

What is Orthodox Critical Theory?

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In 1919, Lukács posed the question, “What is orthodox Marxism?” Even for Lukács, there was an undertone of irony: if by orthodoxy we mean devoutness, then “the most appropriate answer [is] a pitying smile.” But Lukács also points out that the question can be understood and asked in such a way that it invites or even requires a different kind of answer. If we understand it as a question about quintessence, Lukács’ answer is as follows: The quintessence of Marxism does not reside in the results of Marx’s research or a “belief in one or another proposition,” nor in the “exegesis of a ‘holy book.’” Rather, “orthodoxy in matters of Marxism refers exclusively to *method*.”¹

In this essay I want to reapply Lukács’ question to Critical Theory: What is orthodox Critical Theory? And I’d like to advocate an approach that could be called orthodox in three respects.

First, if we understand orthodoxy to mean quintessence, then my question—as Nancy Fraser puts it in the title of her well-known paper—is: “What’s critical about Critical Theory?” For criticism is the quintessence of Critical Theory, as its very name tells us. According to the prevailing response to the question about quintessence, Critical Theory can be critical only if it includes a program of justification [*Begründungsprogramm*].² For Critical Theorists are entitled to operate only with criteria that can be justified as acceptable to all (or, at least, all affected). My position is diametrically opposed: Critical Theory needs no program of justification in order to be critical. In fact, only *without* such a program of philosophical justification can Critical Theory be adequately and appropriately critical.

I speak of orthodoxy also because I think we need to revive the views of the first generation of the Frankfurt School—the trend is currently either to neglect these views entirely or to overlook their broader significance. Thus, in arguing for a reorientation of Critical Theory as I will do below, I will frequently rely on Horkheimer’s writings of the 1930s.

Thirdly, it will turn out that orthodox Critical Theory actually does have something to do with devoutness in the end—irony (and secularism) notwithstanding.

I want to begin with two elements of Max Horkheimer’s seminal 1937 essay “*Traditionelle und kritische Theorie* [Traditional and Critical Theory].” Along the way I will highlight a problem: we first need to understand why many people feel drawn to a program of justification—even regard it as necessary for Critical Theory.

The first element I want to mention is Horkheimer's characterization of what is *ruled out* for a Critical Theory. What is ruled out is to operate in an unquestioning way with the existing criteria for the betterment of society:

[Critical Theory] is suspicious of the very categories of better, useful, appropriate, productive, and valuable, as these are understood in the present order, and refuses to take them as nonscientific presuppositions about which one can do nothing.³

Thus, the normative definition cannot simply be provided by the socially recognized criteria; otherwise criticism will remain imprisoned within the existing society whose ills criticism began by challenging. Simply adopting socially recognized criteria seems particularly problematic when the existing ills are necessarily tied to the social order. A theory that is critical cannot be productive, useful or constructive in this sense.⁴

The second element that I want to bring in from Horkheimer has to do with the historical situatedness of Critical Theory. One of the most important areas of concern in Horkheimer's approach is the historicization of Kant's epistemology. Horkheimer thinks of the subject and object of knowledge as socially and historically, rather than transcendently, preformed:

The facts presented to us by our senses are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ.⁵

This has a number of consequences for Critical Theory, one of which I would like to mention briefly. Horkheimer writes: "No one can make himself a subject other than the one he is at this historical moment"; and he opposes "the assumption of an absolute, trans-historical subject or the possibility of substituting subjects, as though one could remove oneself from the present moment and actually insert oneself into another of one's choosing."⁶

Taken together, the two elements I have outlined may lead one to think that Critical Theory is actually impossible—even according to its own standards. For how can a theory be critical if it can draw neither on the socially recognized criteria of betterment nor on trans-historical subjects or responses?⁷

According to the currently dominant interpretation of the Frankfurt School's history, this is exactly why a learning process began in this theoretical tradition. A second generation led by Jürgen Habermas recognized the problem and sounded the retreat:

Anyone who abides in a paradox on the very spot once allocated by philosophy to its ultimate groundings is not just taking up an uncomfortable position; one can only hold that place if one makes it at least plausible that there is *no way out*. Even retreat from an aporetic situation has to be barred, or else there is a way—the way back. But I believe this is precisely the case.⁸

Since then it has been considered as settled that a program of justification is essential for Critical Theory.

This program was then put into practice in various ways, and here there are small but important differences: some, executing a Habermasian reversal, are guided by Kant; others by Hegel. Despite the differences, there is one constant: a program of justification is supposed to demonstrate the moral correctness of critical standards. How to achieve this remains in dispute. Some (notably Habermas) try to do it by appealing to something not directly moral (such as the requirements of communicative action); others (such as recently Honneth) with the help of a philosophy of history that would enable us to speak of a historical learning process and moral progress; and still others with reference to a directly moral foundation, such as Forst and his basic right to justification.

My approach differs from those just sketched in that I would like to propose a second reversal, though one that does not involve rehabilitating every proposition and pronouncement of the first generation of the Frankfurt School (that would be, with Lukács, the wrong kind of orthodox theory—the kind that would get a pitying smile from us). My concern is to defend the “uncomfortable position” in which Adorno and Horkheimer situate Critical Theory as one that can be held—specifically, one that can be held *philosophically*. Below I will briefly sketch a little of this defense and suggest how we can continue to advance in Critical Theory.

The first step is to once again take seriously the idea that Critical Theory begins with “the hardship of the present [*Not der Gegenwart*],” as Horkheimer put it in 1937.⁹ Even this is not just unquestioningly accepted, but the primary emphasis is on the negative experiences of human beings along multiple dimensions (not merely injustice). Suffering, lack of freedom and injustice demand to be abolished¹⁰—and Critical Theory tries to make a contribution to achieving this. Critical Theorists are partisans in the struggle to put an end to social injustice, to conditions of enslavement in which suffering reigns; they have no ambition to be neutral scholars interested only in recording and systematizing facts;¹¹ and they do not categorically separate thought and action (particularly not scholarly thought and political action). Nor do they believe that we can construct defensible normative theories by simply disregarding existing conditions, to which these theories would then be applied with the help of the social sciences.¹² No, the point is to critically examine a partisan world, guided by an interest in freeing human beings from conditions of enslavement. In such a partisan world, this partisanship will then appear “biased and unjust,”¹³ which will in turn make an independent, universal justification *seem* necessary. But the first step of my response is to point out that this is premature: anyone who argues this way assumes that a neutral place or a neutral way of carrying out a justification can exist. Now it is precisely this assumption that, with Horkheimer, I want to question:

There is no theory of society, not even a theory by sociologists concerned with general laws, that does not involve political interests, and the truth of these

must be decided not in supposedly neutral reflection, but once again in thought and action—in concrete historical activity.¹⁴

I would like to concur with Horkheimer that there is and can be no neutral point of view—and to the degree that programs of justification assume such a point of view, that rules them out. No theory can really be neutral. Any attempt to be neutral with respect to the partisan world will benefit the in the end. Intentionally or not, such attempts are ultimately guided by the ruling interests.

One more consideration that Horkheimer brings into play is essential for my argument. Directly following the passage above, he continues:

Now, it is disconcerting that the intellectual should present things, as though a difficult labor of thought, which he alone could accomplish, were the prime requirement for choosing among revolutionary, liberal and fascist objectives and means. [. . .] The avant-garde needs prudence in the political struggle, not academic instruction on its so-called point of view.¹⁵

Hence the second step is the thesis that at least certain value judgments do not require any mental effort on the part of the intellectual—that is, do not require theory: there are evils with regard to which the guidance by academics is unnecessary and even has no place.

In a 1962 paper, Adorno takes a similar view in an aside on “unfreedom and oppression”: these are “. . . the evil whose malevolence requires as little philosophical proof as does its existence. . .”¹⁶ Four years later, in *Negative Dialektik* (*Negative Dialectics*), Adorno goes a step further when he writes that the new categorical imperative—that is, the imperative to constitute thought and action so that Auschwitz does not recur, so that nothing like it happens again—is “as resistant to being grounded as the givens of the Kantian imperative once was”; in fact, “dealing discursively with it would be an outrage.”¹⁷

Here I see a criticism of the program of justification at work that I share. So conceived, Critical Theory proceeds from the hardship of the present and is guided by the interest in emancipation; it is not its task to ground the evils we face or to provide a discursive derivation of said interest. No, if Adorno is to be believed, this would be *not just an unnecessary* but a *highly problematic* undertaking (“an outrage”).

How can we understand this thesis, and where can we even start to defend it? First I’d like to go back to the idea that we are historically situated and unable to adopt the position of a trans-historical subject. If that is true, certain strategies of justification are ruled out. For example, this consideration has unfavorable consequences for Honneth’s recent program of justification by way of a philosophy of history. In *Das Recht der Freiheit*, Honneth insists, against Walzer and others, that a Critical Theory not only must be anchored in social reality, but also needs to demonstrate the moral soundness of its standards.¹⁸ At the same time he criticizes Forst (and others)—correctly, in my view—to the effect that a justification independent of social and historical conditions would be “completely empty.”¹⁹ Instead Honneth wants to make

use of a post-metaphysical version of the Kantian and Hegelian philosophy of history. A central problem here is that the criteria for the historical learning process that has supposedly taken place are either themselves historical (and as such not suitable for providing independent justification of historical circumstances and values) or else “completely empty,” to repeat Honneth’s criticism of Forst. Thus it is not clear either why, in other works, Honneth thinks he can defend the view that “social inclusion” and “individualization” are suitable criteria for progress. For the dilemma that I have just sketched exists not only for the “right to justification” but also for the criteria of “social inclusion” and “individualization.”

This brings me to a further consideration, one that seems to me equally important. Not only is neutrality impossible, but “a certain interest [*Interesse*] is required” in order to be able to experience and perceive historical possibilities otherwise hidden from view.²⁰ In other words: we have access to the truth only if we are guided by a certain interest—the “interest in eliminating social injustice.”²¹ Access to the truth is not nonpartisan or interest-neutral, but rather is gained by a subject who has this interest: only in this way can we perceive the truth as truth. It follows that there *can be* no independent justification of the interest guiding Critical Theory, since any access to truth (and at the same time any access to criteria of correctness and to strategies of justification) already presupposes that interest. Adorno’s “outrage” might also be thought of this way: to believe that an interest in emancipation requires a program of justification would mean that there is something more important that would provide this justification to begin with. Injustice, lack of freedom and oppression would not speak for themselves. And that means that their elimination would not be the most important thing. Indeed, it would mean that injustice, lack of freedom and oppression might—at least in principle—be considered justified, specifically in the case that the more important thing supposedly justifying them is constituted in a certain way. (The rejoinder that the more important thing is not or even cannot be so constituted will not take care of the problem. Then either the program of justification is superfluous after all or it is being forgotten that is problematic to even allow for the possibility that lack of freedom and oppression might not be evils—just as it does not suffice to defend utilitarianism when its champions assert that, under its influence, the innocent would never actually be harmed. One way of going astray is to give the wrong reasons for the right view.)

Here I should note briefly that a rejection of the program of justification does not involve rejection of argumentation or philosophy or reason. Rather, it means just doing philosophy in a different way, a different kind of argumentation, and a different understanding of reason. Of particular importance for this approach are strategies of making visible. Some evils are obvious, but particularly in view of the socially preformed nature of the organs and objects of perception, it is necessary to contribute through theory to making more complex abuses amenable to being experienced and recognized as such—to reveal and disclose them to us. One important aspect of this is resistance to theoretical constructs that—whether their advocates wish it or not—conceal or obscure social ills. What Critical Theory reveals as evil does not then have to be justified as evil.

Given this critique of the program of philosophical justification, talk of orthodoxy—of devoutness—is not entirely out of place after all, despite the irony with which Lukács (and I) brought it up. And on this point too I find myself in agreement with Horkheimer, who remarks:

There are no general criteria for critical theory as a whole. . . . Despite the plausibility of individual steps and the agreement of its elements with the most advanced traditional theories, critical theory has no specific authority on its side, other than the interest in abolishing social injustice that is bound up with it.²²

In one way this might be a good place to end, but in another we are just beginning. I will close with two remarks.

First I would like to briefly discuss this objection: How can Critical Theory as I have sketched it avoid the charges of dogmatism and irrationalism? Isn't Habermas right that this is an uncomfortable, even an aporetic position, from which it would be best to beat a retreat?

I am happy to admit that the approach I have outlined sounds unphilosophical and problematic *in one respect*: if philosophy is understood to involve programs of justification and universal truths, then the lineage of Critical Theory with which I have aligned myself is unphilosophical or even anti-philosophical. If in addition one is convinced that a program of justification is both possible and necessary, and universal truths both exist and are accessible to us, then my approach must inevitably seem problematic.

I'd like to respond as follows: if our situation is one in which programs of philosophical justification and adherence to universal validity are misguided ambitions—and of course what I have said in this essay on this extremely complex topic cannot have been anywhere near conclusive—but if they are misguided ambitions, it is more reflective and philosophical to realize that and find other strategies for countering irrationalism and dogmatism: strategies of self-reflection, detachment (through genealogical studies, for example) and even self-deprecation, the inclusion of and reference to voices that have been and continue to be excluded—as in the work of Nancy Fraser, Amy Allen and others. It would then be a matter of making society *and oneself* uncomfortable—and that as well is part of the essence of Critical Theory.

Such strategies might also be available to those who subscribe to programs of justification, but it is an illusion to believe that they might offer more (through the program of justification). On the contrary: the danger is that focusing on a program of justification might have the effect that strategies of self-reflection and self-detachment are neglected or even distorted. This can happen if everything is squeezed into an abstract scheme or if a specific program of philosophical justification narrows our vision. Take Honneth's approach in *Das Recht der Freiheit*, for example: in this work he limits himself (not coincidentally) to normatively reconstructing the practices essential

for replicating the present social order.²³ What gets lost here is the normative reconstruction of the subversive practices that might destabilize prevailing values and institutions and thus may be of far greater importance for our self-reflection and emancipation.

I readily concede that strategies of self-reflection provide no guarantees—but if the program of justification is truly misguided, nothing and no one can provide guarantees; the “uncomfortable position” mentioned by Habermas with reference to Adorno and Horkheimer is then in fact inescapable. To work out a critical social philosophy that is not dogmatic in the bad sense or dedicated to a program of justification is one of the most important tasks of philosophy—and one to which we should devote ourselves.

Social philosophy is of course not limited to critical self-reflection (and the critique of the program of justification that is part of it). Here I have concentrated solely on sketching key aspects of how I think the tradition of the Frankfurt School should be carried on.

Already in Horkheimer there are ideas about further roles for critical social philosophy (such as to critique the social sciences), all of which I consider important. Thus he remarks (in “Postscript”):

Unlike modern specialized science, however, the critical theory of society has continued to be a philosophical discipline even when it engages in a critique of the economy. For its content is the transformation of the concepts which dominate the economy into their opposites: fair exchange into a deepening of social injustice, a free economy into monopolistic control, productive work into rigid relationships which hinder production, the maintenance of society’s life into the pauperization of the peoples.²⁴

Here philosophy is implicitly equated with a certain type of conceptual work that forms part of the critical analysis of economic (or, more broadly, social) processes, which have turned into their opposites. These processes are shaped by concepts, so that the critical analysis of them requires conceptual work—roughly the reconstruction and critique of conceptual permutations—, and such work is the *métier* of philosophy.²⁵

Honneth’s suggestion that social aberrations be conceptualized as “social pathologies” represents a good example of such critical conceptual work. Except that we should pursue this research program on social pathology in a modified form—one compatible with my proposed second change of direction. Such a research program should, first, take its point of departure from the hardship prevalent in today’s society and the mechanisms that conceal it.

Second, the task of Critical Theory would then be to clarify the extent to which this hardship is related to the existing social structure—and to show that sickness is in a certain way normal in view of the conditions we live in.²⁶ In advance we cannot rule out (particularly not methodologically) that it may be necessary to abolish this social

structure and even to give up our notion of social freedom. Refusing to rule this out will not necessarily lead to actionist revolutionism of the kind that Adorno rejected, but rather implies a belief that a wholesale transformation of society may be needed. This option cannot be simply ruled out even if there are currently no social actors who might bring about such a transformation.²⁷

Third, such a research program should avoid the monism often adopted by programs of justification—since not all phenomena can be adequately understood and criticized through (for example) the prism of communicative action or recognition.²⁸ Torture may make communicative action impossible and may not aim at reciprocal understanding; it may involve misrecognition and get in the way of an agent’s developing self-esteem; but to think that torture is incorrect and reprehensible for these reasons alone seems to me to be misunderstanding something essential. Torture is also wrong because it entails severe and unnecessary pain. This by itself is reason enough to condemn it. In general, it is presumably most reasonable to understand torture as paradigmatic of badness (rather than a mere instance of disregard of some value or principle, from which it derives its negativity). That way it sets a negative standard, and we condemn events and actions for having elements in common with it.

Fourth, we need pluralism along a second dimension, that of the conceptualization of social pathology: some phenomena are better described by saying that society or one of its central subsystems is “sick” (such as the institutions of representative democracy whose dysfunctionality can be seen in Occupy and in unrest in Paris, London and Ferguson); others by saying that society is making individuals sick (such as the increasing rate of depression since the 1970s or the rates of suicide and child mortality in countries where austerity has been voted for or enforced in response to the financial crisis of 2008).²⁹

Finally, we should not shrink away from ethical judgments in social philosophy. Theorists in contemporary political philosophy largely eschew any talk of social pathology, especially those working in the dominant Rawlsian framework. For them, it is associated with ‘comprehensive conceptions of the good’ – meaning all-encompassing worldviews. Such conceptions, Rawlsian liberals argue, fall foul of the reasonable pluralism we encounter in modern societies – a pluralism of worldviews that is reasonable insofar as it could have resulted from free and extended debate. Instead, they think that we should make do with liberal conceptions of justice, as these can be the object of “overlapping consensus”, that is, these can be acceptable to people with different worldviews for different reasons. However, Rawlsian liberals do not draw the line, where – by their own standards – it should be drawn: taking reasonable pluralism about worldviews seriously means recognizing that it applies also to moral values (and to the issue of what might count as “moral” at all), not just to ethical ones; and if we want to commit ourselves to the idea that normative criteria must be capable of being shared by all (or even just all “reasonable” persons), the negativity of physical pain or of depression or of the tragedy of early childhood death have far greater chances of achieving this than do the specific ideas of freedom and equality promulgated by Rawls and others.

Here I have offered only a brief sketch of key aspects of the endeavor to continue with (orthodox) Critical Theory. What holds these aspects together in a constellation and unifies them is not a deductive system, not a program of justification, and not normative monism, but an interest in abolishing social injustice and suffering.

So what is orthodox Critical Theory? It is holding fast to this interest as one's authoritative normative orientation; and it is the endeavor, guided by this interest, to contribute to the struggle against suffering, injustice and lack of freedom through conceptual work, self-reflection, and a critical appropriation of the humanities and (social) sciences.³⁰

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Notes

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¹ In *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (Berlin: Malik Verlag, 1923), reprinted in Vol. 2 of *Werke (Frühschriften II)* (Neuwied: Herman Luchterhand Verlag, 1968), p. 13; emphasis in original. English translation by R. Livingstone as *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 1; translation amended.

² Sometimes '*Begründungsprogramm*' is translated as 'program of *philosophical* justification' (my emphasis) – and this is what the translator originally suggested. The advantage is that it signals even more than the mere talk of 'program of justification' (or 'justificatory project') that what is at issue is something other than the everyday justifications we tend to give to each other (which tend to run out at some point, rather than going all the way down). The disadvantage is that one can end up with definitions of philosophy that include the term 'philosophy' or its cognates on both sides of the definition (for some, philosophy's quintessence is the program of justification). Ultimately, no translation can resolve this matter in part because the original term is contested already. I won't attempt to offer a definition of '*Begründungsprogramm*' in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions; I suspect that none can be provided. Still, it is not impossible to give an ostensive definition. What I have in mind is the kind of thing Korsgaard attempts to do when investigating the sources of normativity or Habermas and others demand of Adorno and Horkheimer when they criticize their Critical Theory for lacking normative foundations. As I suggest in the text, there is quite some variety among those who engage in, or demand, such justificatory project, with overlapping but not identical concerns. My point is that there is a way to break more fundamentally with such an approach, and that Critical Theory should so break with it.

³ Max Horkheimer, "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie" (1937), reprinted in Vol. 4 of

Gesammelte Schriften, ed. A. Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 162-216 (here 180-1). English translation by M.J. O'Connell in Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 188-243 (here 207). Hereafter "TKT", with the pagination in the German edition and the translation separated by a '/.

⁴ See also TKT, 216/242.

⁵ TKT, 174/200. He continues: "Both are not merely natural; but are shaped by human activity; and yet the individual experiences himself as receptive and passive in the act of perception" (translation amended). See also "Postscript [*Nachtrag*]" (1937) in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 4, 217-225 (here 218)/*Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, 244-52 (here 245).

⁶ TKT, 213-4/240; translation amended. In the "Postscript" published in the following volume, Horkheimer takes the point a step further when he writes that the "class-related form" of all work in society "leaves its stamp on all human responses, even theory" (218/245; translation amended).

⁷ Specifically, what standpoint is it speaking from if it understands the given world both as "bad facticity" and "untrue whole" (in the words of Marcuse in 1937 and the Adorno of the 1940s)?

⁸ Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 155; emphasis in original. English translation by F. Lawrence as *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 128; translation amended.

⁹ TKT, 190/216; translation amended.

¹⁰ See also "Woe speaks: Go" (Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 203; English translation by E.B., Ashton (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 203).

¹¹ See also Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy und Kritische Theorie" (1937), in *Kultur und Gesellschaft 1* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1965), 102-127 (here 111). English Translation in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations* (London: Penguin, 1968), 99-118 (here 105). Available online at: <http://mayflybooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/9781906948054Negations.pdf>

¹² Here I am alluding to ideal-theoretical approaches in contemporary political philosophy, notably those within the Rawlsian framework.

¹³ TKT, 192/218.

¹⁴ TKT, 196/212; translation amended. See also M. Horkheimer, "Materialismus und Moral" (1933), reprinted in Vol. 3 of *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. A. Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 111-149 (here 149).

¹⁵ TKT, 196-7/222-3; translation amended.

¹⁶ "Wozu noch Philosophie" (1962), in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973 ff.), Vol. 10.2, 459-73 (here 465). Translation by H.W. Pickford in T.W. Adorno, *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press), 10.

¹⁷ *Negative Dialektik*, 358/Ashton translation, 365. See also Horkheimer, "Materialismus und Moral," 133-4, 146.

¹⁸ Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011), 16. English translation by J. Ganahl as *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39, n. 6/Ganahl translation, 337-8 n.6.

²⁰ TKT, 187/213; translation amended; see also 196/212 and "Materialismus und Moral," 131.

²¹ TKT, 216/242; translation amended.

²² TKT, 216/242; translation amended.

²³ See Jörg Schaub, "Misedevelopments, Pathologies, and Normative Revolutions: Normative Reconstruction as Method of Critical Theory," *Critical Horizons* 16(2) (2015), 107-130.

²⁴ "Postscript," 220/247.

²⁵ It should be unnecessary to spell out that this conceptual work is not the conceptual analysis of Anglo-Saxon philosophy. Nor is it idealism. Rather, the idea is that social

processes cannot easily be separated from certain key concepts that characterize them. These concepts are not simply ascribed to processes, but are rather in a certain sense constitutive of these processes: they are “real abstractions” (to use Sohn-Rethel’s term). The inversion of concepts is thus not extrinsic or accidental to the inversion of the practices, though neither is it the ultimate cause (that would be bad idealism). At the same time, Critical Theory’s conceptual work is not pure conceptual analysis, but is always bound up with social analysis and diagnosis of the times.

²⁶ See T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (1951), in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 4, here No. 36 (“Die Gesundheit zum Tode”). English translation by E.F.N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974).

²⁷ In this paragraph, I am alluding to criticisms of Honneth’s recent work in *Critical Horizons* 16.2 (2015) and to his Rejoinder in the same issue.

²⁸ See also, in relation to Habermas, Titus Stahl, “Habermas and the Project of Immanent Critique,” *Constellations* 20(4) (2013), 533-52.

²⁹ Here too I am in part alluding critically to Honneth’s recent work, notably “Die Krankheiten der Gesellschaft. Annäherung an einen nahezu unmöglichen Begriff”, *WestEnd* 11.1 (2014), 45-60.

³⁰ See “Materialismus und Moral,” 131, where Horkheimer characterizes “materialism” (i.e., what he later calls “Critical Theory”) as “the theoretical aspect of efforts to abolish existing suffering.”