LANGUAGE, CRITIQUE, AND THE NON-IDENTICAL: NIETZSCHE AND ADORNO ON THE ETHICS OF THINKING

PAOLO A. BOLANOS
BA (Santo Tomas), MA (Santo Tomas), MA (Brock)

Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University
Sydney, Australia

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

October, 2009
I certify that the following thesis is entirely my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or educational institution. All sources of information used in the thesis have been indicated, and due acknowledgment has been given to the work of others.

Paolo A. Bolanos
October, 2009
ABSTRACT

The overarching aim of this thesis is the articulation of a philosophical notion of an “ethics of thinking,” a kind of thinking that is receptive to the non-identical character of the world of human and non-human objects. In order to conceptualize such notion of ethical thinking, I turn to the works of two important German thinkers, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). The thesis, however, will not present a conventional comparative study of the two philosophers. I would rather figuratively call my approach an experimentation with Nietzsche and Adorno, which is to be done by emphasizing and activating the strong theoretical links between the two philosophers: 1) language, 2) critique, and 3) the non-identical.

In Part One, I first revisit the profound influence of the early German Romantics on the basic philosophical temperament in Nietzsche- and Adorno’s thinking. I highlight the German Romantics’ anti-foundationalist stance and their keen sensibility to the role of language in philosophy. This prefigures a more elaborate discussion of their individual engagement with language and how both philosophers criticize and redeem philosophical language from metaphysics (Nietzsche) and identity thinking (Adorno). I consider Nietzsche’s reinscription of “metaphorical language” and Adorno’s stress on “configurative language” as examples of what Nikolas Kompridis refers to as “receptivity to the new.”

Part Two is an attempt to locate the place of the Nietzsche-Adorno tandem in contemporary critical theory and to argue that their style of critique could be considered instances of “disclosing critique,” a notion I borrow from Axel Honneth and Kompridis. I begin by recounting Max Horkheimer’s basic assumptions in “Traditional and Critical Theory” as ground for discussing the main critical and emancipatory thrust of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. Then I respond to the criticisms leveled against Adorno by Jürgen Habermas, arguing that Habermas totally misses the redemptive and emancipatory potential of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. I argue for a rehabilitation the notion of mimesis via the notion of disclosing critique: the re-description of social pathologies (Honneth) which requires our receptivity to the particularity and plurality of our experiences (Kompridis) within a given social matrix.

In Part Three, I highlight Honneth’s recent claim that the survival of critical theory partly rests on a revisionist take on the role of Nietzschean genealogy. I use Honneth’s position as a counterclaim against Habermas’ dismissal of the critical and redemptive potential of the genealogical method. I also discuss the profound ethical thrust and utopian vision of Adorno’s negative dialectics and argue that, against the conventional Habermasian position, negative dialectics is exemplary of what I refer to as the ethics of
thinking. Finally, in the last chapter, I articulate more explicitly the nature of the “ethics of thinking.” It is in this juncture where the Nietzsche-Adorno relation comes into full force. I will demonstrate that the ethics of thinking is linked to aesthetic experience inasmuch as the redemptive dimension of mimesis is only gleaned from an emphatic immersion into damaged life. The experience of damaged life brings to the fore the moments of critical disclosure, possibility and creativity, and redemption.
I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my Primary Supervisor, Dr. Robert Sinnerbrink, for his patience, openness of mind, and for having painstakingly read through the parts and chapters of my thesis. This project, from its naive beginnings to its present form, has profoundly benefited from his constructive criticisms and earnest encouragements. I would also like to thank my Associate Supervisor, Dr. Jean-Philippe Deranty, for his astute insights during conversations and for his generosity during my candidature. Many thanks also to the people of the Department of Philosophy, especially to Dr. Nicholas H. Smith, for his support, and to my fellow postgraduate students, for providing a congenial environment for philosophical exchange and debate.

I wish to acknowledge the generous financial support of Macquarie University which came in various forms. Firstly, my candidature was made possible by an International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (iPRS) and an International Macquarie University Research Scholarship (iMURS) awarded by the Higher Degree Research Unit. Secondly, the Higher Degree Research Unit also awarded me a Postgraduate Research Funding grant (PGRF) which permitted me to present my work in a conference in Salzburg, Austria on March 2009. Lastly, direct funding from the Department of Philosophy and the Faculty of Arts allowed me to attend, as well as present in, various conferences and seminars throughout Australia.

I would like to thank my mentors who have shaped and nurtured my general interest in philosophy for their unwavering support and for the profound inspiration: Dr. Alfie Co, Bro. Romy Abulad, SVD, and Dr. Josie Pasricha. I am also indebted to Dr. Ric Brown, who was instrumental in my general understanding of Nietzsche, and to Dr. Hans-Georg Moeller, for instigating my interest in social philosophy.

I would also like to mention the names of specific individuals who have contributed directly or indirectly to the completion of this thesis, but more specifically, to their friendship and camaraderie. The editorial team of KRITIKE: An Online Journal of Philosophy—Fleur Altez, Moses Angeles, Melai Mejia, and RT Pada—for carrying out important tasks during hectic times; to my fellow Filipino postgraduate students here in Australia—Jeffry Ocvay, Alfred Presbitero, and Ranie Villaver—for the long and intellectually stimulating discussions and debates, philosophical and non-philosophical alike; to my beloved brother and sister, Kris and Kristen, for believing in their Kuya Pao; to my best friend, Jose Olivar, who took care of domestic matters while I am away; to Marella Mancenido, for her love and patience.

Finally, my perpetual appreciation goes to my parents, Paul and Cora, who never failed to exhibit their love and generous support and to whom this thesis is dedicated.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract i

Acknowledgments iii

Table of Contents iv

Key to Abbreviations v

INTRODUCTION 1

PART ONE: ON PHILOSOPHICAL PRAXIS AND LANGUAGE 13

1) The Prospect of Philosophical Romanticism 13

2) Reinscribing Metaphor: Nietzsche’s Theory of Language 48

3) Adorno and the Revaluation of the Language of Philosophy 110

PART TWO: THE PRACTICE OF CRITICAL THEORY 148

4) Early Critical Theory and the Dialectic of Enlightenment 148

5) Habermas and the Battlefield of Theoretical Leverages 192

6) Disclosing Critique and the Renewal of Critical Theory 224

PART THREE: REINScribing THE NON-IDENTICAL 250

7) Genealogy: Nietzsche’s Dialectic of Enlightenment 250

8) Thinking the Other of Reason: Adorno’s Negative Dialectics 292

9) Possibility, Aesthetic Experience, and the Damaged Life 324

EPILOGUE: ARTICULATING AN ETHICS OF THINKING 338

BIBLIOGRAPHY 346
KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

Friedrich Nietzsche (cited by book number, then section number or section number, then page number)

AC – The Antichrist

BGE – Beyond Good and Evil

D – Daybreak

DAR – “Description of Ancient Rhetoric”

EH – Ecce Homo

GM – On the Genealogy of Morals

TL – “On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense”

GS – The Gay Science

HH – Human, All too Human

TI – Twilight of the Idols

TP – “The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle Between Art and Knowledge”

UM – Untimely Mediations

UW – Unpublished Writings

WP – Will to Power

Z – Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Theodor Adorno (all texts cited by page number, except Minima Moralia which is cited by section number)

AR – The Adorno Reader

AT – Aesthetic Theory
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td><em>The Culture Industry</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td><em>Critical Models</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td><em>Dialectic of Enlightenment</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JA</td>
<td><em>Jargon of Authenticity</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LND</td>
<td><em>Lectures on Negative Dialectics</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM</td>
<td><em>Minima Moralia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td><em>Negative Dialectics</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td><em>Notes to Literature</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td><em>Prisms</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMP</td>
<td><em>Problems of Moral Philosophy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLP</td>
<td>“Theses on the Language of the Philosopher”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Max Horkheimer** (all texts cited by page number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BPSS</td>
<td><em>Between Philosophy and Social Science</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td><em>Critical Theory</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Axel Honneth** (text cited by page number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PDC</td>
<td>“The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Nikolas Kompridis** (text cited by page number)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td><em>Critique and Disclosure</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>