
Adorno, Habermas, and the Fate of Reason

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In his work *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor Adorno outlines his observation that the Enlightenment has reverted to mythology and has stopped producing truths. Instead he sees that reason itself has assimilated to instrumentality, creating only power claims and ultimately domination. Jurgen Habermas takes issue with this claim. In his essay “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno”, Habermas outlines where Adorno has gone astray in his evaluation of Enlightenment and reason. This essay will examine Adorno’s work through the perspective of Habermas’ critique thereof. We see that Adorno indeed “enlightens the Enlightenment about itself” by diagnosing the problem of identity thinking and domination. While he could have used this insight to correct the Enlightenment and its course, Adorno instead problematically focuses his attack on reason itself, claiming it to now be synonymous with power and incapable of finding truth. This assumption leads Adorno to base his work on a totalized critique of reason that is not convincing. In fact, his own critique shows a performative contradiction in his claims, showing that reason is still functioning and capable of finding truth. Rather than accepting this, Adorno remains faithful to his wholesale attack on reason, which leaves him with no tools to fix the problems he finds in Enlightenment, to set it back on the right course. Instead, Adorno resorts only to extreme pessimism, which on its own is not enough to combat domination. Ultimately, Adorno’s totalized pessimism leads him to a false conclusion about reason, leading him to abandon it, and as such rendering his critique of Enlightenment incomplete in its ability remedy modernity’s drive to domination; Adorno creates disillusionment and relativism, which create potentiality for domination to spread and grow, not a solution.

Adorno’s critique of the Enlightenment is based on his belief that Enlightenment, from its beginning, has been a weapon against nature, and in this battle Enlightenment has self destructed. He begins, “Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of

thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 1). The natural world, before it is explained, is a source of fear for human beings. It is random, chaotic and unexplained; the simplest natural phenomenon is a source of terror. Thus, as human knowledge advances, humanity creates ways of explaining the world. This began as myth, but as knowledge, and through it Enlightenment, progressed, humans sought to expand their understanding of the world, destroying myth in the process. This becomes the project of the Enlightenment.

So, “The world [is] chaos, and synthesis salvation” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 3). Such synthesis is the totalizing of the world to human knowledge. In order to understand nature and dispel their fear, humans created concepts to make sense of the chaotic randomness of the natural world. By categorizing and conceptualizing everything into reified abstractions, humans become reliant upon what Adorno calls identity thinking – understanding things within their abstractly defined categories and classifications. While identity thinking allows humans to no longer fear nature, it also requires they ignore the concrete particularity – the absolute constitutive and physical difference between all individual things – of nature, and ultimately of human beings as well.

Adorno states, “For Enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 3). Enlightenment becomes an all encompassing totality, anything outside it is a source of fear and must be reduced into the sameness of that totality – become conceptualized and understood. Because of this, “...only what can be encompassed by unity has the status of an existent or an event; [Enlightenment’s] ideal is the system from which everything and anything follows” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 4). As such, “All Gods and qualities must be destroyed,” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 5) and with them all inherent meaning in nature.

Because identity thinking has stripped all of nature of its concrete particularity, all has become fungible, interchangeable and in itself inherently without individual meaning or worth: “In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same...Nature stripped of qualities becomes the stuff of mere classification, an abstract identity”

(Dialectic of Enlightenment, 6). Adorno finds great danger in this reductive pattern. Scientific classification has become humanity's method of understanding the world, and yet that classification has stripped the world of its meaning – that which myth had provided. The world becomes “disenchanted”, and this meaninglessness yields a nihilistic state. Humanity is left with no way to judge the value of a thing, make moral judgments with regard to it. Scientific positivism can provide only *means* – the knowledge of what a thing is and how to utilize it – leaving humanity with only the knowledge of how to *use and exploit* that thing. The question of *ends* cannot be considered in this scientific identity thinking. Everything and anything become fungible means, and no harm can be done through the destruction and exploitation of a single thing. Human cognition is damaged; our reason has a blind spot to particularity: “...nothing is left except that ever-unchanging ‘I think’ which must accompany all my concepts...the subjection of all existing things to logical formalism is bought with the obedient subordination of reason...” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 20). Human reason becomes limited, as it is only able to perceive the scientific classification which Enlightenment has created. Since science tells us only how to use nature, scientific reason allows humans only to understand it with regard to use value, and rationality becomes exploitative and instrumental – “Power and knowledge are synonymous” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, 2).

Instrumental reason lays the groundwork for the domination of the entirety of nature by human beings. Rational conceptualization, for Adorno, is violent upon the particular because it allows for the reduction of that particular thing to a fungible means, which in turn justifies the exploitation, destruction, even annihilation of that thing. It is this blind spot in reason that, in Adorno's view, opens the opportunity for the Nazi soldier to classify a person as “Jew” and not as a particular and distinct human being, and consequently to kill him because he is now destroying nothing more than an interchangeable (and thereby worthless in itself) representation of the “threat to the homeland” or “evil”.

So, Adorno's project is to show that, “Myth is already Enlightenment, and Enlightenment reverts to mythology” (Dialectic of Enlightenment, xviii). Like myth, Enlightenment was a method of

making sense of one's world. In the process of doing so it has become positivist, dogmatic and totalized. Yet, due to reason's blind spot to particularity, Enlightenment is in actuality, like myth, false. Adorno sees that Enlightenment has stopped producing Truth, instead (due to its instrumental nature) teaching humanity only how to use and dominate – it has become intrinsically linked to power. He posits that the only way for Enlightenment to reverse its status as a false promise is to entirely transform human cognition away from identity thinking, as “[When] the thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS like to drown the screams of its victims” (*Negative Dialectics*, 365). If humanity continues to use identity thinking it will never comprehend its domination of nature, and thus can never rectify it. Reason and cognition are veiled by concepts and cannot perceive the violence and domination being committed, the logical outcome of which Adorno sees as the unfettered destruction of nature (of which human beings are a part), the death of the revolutionary consciousness, and ultimately Auschwitz.

Habermas finds that Adorno has oversimplified his claims and abstracted reality in order to make his claims, creating a problem of credibility in Adorno's assertions. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Habermas finds circular reasoning; Adorno's claims, from the start, are dangerously similar to his conclusion (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 107). From the outset, Adorno wishes to prove the self-destruction of the Enlightenment and, subsequently, he generalizes and simplifies his claims and evidence in order to do so. Due to this, Habermas finds that, “...the thesis treated here is no less risky than Nietzsche's similarly posed diagnosis of nihilism...[Adorno] bring[s] abstractions and simplifications into the bargain that make the plausibility of [his] cause problematic” (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 110).

In making his argument, Adorno reduces all knowledge to instrumentality. Habermas says, “The critique of positivist understanding of science deployed earlier is heightened...into the totalized reproach that the sciences themselves have been absorbed by instrumental rationality” (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 111).

Adorno, in order to make his claim, engages in an enormous leap from merely critiquing the effects of scientific positivism to wrapping the entirety of science and knowledge into instrumental reason. Habermas says, "...what Enlightenment has perpetrated on myth, [Adorno] applies to the process of Enlightenment as a whole" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 118). His critique is totalized, all evidence that stands outside it is ignored, discarded or enveloped questionably into his argument. He leaves no room for, and makes no mention of, any progress in knowledge which does not reap domination or may be beneficial. Habermas explains that Adorno's thesis of reason being entirely the product of self-preservation which reaps instrumentality, "...does not yet prove that reason remains subordinated to the dictates of purposive rationality right into its most recent products – modern science, universalistic ideas of justice and morality..." (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 110-111).

Adorno's totalized critique is incomplete and does not conceive positive products of Enlightenment outside its horizons. He fails to prove that "self preservation gone wild" is the sole basis for reason, but makes the claim regardless (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 112). Habermas shows that this is oversimplified and that, indeed, reason does not in all cases revert to instrumentality:

"It is true that with the capitalist economy and the modern state the tendency to incorporate all questions of validity into the limited horizon of purposive rationality proper to subjects' interest in self-preservation...is strengthened. But the far from contemptible compulsion toward progressive differentiations of a reason that, moreover, assumes a procedural form – a compulsion induced by the rationalization of worldviews and life-worlds – competes with the inclination toward a social regression of reason. The formation of expert cultures within which carefully articulated spheres of validity help the claims to propositional truth,

normative rightness, and authenticity, attain their own logic...and this development competes with the naturalistic assimilation of validity claims to power claims and the destruction of our critical capacity” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 113).

The advances of knowledge and science within modernity that Adorno so easily writes off actually allow for a great deal of positive progress. As the project of Enlightenment takes place it creates a continual improvement of human knowledge that enters the public realm for debate over its validity. As Enlightenment advances many views from differing “life-world” perspectives – experiential points of view – are deliberated and debated for validity. In this process, the “expert cultures” – medicine and modern science, politics, or philosophy for example – expose or debunk the validity of new claims, creating progress in knowledge which reaps beneficial outcomes. This process counters the tendency created by capitalism and cultural modernity for reason to simply fall to instrumentality, as the normative rightness of claims ultimately wins out in argumentation. Thus, the more truthful claim, when it is given the opportunity to be heard, proves itself more powerful than the drive to self-preservation and domination.

If all reason was instrumental we would not see the, “...continua[l] push[ing] of the sciences, even the self-reflection of the sciences, beyond merely engendering technologically useful knowledge” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 113). For example, the development of medical technology to prevent diseases which are not “profitable” to the pharmaceutical industry would be outside the realm of comprehension, as it is not self-serving. Also, organizations like the Union of Concerned Scientists could not speak out against the use and abuse of dangerous scientific knowledge, nuclear weaponry for example, as science could not be reflective and would not care to speak of ends if it could. Furthermore, “...The universalistic foundations of law and morality that have also been incorporated (in however distorted and incomplete a fashion) into the institutions of constitutional government, into forms of democratic will formation,” could not take place without some form of beneficial, truth-containing reason to convincingly demand it (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 113). So, there is an

“incompleteness and one-sidedness” to Adorno’s claims (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 114). He is operating only within his circular logic, the result of which is a totalized theory which does not allow for examples of reason acting outside of it. Thus, “...the oversimplified presentation fails to notice the essential characteristics of cultural modernity” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 114).

Adorno would find Habermas’s faith in these “characteristics of cultural modernity” as naïve, since even the most seemingly progressive and benign aspects of modernity are still the products of identity thinking. Habermas’s own words illuminate Adorno’s thinking: “The critical capacity to take up a ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ stance and distinguish between valid and invalid propositions is undermined as power and validity claims enter into a turbid fusion” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 112). This being the case, Habermas’s examples cannot signify the successes of cultural modernity, the Enlightenment, and reason if they are still the product of its cognitive failure. They remain the products of instrumental reason and self-preservation, and as such, even if they are benign on their face are still representative of the human drive to domination.

Habermas’s example of modern science would illuminate this point for Adorno. Medical science blatantly appears to be fueled by the drive for self-preservation. That such science is today commonly profit driven and access is stratified by wealth and power exemplifies the drive toward use and the corruption of modernity’s value theory – in this case profits, which take higher value than a just distribution of healthcare resources and the inherent value of particular human beings. Reason falls into scientific instrumentality, as medical science provides the means but leaves the choice of what to do with them up to the culture, here the pharmaceutical and medical insurance industries. Such industries fail to conceive the ends of their science, human life for example, and become concerned only with more profit.

Furthermore, Habermas’s assertion that modernity has produced new and greater theories of justice and morality would also be fallacious for Adorno. Again, the ethical improvements Enlightenment provides spawn from damaged reason. As such, Adorno would find that in the end such theories of justice can not truly be beneficial as they remain

reductive and outside of reason's blind spot to particularity. In addition, those abstract ethical theories which appear to be progressive, in the end, are ultimately unconvincing and ineffective because they cannot combat the drive to domination which identity thinking produces. Adorno writes during the Holocaust, a rather drastic example of identity thinking ("Jew" becomes an abstraction representing a "threat", not a human being, and therefore must be exterminated) which seemed to prove the failure of ethics to contain domination. In the end, regardless of what endeavor Enlightenment undertakes, humanity falls back into domination.

However, it seems that to make such claims Adorno must again rely on worst case examples and scathing pessimism. He remains within his pessimistic totalized critique, simply enveloping any contrary example which arises. It is then helpful to examine the reasons for Adorno's pessimism if we are to understand why he can see only domination and negativity in modernity.

The period in which Adorno formulates his ideas greatly influences his extreme pessimism toward reason. Habermas says, "Critical Theory was initially developed to think through political disappointments at the absence of revolution in the West, the development of Stalinism in Soviet Russia and the victory of fascism in Germany" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). Adorno's thought stems out of the bleakest period of the twentieth century. Around him were some of the most glaring examples of domination and destruction history has seen, exemplified by Hitler's Final Solution in his homeland. "Against this background," Habermas explains, "it becomes intelligible how the impression could indeed get established in the darkest years of the Second World War that the last sparks of reason were being extinguished from this reality and had left the ruins of a civilization in collapse without any hope" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 117). Adorno's life-world experience is abound with tragedy on a catastrophic scale. His lived experience leaves him to assume there is no hope left in humanity's ability to reason, and that it has taken a cataclysmic turn for the worse. Thus, "...political experiences had to affect the basic assumptions of historical materialism upon which the Frankfurt circle was based..." (Philosophical Discourse

of Modernity, 117). Such negative lived experience led Adorno to an overly bleak understanding of reason and modernity. His time and place lead him to assume that there must be something inherently wrong in humanity's cognition in order to produce such manifestations of violent domination, leaving no potential for future improvement or hope in reason. History renders Adorno's thought awash with negative biases which he mistakes for truth, thereby assuming such biases in his work.

Adorno subsequently engages in an ideology critique of the Enlightenment, the failure of which, he assumes, explains the horrific events of his lifetime. Habermas explains that, "Critique becomes ideology critique when it attempts to show that the validity of a theory has not been adequately dissociated from the context in which it emerged; that behind the back of the theory there lies hidden an inadmissible mixture of power and validity, and that it still owes its reputation to this" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). Adorno's initial ideology critique exposes that the instrumental reason which identity thinking reaps is no longer producing truths. Rather, it is tainted by false concepts which become mixed with power, and thus rather than creating validity claims, creates only power claims. Adorno is, "...disput[ing] the truth of a suspicious theory by exposing its untruthfulness" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). This critique forces Enlightenment to become self-reflective, exposing its failure to reach truth in modernity and showing that it has taken a wrong turn – "enlightening Enlightenment about itself" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). Had he stopped here perhaps he could have seen hope in reason's ability to redirect the Enlightenment, but instead Adorno moves into a second level of critique.

Adorno's resounding pessimism pushes him to take one step further into ideology critique, this time attacking reason itself. Habermas explains that, "...the drama of Enlightenment firsts arrives at its climax when ideology critique itself comes under suspicion of not producing (any more) truths – and Enlightenment attains a second order of reflectiveness" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). Adorno moves past his critique of the Enlightenment and into a critique of reason itself, claiming that it is *reason* which can no longer produce truths. Enlightenment's reversion back into myth is only a symptom of

this greater problem. Adorno is not saying that reason is *being* used instrumentally, but rather that it has in fact been entirely incorporated into instrumentality. He is trying to show that, “As instrumental, reason assimilates itself to power and thereby relinquishes its critical force” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 119). If this is the case, Habermas explains, “...ideology critique does not have anything in reserve to which it might appeal,” and, “Adorno regard[s] the foundations of ideology critique as shattered” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 118).

Problematically, as Adorno’s, “...doubt reaches out to include reason...it renders critique independent even in relation to its own foundations” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116). Habermas exposes that Adorno is attempting to engage in critique which is separate from reason and outside of the Enlightenment. Adorno, in attempting to do this, exposes that he has gone too far in his critique, he is contradicting himself. If reason itself is damaged and incapable of reaching truths, with what is Adorno entering into critique? Indeed, there is a great inconsistency in his argument; an inconsistency which shows that reason is not, as Adorno posits, wholly corrupted and instrumental, or incapable of reaching truth.

Habermas says of Adorno’s self-contradiction, “To be sure, the description of the self-destruction of the critical capacity is paradoxical because in the moment of description it still has to make use of critique that has been declared dead. It denounces the Enlightenment’s becoming totalitarian with its own tools” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 119). Adorno is committing a performative contradiction – the utilization of a means which at the same time one is declaring does not exist (for example “There is no truth so it must be true that everything is relative”) – in trying to critique reason by saying reason is dead. He cannot undergo a critique that is separate from reasoned critique because were this the case he would have no tool with which to make his assessments. Adorno’s critique, “...is performed with respect to [reason’s] own products – theories,” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 116) and is then *employing reason*. He is attempting to show that in modernity humanity’s ability to reason toward truth no longer exists, “But the goal,” of his project, “remains that of producing

an effect of unmasking” – reasoning and enlightening (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 119).

Habermas asks, “...once all predicates concerning validity are devalued, once it is power and not validity claims that is expressed in value appraisals – by what criteria shall critique still be able to propose discriminations” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 125)? Adorno’s performative contraction shows us that he *must* be using reason itself in his critique of reason. Without reason he could not make a value judgment against identity thinking, as he would have nothing with which to explain what, “...deserves to be esteemed and [what] deserves to be devalued” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 125). Thus, Adorno, “...[has] to leave at least one rational criterion intact for [his] explanation of the corruption of all rational criteria” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 126-127). Qualitative reason must be capable of functioning in human cognition, as otherwise Adorno can’t engage in his own project.

Adorno, through his own work of exposing the flaws which identity thinking ascribes to reason, proves reason’s continued capability to be qualitative instead of merely instrumental, its capability to succeed. Qualitative reason cannot be both non-existent yet functioning in Adorno’s work at the same time. Thus, he exposes the fallacy of his second order of critique (that which attacked reason), showing it to be the false assumption of a totalized pessimism. Perhaps inadvertently, Adorno proves that Enlightenment can indeed be revived if the right course of action is taken; he, “...still places the forces of emancipation at the service of counterenlightenment” (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 127).

An example of such a course of action is outlined in Adorno’s own idea of the negative dialectic, which when undertaken exposes the falsehood of categorized identity thinking. He advocates a negative dialectical process of thought – parsing out the concepts of our identity thinking, showing them to be false so as to become, “Aware that the conceptual totality is mere appearance...” (Negative Dialectics, 5). If one can work back through her concepts far enough she can become aware of the concrete particularity of the object she imposes her concepts upon. In doing so, she comes to see how she uses identity

thinking to make sense of that object and put it to her own use. At the core of this project must be reason, as it is the cognitive tool with which one can pick apart her thinking and come to the realization of particularity. So, Adorno's negative dialectic is a *commitment* to reason in its qualitative form, and ultimately can be seen as a revitalization of the Enlightenment since it enlightens the Enlightenment about its current state.

However, Adorno did not view his project in this way, remaining faithful to his performative contradiction and to his assertion that reason has become wholly instrumental (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 120). Had Adorno not abandoned reason by undertaking his second level of critique against it, he could have utilized reason, coupled with his insights on identity thinking, to expand his project by definitively laying out a plan to correct the Enlightenment and bring modernity out of its cognitive trend toward domination. But, Habermas explains, "...since skepticism regarding the truth content of bourgeois ideals seemed to call the criteria of ideology critique itself into question...Adorno made the really problematic move...[he] surrendered [himself] to an uninhibited skepticism regarding reason instead of weighing the grounds that cast doubt on this skepticism itself" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 129). Because he views reason through a totalized critique, Adorno refuses to concede that it can function in any manner which is not instrumental. Thus, he refuses to make any commitment, ethical or political, toward revitalizing the Enlightenment, as he believed such a commitment would only play into identity thinking and perpetuate the Enlightenment's failures. Had he not totalized his critique, left room for faith that reason itself could still produce truths, he, "...could have set the normative foundations of critical social theory so deep that they would not have been disturbed by the decomposition of bourgeois culture being enacted in Germany for all to see" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 129). Had Adorno remained faithful to reason he could have utilized his critique of instrumental rationality within modernity to lay the framework for a normative ethical imperative against domination. Adorno had the opportunity to perhaps set the Enlightenment back on the right course, to convincingly advocate an ethical shift in human cognition.

Habermas believes that there is a way out of the dominating aspects of identity thinking, saying, "...there is a way – the way back," to qualitative, rather than instrumental, rationality (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 128). He says,

"In argumentation, critique is constantly entwined with theory, enlightenment with grounding, even through discourse participants always have to suppose that the unforced force of the better argument comes into play under the unavoidable communicative presuppositions of argumentative discourse" (Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 130).

By submitting a validity claim, a theory or claim to truth about something, into discourse between multiple participants the validity of that claim can be argued. In argumentation Habermas feels that biases in the participants will be overwhelmed, proved false, by the weight of better arguments (which can not utilize coercive or dogmatic measures in order to make its claim) – the "unforced force of the better argument". So, "...the structure of their communications rules out all external or internal coercion other than the force of the better argument and thereby also neutralizes all motives other than that of the cooperative search for truth" (Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, 89). Because of this he sees that in argumentation the drive to domination can be negated, overtaken by a more powerful argument against it. Thus, argumentation can come to a consensus which produces truth, alleviating the use of reason as merely instrumental.

"Discourse ethics", then, can be used to create ethical norms against domination. When the discourse participants can come to a consensus about a validity claim it can be "universalized": "All affected can accept the consequences and the side effects its general observance can be anticipated to have for the satisfaction of everyone's interests (and these consequences are preferred to those of known alternative possibilities for regulation)" (Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action, 65). In the discursive debate over domination the argument against it will win because, as Habermas explains, it would hold the best possible outcome for all involved and is preferable to the consequences which domination brings. If a claim against domination is agreed upon by all affected, it can be made into an ethical norm (Moral

Consciousness and Communicative Action, 66). Had Adorno made an explicit validity claim against domination, made an ethical commitment to changing identity thinking, the “unforced force” of his argument could have set the direction toward forming ethical norms against domination and reviving the Enlightenment.

By claiming that in discourse the necessary elements are present to find truth, one has to wonder whether Habermas is simply advocating the continued use of identity thinking to create false truths. Adorno would see that Habermas has committed himself to acting within the Enlightenment’s framework, naively believing that within its own framework it can be fixed. If identity thinking is the cause of domination, and cognition at the present time relies upon it, then how can discourse utilizing such thinking solve the problem? Until discourse participants can theorize and make claims which are not reliant upon identity thinking, Adorno will not concede that discourse ethics will produce anything but false, instrumental power claims veiled as truth. In addition, it seems Habermas is committing himself to instrumental reason, as he wishes to create an institutionalized plan to fix the Enlightenment. He desires to take discursive reason and put it to use, which for Adorno can only prove that he is rife with instrumentality. Is Habermas, through his commitment to a plan of action and the continued use of identity thinking simply proving Adorno’s point?

Such a counterargument, rather than showing Habermas’s failure, exemplifies how Adorno’s critique goes too far. He does not consider that all identity thinking, while it may be technically false upon the particular, may not inherently lead to domination. The utilization of reason in discourse allows for normative distinctions between what is violent and dominating and what is ethically neutral. Adorno continues to demand that before any progress can be made there must be a fundamental and radical shift in human cognition. However, Habermas explains that the way Adorno sees this change happening is flawed. Rather than a new method of cognition, Habermas sees that we can change the way we think by using the tools of that thought, of the Enlightenment. Adorno’s own performative contradiction has shown that reason indeed can still function to move the Enlightenment forward. If, through discourse, we utilize the tool of reason, and especially the

new tools stemming from Adorno's insights, normative distinctions can be made about the types of classifications we use in cognition. For example, a distinction can be drawn between using a name as a classification (ethically neutral and beneficial to organizing our thought) and creating classifications that reap domination, like that which makes all Jews, for the Nazi, a representation of evil and justifies their death. By using reason in a discourse environment the tools of Enlightenment can be used to curb domination and begin remedying the problems which Adorno diagnoses. The Enlightenment is capable of fixing itself. Adorno, however, leaves no room for such a possibility. He simply writes off reason, demands a transformation in thinking, but sees no way to orchestrate such a change. Adorno leaves modernity at an impasse.

Thus, the "problematic move" of critiquing reason itself creates an uninhibited skepticism, which has no method of fixing the Enlightenment or remedying domination. Because of his belief that, "Behind positivism's ideals of objectivity and claims to truth, behind universalistic morality's ideals of aestheticism and claims to rightness lurk imperatives of self-preservation and domination," Adorno's critique leaves modernity in a relativistic state (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 122). By becoming so skeptical, reason and morality, those things which would have provided the tools to make 'Yes' and 'No' normative decisions, can not be trusted. Without reason or morality to make normative distinctions, Adorno leaves us in a Nietzschean state where, "...taste, 'the Yes and No of the palate,'" becomes the only method left to make ethical, political and moral decisions (*Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 123). Adorno exposes the problems with identity thinking but because he abandons reason as a means of remedying it he provides no convincing justification for making a change. Without reason there can be no moral imperative to end domination, but rather, it becomes a relativistic decision based simply on the individual's taste. Adorno, by declaring qualitative reason dead, in the end lays the ground for nothing but nihilistic relativism. The question of whether to dominate, or whether domination is even bad, becomes a matter of taste; Adorno provides nothing with which to sway that taste. He cries out against domination but gives one no reason to, indeed no tools with which to, care; he offers no argument against

domination which compels one to act against it. This results in perhaps the most counterproductive and troubling aspect of Adorno's project. By abandoning reason he is left with nothing to combat domination, nothing with which to chart a course of correction, leaving modernity in an aporetic situation. Without the ability to provide a compelling reason for combating domination, or even to justify wanting to do so, Adorno leaves the door open for the unchallenged continuation of such domination.

After evaluating Adorno with respect to Habermas's critique thereof it becomes apparent that Adorno's project is flawed and incomplete. His diagnosis of the current state of the Enlightenment and the dangers of identity thinking are illuminating and enlighten the Enlightenment about itself. As such, he shows that the Enlightenment can be revived, indeed it is still breathing, and shows how it needs to be repaired. However, his commitment to an over-generalized and totalized critique that Enlightenment has reverted to mythology, his wholesale attack on reason as assimilated to instrumentality, steers his work away from fixing the problems and strands it in little more than pessimism. This pessimism itself is not enough to bring about an end to the domination he finds surrounding him in great abundance. Adorno had the opportunity to set the path toward ethical norms which could combat domination at his fingertips, but instead of acting he resorted to political and ethical quietism. His pessimism lays the groundwork not for a stand against domination, but for disillusioned political and ethical apathy and relativism. Though he had the opportunity, Adorno did not revitalize the Enlightenment, but instead rendered it unable to save itself at a time when it needed it most.

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