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**Lamentation and Resistance: the Non-Resignation of Philosophy and Adorno's "Melancholy Science" in the Face of the Catastrophe**

"There is no getting out of this, no more than out of the electrified barbed wire around the camps. Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems."<sup>1</sup> These words by Adorno refer to another, better known, phrase which made the German-Jewish philosopher unpopular and whose echoes are still resounding today: "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today."<sup>2</sup> This famous injunction against the *ars poetica* – written in 1949, published in 1951 – is understandable only as part of the dialectic between culture and barbarity which was envisaged by Walter Benjamin and is contextualized but not completely corrected almost two decades later by the statement in *Negative Dialectics*.

This assertion reiterates Adorno's paradox, in whose wake we still find ourselves today, a paradox oscillating between the absurdity of a culture re-emerging from the ashes of disaster and the inevitability of this same culture. "Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter,"<sup>3</sup> writes Adorno. On the one hand, there is the awareness that any culture, art, literature, poetry and philosophy "revived"<sup>4</sup> *afterwards*, "including its urgent critique,"<sup>5</sup> is only idle chatter or "garbage," while on the other hand there is an awareness that this very culture, even if it does merely consist of garbage, is nonetheless necessary and urgent – necessary because it helps us to understand the past and to ensure that past horror will never be repeated; urgent because devastations continue to ravage our present. *We* find ourselves, then, caught in the impasse and paradox of not being able to escape the "circle" that calls for a constant criticism of culture *after* Auschwitz and for the necessity of contributing to its reformulation from within. Auschwitz<sup>6</sup> has brought culture and, as far as the subject of this essay is concerned, philosophy and philosophical thought to an insurmountable impasse.

However, the insurmountable could be overcome if culture were impelled to re-travel the path that led to its failure, to reconsider its stages, images,

myths, illusions, and also its solutions; in short, to rewrite its history through the perspective of a “critical self-reflection” that is entrusted to philosophy, or even through art, which, according to Adorno, is “an objective form” of the “awareness of suffering among human beings”<sup>7</sup> or the “unconscious writing of history” where “the authentic artists [...] are those in whose works the uttermost horror still quivers.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus an opening would be made in this culture of *afterwards*, as both philosophy and art would be able to find their *raison d'être*, a sense after the Catastrophe, in the lucid self-criticism of philosophical thought that is the prerogative of philosophy, and in the echoes of “the uttermost horror” attributed to art. However, although the price to be paid is high, because we risk producing rubbish or idle chatter, and although conformity and reification threaten the critical spirit of one and the potential of the other, it seems that art in particular is entrusted with the role of freeing culture from this impasse, finally promising the realization of what is unrealizable. If Adorno’s interpretation of art takes place, following Walter Benjamin, in light of a philosophy of history and society, it is nevertheless art, in its various forms, to which the role of deliverance, of opening up to utopia, seems to be entrusted. Like philosophy, but more than philosophy, art finds itself in the paradoxical situation of being required to *speak* of the world’s pain, and to endow it with form – in the broad sense of the term – to the point of expressing the unspeakable extremity and suffering of the Catastrophe; simultaneously, art is inclined towards that which transcends and surpasses this, in the sense that art not only shows that what is real is definitive and irreversible, but that it is open to something indelibly new, to an other, a beyond that points to and indicates utopia. At the same time, philosophy is likewise entrusted with a significant role: that of exercising extreme and critical – even self-critical – vigilance, of possessing consciousness and gaining awareness by means of the concept. It too must know the world’s suffering, or rather it must understand, express, and denounce “*the state of the world rushing towards catastrophe*,”<sup>9</sup> as Adorno phrases it. “What is right for art,” he writes,

is just as right for philosophy, whose truth content converges with that of art, by virtue of the technical procedures of art diverging from those of philosophy. The undiminished persistence of suffering, fear and menace necessitates that the thought that cannot be realized should not be discarded. After having missed its opportunity, philosophy must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world – which could be a paradise here and now – can become hell itself tomorrow. Such knowledge would indeed truly be philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

Art and philosophy therefore converge in their respective roles; on the one hand, knowledge, denunciation, and transcendence of what is real – perpetual suffering or catastrophe – and on the other, constant criticism that remains open to alternatives. Through different means (which are not necessarily delineable, in broad outline, in terms of intuition for the one and concept for the other), philosophy and art aim towards the same truth, a truth that neither of them is able to fully grasp on its own. Each therefore needs the other. Moreover, art – in all its forms – and philosophy both contain this impulse or impetus towards what is not, towards the different, towards the other whose outline cannot definitely be made out, towards a boundless beyond, towards a utopia without objectification, without solution, without end. Utopia, promise or redemption?<sup>11</sup>

*A difficult task for philosophy: non-resignation*

In the ravaged post-war landscape and the gaping abyss of the extermination camps, Adorno's position was to show that the task of thinking is still crucial, even though philosophy remained torn. In extreme vigilance, critical and dialectical thought must move away into exile from itself. It is forced not just to tear the exterior, but also to injure the interior, its own interior. It must face its own negativity; it must learn to hide nothing from itself, to distance itself from its own desolation. Furthermore, despite and because of this desolation, and particularly after the devastations of Auschwitz, it must persevere in seeking its own horizon, which is that of thinking and finding solutions. And it must do so, as always, through the means most particular to it: the concept. Hence the singular conflict that can be found in this sometimes "impossible" author's writing is the conflict between him criticizing and distancing the concept while at the same time asserting the necessity of conceptual labor; a conflict relating to the internal logic of negative dialectics which, according to Adorno, "extinguishes the autarky of the concept" and "strips the blindfold from our eyes,"<sup>12</sup> or to put it another way, allows "the concept [to] transcend the concept."<sup>13</sup>

The difficult task of philosophy and negative dialectics, according to Adorno, is to invent another thinking, another way of knowing, another way of practicing philosophy and another approach to metaphysics, based on the concept even while criticizing it; but also to reorient conceptuality or to "disenchant"<sup>14</sup> it, to "turn [it] towards the nonidentical." However,

this task is subject to a condition: that the concept, reason, knowledge, philosophy, metaphysics and truth do not evade the ordeal of the catastrophe that rained down on European Jews; the task is contingent upon conceptual philosophy being able to thoroughly scrutinize itself for any compromise with the external disaster, contingent upon the ability to become aware of this, and, at the same time, contingent upon being capable of emerging from these devastations to recover sense and dignity. For “if metaphysical thinking today is to have any chance [...] it will have to cease being apologetic and pointing to something one can hold onto and never lose, and *think against itself*. And that means it must measure itself against the ultimate, the absolutely unthinkable, to have any right to be a thinking at all.”<sup>15</sup>

Like his Frankfurt School companions, Adorno has no hesitation in believing that, despite everything, despite the “melancholy science” already acknowledged and announced in 1951 at the beginning of *Minima Moralia* and covering “the true field of philosophy,”<sup>16</sup> despite painful lucidity, and above all despite the mutilation inflicted on men and the deadly ordeal imposed on thought during the dark times, it is necessary not to give in to the temptation of disillusionment or resignation in philosophy. It is necessary to resist. As he magnificently writes in one of his last texts, in response to certain critics who had accused him of giving up,

the uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth *the one who does not give in*. Thinking is not the intellectual reproduction of what already exists anyway. As long as it doesn't break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. Its insatiable aspect, its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied, refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation. [...] Open thinking points beyond itself [...]. Prior to all particular content, *thinking is actually the force of resistance*.<sup>17</sup>

And it is precisely this force of resistance, before all content, as well as before all *praxis* and all political commitment, that once again gives a sense to philosophy.

But resistance to what, exactly? Certainly resistance to numbness, to appearance and illusion, in other words to the blind and reified consciousness of mass society; but also resistance to docile acceptance of everything that occurs in this world as if it were the normal course of events, resistance to the form of consciousness and mind “that adapts itself to the world as it is, that obeys the principle of inertia [which] truly is what is radically evil,”<sup>18</sup> because it is precisely this principle of inertia, united with cold-

ness,<sup>19</sup> which made the horror possible. Resistance, also, to the idea that everything is determined, and ensuring that thought does not take place in “triviality, the consummation of which is absolute horror.”<sup>20</sup> Resistance, in philosophy, means resistance to closure and completion, as well as to any solution.

Yet Adorno’s “melancholy science,” shifting between criticism of events and facts on the one hand and lucid awareness of certain philosophical implications on the other, between uncompromising consciousness and the force of a non-resignation that is open to other possibilities for philosophy itself, can take shape and be expressed not only in the form of criticism, or indeed denunciation or protest, but also in another tone, another way – that of a “lament.” “Subjective reflection,” he writes, “even if critically alerted to itself, has something sentimental and anachronistic about it: something of a *lament* over the course of the world.”<sup>21</sup> It is a lament that mourns the historical and meta-historical “disaster”<sup>22</sup> of the extermination yet nonetheless, in its despair, acts for the “sake of the possible,” turning towards that which surpasses thinking by urging it to go beyond itself.<sup>23</sup> It is a lament that turns, over the course of a philosophical and professorial work, towards the necessity of a concrete truth,<sup>24</sup> concrete in the same way as the suffering and mutilated lives of the oppressed and the annihilated, in order to restore dignity to philosophy. And it does so not in order to save philosophy at all costs, but to redress the oversight and forgetfulness of concrete reality, of this concrete suffering, on which it is founded, to free it from its compromises by offering it other chances without giving in to the disguises, enchantments and excesses of which it was and still is capable.

Lamentation and awareness, lamentation as knowledge and as (self-) criticism, but also lamentation as resistance: this is the task and tone of Adorno’s dialectical-critical thinking. As he very clearly states in one of his seminars in 1965,

it [philosophy] seems to me to represent *the only chance* [...] of making good *at least* a part of what [...] is otherwise denied. If one is not oneself capable at each moment of identification with the victims, and of alert awareness and remembrance, philosophy, in the necessary forms of its own reification, is perhaps the only form of consciousness which, by seeing through these matters and making them conscious in a more objective form, can *at least do something*, a *small part* of that which we are unable to do.<sup>25</sup>

“*At least ...*”

There are of course several points to be highlighted which are suggested by this expression, “*at least*,” that recurs throughout this passage and Adorno’s fragmentary and disjointed writing. Firstly, this “*at least*” itself contains the force of resistance and non-resignation, in the sense that it indicates the “*small part*” that we – we who came *afterwards* – can do, thanks to philosophy, through a knowledge that understands how to identify with the victims and the unshakeable memory of their suffering; but it also indicates the “*small part*” that, at heart, expresses the “only chance” of making good, even to a minimal extent, what otherwise could not be made good. This “*at least*,” very close to “practically nothing,” is therefore indicative of the scope provided to philosophy, in the sense of the possibility for taking concrete action and doing that which otherwise would have been impossible – even if such action merely involves becoming objectively aware. But in this possibility of doing the impossible, philosophy also reveals an openness to utopia.

Secondly, and simultaneously, this “*at least*” shows the movement of philosophy – and its object, as we will see below – from the “everything” of the absolute towards the “practically nothing” of the contingent. In short, this expression (“*at least*”) marks the migration of philosophy and metaphysics towards “micrology,”<sup>26</sup> as the philosopher declares at the end of *Negative Dialectics*; towards a “micrology” that “chooses the small.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, in order to be true, philosophy (or more precisely metaphysics as first philosophy) must – and does, in Adorno’s writing – turn towards the “practically nothing” of what he calls “the non-identical,” namely the “practically nothing” of immanence or indeed suffering: immanence as a refuge in the face of that which is total and thus harmful, but also as the prerogative and salvation of the singular because the immanent is singular, is the singular *par excellence*. More precisely still, this “*at least*” not only guides the *minima moralia*, being evidence of the remains of morality inherent, for example, in the modesty of a spontaneous gesture that appears in a moment of compassion in the face of others’ suffering, or in the fragility of an act which ‘*minimally*’ (i.e. to the minimal extent) resists and says “no” to the intolerability of pain. This “*at least*” also steers the *minima metaphysica*,<sup>28</sup> as metaphysics must also change its orientation – and indeed does so in Adorno’s works. As I will show, it must move from the “everything” to the “practically nothing,” from totality to singularity,

from transcendence to immanence. It must migrate from the immutable and eternal towards that which is the most fragile and ephemeral, towards the miniscule, the *minimum*, what lies on the ground, the “*down-to-earth*.”<sup>29</sup> I would even be tempted to say, without being insensitive and indecent, towards the “helplessness” of the humiliated existence of those who were tortured, violated and annihilated and whose bodies covered the ground of the extermination camps.

### *Minima metaphysica*

The course of this descent, this migration of metaphysics towards “micrology,” is well outlined in the “Meditations on Metaphysics” in the third part of *Negative Dialectics*,<sup>30</sup> which relates to the key question that similarly guides me here: can philosophy, metaphysics and their questions live on after the Catastrophe? Is it still possible to talk of metaphysics? Does it still have a sense? Is there still any sense in speaking of *sense*?

The start of these meditations shows that “we cannot say any more” that the immutable or eternal quality of transcendence is truth while the ephemeral or “mobile”<sup>31</sup> quality of immanence is appearance, as suggested by a certain philosophical tradition. Metaphysics has no possibility of surviving if it does not change its position; now, that is to say after the Catastrophe, it must turn towards transitory and material things. Truth must be guaranteed not by the transcendence of the eternal, but by the immanence of the ephemeral, the elusive and the fragile in human existence, because it is precisely the concrete and transitory elements of human life that suffered violence at Auschwitz up to the destruction of the life and death of those who died there.

And yet this strident truth, almost shouted by Adorno, of the impossibility of a truth detached from all immanence and ephemerality, finds its justification in feeling/sensation (*Gefühl*).<sup>32</sup> It is feeling/sensation, i.e. the thing that is the most relative, subjective, sensitive and precarious, but also the most singular, which entitles this truth. It is in the ‘futility’ of feeling that truth *afterwards*, including the truth stated here by Adorno, finds a ‘foundation.’<sup>33</sup> “After Auschwitz,” he writes,

our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims’

fate. And these feelings do not have an objective side after events that make a mockery of the construction of immanence as endowed with a meaning radiated by an affirmatively posited transcendence.<sup>34</sup>

For Adorno, feeling/sensation *afterwards* – the manifestation of a repugnance towards the suffering at Auschwitz, of indignation and revulsion at its crimes – is the first “point” of resistance, the first “no,” while being the “objective moment” that prevents sense from being attributed to the immanence of destroyed existences, starting with transcendence. This feeling/sensation – felt by whom, if not by those who come *after*? – ‘establishes’ the Adornian truth that a transcendent truth absolutely separated from the real, material and concrete existence of the engulfed is impossible. This feeling/sensation first clashes with the idea that all transcendence is positive, and likewise with the possibility of giving a sense to the immanence of the victims’ lives – or rather, of their death – on the basis of some kind of transcendence. This is because Auschwitz destroyed and burned, along with its victims, the possibility of a reconciliation between the “speculative metaphysical thought”<sup>35</sup> surrounding transcendent truth and the concrete experience of the destruction of millions of human beings. In short, Auschwitz drives a chasm between a transcendent truth and the concrete reality of the suffering and death.

Over this chasm, however, Adorno proclaims his truth. It is a different truth, certainly; a truth of the ephemeral and the concrete, with its starting point in the most ephemeral of all: feeling/sensation. Indeed, this feeling that expresses revulsion and denunciation – a form, the first and most minimal form, of resistance and a refusal of resignation – also reveals something more. Its emergence and portrayal as emotion suggests the possibility of a layer of sense spared by events which are rationally intolerable because they are emotionally intolerable; a layer of sense where what is not rationally tolerable is set into motion, changing its sense under the weight of this emotional intolerance. Consequently, the rationally intolerable, emerging from the emotionally intolerable, indirectly expresses a sense: a layer of sense precisely where there is an interruption of a certain sense. It is as if this feeling/sensation revealed to (theoretical) thought – considering the possibility of metaphysics and its own possibilities – that it too can be affected, touched and disturbed by the intolerance of this suffering and by the emotional reaction it causes.<sup>36</sup> It is as if this emotional feeling/sensation of intolerance, this reaction, this *resistance of the senses* (if I



can phrase it that way) was not deprived of sense, and as if its profound sense was transmitted or “transferred” to what is not supposed to become entangled in the emotional – (theoretical) thought. There is therefore a sense in this sense of *Gefühl*/feeling,<sup>37</sup> a fleeting and fragile sense, *a sense of the senses*. But a sense persists.

Furthermore, discovery of the “transformation” of philosophy,<sup>38</sup> the “shock” or injury to philosophical thought – traumatized by this catastrophe and by the change of direction that it requires, shocked by the change in its own view, becoming “micrological” and moving from the heights of the transcendent to the “practically nothing” of what lies on the ground – throws “a glaring light”<sup>39</sup> on truth. This disruption of philosophy and metaphysical thought reveals the possibility of another concept of truth, as we have seen, but also another truth in the sense that it is definitively detached from the traditional model of *adaequatio rei atque cogitationis*. In other words, not only does the Catastrophe disrupt philosophy and metaphysics by affecting both thinking itself and its object (truth) through the feeling of intolerability and revulsion at extreme suffering, or by turning it upside down, as we have seen; Auschwitz also throws a new light on truth, because truth leaves behind its traditional form of *adaequatio* to take on another form, to become “other.” Indeed, as Adorno writes,

life feeds the horror of a premonition: what must come to be known may resemble the *down-to-earth* more than it resembles the sublime [...]. If the pedestrian had the last word, if it were the truth, truth would be degraded [...] unless the formation of a truth concept other than that of *adaequatio* should succeed. The innervation that metaphysics might win only by discarding itself applies to such other truth.<sup>40</sup>

Adorno appears to say that, although philosophical temptation is still connected to the loftiness of transcendence and a truth of *adaequatio*, the premonition of life – another way of saying feeling? what life? whose life? – reveals and testifies by contrast that the ‘object’<sup>41</sup> of knowledge (“what must come to be known”) is “the *down-to-earth*,” that which is below, on earth, on the ground; that which covers – those who cover – the ground of our ravaged earth. However, Adorno is not pleading the case for a return to materialism, but rather, as we have seen, challenging a certain way of practicing philosophy and contemplating metaphysics and a certain concept of truth in favor of a truth that is ‘founded’ on feeling and surrenders its control of adequacy. For if this new thinking – negative

dialectics – that “calls for the self-reflection of thinking” and requires it to be a “thinking against itself”<sup>42</sup> is not measured by “the extremity that eludes the concept,” it risks being “in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims.”<sup>43</sup>

Yet what is “the extremity that eludes the concept” if not precisely the suffering stigmatized at Auschwitz? What else does this represent if not the singularity of these victims’ suffering in particular? What is the logical subject of this phrase if not the agony of those who suffered and died there? Why else would Adorno speak of the “screams of its victims”?

Philosophical thought must be measured against the trial of suffering in general,<sup>44</sup> certainly, but most particularly against the particular suffering, or rather sufferings, that were inflicted at all the places of torture and annihilation during those terrible years. The obstacle that Auschwitz presents to thinking (philosophy and metaphysics) is thus limited by the barrier that suffering erects against the concept that *physical* suffering imposes on it, since “*the physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different.*”<sup>45</sup> Philosophical thought can therefore no longer overcome this barrier and escape the requirement to think about it.<sup>46</sup> It is up to thinking and dialectical-critical philosophical discourse to express this suffering and these cries.

But in what way can suffering, the ultimate singularity, direct or even reorient philosophical (and also theoretical) thought? How can the particularity and multiplicity of suffering(s), which almost prevent us from speaking of them in the singular, be “raised to a concept” while eluding it, without once more being subjected to domination, and without once again being reduced to silence? More precisely, how can the singular agonies suffered during the Catastrophe, *those* inconsolable sufferings, truly reorient philosophical thought and its idea of truth?

This is exactly the challenge of all negative dialectics. Not to dialectically negate thinking on the forgetful identity of singularity and complicity with disaster, as we all too often are too quick to assert, but to show that *Auschwitz is the pivotal point for a reorientation of thought*, a reorientation towards something else, towards the “Other” that, more than any other, “recoils against dominion”<sup>47</sup> because it is something “downright incommensurable with it [thought].”<sup>48</sup>

It is clear that, for Adorno, turning towards the singular or the “non-identical” and addressing what has been abandoned, neglected and exclu-

ded is a way of *resisting afterwards*. However, though the German-Jewish philosopher believes that thinking must turn towards what “fell by the wayside,” that is to say towards “the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic,”<sup>49</sup> how can this thinking, while being a protest, resistance and lament, still dare to speak of the singular “in the face of unspeakable collective events”?<sup>50</sup> How can it become the denunciation yet also the voice of the singular – of the singularity of this suffering – without in turn becoming identitarian or indeed “authoritarian,” not to mention “totalitarian,” and all while knowing that the singular was annihilated in the collective murder of millions of individuals?

It is not without pain and anguish that Adorno admits – as do I – the difficulty of these questions, and indeed all the aporias that are indebted to a philosophy of the extreme, to a philosophy of non-resignation and to the paradox that dictates “the impossibility of thinking that which must nevertheless be thought,”<sup>51</sup> a paradox that also expresses the combination of disenchantment and sadness felt by the intellectual who assumes the task of such thinking. As he writes, “for the intellectual, inviolable isolation is now the only way of showing some measure of solidarity. All collaboration, all the human worth of social mixing and participation, merely masks a tacit acceptance of inhumanity. It is the sufferings of men that should be shared: the smallest step towards their pleasures is one towards the hardening of their pains.”<sup>52</sup>

Despite and due to this “melancholy science,” Adorno attempted with all his philosophical resources, and his weaknesses, to give voice to this otherwise forgotten suffering to the extent of making it the pivotal point for a new era of thinking, for a new dawn.

A dawn that perhaps is yet to arrive.

*Translated by Victoria Aris*

### Notes

- 1 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973), 362.
- 2 T. W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 34. It is worth quoting the entire passage: “The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind and the more paradoxical its effort to escape reification on its own. Even the most extreme consciousness of doom threatens to degenerate into idle chatter. Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of

- culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.” See also *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 179 for this statement by Adorno.
- 3 Ibid.
  - 4 T. W. Adorno, *Critical Models. Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 43.
  - 5 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 366. Cfr. the two important collective volumes edited by Patrick Vessort, *Théorie critique de la crise*, vol. 1 e 2, n° 10/11 and 12/13, Le bord le l’eau, Caen, 2013 and 2014.
  - 6 It may perhaps be worth pointing out that this name denotes not only this particular place of extermination, but also all the other places of annihilation and all the concentration camps – and more. As he states in one of his lectures in 1965, “by that I mean not only Auschwitz but the world of torture which has continued to exist after Auschwitz,” in *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 101. Cf. also 116: “this name stands for something unthinkable beyond the unthinkable.”
  - 7 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 110.
  - 8 T. W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, 47.
  - 9 Ibid., 13 (my emphasis).
  - 10 Ibid., 14.
  - 11 This question certainly merits elaboration that is not possible here.
  - 12 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 12.
  - 13 Ibid., 9.
  - 14 Adorno writes: “Disenchantment of the concept is the antidote of philosophy. It keeps it from growing rampant and becoming an absolute to itself,” *ibid.*, 13.
  - 15 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 115 (my emphasis).
  - 16 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections on a Damaged Life* (1951), trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), 15.
  - 17 T. W. Adorno, “Resignation,” in *Critical Models*, 292f. (my emphasis). Cf. also 15, where Adorno writes: “the force of such resistance is the sole criterion for philosophy today.”
  - 18 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 115.
  - 19 On the theme of coldness as an essential basis for the extermination, please see my own work, O. Ombrosi, *The Twilight of Reason. W. Benjamin, T. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer and E. Levinas Tested by the Catastrophe* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 142–47.
  - 20 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 115.
  - 21 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 16 (my emphasis).
  - 22 Ibid., 55.
  - 23 In the text entitled “Resignation,” Adorno once again writes: “As long as it doesn’t break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. [...] The utopian moment in thinking is stronger the less it [...] objectifies itself into a utopia and hence sabotages its realization. Open thinking points beyond itself,” *Critical Models*, 292.
  - 24 Cf. *infra*.

- 25 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 113.
- 26 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 407.
- 27 M. Abensour, “Le choix du petit,” *Postface* to the French edition of *Minima Moralia* (Paris: Payot, 1980), 234.
- 28 This expression is borrowed from Christophe David’s introduction to the French edition of *Metaphysics*; T. W. Adorno, *Métaphysique. Concepts et problèmes*, trans. C. David (Paris: Payot, 2006), 7.
- 29 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 364.
- 30 And in the preparatory material for *Negative Dialectics* represented by the lectures held in summer 1965, currently published collectively in *Metaphysics*, which should be considered as the testing ground for his *magnum opus* and a testimony to its importance.
- 31 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 361.
- 32 In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno says that “it is rather for philosophy to seek, in the opposition of *feeling* and *understanding*, their – precisely *moral* – unity” (198, my emphasis).
- 33 We must ask ourselves, however, whether it is possible to ‘found’ anything, even a new concept of truth or the new categorical imperative, on the suffering of the annihilateds.
- 34 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 361.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 362.
- 36 For this point, see also J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno. Disenchantment and Ethics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001, 371–414
- 37 In Adorno’s work, this sense is characterized immediately and above all as a feeling of guilt, the distressing feeling of being spared and existing in the place of another, like a nightmare about “a man killed twenty years earlier.” In his own words, “the guilt of a life which purely as a *fact* will strangle another life, according to statistics that eke out an overwhelming number of killed with a minimal number of rescued [...] is irreconcilable with living. And the guilt does not cease to reproduce itself, because not for an instant can it be made fully, presently conscious. *This, nothing else, is what compels us to philosophize.* And in philosophy we experience a shock: the deeper, the more vigorous its penetration, the greater our suspicion that philosophy removes us from things as they are – that an unveiling of the essence might enable the most superficial and trivial views to prevail over the views that aim at the essence. This throws a glaring light on truth itself” (my emphasis), in *Negative Dialectics*, 364. The feeling of guilt at living and breathing when others no longer do, mixed with the instinct for self-preservation – always shameful – is what prevents any reconciliation with life. For Adorno, it is not wrong to wonder “whether *after Auschwitz* you can go on living” (*ibid.*, 363). But this feeling of guilt, which cannot be constant nor continuously present in the consciousness – thereby increasing guilt – is also what “*compels us to philosophize.*” It is the feeling of guilt, united with the feeling of non-reconciliation and the feeling of intolerability, that drives a philosophy of *afterwards*.
- 38 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 118.
- 39 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 364.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 364f. (my emphasis).
- 41 However, is it possible to completely renounce the model of *adaequatio* if we remain attached, as Adorno seems to be, to the distinction between ‘object’ and ‘subject’? If

truth must free itself from the model of adequacy, how can this truly be accomplished while the distinction between the two terms remains implicit, though with its axis leaning more towards the 'object', even if it is the most *abiectum obiectum*?

42 Ibid., 365.

43 Ibid.

44 Indeed, Adorno writes at the start of *Negative Dialectics*: "the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth," 17; in another passage: "all pain and all negativity" are "the moving forces of dialectical thinking," 177; and finally: "its [dialectics'] agony is the world's agony raised to a concept," 6.

45 Ibid., 203.

46 Despite the differences between him and Jean-Paul Sartre, in a passage in *Metaphysics* Adorno takes up a question voiced by one of the characters in *The Victors* and makes it a parameter for thought. The character "asks whether or why one should live in a world in which one is beaten until one's bones are smashed. Since it concerns the possibility of any affirmation of life, this question cannot be evaded. And I would think that any thought which is not measured by this standard, which does not assimilate it theoretically, simply pushes aside at the outset that which thought should address – so that it really cannot be called a thought at all," 111.

47 Ibid., 221.

48 Ibid., 405.

49 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 151.

50 Ibid., 18.

51 T. W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*, 145.

52 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 26.