turns the negative of a negative into a positive, in the identity of non-identity and identity:

Difference in itself is self-related difference; as such, it is the negativity of itself, the difference not of an other, but *of itself from itself*; it is not itself but its other. But that which is different from difference is identity. Difference is therefore itself and identity. . . . This is to be considered as the essential nature of reflection and as the *specific, original ground of all activity and self-movement*. Difference and also identity, make themselves into a moment or a positedness because, as reflection, they are negative relation-to-self. [Original emphasis] (Logic, in Hegel, 1998:228)

after Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Adorno (1963/1993:83) himself says, "... rescuing Hegel—and only rescue, not revival, is appropriate for him—means facing up to his philosophy where it is most painful and wresting truth from it where its untruth is obvious." This "wresting of truth" from Hegel is accomplished by focusing on the negative moment—on negation, the non-identical, unreconciled contradiction—in Hegel and resisting the temptation to reduce the non-identical to a mere internal moment of a reconciled totality. There is an important similarity here between Adorno and Derrida (1967/2001:319), who describes his own approach as "a complicity without reserve" and as one that "takes [Hegelian discourse] seriously' up to the end, without an objection in philosophical form, while, however, a certain burst of laughter exceeds it and destroys its sense ... and this can be done only through close scrutiny and full knowledge of what one is laughing at."

Thus, a transformative reading which rescues "the negative and dialectical core" of Hegel's thought from "its embeddedness in a doctrine of undialectical affirmation, reconciliation and unification," (Nicholsen & Shapiro, 1993:xi) that reads Hegel *against himself*, as it were, is nevertheless one that reads him carefully, systematically and even respectfully.

But Derrida does seem more irreverent than Adorno in his dealings with Hegel. Adorno remains largely in an expository framework, while Derrida takes a freer—or what he describes in *Glas* as a 'bastard course,'<sup>7</sup>—reading Hegel's discourse in terms of "that which exceeds and resists it" (Critchley, 1999:4).

Belmonte (2002:24) argues that for Hegel, the possibility of experience lies not in an ultimate unity, but in a differencing more fundamental than that of the dialectic, a differencing of consciousness with itself, what she describes as "a movement-away-from that is not yet opposition, contradiction or negation."<sup>8</sup> She

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<sup>7</sup>This is a reference to Jean Genet's (upon whom the second column in *Glas*—perhaps Derrida's most sustained engagement with Hegel—is an extended meditation) reference to himself as a 'bastard.' Derrida's primary device in 'deconstructing' Hegel's dialectic is a critical focus on the notion of the (monogamous, heterosexual) family, which for Hegel is a node in the triad *Family – Civil Society – State*.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. Belmonte (2002:24):

... for Hegel, the possibility of experience lies not in an ultimate unity, but in a differencing more fundamental than that articulated in and by the dialectic. It is the differencing of consciousness with itself, that interval of being/time that is

goes on to quote Hegel (Science of Logic, p.417, cited in Belmonte, 2002:25):

Difference is the negativity which reflection has within it, the nothing which is said in enunciating identity, the essential moment of identity itself which, as negativity of itself, determines itself and is distinguished from difference.

It is in this sense that Hegel places difference ‘at the source’, before its activation in the dialectic and (eventual) demobilisation in reconciliation. It is this negative core of his thought that is retained in negative dialectics and in *différance*.

*Drei Studien zu Hegel* (translated as *Hegel: Three Studies*) in which Adorno’s reflections on Hegel are perhaps most comprehensively elaborated, provides clues to the Hegelian roots of Adorno’s negative dialectics, and a preliminary statement of the latter.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno (1966/1973:xix) himself says that he seeks to “free dialectics from [its] affirmative traits . . . without reducing its determinacy.” He steadfastly insists upon the irreducibility of difference: “To equate the negation of negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification; it is the formal principle in its purest form” (Adorno, 1966/1973:158). Thinking must not shy away from the negative. “If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself” (Adorno, 1966/1973:365).

Positivity that masters the object of reflection mirrors the domination of industrial society. So, resistance against instrumental reason is real resistance. His unremitting negativity is precisely what gives his thought its critical power, and that, in the end, points to a redemptive moment; that forms the core of what I hazard to call the utopian impulse in his thought. But I will return to this.

Derrida’s deconstructive practice, like Adorno’s negative dialectics, implies a negativity that can also be traced to Hegelian roots and that shares important characteristics with that of Adorno’s. In fact, Adorno’s negativity led him to exhibit what could even be termed proto-deconstructionist impulses. I see no

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the negativity of the self-same, a movement-away-from that is not yet opposition, contradiction or negation.

reason why the dialectic of Enlightenment could not be termed a deconstruction of Enlightenment thinking—is showing how the intellectual strategies associated with a particular tradition already undermines that very tradition; and doing so using the very resources provided by that tradition, not the classic deconstructive practice?

Central to Derrida’s thought is the deconstruction of the “metaphysics of full presence.” It is striking how directly Adorno seems to anticipate this. In this, too, he takes his inspiration from Hegel: “Hegel does not credit the concept of being, as a primordial value, with immediacy, the illusion that being is logically and genetically prior to any reflection, any division between subject and object; instead, he eradicates immediacy” (Adorno, 1963/1993:33). His denunciation of the “false immediacy” of positivist thought anticipates Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence.

Also interesting is Horkheimer and Adorno’s criticism of the “pure immanence” of positivism that tolerates no outside (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2002:11). Derrida’s project has been described as an attempt to think the possibility of a “constitutive outside” to the system (cf. Belmonte, 2002), i.e. the very possibility of the new and of critique. This problem of the inside and the outside—i.e. of immanence vs. transcendence—which Derrida thinks as an aporetic relation—is one that faces Adorno too, and it lies at the heart of their most radical insights.

The paradox of the immanent and the transcendent manifests in a variety of ways, including in any attempt to think the social or the political. Beardsworth (1996:xiii) points to a distinction evident in most contemporary continental philosophy: that between political organisation on the one hand and the ‘remainder’ of any attempt to organise politically, on the other. This distinction is analogous to the distinctions between ‘the law’ and ‘justice’, ‘the deconstructable’ and ‘the undeconstructable’, ‘the system’ and ‘the outside,’ and between ‘the immanent’ and ‘the transcendent’ that pervade the work of Derrida, Critchley, Cornell and others who write in the deconstructive tradition. The political power of Derrida’s thought flows precisely from its thinking of this distinction as an aporetic relation. Beardsworth (1996:xiii) argues that all political organisation depends upon a stability of conceptual determination and that this stabilisation implies a cer-

tain violence. Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics disrupts this conceptual stability and thereby undermines any totalitarian politics.

Says Caputo (1997:128), “[E]very deconstructive analysis is undertaken *in the name of something*, something affirmatively undeconstructible,”—*justice*. Caputo is concerned with the distinction between *the law* and *justice*—a manifestation of the broader distinction described earlier: “Deconstruction situates itself in the structural, necessary space between the law and justice, watching for the flowers of justice that grow up in the cracks of the law.” This ‘structural’ dislocation or spacing is necessary on the one hand if law is to be deconstructible and therefore capable of improvement (otherwise justice would always already be instantiated in the law and no improvement would be possible or necessary); but it is also necessary to traverse that space—i.e. for deconstruction to not merely watch and wait for the flowers of justice, but to cultivate them by actively transforming the law in the name of justice. Derrida makes sense of this limit as *aporia*: justice is only encountered by running up against the limits of the law.

Derrida says of the notion of *aporia*:

I believe we would misunderstand [the word ‘*aporia*’] if we tried to hold it to its most literal meaning: an absence of path, a paralysis before roadblocks, the immobilization of thinking, the impossibility of advancing, a barrier blocking the future. On the contrary, it seems to me that the experience of the *aporia* . . . gives or promises the thinking of the path, provokes the thinking of the very possibility of what still remains unthinkable or unthought, indeed, impossible. (Derrida, ‘Acts’, p 132, cited in Cornell, 1992:71)

In other words, it is precisely the *aporia* which opens up the possibility of the *impossible*,<sup>9</sup> that is: it is only in the *aporia* that there is any chance for ‘the beyond’ to re-enter the system, for ‘the remainder’ to influence political organisation. Similarly, Derrida (1988:116) says: “[Undecidability] calls for decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility. It is even its necessary condition.”

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<sup>9</sup>This notion of the ‘impossible’ is not used by Derrida to refer to that which cannot be done, but rather that which is beyond the possible. This is discussed later in this paper.

The ‘experience of the undecidable’ is therefore a structural condition of possibility of decision *qua* judgement. Only by reaching beyond the limit of the actual (the law, political organisation, etc.) can a *trace* of the other (the beyond, the remainder) re-enter the system and a ‘fresh judgement’ be made.

This ‘reaching beyond’ is a negation, of course, but like in negative dialectics, there is no access to a positive alternative. Justice does not have determinable content.

The aporetic, then, is what, on the one hand (through undecidability) opens up the possibility of the new and therefore of the just, and on the other, (through responsibility) requires it, compels us to push against the limit. The ‘promise of the future’ emerges as a direct result of the paradoxical process by which undecidability becomes the condition of possibility of judgement.

### Conclusion: negativity and hope

Adorno has often been accused—not entirely unfairly—of having retreated into obscure academicism and cultural elitism, and of having sacrificed political engagement for a kind of theoretical purity. Lukács (cited in Hammer, 2005:178) famously remarked that Adorno “had taken up residence ‘at the Grand Hotel Abyss.’” Adorno assiduously avoided engagement with the practical political problems of his time—never, for example, joining any the Leftist parties or organisations. The claim that theoretical negation as practised by Adorno is in fact a relevant intervention in ‘wrong society’ is not easy to sustain. Hammer (2005:178) argues, for example, that Adorno’s negativity is not helpful when it comes to analyzing collective political action. But, in the context of the overwhelming positivity of industrial society built on instrumental reason, negative dialectics is for Adorno already resistance against social domination.

As the horrors of the twentieth century’s great political experiments amply demonstrate, an absence of negativity and of a critique that relentlessly resists totality (and totalitarianism) can have devastating consequences. Adorno’s silence on practical matters and his refusal to become involved with any particular political initiatives spring not from a preference for theory over practice, but rather an understanding of his time as one in which progressive ideals could be more honestly pursued through theoretical reflection than through political action.

Adorno never placed his faith in Revolution. His resistance to the totality of what he considered reified existence always took a negative form—never resorting to the positive image of the ‘Ideal City’ or of a reconciled existence in a post-capitalist order.

Nevertheless, I have argued that negativity in Adorno’s philosophy reveals a certain positivity, is in fact a condition for the possibility of that positivity, while at the same time rendering fruitless any attempt to positively specify an order that is to come. In the same way that deconstruction, as we have said, is affirmative of ‘the undeconstructable’ (or justice)—while denying the possibility of giving content to the notion of justice—Adorno’s negativity is intimately connected with the redemptive—even utopian—moment in his work, and therefore also with the notion of hope.

The ‘quasi-transcendental’ analysis of Derrida’s deconstruction, allows for a ‘trace of the outside’—the new—to “re-enter the system” and therefore for *l’avenir* (the ‘to come’). This is the the redemptive moment in his thought. Far from leading to fatalism and paralysis—as many critics have charged<sup>10</sup>—in both Adorno and Derrida the negative or anti-totalising (anti-totalitarian!) thrust is essential to this redemptive moment without which all hope is lost.

Hope can only exist if the possibility of the new is recognised—something which positivistic thought cannot do. Both Adorno and Derrida offer versions of critical thinking that allow for the radically new—the revolutionary one might even say—to come into being, in a different future—*l’avenir*. This is why I insist on calling both thinkers utopian, while trying to strip that word of its pejorative connotation.

Let me conclude with the rather ambiguous quote with which Adorno (1963/1993:88) ends one of his essays on Hegel, but one which I prefer to read hopefully:

[Philosophy is] the ray of light that reveals the whole to be untrue in all its moments in none other than utopia, the utopia of the whole truth, which is still to be realised.

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Kolakowski (1978:366): “There can be few works of philosophy that give such an overpowering impression of sterility as *Negative Dialectics*” and (*ibid.* p. 369): “His philosophy is not an expression of universal revolt, but of helplessness and despair.”

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