**Chapter 3: Education Ex Machina**

**I. Between Critique and Theology**

a. After Auschwitz

Critique and its relation to theology constitutes a central, albeit understudied, element in Adorno’s postwar reflections on education spanning the decade 1959-1969. Adorno regarded education, rather broadly, as the arena of human cultivation, and he developed his educational theory in a wide range of texts, as well as public and classroom lectures. His rigorous academic engagement on themes related to education and cultivation was followed with great interest by German scholars and intellectuals, which led to a series of annual public lectures and talks, broadcast mainly (but not exclusively) by the Public Radio services of Hessen. The most representative of his published works from that time is an extensive paper *Theorie der Halbbildung*, while his popular university survey courses paved the way for his *Negative* *Dialectics*.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Positioning himself, one could argue, as a public intellectual in an upstart Federal Germany, Adorno focused his attention on a central mission: “no more Auschwitz.” Thus, for Adorno, the “premier demand” on education is that Auschwitz must never happen again.[[2]](#footnote-2) Auschwitz represented for Adorno an evocative symbol for the extermination of human beings and he was clearly suggestive here of a new categorical imperative, aimed at precluding the potential for another such catastrophe. However, largely because of this overarching mission, Adorno’s lectures, talks and written compositions devoted to education “after Auschwitz” were not limited to a narrow focus on issues of teaching and learning alone, even if he certainly addressed these, for example in his radio talks (particularly with reference to the education of young children).[[3]](#footnote-3) It would also be wrong to claim that Adorno’s thinking was confined within the framework of education as an academic discipline, or as a profession; nor did he wish to develop a new comprehensive theory of pedagogical practice, didactics, or teaching methods, although his talks on education certainly related to such concerns. Rather, in his postwar thinking Adorno was especially interested in the context of the cultivation of critical thinking, and he openly addressed questions aimed at understanding the conditions that made Auschwitz possible, in order to prevent these “conditions”[[4]](#footnote-4) from ever emerging again. In his varied engagement with education (as a cultural theme, in his popular public lectures, or in the classroom) a “radical Adorno” – to use Russel Berman’s words – is at work, one who presents some of his most intimate and fundamental standpoints on history, society, and politics.

The vicissitudes of critique in its relation to theology, from antiquity to modernity, provided Adorno with a leitmotiv for these different discussions. The centrality of this topic is conveyed rather explicitly in the content of the previously mentioned survey courses that Adorno offered. From its Greek origins, critique, Adorno openly argues, is the essence of metaphysical inquiry dedicated to “the teaching of the good life” (*Die Lehre vom richtigen Leben*).[[5]](#footnote-5) In his view, this should be the main priority of education. Adorno presents his students with two clear lines of argumentation that highlight the link between critique devoted to such “teaching” and its theological sources. The first main point that Adorno makes relates to the definition of metaphysics. He defines metaphysics as a “critical practice”, denoting “the form of philosophy which takes concepts as its objects.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Critique then becomes an instrument of reason that may clarify concepts, including their scope of validity, while testing their content and limits. It is in this sense that Kant, for example, spoke of a quest for metaphysics that “cleans” a territory from former errors. But Adorno connects such an understanding of critique with the original quest of Greek philosophy for “the first principles and causes” which Kant dismissed.[[7]](#footnote-7) Therefore, for Adorno, metaphysics represents not just a critical examination of concepts, but an analysis that assigns them “to a higher order of being.”[[8]](#footnote-8) This critical quest for that which “transcends life” is, in Adorno’s interpretation, the hub of metaphysics.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Theology thus provides metaphysical (i.e. critical) inquiry with a foundation. This is the second point that Adorno accentuates. Theology, he argues, is a “mythical” way of thinking about the beginning of being (as a first cause of all things) in terms of mythology – the gods who transcend life and offer a “higher order of being.” The search for the “first principles and causes” that can be applied in conducting a “good life” and assigned to a “higher” order was originally a central feature of thinking about God, or else theology. In its critical dedication to the same issues, however, metaphysics took over such theological thinking. It substituted theological explanations with a critical investigation provided by human reason alone. Yet, the point to note is that for Adorno, this means that critique relates to its theological precursor in a unique way which he terms “secularization”:

It is undeniable that metaphysics itself is a phenomenon of the secularization of mythical and magical thinking, so that it is not so absolutely detached from superstitious ideas as it understands itself to be, and as it has presented itself in the history of philosophy.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The notion of a type of “secularization” that is not “absolutely detached” from its theological sources is paramount here.[[11]](#footnote-11) It denotes the intricacy dominating the relation between critical and “mythical” thinking. On the one hand, secularization is about scrutinizing being by means of reason, rather than through belief in the myth of divine creation – a disenchantment of the world, as it were. On the other hand, in being “not so absolutely detached” from mythical explanation, it still resonates with its theological forerunner and, as far as explaining the meaning of being is concerned, its adversary. Secularization, Adorno adds, is also a “translation” of theology rather than its full rejection:

It could be therefore said that metaphysics is a translation of theological conceptions into categories of reason, that it is a conceptualization of those conceptions.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Critique therefore means a “translation”, or else a reconceptualization of theological conceptions[[13]](#footnote-13) Translation in this case entails a transmutation of the theological substance. As in Benjamin’s early writings, there is a certain original meaning – which Benjamin articulated in terms of a “pure” substance, an “ash”, or residue – that the translation releases from its former appearance. This reflects on what Benjamin would later term “the task of the translator.” For Adorno, this task attests to the fact that theological “conceptions” are not dismissed by metaphysics but are rather reframed through their reconceptualization.

Critique in this specific sense can be traced back to its theological origins even if in a compound manner. But Adorno goes even further and argues that critique is not only a reformulation of theology. It is specifically designed to rescue theology:

Metaphysics in the precise sense I have set out here is both a critique and a reprise, a resumption, of theology. It is a peculiarity of metaphysical thinking, [….], that the conceptual operations it performs, which aim initially at something like a critique of mythological beings, repeatedly end in reinstating these mythical beings, or the divinity; but it no longer does so in a belief in the direct experience of the sensible perceptibility or the substantial existence of the divinities or divinity, but *on the basis of conceptual thought*.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Furthermore:

What I said earlier about the rescuing intention which accompanies the critical aim of all metaphysics now takes on its precise meaning, which is quite simply that metaphysics attempts to rescue through concepts what it simultaneously calls into question through its critique.[[15]](#footnote-15)

From this perspective, critique is not only about replacing theological thinking with categories of reason. It is also about “rescuing” theological concepts that are replaced by critical terminology. Metaphysics as a form of critique carries out a double mission of working against and, in so doing, holding onto the same object – that is, theology. This double mission is represented by “the unity of a critical and a rescuing intention.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Such a unity is maintained because the “conceptualization” of theological “conceptions” must still uphold their original meanings.

The reference to critique as a conception of theological concepts seems to be the decisive point in Adorno’s teachings. It denotes an arena of thinking in which theology is not refuted but rather rethought. To rethink an object of reference, by means of critique, indicates for Adorno that the object of this rethinking endures. The crux of the matter is the idea that any reconsideration of theological conceptions works only by means of disbelief in these concepts. Put differently, critique preserves theology by working against it.[[17]](#footnote-17) This is a rather clear dialectic articulation of the relation between critique and theology, in which critique represents both the end and the recovery of theology. In critique, theological conceptions are held by means of their dismissal.

Even if the argument that Adorno makes refers to the Greek origins of critique, it is clear, at least in the context of his own teaching, that what is at stake for him are the modern political implications. Arguably, Adorno’s lectures were engaged with one burning question: Whether and in what way it could be possible to save the teaching of metaphysics in the face of “Auschwitz”. The Holocaust changed the concept of metaphysics “to its innermost core” and made “the presence of a positive meaning or purpose in being” clearly “impossible.”[[18]](#footnote-18) This exact mission was later reflected in his *Negative* *Dialectics*. “The intention of saving metaphysics” wrote Adorno to Scholem “is in fact the central point of ‘Negative Dialectics.’”[[19]](#footnote-19) What clearly interested Adorno was to bring his discussion of critique to bear on contemporary social and political questions. Adorno, it seems, was drawn to the theological origins of metaphysics in the light of the educational implications of its possible end. The “civilizational break”, to cite Dan Diner, represented by “Auschwitz”, conditioned Adorno’s quest for the theological roots of critique.[[20]](#footnote-20) In this sense, he wanted to reconstruct a history of metaphysics from antiquity to modernity (motivated, inversely, by looking from modernity back to antiquity) in order to show his students what a “demand for a new beginning” meant at that time in Germany.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Adorno’s call for a “democratic pedagogy” further illustrates this last point. The importance of this call is that it constituted a central element in his public lectures on “critique.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Here, Adorno makes connections between the decline of critique (that is, a “secular” resuming of theology) and the collapse of Greek democracy. But the waning of critique that Adorno speaks of also explicitly and even more strongly relates to the collapse of modern democracy because it enabled the “delusional mania of nationalism” that “possessed the nation.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Clearly, in referring to such “mania” Adorno has in mind the modern political experience of his country. Athens was an allusion to Weimar. Adorno’s pedagogic call for “democratic” education is thus mainly designed to bring about an awareness of and resistance to the modern social and political conditions that he associates with a retreat from critique. Critique and resistance to the modern political setting are thus inextricably linked and it is because of the recent delusion of “nationalism” that critique is, for Adorno, “essential to all democracy.”[[24]](#footnote-24) Not surprisingly, then, Adorno teaches his students that metaphysics is “something fundamentally *modern.*”[[25]](#footnote-25) From such a perspective, the idea of “working through the past” (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*), a central educational theme for Adorno, receives particular attention. It refers not only to an urgent call for pedagogy to engage with recent historical events, but also and perhaps more profoundly to the need to understand the strong ties between critique, as an instrument of “rescuing” theology, and democracy.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The concept of critique acquires an additional meaning here. Critique does not only mean an ordering of concepts, nor is it limited to the resumption of theology. It also mediates theology and what Adorno calls, in passing, “the world in which we exist.”[[27]](#footnote-27) As in the case of Freud’s analysis of jokes, and Benjamin’s concept of youth, such a focus on “the world” refers to the social and political context to which we are subjugated and to which critique relates.

The manner in which critique corresponds to the liberation of human beings from the “enslaving” social mechanism of domination and control will be examined in the next section of this chapter. Here, however, I shall underline the fact that our critical concepts that relate to the political sphere are clearly based on former theological ones. The idea that our political categories are “secularized theological concepts” constitutes the hub of Carl Schmitt’s notion of “political theology.”[[28]](#footnote-28) The claim also seems to be relevant to Adorno’s teachings which associate critique as a “secularization” of theology with politics. In view of Adorno’s critical focus on “the world”, we are dealing, then, with a political theology of sorts. Yet the dissimilarity between Schmitt and Adorno is noticeable. The former, for example, dismisses latter’s strong emphasis on the power of the sovereign. Mitigated through critique, Adorno’s political theology promotes resistance to political conditions, including resistance among those who are by any form of authority and control. This point seems to me to have been decisive in Adorno’s repudiation of Schmitt’s legal theory. The “political theological predicament” (a concept that relates to the diagnosis of the relation between politics and theology as much as to its reconstruction) is clearly central to Adorno, too, but acquires, it seems, a new guise.[[29]](#footnote-29) In Schmitt’s theory what defines the sovereign is the capacity to declare a “state of exception” (*Ausnahmezustand*) and this capacity to “decide” exists because it remains analogous to the domain of divine authority. In Adorno’s concept of critique, however, there is an opposite, perhaps intentionally opposing political-theological image of resistance to the overwhelming power of the sovereign. As in Schmitt’s political theology, political categories were formerly theological, but they do not indicate the “decisionism” of the potentate, but rather its negation. Christoph Schmidt, for example, pointed out that the emphasis on such a theological conceptualization of resistance to political circumstances uncovers its reliance on biblical images of exodus and deliverance from “slavery.”[[30]](#footnote-30) It is, to follow Schmidt, not the power of the sovereign, but rather the freedom from such power that indicates what a “state of exception” may have meant for Adorno.

b. A Critique of Theology

Is it not possible to argue that a critique of theology is being put forward here? As in Benjamin’s modern mysticism, and Freud’s recourse to the “law”, composed in the first decades of the twentieth century, a critique of theology denotes in this case a concept of critique that is starkly dependent on theology. Adorno did not teach critical thinking as something that comes from outside of theology, but as a reconceptualization of theological concepts. Arguably, then, with the “secular” emphasis of critique, theology loses neither its sway nor its centrality. As a form of analysis that saves theology, and a political category, critique emerges from former theological concepts and can be traced back to them. Critique of theology is also, in this sense, a form of immanent critique because it points to a redeployment (rather than a dismissal) of theological constellations.

  Critique of theology thus indicates a dialectical relationship between theology and its critical adversary and successor, in which the latter holds up the former by overriding it. This point seems to be important because it is in this particular sense that one may speak of the ways in which religious modes of critique power critique’s secular distancing from religion. The critical endeavor is designed to replace theology as a precondition of its maintenance and theology is thus held onto only in terms of its critical surrogate that relates concurrently to conceptual thinking and to society and politics (i.e. the “world in which we live”). And vice versa: critique addresses these issues by secularizing, and therefore translating, theological concepts. The mission of rescuing theology, which Adorno ascribes to metaphysics, is a critical-theological undertaking of this kind. And the question he poses as to the extent to which one may still hold onto metaphysics in the postwar era, attests to his endeavor to salvage theology by means of a return to the teaching of critique. If anything, the postwar, social, and political context to which Adorno relates only emphasizes the need to re-engage with what could be referred to as a critical theological predicament – regarding not only the analysis of the relation between critique and theology but also its reconstruction.

History provides Adorno with the central arena for such analysis and reconstruction.[[31]](#footnote-31) We have seen, for example, how in his classroom lectures the relation of critique to theology is revealed in the course of history from antiquity to modernity. Adorno was particularly concerned with the description of a historical process, from “Aristotle’s theology” to Christian cosmology, and Hegel’s philosophy.[[32]](#footnote-32) The centrality of Hegel’s philosophy to such an overarching, and for Adorno “universal” (even if clearly Eurocentric), process will be discussed next. Here, I wish to point to the manner in which not only theology in general but also gnostic theology in particular marks a central aspect in Adorno’s classroom presentation of the historical unfolding of critical thinking.

Gnosis is the main theological issue because Adorno starts his historical overview with theological dualism. Dualism for Adorno originates in Aristotle’s clearly theological concept of “unmoved mover,” which marks a glaring opposition between being and beings (i.e. the so-called ontological difference). This points to being as a “pure concept” of thought and as an “absolutely perfect entity” which is separate from all beings (or else it would not have been an “unmoved” and “perfect” origin of things). Such an idea was redolent of theology because it was not only about a “radical dualism of matter and form, the divine and the earthly, body and soul”, but also represented “the ancient precursor of the ontological proof of God.”[[33]](#footnote-33)

Indeed, Christianity inherited from Aristotle’s metaphysics this theological dualism in which being “resists identity” with beings. “Resistance” means an innate non-identity between form and matter, God and the world.[[34]](#footnote-34) Thus:

What you have here is, fundamentally, the later problem of Christian theology: why the world created by God is not a divine world, why it is not already perfect. This, too, is answered in accordance with the same dualistic principle, which states that creation opposes, or in some way resists, pure identity with the creator.[[35]](#footnote-35)

By means of its emphasis on dualism, Aristotle’s secularization of theology (i.e. his critical thinking) informs, perhaps ironically, Christian theology. But the point that Adorno makes here is that Christianity is consumed by the unequivocal opposition between a benevolent god and its counterpart, an evil world. Christianity, it seems, does not fully dismiss its secular, critical forerunner, in much the same way as Aristotle’s metaphysics did not fully dismiss its own theological precursor. It thus continues to engage with a theological problem that is dominant in the construction of critical thinking.

Yet why associate such dualism with gnosticism? The reference to gnosis, I suggest, is pertinent not only because it was relevant, for example, to Benjamin (as described in chapter 2), but also and especially in the light of the increasing interest in gnostic theology in intellectual discussions in Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.[[36]](#footnote-36) In these discussions gnostic theology stood for a radical distinction (i.e. dualism) between a completely transcendent (other, alienated, true) God and the world.[[37]](#footnote-37) This is a perspective that encloses the hidden character of the true “absolutely other” God, who is conceptualized as removed from a world governed by other forces. Gnosis, to put it bluntly, is the theology of dualism.

This dualistic theology was addressed in the writings of scholars like Hans Blumenberg, Eric Voegelin, Jacob Taubes, Ernst Bloch, Hans Jonas and Gerschom Scholem in the decades that followed the Second World War (the last two already began taking an interest in gnosis in the 1920s and 1930s). In a variety of ways, at times contradicting, these scholars integrated gnosis into their different historical descriptions and, not less importantly, social and political imaginaries. This array of references was directed less at questions relating to the existence of a dualistic or Manichean faith in antiquity (e.g. What constituted such faith? Who were its agents? When and where did it proliferate?). The focus was rather on the symbolic significance of gnosis for an analysis of modern society and politics.

Voegelin’s “revolt against modernity”, for example, was based on his move to identify gnostic heresy with all modern social and political ideologies.[[38]](#footnote-38) For Voegelin, the common denominator of all modern political phenomena – without differentiating, for example, between liberalism and communism – is that they are gnostic. His critique of modernity relied on this supposition which pointed not only to a connection between gnostic theology and modernity but also, more profoundly, to an identity between them. At the same time, Jonas critically reconsidered his own early enthusiasm for gnosis (beginning in the 1920s) and connected it with Heidegger’s philosophy.[[39]](#footnote-39) In a rather convoluted way, Jonas wished to highlight the gnostic characteristic of his former mentor’s existentialism, which made it even more susceptible to “the absolute pit” of nihilism than its theological portent.[[40]](#footnote-40) Unlike gnosticism, which classifies the world as evil, Heidegger’s existentialism goes even further and empties the world of all meaning (whether good or evil). To overcome gnosticism, Jonas argued, meant to combat such nihilistic existential theology and to do so by rethinking the relation between God and the world. In the 1960s, Hans Blumenberg’s *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, picked up these different engagements with gnosis. Underlining, however, modernity as a successful attempt to “overcome” gnosis, Blumenberg presented an explicit retort to Voegelin’s association between modernity and gnostic theology.[[41]](#footnote-41) For Blumenberg, gnostic theology appears and reappears in the course of history as an upshot of failed attempts to explain the endurance of evil. One falls back on dualism when all other possible theological explanations for the coexistence of evil and good are rendered invalid. However, modernity breaks loose from this theological inheritance by introducing “the immanent self-assertion of reason through the mastery and alteration of reality.”[[42]](#footnote-42) In the light of human “self-assertion” any imagined dichotomy between the world and God is meaningless. By overcoming gnostic dualism, modernity is in such a way “defended” and to some extent celebrated because it presents a final, perhaps redemptive, liberation from all former theologies of redemption.

Similar overarching reflections on gnosticism, the course of history, and the meaning of modernity are visible in Ernst Bloch’s utopian imagination (which he associated with “revolutionary gnosis”), Jacob Taubes’ critique of modern political theology, and Gershom Scholem’s writings on Jewish modernity from the 1960s.[[43]](#footnote-43) Scholem’s scholarship is a particular case in point because the concept of gnosis was central to his ongoing studies of Jewish messianism and in particular Sebastianism. For instance, as early as 1937, in his celebrated “Redemption through Sin” he underlined the strong association between the sabbatical heresy and gnostic theology.[[44]](#footnote-44) This association was then central to Scholem’s ongoing studies of Jewish mysticism, which always incorporated a reference to a dualist theological speculation that necessarily accompanies the mystical notion of an “alien” God, not of this world.

Adorno was, no doubt, familiar with this wide scholarly context, elaborated in brief above. In one of his early letters to Scholem, he confessed his interest in what ties together gnosis, Jewish mysticism, and the modern works of Kierkegaard, Benjamin, and Kafka.[[45]](#footnote-45) His critique of theology, especially in its anchorage in the history of dualism, may thus be suggested as his own way into the discussion. In Adorno’s critique of theology, the historical process is described in terms of the separation between God and the world, proceeding from its Greek theological and metaphysical origins to Christian theology, and continuing into modernity. Such a dualistic world view represents in particular the “problem” that was transmuted from Christianity into modern forms of critical investigation. Put differently, the history of critique, in its dependence on theology, is marked mainly by the relation between critique and gnosis. Modernity, especially, inherited ontological dualism from Christianity and, not a far cry from Blumenberg’s thesis, is characterized, according to Adorno, by endeavors to overcome this gnostic inheritance.

These endeavors culminate in Hegel’s idea of progress (*Fortschritt*). We are returning here to the centrality of Hegel’s philosophy in Adorno’s lectures. For Adorno, Hegel’s idea of progress marks an attempt to overcome gnostic dualism because it points to a historical process which ends in “oneness”, identity, or unity (*Einheit*) of the divine spirit with the world. This unity between God and the world denies a stark separation between the two and is achieved by the progressive process of systematic negations and the negations of these negations, whose summative result is the identification of all negations with a positive, final, one may say all too final, redemptive confirmation.[[46]](#footnote-46)

To some extent, what Adorno presents here is a philosophical reconceptualization of the Christian theological struggle against Judaism, central to Hegel’s *The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*.[[47]](#footnote-47) Hegel’s “progress” is in such a way considered an upshot of his understanding of Christian eschatology.[[48]](#footnote-48) Here Adorno seems to simply reiterate Karl Loewith’s thesis that all modern categories – and specifically Hegel’s philosophy – are reformulations, and thus secularization, of Christian eschatological notions, although Adorno is not sedulous in disclosing this source.[[49]](#footnote-49) Modernity for Adorno “is still linked to redemption by Christ, as the historically successful redemption.” The theological concept of redemption, however, is translated into “an immanent teleology and the conception of humanity as the subject of all progress.” Hegel’s progress, then, means that the advent of the divine spirit is achieved in the world through a worldly process and it culminates in a final identification, or else redemptive oneness, of this spirit with the world.[[50]](#footnote-50) Because of the unity between God and the world, metaphysics slips “into material existence” which means that it offers a critique in which the essence of being is not separated from beings, but rather absorbed into their worldly existence.[[51]](#footnote-51)

In Hegel’s dialectics, one may argue, the problem of gnostic dualism is resolved because unity (or identity) elevates gnostic conflicts (i.e. non-identity between God/world, matter/form, object/thought) to a higher “positive” unity of all conflicts within this worldliness. But the final unity of matter and spirit, world and God, history and eternity, cosmology and soteriology, not only presents a modern solution to old theological problems. It also stands for a new and, for Adorno, far more precarious predicament: if transcendence is transformed to indicate an immanent, historical process, this process “receives the aura of redemption even though redemption failed to occur and evil persisted unabated.”[[52]](#footnote-52) The problem that Adorno identifies stems from the fact that in modern Hegelian critique “Christian soteriology – in other words, the science of salvation, the doctrine of salvation” is “completely absorbed into the *civitas terrena,* its Augustinian counterpart.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

In *Minima Moralia* Adorno clearly points out that such an association between soteriology and cosmology means no more than to “justify the diabolical positive, naked interest.”[[54]](#footnote-54) What makes such a process “diabolic” is that dualism is replaced with oneness, thus clinging onto a “religious authoritarian pathos without the least religious content.”[[55]](#footnote-55) The theme reappears, therefore, as educational content. Much like Aristotle’s metaphysics, Hegel’s dialectics is endowed with a secular shift from the divine to the worldly in a way that also preserves the original theological connotations. In both cases, a theological argument is refuted, and held onto concurrently by critique – a structure that attests to the continuing presence of theology at the heart of all critical endeavors. Adorno then concludes that dialectics takes over metaphysics:

One of the mystical impulses secularized in [Hegel’s] dialectics was the doctrine that the intermundane and historic is relevant to what traditional metaphysics distinguished as transcendence – or at least, less gnostically and radically put, that it is relevant to the position taken by human consciousness on the questions which the canon of philosophy assigned to metaphysics.[[56]](#footnote-56)

What the canon of philosophy “assigned to metaphysics” was the original theological argumentation concerning a transcendent being, absorbed, in Hegel’s secular scheme, into the “universal” historical process. This process of secularization, however, has the effect of diluting transcendence. As a result, there is a difference between modern and ancient critique. Only the modern critical approach identifies being with beings, history with salvation, and critique with an adaptation to existing conditions. Critique, arguably, becomes enslaved to the existing social and historical circumstances. Furthermore, modern critical thinking does not fulfill its calling to “rescue” theology, but instead attenuates it by representing a worldly and immanent process as if it were divine and transcendent.

In this way Hegel’s dialectic ends not with the “freedom” of subjectivity but rather with its absolute enslavement to a new form of total domination and control.[[57]](#footnote-57) Under such new circumstances, historical events:

work themselves out at the expense of human beings, human beings are their victims, history stretches its hand out over all human beings.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Adorno then goes on to describe the total “entrapment” of the human being.[[59]](#footnote-59) A complete “adaptation” to reality with no possibility of escape, entrapment is the result of a mechanism of total domination and control, which Hegel’s theology of “unity” stands for.[[60]](#footnote-60) This conclusion brings Hegel closer, perhaps, to Spinoza’s pantheistic identification of God with natural necessity and the consequent exclusion of transcendence. But the point that Adorno seems to make is that “entrapment” still culminates in “oneness”, “identity”, and “unity” – the focus of all eschatological anticipation. It does so, however, because it is merely a material process (i.e. social and historical) with no reference to any divine or transcendent sphere. In the same vein, history still maintains the ideal of unanimity of thought and matter, subjectivity and external conditions, freedom and law that characterizes the continuing relation between critique and theology. This, however, becomes devoid of any notion of the eternal, transcendent, and divine, at least in the sense that the historical operation encloses its inner rationale within itself and for itself. It becomes a *modus ponens* of sorts – a process that affirms itself by the very operation of its own mechanism. One may argue, then, that Adorno’s critique of theology portrays here an image of an all-consuming mechanism in which deliverance is reformed as the bare technical reason of a worldly apparatus.

**II.****Entrapment and Education**

a. From *Bildung* to *Halbbildung*

The “entrapment” of critique, following the dilution of theology, is especially visible in the context of modern education.[[61]](#footnote-61) The fact that the cultivation of human beings provides a central arena for thinking about the theological roots of critique and their modern implications is particularly underlined in Adorno’s extensive essay, *Theorie der Halbbildung,* which (given the rich meaning of the term *Bildung*) may be translated as a Theory of Pseudo-Culture and as a Theory of Pseudo-Education.[[62]](#footnote-62) The paper’s reference to education is obvious since *Bildung* represents for Adorno the educational ideal of the Enlightenment, denoting the self-formation of an individual who practices universal rationality and makes autonomous decisions.[[63]](#footnote-63) In the tradition of the Enlightenment, the development of such a critical individual is accomplished by means of “self-formation” (*Bildung*) whereby the individual’s inner capacities advance towards a “complete and consistent whole.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Especially in the light of Humboldt’s dominant view, self-formation indicates the inner progression of free individuals towards a better understanding of themselves, fulfillment, and self-growth, which, as Bauer rightly argued, was considered to be a characteristic of human beings that may eschew any direct social control.[[65]](#footnote-65) Critical thinking is thus entwined with freedom from social circumstances because the cultivation of the “self” is not supposed to yield to external guidance but is rather directed “by each individual of himself and his own free will, according to the measures of his wants and instincts, and restricted only by the limits of his powers and his rights.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

This rather traditional view of *Bildung* was a generational truism. Steven Aschheim, for example, has pointed out that among twentieth-century German intellectuals there were those who reproached *Bildung,* thus “abandoning” the rational, universalist ideals inherited from the Enlightenment.[[67]](#footnote-67) This is also true of Adorno. For him, *Bildung* denoted what Fritz Ringer called the “ideological position” of the German “*Bildungsbürgertum”* – endowing their emerging liberal ethics and idea of “progress” with a foundation.[[68]](#footnote-68) In such a way, *Bildung* referred to education, to culture, and to an ideology at the center of which lay an idea of progress, absorbed into the development of each individual. As an educational ideal it also represented the cornerstone of class identity“of the educated middle classes under the circumstances of political impotence”, thus connecting the ideals of the enlightenment, i.e. liberal ethics, with concrete social and political aims.[[69]](#footnote-69)

However, Adorno sought to develop the particular theological aspects that Benjamin ascribed to *Bildung*. Theology is central here because for Adorno self-formation secularizes the concept ofthe godlikeness of man (*imago-dei)* found in Christian theology.[[70]](#footnote-70) This notion of secularization is decisive. It underlines the manner in which education epitomizes the history of critique discussed above. Arguably, we are presented with a stage on which theological ideas are translated into rational categories of critique – replacing, but in so doing rescuing, these ideas. Aimed at the refinement of a rational, autonomous individual, *Bildung* comes to represent the overall idea of progress by means of self-fulfillment, designating self-perfection.[[71]](#footnote-71) This overall mission of progress towards the “good life” carries with it a secularized version of human creation according to the image of God, with all its redemptive overtones. These overtones are connected to what Gotthold Ephraim Lessing labelled “revelation coming to the individual man”, which Adorno understood as a process in which theological notions are central because they are invested in the formation of an ideal type of rational, autonomous, critical human being.[[72]](#footnote-72) From this perspective, the secularization of revelation contained within the concept of *Bildung* offers a reconceptualization of theological concepts.

Yet, while the cultivation of humanity provides Adorno with the forum for discussing the relation of critique to theology, it also becomes the locus of its entrapment, when *Bildung* is transformed into “a socialized pseudo-education (*Halbbildung*), the ubiquity of the alienated spirit.”[[73]](#footnote-73) For Adorno the transformation of an educational ideal means “regression” (*Rückbildung*), a term that indicates a shift from self-formation that critically resists social dominance to self-formation that is absorbed by such a controlling influence. What enables regression is the “spiritualization” (“*Vegeistlichung*”) of self-formation.[[74]](#footnote-74) As in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the spiritualization that Adorno evokes does not refer to the making of a concrete substance that is more abstract or removed from the world, but rather to the loss of the original theological horizon of critique.[[75]](#footnote-75) Following such a process, social and political reality – “the world in which we exist” – absorbs the theological hopes for redemption invested in human self-formation. In this way, “the dream of associating critique with freedom from the dictate of means (*Mittel*), from obdurate and sterile utility, is falsified into an apology for the world guided by the same dictate.”[[76]](#footnote-76) An entrapping education, somewhat cunningly, replaces an original theological mission by means of its falsification.

This last point seems to be crucial. An unctuous pseudo-education (*Halbbildung*) represents for Adorno an emblem for the “entrapment” that was central to his discussion of the relation between critique and theology in his lectures. What was imagined as a site of “freedom” and “autonomy,” because it was still saturated in theology (even if by working against it), is distorted in such a way that it comes to represent a call for adaptation to social structures and heteronomy.[[77]](#footnote-77)

The prefix “pseudo” points to such a distortion and corresponds to an educational surrender to what Horkheimer categorized as “enslaving circumstances.”[[78]](#footnote-78) The image that was relevant to Benjamin’s social critique reappears in Adorno’s reflections on education. This means that pseudo-education does not just refer to the reduction of education to mere practical, narrow knowledge, although this is certainly a characteristic. More importantly, it signifies that education is replaced by a devious doppelganger (i.e. pseudo-education) which does not imply that people are uneducated but that they “hypostatize limited knowledge as truth” and equate limited schooling with personal growth.[[79]](#footnote-79) Deceitful education does not leave people uncultivated as such, but rather entraps them in a mendacious reality.

In the spirit of today one may call this, perhaps, fake education. A fake educational ideal stands for a type of cultivation that reduces humans to controllable things. Bearing this particular argument in mind, Adorno’s assertion that “pseudo-education made the secret kingdom into an everything” means more than just making hidden truths “available to all.”[[80]](#footnote-80) It implies (with Benjamin’s “Kingdom of God” in mind) that a theological imagination referring to the divine, clandestine “kingdom” is absorbed by its opposite reified, worldly, fully material, and for Adorno technological, polity. Material reality substitutes the divine, and practical knowledge presents itself as if it were critical reflection. The crux of the matter lies not in replacing one ideal of critical education with a different one. More accurately, it is about the corruption of a critical theological educational mission that is turned into its opposite because of mechanisms that were already embedded within this mission.

In the light of this, we may understand some of Adorno’s prevalent concepts such as “reified consciousness” and “coldness.” Discussed especially in his lectures on education, reified consciousness – a concept that Adorno adopts from Lukacs – characterizes a person who is fully absorbed into existing conditions.[[81]](#footnote-81) As Brian O’Conner has noted, “by reification Adorno means the perception of what is qualitative as quantitative.”[[82]](#footnote-82) It is where the human being is reduced to an entity “with certain socially useful capacities.” This is also where there is no “sphere of life” that is independent of “the requirements of society.”[[83]](#footnote-83) “Coldness”, in the same spirit, encompasses an aspect of reification because a person who is absorbed by “what happens to be the case” is also indifferent to others, or else “cold.”[[84]](#footnote-84) In both cases, however, the argument that Adorno wishes to make is not restricted to human submission but more profoundly extends to the effects of fake education. We are dealing, then, with the different outcomes of the transformation of a theological imagination into its opposite. An important consequence is that the original mission of critique (a mission anchored in theology) is rendered hollow.

Adorno less frequently, but no less significantly, refers to a “short circuit in permanence” (“*Kurzschluß in Permanenz*”).[[85]](#footnote-85) This unique image captures for Adorno the transformation of the critical theological ideal of *Bildung* into its replicon, which is characterized by a total submission to worldly conditions. In chapter one, we saw how Freud used the concept of “short circuit” to indicate a complicated relation between the law (broadly understood) and its forms of transgression in which a law that turns against itself simultaneously enables its own persistence. Falsifications, in particular, were for Freud a mechanism that supported such an operation. Adorno seems to work along similar lines of argumentation because he takes the concept of a “short circuit” to signify the manner in which in pseudo-education the divine is transformed and thus turned against itself. But, a clear difference between the two approaches can be observed. In Freud’s theory of jokes, short circuits stand for antinomies that enable, nonetheless, the persistence of “the law by which we live” and which Freud therefore endorses. For Adorno, conversely, such a law seems to lose its immediate positive connotation. It represents a complete subordination to the “world in which we exist,” which denotes a clear, and one may say, final distortion of its theological origins. Adorno does not address this end result in terms of the victory of untamed impulses, non-rational desires or suppressed wishes, as Freud’s theory of jokes indicates, but rather in terms of the opposite triumph of rationality over such impulses. One could say that the law at stake is now rethought and redefined as an industrial, arguably technological, logic, with no possibility of transgression. Such a conclusion may demonstrate not that antinomian moments of defiance and relief win the day, but rather, conversely, that they are fully lost.

b. Moloch

I would like to zoom in at this point, albeit briefly, on the entanglement of entrapment, reification, and technology that Adorno’s discussion of education brings to the fore. It is clear that Adorno’s critique of theology brings together these notions, and it is valuable to unpack some of their central implications for education. Even if this rich symbolism was addressed in Adorno’s lectures and written compositions in the 1960s, I find the Weimarian image of a “Moloch” – depicted melodramatically, for example, in Thea von Harbou’s and Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* – a fruitful way to encapsulate rather elegantly the association of this array of different notions and of their theological connotations.[[86]](#footnote-86) The “strength of an image,” to evoke Adorno’s own conceptualization, can capture the philosopher’s pedagogic constellations.[[87]](#footnote-87)

The term “Moloch” refers to the biblical Canaanite god, associated with human, especially child, sacrifice. In the German intellectual milieu of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the terms “Moloch” and “molochitisch” were typically used as allegories of destruction and annihilation. For instance, for members of the “George Circle” they signified the main characteristics of a repressive modern culture that represented the “sworn enemy” of life. Ludwig Klages’ blatant anti-Semitism was a case in point, because he associated this metaphysical foe of life with the Jewish God of creation.[[88]](#footnote-88)

For the viewers of *Metropolis,* however, Moloch was developed to represent a modern, all-embracing machine-god that demands human sacrifice; a human-made principle of reality that consumes the human being within the very framework of modern society and its cruel demands. When the protagonist of the film, Freder Fredersen, cries out “Moloch” he envisions, for a brief, elusive moment, the machine-god as the essence of an industrial society whose fruits he was born to rather insouciantly enjoy at the brutal expense of others. Moloch, to put it bluntly, controls and consumes all aspects of life. There is, therefore, a clear association between technology and theology, at the center of which lies a human-made enemy of the humane: an idol of self-sacrifice.

This image seems to resonate rather well with the interweaving of entrapment, reification, and technology that Adorno’s critique of theology highlights. This is not to argue that Adorno had seen *Metropolis* or that he had been influenced by it. But at the heart of Adorno’s symbolism lies, it seems, an analogous dramatic association between theology and technology, encapsulated by the image of Moloch: an association between a divine and an all-embracing worldly mechanism that operates with its own sacrificial logic and rationale, where human beings are but victims. This is, arguably, what Adorno means when he points to the transformation of transcendence into an immanent universal and mechanical, consuming reality with no possibility of escaping its domination and control, even if Adorno predominantly has in mind the secularization of Christian theology rather than the notion of a pagan deity.

The association between a theological argument and mechanical imagery is one of the main points to note here. What specifically entraps critique is a mechanism of worldly domination that enslaves humanity with its sacrificial logic. Freud’s civilizational “discontents” in which “civilization itself produces anti-civilization and increasingly reinforces it” may come to mind.[[89]](#footnote-89) But for Adorno this “discontent” mainly means a sadistic “pleasure machine” and, thus, a form of “torture” in which any resistance to the “adaptation of people to collectives” is futile.[[90]](#footnote-90) Gerschom Scholem’s critical remark that Adorno’s concept of history acts as a “deus ex machine” seems to present the case rather fittingly. In Adorno’s postwar thought, Scholem finds a Hegelian notion of an organizing “totality” that binds everything to its logic, although such a mechanism does not resolve the tragic plot but rather embodies it.[[91]](#footnote-91)

Is it possible to argue that Adorno is reacting to Kant’s statement that the human being is “more than a machine” (*mehr als eine Machine*)?[[92]](#footnote-92) Kant’s somewhat hopeful avowal closes his famous “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment,” central to which was the notion of a human “release” (*Ausgang*) from self-imposed tutelage. In this closing passage, Kant seems to think that both human freedom and human “dignity” depend on the separation between human and machine. Critique is a central element of this imagery because it represents the main capacity of the human being to act as a rational, autonomous, and self-dependent free agent. From this point of view, the problem that Adorno identifies for education may be related to the fact that such a separation was lost. Especially because of its entrapment in the totality of history, the humanity of humans becomes enslaved by a working mechanism. The human being, therefore, is not “more than a machine” but is rather adapted to its modes of operation.

At that time, Adorno often seemed to accentuate and apply this particular imagery to education. His celebrated “Culture of Industry” is one of the more widely discussed cases. The notion of an industry is visibly the main topic here. This notion relates to the “standardization” of objects themselves and to the “rationalization of distribution techniques.”[[93]](#footnote-93) These two categories (standardization and rationalization) affect individuals to their innermost core. They do so even to the extent that “imagination is replaced by a mechanically relentless control mechanism which determines whether the latest imago to be distributed really represents an exact, accurate and reliable reflection of the relevant item of reality.”[[94]](#footnote-94) And thus:

The massive concentration of economic powers, and consequently of political and administrative ones as well, to a large extent reduces every individual into a mere functionary of the machinery.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Humans become “an appendage of the machinery” representing merely “an object of calculation.”[[96]](#footnote-96) Here, mechanization represents a central image for Adorno, one that encapsulates the human modern condition. Such mechanization is not just about mass production of factories, though this seems to be part of Adorno’s social imagination. More profoundly, in referring to notions such as sameness and reproduction, mechanization represents an emblem for dehumanization. As in the Weimarian image of Moloch, the “technological rationality…makes souls into things,” and it is exactly this theologically imbued notion that Adorno develops further in his concept of mechanized, technological totality.[[97]](#footnote-97) One could say that, perhaps in stark opposition to Heidegger, there are no traces of ‘techne’ (craftsmanship, skill, art) in Adorno’s concept of technology.[[98]](#footnote-98) On the contrary, modern technology is devoid of such qualities. It is thus not about a “revelation” of being, as Heidegger would argue; instead, it is a matter of exposing the “demonic” termination of the human being.

Adorno clearly has Auschwitz in mind. We are returning here to the overriding concern of education, the call for “no more Auschwitz.” An emblem for annihilation, Auschwitz is a product of a critique that distorts theology. Secularization and annihilation are in such a way connected through an evocative image of “barbarism,” which Adorno evokes (in parallel and in contrast to Hannah Arendt, who will be discussed in the next chapter) in many of his lectures and oral presentations on education. With his reference to “barbarism” Adorno aimed at presenting his audience with the absolute bottomless pit of extermination. As Terrence Holden rightly pointed out, however, Adorno takes such a notion to represent more profoundly the absolute evil of theology.[[99]](#footnote-99) As a form of evil, barbarism reflects the full extent of the absorbtion of transcendence within immanence, making the first (transcendence) void and the second (immanence) malicious. Barbarism, then, is not characterized by its impulsive or irrational aspects, or by a refusal to comply with the norms of correct or acceptable behavior. It is, rather, described as being consumed by an all-embracing “machine,” or else as a full capitalization to the mechanism of social rule, cultural habits, and political coercion. It is where human beings are “one with domination” – with special emphasis, though, on the theological connotation of “oneness” and “dominion” – a catastrophic play on the imaginary end result of the Christian promise of redemption through sameness, oneness, and identification with Christ.[[100]](#footnote-100)

These theological associations not only relate to the horrifying systematic murdering of Jews, although this was certainly of central concern to Adorno, whose Jewish origins might have condemned him to such a fate, had he not escaped Germany.[[101]](#footnote-101) More universally, they represent a full withdrawal of society and culture from humane considerations, culminating in the *Endlösung* – which Adorno sees as the complete loss of humanity.[[102]](#footnote-102) Here, a control mechanism denotes the extinction of humanity by reducing the human being to represent nothing more than a part of a machine – an image which persisted later in the speculations of nomadic philosophy and the science fiction of Star Trek that brought us the ominous collective “Borg.”

**III. Critical Self-Reflection**

a. Sabotage

Against the critical theological image of entrapment in a sadistic “pleasure machine” Adorno endeavors to throw “wrenches into the machinery.”[[103]](#footnote-103) One could fairly say: an act of sabotage. In the field of education, the notion of sabotage seems to be important because it points to the acute need to rethink cultivation in a way that saves human beings from the machine. While the consumption of a human being by a mechanism of total control is an image that represents the end result of a form of critique that dilutes its theological sources, sabotage may denote the opposite in saving the human being from such a fate. To put it more metaphorically, it is about an education ex machina. By using this metaphor, the aim is not to appeal to the supernatural dramatic appearance of God by means of the machine (a *deus ex machina* as Scholem, for example, suggested) but to the no less theatrical allure of rescuing human beings from the Ananke of entrapment. Thus, to the extent that education represents for Adorno an arena for demonstrating how human beings became an “appendix” of the machinery (as in the case of *Halbbildung*) it also serves as the showground for sabotaging the instruments of control, with all its critical and theological overtones.

“Critical self-reflection” is the main educational concept reflecting this aim. I suggest this point because in many of his lectures Adorno pitted an education centered on “critical self-reflection” and one based on “reified consciousness” – the latter characterizing, as noted above, people who are “an appendage of the machinery” – against each other.[[104]](#footnote-104) But critique indicates sabotage in a distinctive way: it reflects the recovery of the critical endeavor to “save” theology (even if by turning away from it), against the background of the impossibility of recreating the educational tradition of self-formation, devoted to this mission. In the notion of “critical self-reflection,” arguably, Adorno presents a reconceptualization of the educational concept of critique that has been rendered invalid.

The point to note relates to Adorno’s double reference to the original mission of critique. On the one hand, “critical self-reflection” still resonates with the hope that the human being is “more than a machine” and in such a way echoes the “Kantian idea of the humanity in our person.”[[105]](#footnote-105) On the other hand, it takes into consideration the conversion of *Bildung* into *Halbbildung* which renders this original ideal inaccessible. The question that Adorno seems to underline with regard to an education ex machina is whether and in what way it is possible to re-engage with the mission of critique, in the face of the impossibility to do so.

One may consider Adorno’s celebrated notion of negativity in this educational light. Paul Mendes-Flohr pointed out how negativity, perhaps *the* concept that is most associated with Adorno’s postwar thought, is a theological concept that appeals to “an entire other,” and as such it means resistance to identity (the type of unity between God and the world that Adorno ascribes to the source of fake education); “non-identity” is presented in its stead.[[106]](#footnote-106) In the educational arena, however, such a notion may suggest something further still. In signifying the retreat of critique from any belief in a final positive unity, goal, or end for human self-formation, negativity also presents the only viable way to still hold onto these ideals. Put differently, it is about re-engaging with the mission of critique, against the background of its disappearance. This is, then, what negativity stands for: the only possible way of holding onto an unholdable object.

This last point is crucial. Peter Gordon recently suggested that in Adorno’s postwar “dialectic of secularization” we see a clear “migration in the profane” (*Einwanderung ins Profane*) from which “all metaphysical authority” evacuates.[[107]](#footnote-107) In his reflections on education, however, we see, perhaps, a more nuanced approach to such a migration in which there is a turn against metaphysical authority in order not to lose sight of it. Since the ideal of *Bildung* is transformed into its fake-educational doppelganger, one must scour any naïve faith in the redemptive hopes that are invested in the enlightened perfect “personality” (*Persönlichkeit*) in which self-formationis supposed to culminate. In particular, “the concept of personality,” Adorno argues, “cannot be saved.”[[108]](#footnote-108) Nonetheless, in evoking the need for critical self-reflection these ideals are not forsaken. On the contrary, Adorno strove to re-engage with their critical calling. This re-engagement, however, is possible only at the expense of dismissing the actual (but not the potential) realization of the original theological mission of critique.[[109]](#footnote-109) To put it differently, critique’s theological promise can be realized only by not being realized.

This point is developed, for example, in Adorno’s reflections on the educational role of philosophy. Constituting a central element in many of his oral lectures (e.g. “Philosophy and Teachers,” “Why Still Philosophy,” and “Notes on Philosophical Thinking”), philosophy attests to the grasping of the theological mission of critique that cannot be held onto anymore. Thus, on the one hand, the role of philosophy is to resist the machinery’s consumption of human beings by continuing to hold onto critical thinking.[[110]](#footnote-110) Offering such a form of resistance generates “a force that opposes the narrow-minded acquisition of factual knowledge, even in the so-called philosophical specialties.”[[111]](#footnote-111) For “specialists” (Heidegger’s existentialism and logical positivism represented clear examples for Adorno) thinking is contracted to disclosing “pre-given data.” In still avowing the original role of critique, however, philosophy works “against the justification of what happens to be the case.”[[112]](#footnote-112)

On the other hand, however, “philosophy is no longer applicable to the technique of mastering one’s life.”[[113]](#footnote-113) Here especially, philosophy withdraws from the original mission of the critical quest of metaphysics which it can no longer guarantee. Philosophy can thus appear in the field of pedagogy only “as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy” and as a “powerless attempt” not to offer truth but to expose “untruth.”[[114]](#footnote-114) In such a way, philosophical education holds onto a tradition – in this case that of critical inquiry – only by rejecting its positive aims. Adorno put this duality in the following terms:

The only responsible philosophy is one that no longer imagines it had the Absolute at its command; indeed, philosophy must forbid the thought of it in order not to betray that thought, and at the same time it must not bargain away anything of the emphatic concept of truth. This contradiction is philosophy’s element. It defines philosophy as negative.[[115]](#footnote-115)

Forbidding the mission of philosophy in order “not to betray” it seems to be the main issue here. Defining philosophy as negative means a dialectic move away from a theological conviction (i.e. the belief of having the “Absolute” at our command) in order to save it. The association of such a notion of negativity with so-called negative theology and “*Bilderverbot”* (the biblical prohibition of making images) will be presented in the last section of this chapter. Here, the point to note relates to the manner in which Adorno underlines the effort to hold onto an unholdable theology – not “betraying” the theological endeavor that must be considered lost at the same time. Critique’s theological promise can thus be realized only by not being realized, precisely because philosophy does not “bargain away” its conceptual commitments by dismissing them.

Many of Adorno’s concepts of education point in the same direction. For example, Adorno’s “return to the subject,” or else “a turn toward the subject” accentuates a belief in the success of the project of humanism while dismissing its underlining positive aspirations (i.e. those that relate to its material realization) altogether.[[116]](#footnote-116) This is also true of the “individual element” that education needs to nurture. It still attests to the “enduring persistence of particularity” without, however, pointing to its realization through the perfection of the human being.[[117]](#footnote-117) The same can be said with reference to “universal history”. For Adorno, this is something that “must be construed and denied.”[[118]](#footnote-118) There is a critical act at stake in which the only way to “construe” a lost object is to deny any positive ability to do so.

What is denied in Adorno’s appeal to foster “critical self-reflection” in education is not the theological horizon of critique but rather the belief in a progressive advancement towards the realization of its redemptive mission. Again, we should bear in mind the sort of critique that entails a reconceptualization of theological concepts, indicating a critical adversary and successor to theology that ensures its continuation by overriding it. A critical retreat from redemption to reflection reflects this method. The redemptive mission is about perfection; the new negative mission of education is about a retreat to the “refuge” of reflection.[[119]](#footnote-119) Reflection rather than perfection means self-formation which does not correspond to a process of advancing or progressing towards a final redemptive end in any positive sense. Neither is it about losing sight of that theological aspect; it is a question of holding onto that which always remains the source of critique and its ability to offer resistance to “enslavement.”

The idiom of holding onto an unholdable object seems, then, to capture such a “negative” approach to critical self-reflection rather well. It encapsulates the extent to which Adorno distances himself from the “final” unity of God and the world, in order not to lose sight of its theological underpinning. “Destroying immediacy” thus signifies the sabotaging of the modern (and, for Adorno, mainly Hegelian) attempt to establish a link between the advancing of history and the advent of redemption.[[120]](#footnote-120) Indeed, it is not a matter of resisting the theological image of a perfect, redeemed “utopia.” Instead, it is a type of resistance that “sabotages its realization.”[[121]](#footnote-121)

Can we speak, in this context, of an orchestrated return to gnosis? We have seen above how the unity that Adorno seems to have worked against for him represented a failed attempt to overcome gnosis. The focus on non-identity may thus be regarded as a re-engagement with the traditional differentiation between God and the world, which falls back on theological dualism. The point seems to carry weight, particularly in the light of Hegel’s clear dissociation between Christianity and Judaism, whereby the first represents the dialectic integration (and for Hegel this also means a redemptive reconciliation) of God and the world, and the second the stark, vehement, separation of the two.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Nonetheless, if we concede that to dismiss unity, sameness, and identification is to save them, we must also acknowledge an implicit resistance to stark dualism. On the one hand, the notion of a totally alien “other” (as Mendes-Flohr, for example, put it) is indeed redeployed by Adorno in order to eschew its unity with the world. On the other hand, and concomitantly, such a dual approach is not meant to dismiss the relation of God to the world and re-separate them. Rather, it is intended to point to the only way that remains available in order to hold onto such a relation, and this can only happen in a negative sense. The patent separation between the “Absolute” and the world is resisted by holding onto it, and perhaps this represents what a reconceptualization of gnostic conceptions might have meant for Adorno.

b. A Love Supreme

Love represents another important, perhaps surprising, feature of critical self-reflection that holds onto an unholdable theological mission. A close examination of love seems to be fitting because Adorno repeatedly, albeit far from systematically, associates love with critique in his lectures on education.[[123]](#footnote-123) In his university course on metaphysics, for example, he differentiated between the type of love that needs to be directed “towards evil,” and the “unqualified love” which is an “uncritical” attitude “in the face of what is.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Earlier in his radio address “Philosophy and Teachers” Adorno made connections, though somewhat loosely, between love and “the ability to engage with intellectual matters” and between the lack of love and the mere learning of bare facts.[[125]](#footnote-125)

In “Education after Auschwitz” Adorno expands on these connections. People with “reified consciousness” are discussed in terms of their deficit in love: “With this type who tends to fetishize technology, we are concerned, baldly put, with people who cannot love.”[[126]](#footnote-126) A person who cannot love resembles for Adorno a “societal monad” whose “coldness” and “indifference to the fate of others” displays “the pathogenic character” of the tendencies that led to Auschwitz.[[127]](#footnote-127) Thus:

those people are thoroughly cold; deep within themselves they must deny the possibility of love, must withdraw their love from other people initially, before it can even unfold.[[128]](#footnote-128)

In the same vein, the “power of reflection” is also considered in terms of love, because to be able to reflect critically means to be able to belong “to *all* people without exception as they exist today.”[[129]](#footnote-129) The universal character of love is then amplified, Adorno reasons, by the fact that love is indifferent in that it does not differentiate between worthy and unworthy objects, “for the people whom one should love are themselves such that they cannot love, and therefore in turn are not at all that lovable.”[[130]](#footnote-130) Specifically, through these considerations, Adorno articulates the concept of critique in association with love. The absence of the one entails the non-existence of the other.

It might seem bizarre that one of the instigators of critical theory should bring together two seemingly unrelated concepts (critique and love) in this way – perhaps simply the romantic glitch of a philosopher. But love and its relation to critique did not represent a new theme for Adorno at that point, and certainly not one that he considered a matter of rhetoric or trifle. As early as 1939 Adorno published an extensive essay “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love.”[[131]](#footnote-131) Published the same year that Adorno and Horkheimer began their collaboration on their “*Dialectic of the Enlightenment*,”the essay on Kierkegaard extended Adorno’s early interest in the so-called “Young Hegelian” tradition, which was already evident in his professorial thesis, published in 1933.[[132]](#footnote-132) While the latter focused on Kierkegaard’s religious thinking as an aesthetic construction, his stand-alone paper scrutinized more specifically Kierkegaard’s Christian doctrine of love, presented mainly in *Leben und Walten der Liebe* (Works of Love), as a critical endeavor. Adorno’s key points in this paper expand on the relation between critique and theology in Kierkegaard’s “collection of so-called edifying discourses,” and it is this connection, Adorno argues, that should command our attention.[[133]](#footnote-133)

There are three points to note. First, according to Adorno, Kierkegaard converts the Christian notion of love (*agape*)into social categories.[[134]](#footnote-134) This means that for Kierkegaard loving people is equivalent to resisting the modern conditions that enslave them. The Christian motif of a “Love Supreme” – to use the title of John Coltrane’s 1965 Jazz standard – operates as a type of critique of the reification of human beings.[[135]](#footnote-135) Adorno’s main thesis is that Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love enables him “…like few other writers, to perceive decisive character features of the typical individual of modern society,” which means that “Kierkegaard regards the criticism of progress and civilization: as the criticism of the reification of man.”[[136]](#footnote-136)

For Adorno “it is this awareness which invests Kierkegaard’s critical motives with their genuine earnestness and dignity.”[[137]](#footnote-137) It is not only that Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love has “critical potential.”[[138]](#footnote-138) More particularly, love is a critical category. This means that love liberates human beings from entrapment in enslaving circumstances because it turns into hostility “toward the dominating mechanisms of a society that turns human beings into a mass.”[[139]](#footnote-139) To love means in this sense to be critical of entrapment, to analyze it and thereby resist its sway over human lives.

Kierkegaard’s love is thus a form of critical theology. This is the second point to note. Critical theology means that the Christian supremacy of love is reformulated as a critique of modernity. Critique denotes a resistance to the “net like” conditions and “machinery” of the modern world that make people into things.[[140]](#footnote-140) The concept of critique is of relevance here precisely because Adorno ascribes to Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love what he applied to the definition of a critical theory. To some extent, such an argument enables Adorno to distance Kierkegaard’s existentialism from Heidegger’s “jargon of authenticity.”[[141]](#footnote-141) It also endows Kierkegaard with an almost prophetic critique of modern “mass society.” Indeed, “in speaking of the mass meetings of the 1848 period,” writes Adorno, Kierkegaard “seems to have heard those loudspeakers which filled the Berlin Sportpalast one hundred years later.”[[142]](#footnote-142) However, what is crucial here is the fact that, for Adorno, Kierkegaard does not simply bring the theological notion of *agape* to bear on philosophical scrutiny. More profoundly, he points to the clear dependency of critique on theology. Such dependency is reflected, for example, by the relation between critique and the divine object to which love refers. Critique may attain knowledge of the divine “absolute” only by “sacrificing itself.”[[143]](#footnote-143) Self-sacrifice is, arguably, a devout measure adopted by critique. As a religious measure it indicates “not so much the expropriation of philosophy by theology as the transplantation of theology into the philosophical realm.”[[144]](#footnote-144)

Yet, what concerns Adorno most is the fact that Kierkegaard’s critical theological attempt to deny the “reification” of human beings ends in failure. This is the third and last point: Kierkegaard’s critical theology, according to Adorno, fails.[[145]](#footnote-145) This failure means that Kierkegaard’s approach “acknowledges the very same reification of man against which Kierkegaard's doctrine of love is directed.”[[146]](#footnote-146) Love in such a way ends up supporting reification rather than dismissing it.

The reason for such a failure lies in the fact that love, for Kierkegaard, remains “a matter of pure inwardness” – a retreat to an “interior” realm of the subject over against the external world that includes other people. Consequently, Kierkegaard’s love is directed by the individual to his or her own subjectivity alone.[[147]](#footnote-147) The love of God becomes a love that “is determined only by the subjective qualities of the loving one, such as disinterestedness, unlimited confidence, unobtrusiveness, mercifulness, even if one is helpless oneself, self-denial and fidelity.”[[148]](#footnote-148) In this way love denies not only reciprocity but also the separate existence of an-other beloved subject. To love God, or better to love the love of God, is consumed by the loving subject alone. Thus, love can only be an appropriation of self-love.

The appropriation of love also means that love is a positive form of critique because in resisting the world it is directed at affirming the inner qualities of the individual that it wishes to constitute or to possess. Thus:

What is introduced here as an exegesis of Christian Love, is revealed, through a more intimate knowledge of Kierkegaard's philosophy, as supplementing his negative theology with a positive one, his criticism with something edifying in the literal sense, his dialectics with simplicity.[[149]](#footnote-149)

For Adorno, the main problem with such a “positive” appropriation of love lies not in its “simplicity” per se, nor in its cultivating character, but rather in the way it renders other human beings superfluous. In other words, the subject retreats to an “interior” realm, as opposed to the external social world.

Peter Gordon rightly pointed out that such a “philosophy of the interior” means that Kierkegaard’s love is “object-less” because the individual directs love to his or her own subjectivity. But in his paper, Adorno accentuates more radically the consequential fact that Kierkegaard’s love is “universal” in being a love of no one. “Perhaps one may most accurately summarize Kierkegaard’s doctrine of love,” Adorno argues, “by saying that he demands that love behave towards all men as if they were dead.”[[150]](#footnote-150) Love can then “easily turn into its opposite, a universal hatred of human beings.” It “threatens, at any given moment, to become transformed into the darkest hatred of man.”[[151]](#footnote-151) Love, Adorno concludes, becomes “demonic love” – a retreat to pure inwardness to the extent of exhibiting animosity towards an imagined hostile exteriority which, again, includes all human beings.

As a type of theology, “demonic” love is arguably gnostic because it points to a stark dualism between the loving individual who encompasses the love of God, and the devious external world. Earlier in this chapter, Adorno’s critique of theology was associated with his contribution to the debates on Gnosticism in the 1950s and 1960s, and one may see in “demonic love” another example of this association. Here, in particular, Adorno seems to flesh out the type of radical, perhaps narcissistic “inwardness” that is a central characteristic of the gnostic “knowledge” of the divine core that lies within the depths of the human soul. Adorno makes the case rather clearly, since for him “Kierkegaard is unaware of the demonic consequence that his insistence on inwardness actually leaves the world to the devil.”[[152]](#footnote-152) The demonic characteristic of love therefore emphasizes that Kierkegaard’s Christian love ends up reinstating the problem of gnostic dualism between the benevolent God and the evil world (or in this case a demiurgic power). The particular failure that Adorno attributes to Kierkegaard also implies the modern failure to overcome gnosis in general.

One of the main outcomes of this failure is an inconsistency between the inward character of love and the critique of social domination that love is supposed to have represented. The demand to love other human beings is impossible to fulfill when, for example, “the love of the neighbor” is no more than “the reduplication of one's own ego,” or when love means viewing all other people as if they were dead.[[153]](#footnote-153) With the emphasis on others, Kierkegaard’s orientation towards this worldliness is at stake for Adorno. Certainly, what makes other human beings lovable is their inherent feature of being made in God’s image. But if for Kierkegaard humans are loved because they are nothing but a replica of God, are they not marked by the instrumental “sameness” that he condemned? Arguably, loving the image of God in the “other” (and especially as a reproduction of self-love) means that all other human beings represent nothing more than an instrument for the love of God rather than an end in themselves. The focus on the oneness of God in us all thus ignores the uniqueness of each concrete individual. Moreover, by converting human beings into instruments of love, they become things. Adorno seems to clearly distinguish here between loving the God-given feature of humanity, and loving concrete human beings; between caring for particular others in all their diversity, uniqueness and actual individuality, and the love of the humane which renders such a notion of others redundant. Kierkegaard’s critical theology fails, then, because it re-employs the type of instrumental relationship that characterizes the demonic feature of reification, against which he set out his critique of social domination. This critique ends, therefore, with a demonic hatred of humans and Adorno concludes that “the presuppositions of this doctrine of the neighbor and, at the same time, of love itself, are untenable.”[[154]](#footnote-154) Love cannot fulfill its critical calling.

Adorno’s “edifying discourses” seem to drive at overcoming this failure of critique. The following lines from “Education after Auschwitz” may hence be read as though they had been composed with Kierkegaard in mind:

One of the greatest impulses of Christianity, not immediately identical with its dogma, was to eradicate the coldness that permeates everything. But this attempt failed; surely because it did not reach into the societal order that produces and reproduces that coldness.[[155]](#footnote-155)

To “reach into the societal order”, however, does not mean for Adorno an abandonment of Kierkegaard’s love but rather a more compound holding onto it by resisting its “demonic” potential – ensuring a theology of love by critically overriding it. We are engaged here with another mode of reconceptualization of theological concepts that saves a theological charge by its dismissal. Under such a composition, love is still “something immediate and in essence contradicts mediated relationship” as Kierkegaard argued.[[156]](#footnote-156) It is still redolent of its universal (belonging to “all people”), indifferent (not differentiating between potential worthy and unworthy objects of love), and spontaneous (“something immediate” and contradicting mediated relationships) characteristics that Anders Nygern, for example, strongly associated with the Christian “agape motif.”[[157]](#footnote-157) In the same vein, love remains a critical category exactly because of these characteristics, which is perhaps the central feature that Adorno ascribes to Kierkegaard’s doctrine.

Nonetheless, Adorno assumes these theological orientations in order to turn away from Kierkegaard’s solitude of “inwardness.” He interlocks the “power of reflection” with interpersonal love (the “belonging to *all* people as they exist today”), and this is key. In showing some similarity to Levinas’ ontological quest from that time, Adorno seems to present education with a shift from “solitude” to “relation.”[[158]](#footnote-158) Redeploying theology by means of critique points in this case to an intention to relate to the “world in which we exist” rather than to retreat into the solitude of the self. This new understanding of a “love supreme” is critical because it offers resistance “to the expanding heteronomy.”[[159]](#footnote-159) Still imbued with this theological image, critique therefore aims at fulfilling its original calling when the world of human beings, and not the solitude of the loving individual, stands as the arena of non-instrumental love.

The last point may perhaps show some similarity between Adorno’s critical self-reflection and the Jewish concept of “Mitzva” (an obligation that is performed in the world and mostly as a duty to others). However, the question is to what extent was Adorno aware of this connection between interpersonal love, with which he expressed his distancing from Christianity, and relational duties, which brought him closer to Jewish religious vocabulary. No less interesting is the fact that the concept of “a love of the world” may be seen as embedded in a turn away from inwardness to a relation to others, even though such a concept is more commonly associated with Hannah Arendt than with Adorno.[[160]](#footnote-160) In Adorno’s loving (and in this sense critical) commitment to the world, one may speak of a de-demonization of love because it shifts from a “demonic” hatred of humans to an interpersonal relation that informs a critical resistance to social domination. It is also possible to evoke in this case Adorno’s concept of “inverse theology” by suggesting that in the context of education the inversion relates to a turn away from Kierkegaard’s movement inward to an emphasis on ensuring that “suffering be remedied and society redeemed.”[[161]](#footnote-161)

Kierkegaard’s love is therefore not refuted, but rather upheld by being disavowed in accordance with an immanent critique that redeploys theological concepts. A lost theological mission is saved by a subversive turning against it, thus respecting the most intimate core relation between critique and theology. Subversion, resistance, and perhaps irony, are parts of the critical promise of theology. Perhaps reminiscent of Freud’s analysis of the Mosaic tablets, love is turned upside down – from self-love to the love of others, from inwardness to the redeeming of society, from the inner qualities of the loving subject to the obligation (of education) to one’s fellow human beings.

c. Messianic Passion

I wish to conclude the discussion of Adorno’s critique of theology, featured in his reflections on education, by pointing to its relation to messianism. There is, it seems, a connection between Adorno’s call for an education centered on critical self-reflection and his articulation of messianic expectations. Adorno’s approach to messianism is captured rather well by Elliot Wolfson. For Wolfson, Adorno’s “decisively secular” thought is, nonetheless:

rooted in what has been called the ‘Jewish passion for the impossible,’ a fidelity to the idea of redemption that assumes the form of its refusal – in the traditional idiom, the Messiah can be present only in the absence of being present.[[162]](#footnote-162)

This extract points to Adorno’s messianic “passion” because the quest for “uttering the unutterable” gives a “valid redemptive response” that “involves turning away from redemption.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Thus, in what has been termed in this chapter holding onto an unholdable object, “the possibility of redemption” is inescapably bound to the “impossibility of its actualization.”[[164]](#footnote-164) In such a compound way one may endow Adorno with a “non-eschatological eschatology” which is, to emphasize again, a turn away from redemption that is made, however, for the sake of retaining the theological hope that it represents.[[165]](#footnote-165)

With this messianic passion in mind, one may reflect on some of Adorno’s main arguments discussed above. For example, we have seen that Adorno simultaneously clings to and dismisses Hegel’s secularization of eschatological expectations. Here Adorno turns away from Hegel’s positive hopes for redemption while, nonetheless, holding onto the idea of redemption – a point that Adorno already stresses in the closing statement of *Minima Moralia*.[[166]](#footnote-166) One maintains the messianic idea only by revoking it. The same may be said in relation to the notion of critical self-reflection, central to Adorno’s discussion of education. In calling for critical self-reflection in education Adorno holds onto an object that can be realized only by not being realized and thus takes distance from any redemptive hopes concerning “the Absolute” in order “not to betray” such redemptive hopes.

Love represents, arguably, the clearest example of these interconnections since the act of advocating interpersonal love points to a double resistance. On the one hand, there is a resistance to the social and political conditions that enslave us with Kierkegaard’s love (as Adorno interprets it). It represents a thrust against “coldness” and the “lack” of love that enable the subordination of human beings to the “machine,” sharply exemplified by the transformation of *Bildung* into *Halbbildung*. Here, the gift of love denotes the critical capacity of human beings to transgress such social domination by subversively working against it. On the other hand, Adorno also presents a resistance to Kierkegaard’s arguably narcissistic self-love, which imagines it has the absolute under its command; and in this turn away from Kierkegaard’s theology Adorno holds onto what Wolfson underlined as a redemptive approach that is bound to the “impossibility” of its actualization. One may see here not only a philosophical commitment to theology, but also, one could argue, a rather clever appeal to one theological tradition (Jewish messianism) in order to amend another (Christian faith).

Arendt’s rather shrewd comment that Adorno was Walter Benjamin’s only student seems to be rather fitting here. Adorno explicitly identifies with Benjamin’s messianism. For him it is Benjamin’s type of “messianism” that attempts “to formulate a materialist conception of history, albeit one that is shot through with theological ideas that are presented in terms of a highly negative dialectic.”[[167]](#footnote-167) As presented in chapter 2, Benjamin’s nihilism suggests a messianic time that is nevertheless embedded within history (in every “present moment”) but not revealed by the course of history. In this last sense Benjamin holds to a messianic potential that is innate in historical time (and the immanent world) while lying beyond its worldly flux. Potentially, this approach could be associated with the notion of exile. This type of complete resignation, supported by a separation between history and redemption – cosmology and soteriology – represents, for Adorno, Benjamin’s concept of a “messianic arrest of happening”: the potential for a messianic eruption that may penetrate history but that is not actualized within its course.[[168]](#footnote-168)

Adorno’s explicit critique of messianic traditions may be read against such a backdrop. The theme was discussed, for example, in his classroom lectures on metaphysics. Here Adorno stressed his opposition to the mystical traditions that uphold an “affirmative or positive theses of metaphysics.”[[169]](#footnote-169) Arguably, what Adorno seems to rebuke is an “affirmative or positive” understanding of the messianic moment.[[170]](#footnote-170) Messianism, then, in Adorno’s view, still corresponds to valuable “primal religious experiences.”[[171]](#footnote-171) These are, however, positive interpretations of redemption that “simply become blasphemies” because they form a perspective that “effectively demonizes the absolute” in a way that “turns God into an abyss.”[[172]](#footnote-172)

This last point seems to be important. The “blasphemy” inherent in such a messianic “turn” relates to “vulgar materialism” which means that a positive redemptive meaning is enclosed within history. In a more concrete tone, messianism cannot be about the affirmation of faith, the attainment of redemption through acts of sovereignty, the justification of nationalism, the fighting of “just wars”, or the oppression of others. Neither can it support political theological national arguments about historical rights or God’s promise. But one may think of Adorno’s mistrust in the social and political activism of the German student movement in the 1960s, expressed, for example, in his famous correspondence with Marcuse.[[173]](#footnote-173) In pointing to the student’s “streak of coldness”, Adorno seems to be concerned less with their lack of critical awareness and more with their transformation of critique into an ideological zeal.[[174]](#footnote-174) This was, arguably, a moment in which critique itself became what Isiah Berlin called a “positive doctrine of liberation by reason” by offering a positive actualization of critique’s redemptive promise.[[175]](#footnote-175) In a play on Adorno’s own argumentation we may speak of a critique that is not realized by being realized because it is fulfilled by suggesting itself as worthy of compliance and in this sense by working against itself. In such a case, unrefined materialism simply means a bowdlerizing of transcendence by transforming the content that was associated with it to represent nothing more than another mechanism of violence and control.

To some extent, Adorno connects the messianic materialism that he identifies in contemporary political agendas with “the intricate interrelationship between gnosticism, Neoplatonism, the Cabbala, and later Christian mysticism” and in particular the adaptation of the “Sohar” in German Idealism.[[176]](#footnote-176) It might be hard to defend this bringing together of a rather broad array of redemptive and messianic traditions in one stroke. Still, Adorno’s moral aim is to point to the vulgarization of messianism, based on the intertwining of transcendence and immanence, cosmology and soteriology, divine time and historical time, even if at the expense of scholarly precision. He therefore turns not against a messianic interest in this world, but rather against a particular expression of such an interest. Wolfson’s reference to the Jewish messianic idiom – “the Messiah can be present only in the absence of being present” – seems indeed to illuminate Adorno’s reproach of these messianic traditions, and of their political implications, on the one hand, and his own quest for a critical messianism (so to speak) that is based on “uttering the unutterable” on the other hand. The “messianic idea” (as Benjamin put it) is only that which always remains constantly absent. One may talk of an “heretic” turn against all former messianic heresies that rejects their various historical appearances, for the sake of holding onto their core theological rationale, nonetheless.[[177]](#footnote-177)

Such an approach to messianism exemplifies what has been presented in research as Adorno’s negative theology.[[178]](#footnote-178) There is, however, a particular standpoint to consider. Taken to represent the limits of our capacity to represent and in this sense have knowledge of the limitless, the eternal, the transcendent and the divine, negative theology is about the exclusive articulation of non-divinity (or, to put it simply, an articulation of what is not God). I tend to agree that such an apophatic approach is part of Adorno’s argument. Nevertheless, one must not overlook his particular understanding of negativity in this context. Rather than an inability to represent the divine, negativity points to the possibility of representation by means of non-representation. Adorno openly and uniquely associates the *Bilderverbot* (the biblical prohibition on the making of idols and images) with a negative theological imagination.[[179]](#footnote-179) There is indeed a prohibition of making an image of God, but it is imposed not because it is impossible to have any knowledge of the divine but rather because it is the only viable way to still hold onto the possibility of such knowledge in a material reality which is now pregnant with a theological, indeed messianic, passion. Thus, for Adorno:

It is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence concurs with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting Utopia to be positively pictured; this is the substance of its negativity. At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of the absolute spirit.[[180]](#footnote-180)

In absence, then, we may conceive what is inconceivable. Our attention could be drawn at this point to Adorno’s reflection on “fruitless waiting” – a Weberian image that refers particularly to Jewish messianic expectations – which concluded his classroom lectures on metaphysics.[[181]](#footnote-181) Contrary to Weber, however, Adorno upholds such waiting to be “no doubt the form in which metaphysical experience manifests itself most strongly to us.”[[182]](#footnote-182) Is it not this very “waiting” that embodies the “absence” (of a messiah) as the only possible way of conceiving a promised deliverer within the boundaries of the “world in which we live”? In its association with “fruitless waiting,” metaphysics, and thus critical thinking, demonstrates a subtle rejection of messianism, which is the only way to retain a hold on its passion. This is also true, ceteris paribus, of education. Perhaps as a type of “melancholic” engagement with the cultivation of humans, education should not aim at mourning a lost object, but rather at being attentive to the ever-present possibility of its resurrection.[[183]](#footnote-183) Its critical mission navigates itself in such a way through the troubled waters whirling between an imagined Scylla and Charybdis. Education must “rescue” theology and at the same time suspend its worldly realization.

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2. Theodor Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” in *Critical Models*,191. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See e.g. Theodor Adorno, “Philosophy and Teachers”, in *Critical Models,* 19-36 (broadcast on December 7, 1961 by the radio services of Hessen under the title “Lehrer und Philosophie: Ansprache an Studenten”) and Theodor Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,” in *Critical Models,* 89-104 (broadcast on February, 7 1960 by the radio services of Hessen under the title “Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?”). See also Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,”194-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See e.g. Adorno, “Philosophy and Teachers,” 19-36; idem., “Education after Auschwitz,” 194-200. See also Daniel K. Cho, “Adorno on Education or, Can Critical Self-Reflection Prevent the Next Auschwitz?,” *Historical Materialism* 17 (2009): 75; Helmut Schreier and Matthias Heyl, eds., *Never Again! The Holocaust’s Challenge for Educators* (Hamburg: Krämer, 1997), 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott(London: Verso, 1974),i; Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem Beschädigtem Leben* (Berlin,Suhrkamp, 1950), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 145. In metaphysics “nothing can be even experienced as living if it does not contain a promise of something transcending life.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 98. See also Gerhard Richter, *Thinking with Adorno: The Uncoercive Gaze* (New York: Fordham UP, 2019), 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See also the point made in Hent de Vries, Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 101. See also Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 361: “After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims.” Auschwitz then makes “a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Adorno’s letter from March 14, 1967, in Theodor W. Adorno and Gershom Scholem, *Briefwechsel 1939-1969 “Der liebe Gott wohnt im Detail,”* ed. Asaf Angermann (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2015), 407-416 (“Die Intention einer Rettung der Metaphysik ist tatsächlich in der “Negative Dialektik” die zentrale”). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 101. For the concept of “civilizational break” see Dan Diner (Hg.), *Zivilisationsbruch: Denken nach Auschwitz* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1988); Dan Diner (Hg.), *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Adorno, “Critique” in *Critical Models*, 281-288. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Adorno, “Critique,” 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 19. Emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,”98. See also Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy” in *Critical Models*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005), 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See e.g. Peter E. Gordon, “The Concept of the Apolitical: German Jewish Thought and Weimar Political Theology,” *Social Research* 74, no. 3 (2007): 855-878; Leora Batnitzky, “Leo Strauss and the ‘Theologico-Political Predicament,’” in *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss,* ed.Steve B. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 41-62; Facundo Vega, “On the Tragedy of the Modern Condition: The ‘Theologico-Political Problem’ in Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt,” *The European Legacy* 22, no. 6 (2017): 697-728. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See the discussion in Christoph Schmidt and Bernhard Greiner, eds., *Arche Noach: Die Idee der Kultur im deutschjüdischen Diskurs* (Freiburg: Rombach, 2000), 1-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See the point made by Paul Mendes-Flohr, “‘To Brush History Against the Grain’: The Eschatology of the Frankfurt School and Ernst Bloch,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 4 (1983): 631-650. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 88-89. According to Adorno, this also differentiates Aristotle’s metaphysics from Plato’s doctrine of ideas in which there is still a relation between God and the world. See Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 18, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 77-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See e.g. Yotam Hotam, “Gnosis and Modernity - a Postwar German Intellectual Debate on Secularisation, Religion and 'Overcoming' the Past,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political*

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37. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See in particular Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1952). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Hans Jonas, “Gnosticism and Modern Nihilism,” *Social Research* 19, no.? (1952): 430–452. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1966). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy,* 138; Hotam, “Gnosis and Modernity,” 591-608.  [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), 279-282; Jacob Taubes, *Gnosis und Politik* (München: W. Fink, 1984); Gerschom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1960). See also Christoph Schmidt, “The Leviathan Crucified. A Critical Introduction to Jacob Taubes’ ‘The Leviathan as Mortal God,’” *Political Theology* 19, no. 3 (2018): 172-192; Eliot R. Wolfson, *Poetic Thinking* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015)*,* 189; Benjamin M. Korstvedt, *Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch’s Musical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See e.g. Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays in Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1971), 133. Here Scholem refers specifically to Hans Jonas’ *Gnosis und Spätantiker Geist.* See also Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminar, 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. See Angermann, *Briefwechsel*, 9-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. G. W. F. Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate,”in *Early Theological Writings*, trans. T. M. Knox (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1948), 182-301. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Adorno, “Progress”, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1949). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 147-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See e.g. Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991),5. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Adorno, *History and Freedom,* 76-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Adorno, “Halbbildung”, 93-121. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See e.g. Sharon Jessop, “Education for Citizenship and 'Ethical Life': An Exploration of the Hegelian Concepts of *Bildung* and *Sittlichkeit*,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 46, no. 2 (2012): 287-302; Heinz Sünker, *Politics, Bildung and Social Studies: Perspectives for a Democratic Society* (Rotterdam: Sense, 2006); Christiane Thompson, “The Non-Transparency of the Self and the Ethical Value of Bildung,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 39, no. 3 (2005): 519–34; Walter Bauer, “Introduction,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 35, no.2 (2003): 133-137; Fritz Ringer, “Bildung: The Social and Ideological Context of the German Historical Tradition,” *History of European Ideas* 10, no. 2 (1989): 193-202; David Sorkin, “Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Theory and Practice of Self-Formation (Bildung), 1791–1810,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44 (1983): 55-74; Heinz-Joachim Heydron*, Über den Widerspruch von Bildung und Herrschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: FRG Syndikat, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Wilhelm von Humboldt, *The Sphere and Duties of Government* (London: John Chapman 1854), 11. See also Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Ideen zu einem Versuch die Gränzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen* (Berslau: Verlag von Eduard Trewendt, 1851), 9: “Die Wahre Zweck des Menschen […] ist die höchste und proportionirlichste Bildung seiner Kräfte zu einem Ganzen. ” [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Bauer, “Introduction,” 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Humboldt, *The Sphere,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Aschheim, “German Jews beyond *Bildung* and Liberalism: The Jewish Radical Revival in the Weimar Republic,” in *The German-Jewish Dialogue Reconsidered: A Symposium in Honor of George L. Mosse*, ed.Klaus L. Berghahn (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 31-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ringer, “Bildung,” 199. On the centrality of progress see also Adorno, “Halbbildung*,*”97; Bauer, “Introduction,” 134; Jessop, “Education for Citizenship,” 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Klaus Prange, “Bildung: A Paradigm Regained?,” *European Educational Research Journal* 3, no. 2 (2004): 508. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck, *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe, Lexikon Zur Politisch-Sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 210; Bauer, “Introduction,” 134-135. Yotam Hotam, “Bildung: Liberal Education and its Devout Origins,” *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 54, no. 3 (2019):619-632. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hotam, “Bildung,”619-632. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, “The Education of the Human Race,” in*Lessing’s Theological Writings,* ed. Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1956), 83. In 1932 Adorno taught Lessing’s theory of education in a seminar together with Paul Tillich. See Adorno, *History and Freedom*, XV. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. [Bildung] “ist zu sozialisierter Halbbildung geworden, der Allgegenwart des entfremdeten Geistes. ” Adorno, “Halbbildung,” 93. I slightly amended the English translation to better reflect Adorno’s theological association. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Adorno, “Halbbildung,” 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Adorno, “Halbbildung,” 105: “Der Glaube an den Geist mag den theologischen ins Wesenlose säkularisiert haben.” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. This is a slightly amended translation of Adorno, “*Pseudo-Culture,”* 19. See also the German original: “Der Traum der Bildung, Freiheit vom Diktat der Mittel, der sturen und kargen Nützlichkeit, wird verfälscht zur Apologie der Welt, die nach jenem Diktat eingerichtet ist” in Adorno, “Halbbildung,” 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Adorno, “Halbbildung,”104. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Max Horkheimer, Critical Theory (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), 244. See also *“Die Emanzipation des Menschen aus versklavenden Verhältnissen,*” in Max Horkheimer, Kritische Theorie (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1982), 194*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972)*,* 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. This is a slightly amended translation of Adorno, “Pseudo-Culture,”32 which refers to the German passage “Halbbildung hat das geheime Königreich zu dem aller gemacht”. See Adorno, “Halbbildung,”113. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Georg Lukacs, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 83-222; Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 194-200. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Brian O’Connor, ed., *The Adorno Reader* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. O’Connor, *The Adorno Reader,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Adorno, “Halbbildung,” 115. I slightly adjusted the original English translation of a “permanent short circuit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Fritz Lang, *Metropolis* (Germany: UFA, 1928). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1989),131. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Hotam, *Modern Gnosis,* 32-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1961), 34. See also Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,*”* 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See Angermann, *Briefwechsel,* 83-84, 408-409; Peter Gordon, “The Odd Couple,” *The Nation,* June 9 2016. <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-odd-couple/>. Scholem, however, remained skeptical as to whether Adorno remains loyal to Hegel’s intensions. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question What is Enlightenment?,” in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. TheodorAdorno, “Reason and Revelation,” in *Critical Models,* 139. The lecture “Offenbarund oder autonome Vernunft” was broadcast by Wesdeutscher Rundfunk, on 20 November, 1957. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 98-99. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” in *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1977), 3-35. Originally published in: Martin Heidegger, “Die Frage nach Technik,” in *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Band 7 (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1954), 5-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Terence Holden, “Adorno and Arendt: Transitional Regimes of Historicity,” *New German Critique* 46, no. 1 (2019): 41-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Adorno, *The Culture Industry,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See also Adorno’s personal reflections on the “guilt” of “one who escaped by accident” and was consequently “spared”, in Adorno, *Negative,* 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For a critique of Adorno’s universalization of Auschwitz, see Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 23-24. The author criticizes it as a case of European “universalization of its own particularism.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See Theodor Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,”in *Critical Models,* 92. For Adorno the reluctance to “throw any wrenches into the machinery” (*Sand ins Getrieb*) characterizes “the desire to get on with things” in postwar Germany. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. See e.g. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 192; idem., “Why Still Philosophy,” 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Theodor Adorno, “Gloss on Personality,” in *Critical Models,* 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Mendes-Flohr, *“To Brush”,* 634-635. On negativity as “non-identity” see also Eric S. Nelson, *Levinas, Adorno, and the Ethics of the Material Other* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 4-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Peter Gordon, *Migrants in the Profane* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2020)*,* 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Adorno, “Gloss on Personality,”164. The public lecture “Persönlichkeit: Höchstes Glück der Erdenkinder?” was broadcast by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk on January 2, 1966. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Theodor Adorno, “Gloss on Personality,”164. See also Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,” 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Adorno, “Philosophy and Teachers,”21. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Theodor Adorno, “Why still Philosophy,” 5-6. See also Axel Honneth, *Pathololgies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 26-27; Wolfson, *Poetic,* 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 192; idem., “Why Still Philosophy,” 102.  [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Adorno, “Resignation,” in *Critical Models,* 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. See Hegel, *The Spirit of Christianity.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. See a similar argument made by Kathy J. Kiloh, “Adorno’s Materialist Ethic of Love,” in *A Companion to Adorno, eds.* Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky(Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2020), 601. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Adorno, “Philosophy and Teachers,” 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid.,202-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Ibid., 200-201. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Ibid., 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Theodor W. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” *[Zeitschrift fur Sozialforschung](https://archive.org/details/ZeitschriftFrSozialforschung8.Jg)* [8](https://archive.org/details/ZeitschriftFrSozialforschung8.Jg), no. 3 (1939): 413-429. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Theodor Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962). On Kierkegaard’s importance for Adorno, see e.g. Asaf Angermann, [*Beschädigte Ironie: Kierkegaard, Adorno und die Negative Dialektik Kritischer Subjektivität*](https://www.amazon.com/-/he/dp/3110308487/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&qid=1622531335&refinements=p_27%3AAsaf+Angermann&s=books&sr=1-2) (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s Doctrine of Love,” 413. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Agape as a “motif” is especially presented in Anders Nygern, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), 61-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (New York: SUNY, 2007), 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy,” 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Kiloh, “Adorno’s Materialist Ethics,” 608. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See also the point made by Marcia Morgan, “Reading Kierkegaard,” in *A Companion to Adorno, eds.* Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky(Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2020), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. See also Angermann, *Ironie,* 127-129 and Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 25. Both authors rightly point out that Adorno’s critique of Kierkegaard’s retreat to an “interior” realm within the subject is already a central argument in his *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetics.* [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 416-417. For Kierkegaard “that we think lovingly of those who passed away is a deed of truly unselfish love.” However, since a deceased person “is no actual object” such a love means that one “recollects the dead as what resides in the one living.” Adorno calls this love for the dead “both the worst and the best part of [Kierkegaard’s] doctrine of love.” See Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 427-428.   [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See David Sherman, *Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity* (New York: SUNY, 2007), 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Adorno, “On Kierkegaard’s,” 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Adorno, *“*Education after Auschwitz,*”* 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Adorno, “Education after Auschwitz,” 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Nygern, *Agape and Eros,* 61-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See e.g. the opening statement in Immanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays* (Pittsburg PA.: Duquesne University Press, 1987), 42. For a similar point, see Nelson, *Levinas,* 2.I thank Cedric Cohen Skalli for pointing me to this aspect of Levinas’ philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Adorno, “Why still Philosophy,” 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. For a detailed comparison between Arendt and Adorno, see e.g. Lars Rensmann and Samir Gandesha, eds., Arendt and Adorno: Political and Philosophical Investigations (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 181. On Adorno’s inverse theology, see e.g. Christopher Craig Brittain, *Adorno and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 83-113. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Wolfson, *Poetic*, 180. See also Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005), 33 (Wolfson also cites Cohen). [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Wolfson, *Poetic,* 181-182. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Wolfson, *Poetic,* 184. See also Christoph Schmidt, “The Return of the Dead Souls: The German Students’ Movement and the Holocaust,” *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 75-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Wolfson, *Poetic,* 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 89-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 90-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 143. Adorno specifically addresses Schelling. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Adorno, *History and Freedom*, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse, “Correspondence on the Student Revolution,” *New Left Review* I, no. 233 (1999): 123-136. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. See his letter to Marcuse dated May 5, 1969, written a couple of weeks after the students’ so-called *Busenaktion* had disrupted Adorno’s classroom lecture on April 22, 1969, leaving him weary and in need of a vacation (from which he never returned). Adorno, “Correspondence on the Student Revolution,” 127. Cited also in Gordon, *Adorno and Existence,* 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in idem., *Four Essays On Liberty* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1969), 118-172. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Angermann, *Briefwechsel*, 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. See e.g. Elizabeth A. Pritchard, “*Bilderverbot* meets Body in Theodor W. Arorno’s Inverse Theology,” *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 291-318; Alexander Garcia Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2002), 58-61; Schmidt, “The Return of the Dead Souls,” 75-86. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. See e.g. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* 207. See also Schmidt, “The Return of the Dead Souls”, 75-86; Christoph Schmidt, “The Return of the Katechon: Giorgio Agamben contra Erik Peterson,” *The Journal of Religion* 94, no. 2 (2014): 182-203; Josh Cohen, *Interrupting Auschwitz: Art, Religion, Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2005), 33; Rebecca Comay, “Materialist Mutations of the Bilderverbot,” in *The Discursive Construction of Sight in the History of Philosophy*, ed.Michael Levin(Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 337-338. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Adorno, *Negative,* 207.  [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. See Max Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” in Max Weber, *The Vocation Lectures* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004), 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. For Adorno’s concept of “melancholic science” see: Adorno, *Minima Moralia,* i. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)