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Theory-Praxis: Spinoza, Hess, Marx, and Adorno

In modernity, the theory-praxis problem is usually thought to have evolved from Kant to Marx and from Marx to Critical Theory. However this narrative of the triumphant course of practical reason's emancipation from the grip of grey and stale theory obscures the story's hidden aspects and silences what it suppresses. In Adorno we find one of the most critically astute considerations of the theory-praxis problem but his project is the end product of other's efforts to rethink the relationship of theory and praxis. Remaining captive to the dominant genealogies may deprive us of the opportunity of alternative perspectives which enable a more nuanced reimagining of theory and praxis. Examining the resonances of Spinoza's, Hess's, Marx's, and Adorno's critical concerns allows a new appreciation of Spinoza and sheds new light on Marx as well as on Adorno. The commonality of their critical interventions illuminates a sustained critique of a discourse of philosophy that would exclude them and with them anybody who would not comply with the dominant distinction between theory and praxis. Contextualized in this way, Jewish modernity is critical to the rethinking of the theory-praxis problem.

The dominant distinction between theory and praxis follows the "Greek" juxtaposition of *bios theoretikos* and *bios praktikos* spelled out in classic manner in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (10, 6-8) where theory is given precedence over praxis. We know that Socrates favored the function of knowledge with regard to leading one's life, a life that in his eyes would only be deemed worth living when examined, and that Plato was quick to affirm this favoring. While such a "Greek" attitude clearly seems to express a bias towards theory, the reception of Jesus's comment to the hard-working Martha that her sister Mary chose the better part of life no less persuasively attests to a leaning towards the same preponderance of theory – in this case literally *theoria*, i.e. a contemplation of God or the divine – over praxis.

While not a feature of Greek culture in general it is the kind of construal to which Greek philosophy has been subjected. As a consequence, dissonant voices like Epicurus and his turn to praxis were marginalized

if not shunned by the grand narratives of Western philosophy. Likewise, Christianity derived much of its supersessionist legitimacy by advocating the superiority of spirit over matter. With Greek thought so conceived even the criteria for good deeds would remain ultimately defined by the imputation of intention and thus thought. As a result, action could not be figured without a schema that would presuppose a will and therefore claim a split of the individual that would divide man's whole into spirit and flesh, a split that with Descartes took on a radicalized form. The normative hold of this schematism was so persuasive that even its most outspoken critics found themselves entangled in its binary logic.

Philosophy's theory-heavy drift is arguably more the result of a fixation on a construct of Greek thought that would define philosophy as it emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment than the result of genuine thinking. Seen as a distinctly Greek concern, the relationship between praxis and theory fell squarely within the domain of a philosophical discourse that would conceive of praxis in terms of a "Greek" attitude to subordinate praxis to theory. The critical reminder that theory is a form of praxis is usually attributed to Marx and its powerful reiteration to Adorno.¹ Cast as a rebellious Young Hegelian and a resolute post-Feuerbachian, the complexity of the sources that inspired Marx is often dismissed as an anti-idealism impelled by the force of Hegelian dialectics. However, reducing Marx to a product of influence diminishes the distinctive force of his thought. Besides Hegel and Feuerbach there are other philosophers whose trajectories intersect with Marx's. It is only by attending to the interplay of these various voices that Marx's own critical trajectory becomes clear.

One important but neglected voice is that of Moses Hess who, while not a philosopher of the order of Hegel or Feuerbach, played a crucial role at a pivotal point in Marx's life. Marx had begun to study Spinoza intensely in 1841 as his long excerpts from Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise* of that year show.² But it was not until Hess established the link between Spinoza and the socialist agenda of the post-Hegelian left that Spinoza gained critical significance for Marx. It was this link that enabled Marx to formulate a concept of praxis that moved beyond the parameters Hegel and Feuerbach had established.

In his seminal piece "Philosophy of the Act" (*Philosophie der Tat*), Moses Hess redefined the principal terms of the theory-praxis problem and the project of philosophy as a whole. Couched in a curious diction beset with Fichtean overtones, Hess articulated a resolutely post-idealist

vision for rethinking the concept of action in a revolutionary manner that moved the agenda from the philosophy of spirit to a philosophy of action, or from heaven to earth as Marx put it shortly thereafter in *The German Ideology*:³ “It is now the task of the philosophy of the spirit to become the philosophy of the act (Tat).”⁴ For Hess, this means more than just a turn in thinking: even more comprehensively, it is a thoroughgoing change that embraces “all human activity” (ibid.), or as the German has it, “die ganze menschliche Tätigkeit” (L 140), as we know it. According to Hess, thinking and intellectual activity is inseparable from a life form’s activity and gains meaning only in relation to it.

Thinking, to Hess, is inextricably bound and not detachable from praxis. Unlike any reductionist materialism and different from Fichtean idealism, Hess emphasized that a life form’s activity has a social dimension that always involves *interaction*, i.e. the praxis of acting in relation to others and in specific contexts. To Hess, praxis is the defining feature of human nature in which the continuous process of self-making is more important than the end result. As Hess formulates it: “The ‘realizing,’ not the ‘realization’ is the important thing.” (ST 268; L 142: “Das ‘Wirken, nicht das Werk’ ist die Hauptsache.”).

For Hess, the act or action as the manifestation of life activity is always a profoundly social process whereby the self emerges as a function of the life activities it produces and whereby the self emerges as a function of its interaction with others. It is this powerful dialogical and anti-teleological concept of the philosophy of the act that situates Hess resolutely outside any form of philosophy of history.

Hess’s ‘the way is the goal’ integration of theory and praxis challenges any form of philosophical framework that would break the complex relationship into simple opposition. Idiosyncratic, eclectic, searching, prepared to risk speculative construction, Hess molded Spinoza’s thoughts on the philosophy of action into an original reasoning capable of substantial critical work.

Swimming against the traditional tide of theory as the divine escape from the pettiness of the entanglements of the human world, Hess introduces a form of alternative thought whose semblance to a hyper-speculative constructionism seems to erode the very move past German Idealism his critique aims for. However, secured to social and political idealism in a critically praxis-oriented impulse that connected to Spinoza, Hess moves critical thinking out of the murky waters of German idealist speculation into the direction of a post-metaphysical critique.

For Hess, Spinoza is the philosopher who recognizes activity as the praxis that is its own purpose and telos. Hess agreed that pleasure and joy cannot be separated from activity and are what make activity life-enhancing. For Hess, Spinoza's great achievement is the realization that praxis frees humans and makes us happy (ST 265; L 141). Hess views Spinoza primarily as the philosopher of a philosophical ethics (ST 265; L 141) that stands remarkably opposed to "philosophy" as we know it:

Die freie Geistestat ist der Mittelpunkt, von dem alle Bestrebungen der Neuzeit ausgegangen und auf den sie alle wieder hinauslaufen. Es ist daher nötig, das Gesetz derselben, ihren Organismus, ihre Konsequenzen zu erforschen. Die Basis der freien Tat ist die *Ethik des Spinoza* und die vorliegende *Philosophie der Tat* soll eben nur eine weitere Entwicklung derselben sein (L 142).

The free act of the spirit is the center from which all efforts of modern times have originated and to which they lead again. It is therefore necessary to explore the law thereof, its organism, and its consequences. The basis of the free act is Spinoza's *Ethics* and this *Philosophy of the Act* shall merely be its further development (267).⁵

A few years before, Hess noted in a draft of an introduction to Spinoza that Spinoza's theory is "not just a dead theory but a vital praxis [...]. [He] was no mere theoretical philosopher but in every sense a practical – his magnum opus was no metaphysics but an ethics."⁶ The idea that genuinely critical philosophy concerns itself with the concrete aspects of social life meant to Hess that praxis should be at the center of philosophy's attention.

Post Althusser and Balibar, attending to the social and political aspects in Spinoza is not that striking but at the post-Hegelian juncture of the 1830s and 1840s it was rather bold. Fichte, Hegel, Schelling, and Schleiermacher had, all in their own way, appropriated Spinoza, and Feuerbach made good use of Spinoza's critique of religion in developing his theory of the anthropological significance of religion, but they all remained ultimately caught in the grip of German Idealism. Even Feuerbach's materialism remained curiously fixated on its opposition to the idealism it sought to defeat. Bound to the idealism it so radically exposes, Feuerbach's materialist critique remains hostage to the Cartesian dichotomy it so fiercely opposes. Only a few German critics of the time succeeded in breaking free from the dichotomy of mind and matter, but they did not always qualify as members of the philosopher's guild as, for instance, Heine, and to a certain degree Goethe.⁷

And indeed, it was Heine who introduced an alternative view of Spinoza that, in the wake of Moses Mendelssohn's as well as Goethe's subtextual but equally consequential reception of the philosopher, prepared the grounds for new ways to appreciate Spinoza. Recognizing Spinoza as the trailblazing thinker of liberation and emancipation in modernity, Heine welcomed Spinoza as the philosopher whose approach would point beyond German idealism and towards a radical philosophy of universal liberation. Following Heine who placed Spinoza at the center of a new vision of philosophy that would undo the grip of its logocentric fixation, it became possible for Hess to advance his own version of Spinozism.⁸ Hess openly announced in his first (but still anonymous) publication, the 1837 *Holy History of Mankind*, that its author was "an apostle of Spinoza" ("Jünger Spinoza's")⁹ an announcement that signaled Hess's resolution to move from philosophy to praxis.

For Hess the difference between philosopher and apostle is the difference between knowledge and intention. Later in his life he wrote to Alexander Herzen, "because I don't just know what I want but also want what I know I am more of an apostle than a philosopher." ("[W]eil ich nicht nur weiss, was ich will, sondern auch will, was ich weiss, bin ich mehr Apostel als Philosoph.")¹⁰ In Hess's eyes, the apostle was not simply a follower or pupil but the one whose initiative would transform knowledge into praxis, the ultimate move that would take philosophy beyond its last limits to realize its critical purpose. The intimate link of thought, will, and action that Hess expresses as defining life's activity could not be derived from a Hegelian or Feuerbachian stance but points directly to Spinoza's view that thought and will are the same.

Spinoza allows us to conceive of human activity as a continuity that would conceive of matter and mind, indivisibly interrelated, whereby thought is already itself a form of praxis and praxis a product of the totality of life activity that would include thought. A year or so after the publication of "The Philosophy of the Act," in 1843, Hess drafted "On the Nature of Money." By rejecting the binary opposition of theory and praxis, and as Spinoza's apostle, Hess was free to approach praxis as the expression and realization of human social interaction and thus a central key for rethinking the relationship between theory and praxis:

Leben ist Austausch von productiver Lebensthätigkeit. [...] diejenigen Organe des Körpers, welche die *Centralpunkte des Austausches* [sind] auch seine *edelsten, unveräusserlichsten*

Organe [...] z.B. Hirn und Herz [...] Ihr wirkliches Leben besteht nur im gegenseitigen Austausch ihrer productiven Lebensthätigkeit, nur im *Zusammenwirken*, nur im Zusammenhang mit dem ganzen gesellschaftlichen Körper.

Der gegenseitige *Austausch* der individuellen Lebensthätigkeit, der *Verkehr*, die gegenseitige *Erregung* der individuellen Kräfte, dieses *Zusammenwirken* ist das *wirkliche* Wesen der Individuen, ihr *wirkliches* Vermögen.¹¹

Life is exchange of productive life-activity. [...] hence those organs of the body, which are the *central points of the exchanges*, are also its *noblest, most inalienable* organs, i.e., the brain and the heart. [...] Their real life consists only in the reciprocal exchange of their life activity, only in the *cooperation*, only in the association of the entire social body.

The reciprocal *exchange* of the individual life-activity, the *association*, the reciprocal *stimulation* of the individual forces, this *cooperation* is the *real essence* of the individuals, their *real* power.

And Hess continues: “The greater their [men’s] interaction, the greater is their force of production” (“Je stärker ihr [der Menschen] Verkehr, desto stärker ist auch ihre Produktionskraft,” 330f.):

Denken und Handeln gehen nur aus dem Verkehr, dem *Zusammenwirken* der Individuen hervor. [...] Jede freie Thätigkeit [...] ist ein Gattungsact, ein *Zusammenwirken verschiedener Individualitäten*. Dieses *Zusammenwirken* erst *verwirklicht* die Produktionskräfte und ist demnach das *wirkliche* Wesen eines jeden Individuums.¹²

Thought and action originate from the association, the *cooperation* of the individuals. [...] Every free activity [...] is an act by the species, a *cooperation between different individualities*. Only this *cooperation* *realizes* the forces of production and is therefore the *real* essence of each individual.

“On the Nature of Money” was published in 1845 but Marx had likely read Hess’s manuscript in 1843. It is not difficult to see that Hess profoundly impressed Marx in that period. Hess’s emphasis on the social interaction of human beings as the central feature of all life-activity as reciprocal exchange and cooperation resonates deeply with the ideas Marx developed in his “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” in 1844 and in *The German Ideology* in 1845–46. But while Marx effaced the sources of his conceptual breakthrough, he gave Hess’s reconception of Spinoza’s thought on the theory-praxis problem the radical edge that made it heard. Marx’s adoption of Hess’s recovery of Spinoza’s critical impulse broke the grounds for the liberation of philosophy from the grip of the split bet-

ween speculative thought and actionism embracing the vision of a new understanding of philosophy as itself a form of critical praxis.

Attending to these connections helps recover a more dynamic, nuanced, and less hegemonic context for the emergence of Critical Theory and a more differentiated reading of Marx that more doctrinaire versions shut down. More importantly, these connections gave rise to a more sophisticated appreciation of the theory of praxis and the praxis of theory as *theory-praxis*, where the hyphen signals the irreducible nature of the self-feeding loop of thinking and action.

This move resonates with a profound moment of dialogical thinking that – reflected in Hess and transpiring in Marx’s vision of the theory-praxis problem – comes to the fore in Spinoza’s critical attention to the fundamental reciprocity of theory and praxis. Seen in the context of dialogical thought as it will emerge at the beginning of the 20th century, exploring the praxis-theory problem as it unfolds from Spinoza to Hess, Marx, and Adorno sheds light on the deeper epistemologically critical concerns they share.¹³

In the 1960s, Adorno revisited the theory-praxis problem with new and pressing urgency when both revolutionary ideology and capitalism seemed to privilege action over thought. Adorno’s answer to the actionist agendas of the era is the insight that while action and praxis are themselves products of theoretical constructions, critical thinking itself is a socially embedded and determined activity, i.e. a form of praxis, an insight that re-imagines not just theory but also life as a praxis independent from the schematic split of human activity into the dualist terms of theory and praxis as well as the Cartesian mind/body split.

While Adorno’s position with regard to Spinoza seems uneasy if not outright hostile, the underlying framework of his thought fits seamlessly with Spinoza’s views of the nature of man, the relationship between body and mind, the role of the dynamics of the affects, and his ideas about how to rethink reason and philosophy. But the affinity is especially striking in the way both address the relationship between theory and praxis. If Adorno most likely took his cue on this issue from Marx, I would like to argue that reconnecting Adorno’s approach to Spinoza allows us to register the deeper impulses of Adorno’s (and Marx’s) critical rethinking of theory and praxis. As a result, the thrust of Adorno’s philosophical project as a whole comes into sharper relief as the persistent exploration of the irreducible but dynamic interplay between theory and praxis.

In *Minima Moralia*, his early reflections on his existence in exile, Adorno examines the intimate interplay between theory and praxis that informs the minutest details of daily life. Once “the perspective of life has passed into the ideology which conceals that there is life no longer,”¹⁴ theory and praxis can no longer be grasped in simple terms of identity or opposition. Adorno’s “Reflections on a Damaged Life” (*Minima Moralia*’s subtitle) are critical explorations of the deep nexus between life praxis and theoretical reflection. Highlighting the issues of ethics in their most minute but at the same time most important significance, Adorno’s reclaiming of *minima* versus *magna moralia*, i.e. the attention to the minute aspects of every day life serves as an insistent reminder that praxis, as insignificant as it might appear to be, informs the theory that reflects on it and often does so in profoundly decisive manner.

For Adorno, praxis is “itself an eminently theoretical concept” (ND 144). His caveat against a too quick identification of theory and praxis, however, objects to the “unity” (*Einheit*) to which complete identity would subject the complex nexus of interrelations that defines their relationship. Adorno’s strikingly odd use of the German word *Einheit* in this context suggests that failing to differentiate theory and praxis subjects them to a repressive regime of homogenization. The specter of militant violence looms behind Adorno’s concern to resist the desire to imagine theory and praxis as ultimately identical: “The call for unity of theory and practice has irresistibly degraded theory to a servant’s role, removing the very traits it should have brought to that unity” (ND 143). Adorno argued, such a reduction not only violated theory but also rendered praxis “begriffslos,” i.e. toothless and devoid of any conceptuality, or in Kantian terms, blind (*Critique of Pure Reason* A 51/B 75). Consequently, it would hand over not only theory but also praxis to power as Adorno’s critique of the Marxist prioritizing of praxis over theory highlights. As a result, bad theory assumes an insidious reach over an instrumentally reduced notion of praxis. For Adorno, the interest in theory regaining independence is thus ultimately praxis’s own interest. Or as Adorno puts it, “the liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice” (ND 143). Differentiating theory and praxis allows us to productively relate one to the other. Whereas arguing for a “unity” of theory and praxis erases the emancipatory potential of the difference and forces everybody to toe the party line, articulating their difference creates the momentum through which both theory and praxis gain their liberating power.

In his late “Marginalia on Theory and Praxis” Adorno notes: “Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis” (CM 261), and ironically adds: “The thinking denigrated by actionists apparently demands of them too much undue effort: it requires too much work, is too practical” (CM 263). The practical effect of differentiating thought from praxis follows with a dialectical punch: “He who thinks, poses [setzt] resistance” (CM 263).¹⁵ Resistance, however, is exactly the point where theory’s aspect as praxis becomes undeniable. If theory and praxis require each other mutually, the answer can be neither identity nor a complete disconnect, but a dynamic relationship from which neither can be disengaged, in and through which each enables the other: an ever-evolving interplay of identity and difference. It is the play between the two that for Adorno represents the awakening of humaneness (CM 267).

But it may well be that Adorno expressed this point most strikingly in one of his last texts, “Resignation,” published in February 1969, a half year before his premature death, where evoking affinities with Spinoza, he argues in the concluding paragraph that thinking is not just praxis but a particular form of praxis whose therapeutic moment has a transformative and emancipatory effect. And remarkably, Adorno’s last text, published at the end of June and only weeks before his death in August 1969, ends with a quote from Spinoza. In this short radio talk, “Critique,” in what was a resolute intervention in the time’s heated controversy concerning the primacy of praxis and actionism over theory and the indictment of critical thinking, Adorno makes what was to be his last effort to justify critique not just as the merely negative, destructive force as which it had been branded at the time but as a liberating, and ultimately more constructive, force that would be crucial for any praxis that would be transformative:

Those talking most about the positive are in agreement with destructive power. The collective compulsion for a positivity that allows its immediate translation into practice has in the meantime gripped precisely those people who believe they stand in the starkest opposition to society. This is not the least way in which their actionism fits smoothly into society’s prevailing trend. This should be opposed by the idea, in a variation of a famous proposition of Spinoza, that the false, once determinately known and precisely expressed, is already an index of what is right and better (CM 288).¹⁶

With this reference to Spinoza at the end of his essay, Adorno highlights the point of contact whose epistemological implication suggests the deep but conflicted affinity with regard to the theory-praxis problem. By inverting

Spinoza's dictum "Est enim verum index sui et falsi" ("For truth is proof of itself and untruth")¹⁷ to argue that thinking and thus theory is a genuine form of praxis that opposes and exposes actionism's self-declared positivity, through negative dialectics, Adorno alludes to the critical impetus he shares with Spinoza. But Adorno's notion that critique's negative force breaks open the sedimentations of the status quo to enable genuine action of a liberated praxis profoundly reverberates with Spinoza.

In the finale of Adorno's penultimate text, "Resignation," in which he refuses to succumb, his view of praxis reads like a synopsis of the key points of Spinoza's *Ethics*, whose theory of affects is conceived as a guide to self-emancipation from the bondage of the passions to the freedom of self-determination as the praxis that grasps happiness as the life-enhancing activity of self-empowerment:

Whoever thinks is not enraged in all his critique: thinking has sublimated the rage. Because the thinking person does not need to inflict rage upon himself, he does not wish to inflict it on others. The happiness that dawns in the eye of the thinking person is the happiness of humaneness.¹⁸ The universal tendency of oppression is opposed to thought as such. Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness: by enunciating it. By this alone happiness reaches into universal unhappiness. Whoever does not let it atrophy has not resigned (CM 293).

By reclaiming happiness once more as a legitimate concern of philosophy by intimately tying it to the project of critical theory, Adorno reiterates the transformative move to redefine philosophy that Spinoza had initiated.¹⁹

Attending to the wider range of contexts in which the theory-praxis problem takes shape in modernity and the currents that connect it to Spinoza allows us a more nuanced understanding of Marx's and Adorno's attempts to rethink the theory-praxis problem. Its corollary is that it also helps us understand the critical impulse that already informs Spinoza and Moses Hess as they break the grounds for what was to follow. The constellation of this genealogical filiation highlights a shared interest in the need to reimagine the concepts of theory and praxis and their relation anew, an issue that lies at the heart of philosophy, a project whose re-examination calls for rethinking philosophy in principal terms. Self-consciously associating their project to reimagine philosophy as a praxis of its – and of their – own with the experience of Jewish modernity, they are unafraid to recognize that the challenge their Jewish experience poses to inclusion by philosophy is their most critical asset as they reimagine the relationship

between theory and praxis on their own terms. It is their agreement in the dynamically rich and complex interplay between theory and praxis that makes their interventions so important. Marginalized, and in some cases self-marginalizing their Jewish sensitivities, their desire to take the project of philosophy philosophically seriously compelled them to recognize that theory is just a particular form of praxis, and that there is hence no need to exclude or suppress it in any theoretical, or practical aspect.

However, the problem as it continues to challenge us highlights a problem in philosophy itself, or more precisely, the problem of philosophy in general. Rather than abandoning philosophy altogether, Spinoza, Hess, Marx, and Adorno suggest that rethinking the theory-praxis problem leads to the insight that philosophy itself needs to be grasped as a particular instance of praxis rather than just as theory. To rethink the theory-praxis problem requires more than just the application of philosophy, i.e. more than merely a task of theory: rethinking theory and praxis from the bottom up is tantamount to rethinking the project of philosophy itself.

Let me conclude with a sentence that could have been pronounced by Kant, Hess, Marx, or Adorno, but was certainly anticipated by Spinoza: “There is nothing more practical than a good theory” which should give us pause to appreciate that the recovery of the traces of alternative genealogies complicates but also enriches the dominant narratives in liberating ways.

Marx’s reconceptualization of the theory-praxis problem owes its critical moment to Moses Hess’s recovery of Spinoza’s insight that thinking is a form of praxis and praxis is necessarily informed by some form of thinking – critical or not. It was Hess’s initiative that allowed Marx to break free from Hegel with the leverage of Spinoza.

To argue for Spinozist traces in Critical Theory and in Adorno’s insight that praxis is ultimately a theoretical concept and that theoretical thought is liberating because it gains its most profound critical traction when it recognizes itself as a form of praxis might seem surprising but it might seem less so once Spinoza’s thought is unencumbered by Adorno’s characterization of it as disabling rationalism.

Marx, for one, had always demonstrated a higher regard for Spinoza’s thought if only tacitly.²⁰ If on the surface Adorno may have suffered from fear of association with the 17th century philosopher, his critique resonates in striking manner with Spinoza. On this view, critical thinking is less a task but rather praxis. If critique is a praxis, its theoretical strength rests on precisely this insight.

Whether Critical Theory is a Jewish theory or not is of little significance. The question has an oddly false ring: what would make any theory Jewish? More to the point, the question is whether critical theory reflects on itself being, as thought, always already a certain form of praxis. If it is critical in terms of being self-reflective it does so and in that way we could say it may reflect its Jewish sources as well.

Extending the narrative of the theory-praxis problem to Spinoza and Hess enriches by opening new perspectives with a different and differentiated frame of reference that allows us to register otherwise impossible to register imponderables and enables us to see that the theory-praxis problem is not just theory but a place where very practical concerns are negotiated, among them the place and significance of Jewish philosophers in modernity.

Notes

- 1 While Marx clearly suggests that much, the passage that comes closest to highlight the fundamental nexus of theory as a praxis are his comments in *The German Ideology* on the ruling class as manifestation of “the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas.” See Karl Marx, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, New York: Norton, 2nd. ed. 1978, 172f. and Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Continuum, 2005, 144. Henceforth referred to as ND.
- 2 Karl Marx, *Exzerpte und Notizen bis 1842* in Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels Gesamt-ausgabe (MEGA) part 4, vol. 1, Berlin: Dietz, 1976, 233–276.
- 3 Marx, *The Marx-Engels-Reader*, 154.
- 4 Moses Hess, The Philosophy of the Act, in *Socialist Thought: A Documentary History*, eds. Albert Fried and Ronald Sanders, New York: Columbia University, rev. ed. 1992, 249–275, 264, henceforth cited as ST; Moses Hess, *Ausgewählte Schriften*, ed. Horst Lademacher, Wiesbaden, n.d., 140, henceforth cited as L.
- 5 I have changed the wording slightly to reflect the German more precisely.
- 6 “nicht nur eine tote Theorie, sondern nur die lebendige Praxis zu sein [...]. [Er] war kein bloss theoretischer Philosoph, sondern in jedem Sinn ein praktischer – Sein Hauptwerk war keine Metaphysik, sondern eine Ethik.” The ms. is in the Moses Hess collection of the International Institute for Social History in Amsterdam, Moses Hess, B 89, 4. I thank the International Institute for Social History for providing a scan of the ms.
- 7 While there is some research on Goethe’s reception of Spinoza, its full magnitude needs yet to be explored. It also represents one of the intriguing connections with Heine. Both developed a distinct vision of the theory-praxis problem that interestingly reflects their affinity to Spinoza.
- 8 For Heine see Willi Goetschel, *Spinoza’s Modernity: Mendelssohn, Lessing, and Heine*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, 253–265.
- 9 Isaiah Berlin renders this as “a Young Disciple” in his *The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess*, Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1959, 6.

- 10 Silberner opens his biography of Moses Hess with this quote: Edmund Silberner, *Moses Hess: Geschichte seines Lebens*, Leiden: Brill, 1966. For the letter see Moses Hess, *Briefwechsel*, ed. Edmund Silberner with Werner Blumenberg, The Hague: Mouton, 1969, letter to Alexander Herzen, February 1850, 241.
- 11 Moses Hess, Über das Geldwesen, in Moses Hess, *Philosophische und sozialistische Schriften 1837-1850*, ed. Wolfgang Mönke, Vaduz: Topos, 1980, 330, §§ 1 and 2. Translations from this are mine.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 331.
- 13 For the critical edge of dialogical thinking see my discussion of Goldschmidt in *The Discipline of Philosophy and the Invention of Modern Jewish Thought*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013.
- 14 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N Jephcott, London: Verso, 2005, 15.
- 15 Pickford's translation is "offers resistance." The German *setzen* can mean both to posit theoretically as well as to practically place or put in place.
- 16 This is the only statement of Spinoza to which Adorno refers repeatedly in agreement. The mantra-like return to this reference resonates with Adorno's negative dialectics to get to the truth-content by way of examination of the negative through which the constellation of the true can be surmised if only by way of conjecture.
- 17 Spinoza's letter 76 to Albert Burg. A similar formulation can be found in his *Ethics*: "veritas norma sui, & falsi" (2E43schol.).
- 18 The translation renders Adorno's *Menschlichkeit* with humanity while the translator, Pickford, uses humaneness in CM 267 where Adorno uses "Humanität."
- 19 For Spinoza's move to redefine philosophy see Pierre-François Moreau, "Qu'est-ce que c'est la philosophie? Spinoza et la pratique de la demarcation" in Moreau, *Problèmes du spinozisme*, Paris: Vrin, 2006, 87–99. See also Goetschel, *The Discipline of Philosophy*, 166–170.
- 20 The deep connection of Marx with Spinoza deserves yet fuller critical exploration.