

## Language and the Recovery of Experience: The Role of the Body in Nietzsche and Adorno

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**Abstract:** This article engages with the respective philosophies of language of Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodor Adorno in order to outline the ethical struggle of thinking, in general, and philosophical thinking, in particular. This ethical struggle results from philosophy's recognition of its epistemic vulnerability. First, a reconstruction of Nietzsche's critique of conceptual reification is provided, revolving around the metonymic-metaphorical structure of language and cognition. Second, Adorno's account of the pathogenesis of human reason is provided in order to outline the mimetic origin of human reason, presented by Adorno via his critique of subject-object relation. Third, given the critique of conceptual reification and the pathogenesis of human reason, the possibility of conceiving an "ethics of thinking" is explored. This ethics of thinking is framed as the recovery of experience resulting from thinking's reorientation back to its material origin. Finally, thinking's discovery of its ethical dimension via the recognition of its very own vulnerability brings the "body" back to the center stage of the recovery of experience.

**Keywords:** Adorno, Nietzsche, language, recovery of experience

Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodor Adorno both construe history as a locale of human experience. Historical experience, in this context, means receptivity to the material conditions of life that involves our conceptual apparatus. Nietzsche and Adorno, moreover, point out that within the same historical-experiential sphere our conceptual apparatus could become perverted, repressing our receptivity to objects of experience. This happens when objects of experience are reduced to reified concepts, a moment when concepts become "more real" than material objects and, in effect, we forget the "nonidentical" character of these objects. This forgetfulness is the pathogenesis of reification, human reason's amnesiac attitude towards its material origin. Human reason's insensitivity to its

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material origin renders thinking's very own inability to overcome its obsession with identitarian concepts, such as, order, universality, or purity. In the current form of society, this obsession of reason manifests in the stratification or standardization of practices or behavior—a form of necrosis of the vitality of human relations which, in its extreme form, results in oppression and violence towards both human and non-human others. This forgetfulness of the material origin of thought is also symptomatic of philosophy, that is why Nietzsche and Adorno emphasize the vulnerability of philosophy. This vulnerability is philosophy's failure to self-reflexively evaluate its very own language, thereby a failure to enact the ethical character of thinking.

Based on Nietzsche- and Adorno's philosophical engagement with language, I will attempt to outline the ethical struggle of thinking by articulating the vulnerability of philosophical thinking. Firstly, I will provide a reconstruction of Nietzsche's critique of conceptual reification based on his reading of language as essentially metonymic in character. Secondly, I will discuss Adorno's account of the pathogenesis of human reason which is related to what Adorno calls the mimetic character of the subject-object relation. Thirdly, informed by the critique of conceptual reification and the emphasis on the mimetic character of the subject and object, I will gesture towards the possibility of conceiving an "ethics of thinking" inspired by Adorno's reconciliatory dialectic of the subject and object. This I refer to below as the "recovery of experience." Fourthly, I rehearse, once again, the ethical call of philosophy's vulnerability by putting the body at the center stage of the recovery of experience—I argue that such recovery is the reaffirmation of the mimetic dimension of thinking.

### **Metonymy and the Origins of Conceptual Reification**

Ascertaining Nietzsche's critique of conceptual reification means that we have to understand his general critical attitude towards the language of metaphysics. As a purely conceptual language, metaphysics, according to Nietzsche, conceals the material origin and mediatory nature of thinking. More specifically, metaphysics isolates itself from its social, interpretative, and metaphorical character—which are material conditions that constitute thinking or human reason. This dissimulation of the material origin of metaphysical language hides behind the epistemological assumption that human reason is capable of accurately mirroring reality. Nietzsche calls this assumption the "truth drive" that underlies the traditional language of philosophy. By construing its language as educing truth, metaphysics (or the traditional language of philosophy) is somewhat oblivious to the tensional relation between its pragmatic origin (its material origin) and the role that

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metaphysics plays within society, a role made possible by ignoring precisely such pragmatic-material origin.<sup>1</sup> As such, a “rational world” is only conceivable when we make official a metanarrative of the world whose epistemic justification is the abandonment of its very own social and material constitution. Nietzsche describes this as the invention of the metaphysical origin of the world or what I simply call metaphysical bias.

Apart from the disclosure of the concealed material origin of thinking (or truth valuation), another aspect of Nietzsche’s critique of conceptual reification is the recovery or orientation back to thinking’s material origin. Inasmuch as the manifestation of the truth drive is done through language, Nietzsche contends that the recovery of the material origin of truth valuation requires a reevaluation of the normative foundations of language. As such Nietzsche begins this inquiry with a question regarding the nature of the “word.” He does this in “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense” where he provides a definition of the “word”:

It is a copy in sound of a nerve stimulus. But the further inference from the nerve stimulus to a cause outside of us is already the result of a false and unjustifiable application of the principle of sufficient reason. If truth alone had been the deciding factor in the genesis of language, and if the standpoint of certainty had been decisive for designations, then how could we still dare to say “the stone is hard,” as if “hard” were something otherwise familiar to us, and not merely a totally subjective stimulation!<sup>2</sup>

The “word,” Nietzsche contends, is a derivative of a physiological process. What the nerve stimulus entails is the presence of an external referent and the word is the expression in sound — that is to say, an indirect expression of the referent. For Nietzsche, this process is not only linguistic but also “metonymic” inasmuch as the word is a substitute for the physical referent. Nietzsche notes that metonymy is “the placement of one noun for another” or “the substitution of cause and effect.”<sup>3</sup> It is also important to mention that, by calling the word metonymic, Nietzsche hints on his critical stance towards

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wayne Klein, *Nietzsche and the Promise of Philosophy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense,” in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections From Nietzsche’s Notebooks of the Early 1870’s*, ed. and trans. by Daniel Breazeale (New York: Humanities Press International, 1990), I, 81-82.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Description of Ancient Rhetoric,” in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), III, 25 and VII, 59.

the “correspondence theory” of truth where a proposition is considered a direct and accurate representation of a matter of fact. In contrast, Nietzsche argues that any linguistic expression is metonymic; more importantly, that metonymic expressions are grounded in the physiological origin of cognition. Nietzsche questions the dissimulation of this physiological origin and, hence, the transcendental bias in truth-claims. The example he uses in the above passage, “the stone is hard,” illustrates the process of conceptual reification wherein the statement, “the stone is hard,” is imposed upon a physical referent. Conventionally, we call this physical referent “stone,” and the physical encounter with this referent is the “subjective stimulation” that we describe via the predicate “hard.” The predicate “hard” is another word that we use to describe the sensation or subjective stimulation that occurs upon encountering the physical object we call stone: “hard” is how we perceive the object. For Nietzsche, this is not simply a passive reception of the “in itself” of the object, but, rather, an active or creative naming of the object. According to Nietzsche, we are not aware of this active and creative process; we are mistaken to think that we are passive receivers of truth. He says, “It is only by means of forgetfulness that man can ever reach the point of fancying himself to possess a ‘truth’.”<sup>4</sup> Since we are forgetful of the physiological-active-creative nature of language and the truth drive, we become passive users of language and believe that words have a transcendental source. On the contrary, we are participants in the active creation of truths which Nietzsche describes as an “aesthetic” engagement with the world: “between subject and object, there is no causality, no correctness, and no expression; there is, at most, an *aesthetic* relation ... a freely intermediate sphere and mediating force.”<sup>5</sup> This mediatory character of our language use is the metonymic dimension of knowledge formation. In his “Description of Ancient Rhetoric,” Nietzsche further elaborates on the metonymic dimension of knowledge formation:

... it is not the things that pass over into consciousness, but the manner in which we stand toward them .... The full essence of things will never be grasped. Our utterances by no means wait until our perception and experience have provided us with a many-sided, somehow respectable knowledge of things; they result immediately when the impulse is perceived. Instead of a thing, the sensation takes in only a sign.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 86.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, “Description of Ancient Rhetoric,” III, 23.

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The phrase the “manner in which we stand toward” things does not necessarily mean, for Nietzsche, the Kantian a priori categories of understanding. Rather, Nietzsche is simply describing the dynamism between language and human reason. However, very similar to Kant, Nietzsche maintains that the “full essence of things will never be grasped.” This is not a denial of the material world, but a recognition of the limitations of human intellect. Nietzsche is pointing out here the mediatory and, perhaps, haphazard nature of language—he says, our “utterances by no means wait until our perception and experience have provided us with a many-sided ... knowledge of things.” Nietzsche, moreover, adds that “language never expresses something completely, but displays only a characteristic which appears to be prominent ....”<sup>7</sup> This brings us back to the “hard stone” example; “hardness” does not describe the entirety of the stone. The description, “the stone is hard,” is merely metaphoric. Nietzsche explains that this process involves two metaphoric moments: “a nerve stimulus is transferred into an image: first metaphor. The image, in turn, is imitated in a sound: second metaphor.”<sup>8</sup> Our experience of things in the world is conditioned by these two metaphoric moments. Nietzsche is claiming that we do not possess knowledge of the essences of things, but, rather, we merely possess metaphors that, at best, offer indirect and incomplete descriptions of things. The hypostatization of a description—a word or a concept—results in conceptual reification, that is to say, when an “effect” (the “abstracta”) becomes more real than the “cause” (the actual physical object). For example, when “hardness” is mistakenly construed as the essence of the stone. A reversal of cause and effect. Paul de Man has an apt description of this phenomenon:

The outer, objective event in the world was supposed to determine the inner, conscious event as cause determines effect. It turns out however that what was assumed to be the objective, external cause is itself the result of an internal effect. What had been considered to be a cause, is, in fact, the effect of an effect, and what had been considered to be an effect can in its turn seem to function as the cause of its own cause.<sup>9</sup>

As such, there is no such thing as literal use of language since language, at its core, is metaphorical. Nietzsche further points out that, “that

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies,” I, 82.

<sup>9</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 107.

the original perceptual metaphors are metaphors” and take “them to be the things themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Another word for the metaphorical reversal of cause and effect is metonymy. The “stone is hard” is a metonymic statement because there is a reversal of cause (the actual stone) and effect (hardness). For Nietzsche, this is not a simple linguistic embellishment or a conscious use of style (e.g., rhetoric) on our part. Rather, metonymy is constitutive of how we conceive the material world. Nerve stimuli are neither Platonic ideas nor unbridled representations of things, but, rather, they result from our active and creative (hence, non-corresponding) reception of things. If we forget this active-creative aspect of our cognition and the metonymic-metaphoric structure of language, then we become blind to the uniqueness and particularness of experience. If we subsume particularities under the concept, then individual differences are discarded. For Nietzsche, the metonymic structure of language is the transference from the material object to the abstract concept, thereby dispensing with the particularities of the original experience. This results in the confusion of cause and effect or simply reification.

Nietzsche is pointing to us a crucial aspect of our experience of the world—its linguistic constitution. Yes, there exists an external material world, but one that we can only comprehend via the mediation of language. This mediatory experience of the world is viewed by Nietzsche as an aesthetic relationship because, as has been pointed out, it involves our active creation of concepts. Therefore, this aesthetic relation is the basis of Nietzsche’s epistemology, countering traditional representationalist epistemologies. Nietzsche’s epistemology is “world-disclosive” and “perspectival-creative.” Moreover, it is not farfetched to describe this epistemology as a form of materialist epistemology because it pays attention to the role of the body in the formation of knowledge. Hence, this aesthetic relation with the world is essentially a somatic relation. Through this materialist epistemology, Nietzsche highlights the historical dimension of human experience and how experience interplays with language and our truth drive. By disclosing what has been dissimulated in the reification of our conceptual apparatus, Nietzsche counters the traditional view that knowledge is a neutral representation of the world.

## Mimesis and the Pathogenesis of Human Reason

Adorno shares with Nietzsche a critical attitude towards language and its relation to our cognitive apparatus. For one, like Nietzsche, Adorno also begins his critical philosophy of language with a genealogical account of

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<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lies,” I, 86.

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conceptual reification which is also an occasion for the “revaluation of the language of philosophy.” Philosophy’s revaluation of its very own language becomes, for Adorno, a *conditio sine qua non* for philosophizing, that is to say, philosophy from now on is only possible, first and foremost, as self-reflexive critique. “All philosophical critique,” Adorno declares, “is today possible as the critique of language.”<sup>11</sup> This implies that philosophy, in a radical way, is a linguistic process and, hence, thinking is a linguistic process. As such, it is incumbent upon the praxis of philosophy to be a critique of itself. Moreover, since philosophy/thinking is radically linguistic, any philosophical discourse is conditioned by the normative limitations of language. Recognizing that philosophy cannot escape the limitations of language, Adorno’s declaration also implies that the self-critique of philosophy is philosophy’s self-awareness of its tendency towards conceptual reification.

Like Nietzsche, Adorno calls out traditional philosophy’s naïve assumption that words and objects are ontologically connected. This naïve assumption downplays the complexity of the language-thinking relation, simply taking for granted that philosophical ideas could be communicated straightforwardly. Adorno, disagrees with this naïve assumption, he says, “The intended communicability of philosophical language is today to be unveiled in all aspects as fraud.”<sup>12</sup> We could construe this critique of philosophy as a deconstruction of the history of Western philosophy, where traditional philosophy is “understood as a metanarrative of forgetting and, by extension, reification, insofar as philosophy has translated the ‘non-identical’ into a static, representational relation between subject and object.”<sup>13</sup> Adorno’s deconstruction of Western philosophy is reminiscent of Martin Heidegger’s own deconstruction of the history of ontology, a history marked, according to Heidegger, by the forgetfulness of the meaning of Being.<sup>14</sup> However, in contrast to Heidegger, Adorno understands the predicament of Western of philosophy from a materialist standpoint as he points out that what is being forgotten is the visceral dimension of human thinking, hence of philosophy. Adorno remarks:

Thinking as a subjective act must initially surrender  
itself to the subject matter, even when, as Kant and the  
Idealists taught, thinking constitutes or indeed even

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<sup>11</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher”, in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), thesis 9.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, thesis 5.

<sup>13</sup> Samir Gandesha, “The ‘Aesthetic Dignity of Words’: Adorno’s Philosophy of Language”, in *New German Critique*, 97 (Winter 2006), 141.

<sup>14</sup> See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 19.

produces its subject matter. Thinking still depends on the subject matter even when the concept of a subject matter is problematic and thinking alleges that it first establishes it.<sup>15</sup>

The above passage speaks about the groundedness of thinking in material reality, wherein material objects are the “subject matters” of thought. This is what Western philosophy forgets, thinking’s material groundedness in things. This is also how Adorno construes “objectivity,” as the objectivity of the material object. Interestingly enough, Adorno understands our visceral engagement with material objects as a form of “interruption” by the other of thought: “To think ... means as much as to think intermittences, to be interrupted by that which is not the thought itself.”<sup>16</sup> The material, as opposed to the transcendental, world is the ontological basis of thinking. The role of language is to mediate, as Nietzsche already pointed out, world and thought. I mentioned in my discussion of Nietzsche above, the inversion of cause and effect—the metaphysical mistake of giving priority to the effect—in Adorno, we find a reorientation back to the cause, that is, the material object. In other words, the “primacy of the object”: “There is hardly a stronger argument for the fragile primacy of the object and for its being conceivable only in the reciprocal mediation of subject and object than that thinking must snuggle up to an object, even when it does not yet have such an object, even intends to produce it.”<sup>17</sup> Adorno’s primacy of the object argument reminds us of Immanuel Kant’s main epistemological premise, “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.”<sup>18</sup> What undergirds this premise, according to Adorno, is the primacy of the object.<sup>19</sup> However, Adorno is wary of Kant’s possible psychologism because of the latter’s overemphasis on the role of human reason that tends towards a form of mentalism or idealism.<sup>20</sup> Against this psychologism, Adorno insists that, “Thinking is a mode of comportment” and “the subject matter with which it comports itself is indispensable.”<sup>21</sup>

In Adorno’s essay titled “Subject and Object,” he expounds on the relationship between the “subject” and the “object.” In this context, the thinking mind is the subject, while the object is the subject matter of the

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<sup>15</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Notes on Philosophical Thinking,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 129.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), A51/B75.

<sup>19</sup> See Adorno, “Notes on Philosophical Thinking,” 129.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

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thinking mind or material reality itself. The relationship between subject and object is dialectical, a relationship characterized by provisionality as opposed to absolute ontological conditions. Adorno highlights the tensional or aporetic relation between thinking and material reality, thereby gesturing towards the preservation of the primacy of the object. By highlighting the aporetic relation of subject and object, Adorno, in effect, is also emphasizing their inextricable relation. Human consciousness, Adorno claims, is a byproduct of the symbiotic, albeit tensional, interaction between subject and object.<sup>22</sup> Adorno also refers to this symbiotic relation as the “mimetic” relation. Mimesis is the dialectical encounter between the subject (thinking) and its other (material reality). This encounter is described in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an anthropological phenomenon: the human experience of encountering “outer nature.” It is important to note that the mimetic moment presupposes an encounter between subject and object; therefore, mimesis is neither with the subject nor with the object, but, rather, is the process of encounter itself. Through this narrative of the mimetic encounter, Adorno is effectively offering an alternative philosophical anthropology, that is to say, a genealogical account of the normative conditions for the formation of human subjectivity. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is, of course, Adorno- and Max Horkheimer’s attempt at a genealogy of human rationality which is, for them, a history of that tragically culminates in the rise of a domineering relationship with nature and its objects: how “humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.”<sup>23</sup> This could be further dramatized through at least five scenarios which basically arise from a cognitive process grounded in fear: 1) the sorcerer and the demon, 2) the myth-making hero, 3) the rationalizing libertine, 4) the deluded consumer, and 5) the furious fascist.<sup>24</sup> By telling a story about the barbaric propensity of human rationality to dominate nature, Adorno and Horkheimer indicate that the primitive mimetic encounter of early humans with nature reemerges in modern society in the form of repressive ideologies—not just fascistic ideologies (e.g., Bolshevism or Nazism), but also systems such as capitalism.

With the above, we could read the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an account of the pathogenesis of human domination which manifests today, I wish to add, in various systems of standardization (e.g., the tyranny of metrics), control (biopolitics), rabid populism, and contemporary forms of political tyranny. All these pathological conditions happening against the

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<sup>22</sup> See Theodor Adorno, “Subject and Object,” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O’Connor (MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 138-151.

<sup>23</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), xiv.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Karla L. Schultz, *Mimesis on the Move: Theodor W. Adorno’s Concept of Imitation* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1990), 15-59.

backdrop of the capitalist or neoliberal society—a society, Adorno and Horkheimer lament, “ruled by equivalence,” wherein dissimilar things are reduced “to abstract quantities.”<sup>25</sup> Society is profoundly reified, a condition rooted in the predominance of a technology of the self snafued by a pathological relation with the material world: a forgetfulness of the mimetic (somatic) origin of human reason. This forgetfulness, Adorno observes, is a form of usurpation of reason, “of something absolutely independent – which it is not; its claim of independence heralds the claim of dominance. Once radically parted from the object, the subject reduces it to its own measure; the subject swallows the object, forgetting how much it is an object itself.”<sup>26</sup> Adorno bemoans the fact that traditional philosophy—call either metaphysics or positivism—is guilty of this forgetfulness. Instead of the primacy of the object, traditional philosophy valorizes the “primacy of human reason.” Adorno insists that the only way philosophy could redeem itself is by a reevaluation of its own language. Such reevaluation, Adorno hopes, should bring philosophy to the utopian vision of “the state of distinctness without domination, with the distinct participating in each other.”<sup>27</sup> Adorno’s account of the subject-object dialectic demonstrates the occurrence of reification that results from the encounter between reason (language) and the non-identical material world.

The material (objective) world is the point of departure of Nietzsche and Adorno’s respective philosophies of language. Both philosophers reject the traditional epistemological claim that our cognitive apparatus has direct access to material reality. Rather, our cognitive link with material reality is merely mediatory, only possible through a metonymic (Nietzsche) or mimetic (Adorno) process. As such, the dynamics between worldview (subject) and world (object) is complex. Our forgetfulness of this complexity results in the reification of our cognitive apparatus, an outcome of what Adorno calls identity thinking. Reification or identity thinking is forgetful of the material-visceral foundation of human cognition, forgetful of the fact that our conceptualizations are based on our sensuous experiences.

### The Ethics of Thinking and the Recovery of Experience

The “ethics of thinking” is a “kind of thinking that is receptive to the nonidentical character of the world of human and nonhuman objects.”<sup>28</sup> It is an emphatic rejection of the reificatory character of conceptual thinking.

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<sup>25</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Adorno, “Subject and Object,” 139-140.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>28</sup> Paolo A. Bolaños, *Nietzsche and Adorno on Philosophical Praxis, Language, and Reconciliation: Towards and Ethics of Thinking* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 146.

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Roger Foster describes the overall thrust of Adorno's philosophical project as the "recovery of experience." The recovery of experience is a radical recovery from "the everyday work of habitual classification."<sup>29</sup> Foster further remarks:

... the recovery of experience must take the form of a type of process that uses the subject to 'break out' of the confinement that the role of the subject in cognition has come to resemble. Through the recovery of experience ... Adorno in fact claims to be able to reveal the truth about the constituting subject, that is, its origin in the self-constriction of the subject, which leads to the social-historical condition of disenchantment. In this way, the subject is able to come to a reflection on its own conditionedness.<sup>30</sup>

Adorno describes conceptual reification as a form of "internalized captivity" wherein "the individual is no less imprisoned in himself than in the universal, in society."<sup>31</sup> This internalized captivity is an impoverishment of experience, referred to by Adorno in *Negative Dialectics* as the "spell" of "the subjective form of the world spirit, the internal reinforcement of its primacy ... in its perversion, as impotent individualization ... the particular is dictated by the principle of perverted universality."<sup>32</sup> This is the binding spell of the primacy of subject over the object, a perverted image of the subject's separation from material nature. Adorno further laments that this separation

... threatens the life of the species as much as it disavows the spell cast over the whole, the false identity of subject and object. The universal that compresses the particular until it splinters, like a torture instrument, is working against itself, for its substance is the life of the particular; without the particular, the universal declines to an abstract, separate, eradicable form.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Foster, *The Recovery of Experience* (New York: University of New York Press, 2007), 149, 151.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Adorno, "Subject and Object," 145.

<sup>32</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1999), 244.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

This self-inwardization of subjectivity is the hostile attitude of humanity towards humanity, that is to say, “a denial of nature in the human being for the sake of mastery over extrahuman nature and over the other human beings.”<sup>34</sup> As discussed above, this is the story that Adorno and Horkheimer tell in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the story of the subterranean history of instrumental reason that began with the mimetic encounter with nature. However, the recovery of experience is not a return to our pre-mimetic state, but, rather, the renunciation of the virulent character of human reason via reason’s acknowledgment that it does not act entirely rationally every time. As Adorno points out: “The irrationality of the particularly realized *ratio* within the social totality is not extraneous to the *ratio*, not solely due to its application. Rather it is immanent to it. Measured by complete reason, the prevailing one unveils itself as being polarized and thus irrational even in itself, according to its principle.”<sup>35</sup> The irrationality of reason manifests, interestingly enough, in science, philosophy, and even politics. These are the spheres where the imperialism of reason reigns. Quite ironically, reason’s abdication from its irrationality is only possible when it begins to own its own irrationality. For Adorno, reason’s recognition of its own self-contradictoriness is the key in acknowledging the nonidentical character of things in the world; it is the recovery of experience because it discloses—albeit only metonymically or mimetically, “the utopian particular that has been buried underneath the universal.”<sup>36</sup> The disclosure of the utopian particular or acknowledging the primacy of the object is not the abandonment of reason; it is, rather, the reconciliation of reason with its material constitution, thereby making reason more robust. Adorno understands this reconciliation as the reorientation of reason back to the nonidentical givenness of the material object, but it is also the openness of the material object to concept since the “object, too, is mediated; but according to its own concept.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, the object too needs the subject because if “the object lacked the moment of subjectivity, its own objectivity would become nonsensical.”<sup>38</sup> “Cognitive utopia” is another description that Adorno uses to refer to the reconciliation of subject and object: the “use of concepts to unseal the non-conceptual with concepts, without making it their equal.”<sup>39</sup> Through cognitive utopia, the recovery of experience becomes more viable. More specifically, the recovery means giving back to the object its nonidentical integrity—a cognition via concepts sans the hypostatization of

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<sup>34</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42.

<sup>35</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 317.

<sup>36</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 318.

<sup>37</sup> Adorno, “Subject and Object,” 143.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 10.

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concepts. At this point, we could already say that the recovery of experience presupposes the mimetic conceptualization of the material world. The dynamo of experience is mimesis but, as shown above, the same dynamo could result in reification and, thus, arresting instead of empowering experience.

### **Epilogue: The Body and the Vulnerability of Philosophy**

The body is the material basis for the reconciliatory dialectic between subject and object. The creation of a worldview is only possible through the body because we are situated within the world—spatiality and temporally—via our bodies. This is also the moment when Nietzsche and Adorno converge, as they both understand that consciousness proceeds from a unity of somatic forces. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche remarks that there “could be no judgments at all if a kind of equalization were not practiced within sensations ... Before judgment occurs, the process of assimilation must already have taken place ... as pain does as a consequence of a wound.”<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Adorno maintains that “body and mind are abstractions of their experience .... All mental things are modified physical impulses ....”<sup>41</sup> Once again, both Nietzsche and Adorno reprove the idealist for neglecting the radically material origin of consciousness. As opposed to the idealist, Nietzsche and Adorno emphasize the primacy of the body (primacy of the object or the material world) over the mind. The mind is a byproduct of our dialectical encounter of the material world. Metaphysics or identity thinking separates the mind from its material origin, that is, from its bodily origin. Adorno frames this separation as a kind of alienation and, as such, as a forgetfulness of the mind’s somatic origin, it is the reason for of the mind’s “unhappiness.” Nevertheless, it is precisely this sense of alienation that becomes a reminder for the mind of the need for reconciling with its own materiality. In this sense, thinking or philosophy becomes self-reflexive. In other words, philosophy’s recognition of its very own vulnerability is key in redeeming its lost dignity. However, philosophy only remains dignified if it, indeed, becomes a constant struggle with itself, that is to say, a constant struggle with the possibility of conceptual reification.

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<sup>40</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 352.

<sup>41</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 202-203.

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