

What Does It Mean to Think Philosophically?: Cognitive Utopia in Gilles Deleuze and Theodor Adorno

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Abstract

In this paper, following Hegel, I operate with the assumption that philosophy is characterized through its work with concepts and its critical nature, and that these features are frequently overlooked by philosophers due to the tendency to forget that philosophy is an inherently reflective project. I investigate the question of how to understand philosophical thinking in a way that recognizes philosophy's critical nature. I look at the way that Theodor Adorno and Gilles Deleuze theorize philosophical thinking in a cognitive utopia, or in a context where philosophical thought is not constrained by false conceptions of thinking. I claim that Adorno's approach allows for an understanding of exactly what prevents philosophy from being properly actualized, namely Hegelian dialectics and concept fetishism. Deleuze's approach, while also critical, is more useful for understanding how philosophy always necessarily engages in self-criticism and creation in spite of the forces that constrain it. Ultimately, I argue that Adorno and Deleuze are engaged in complementary projects and the latter builds on the former.

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Deleuze and Adorno on Dialectics	6
Chapter 2: The Centrality of the Nonconceptual	15
Chapter 3: Utopia: Possible or Virtual?	29
Conclusion and Final Remarks	38
Bibliography	43

Abbreviations:

DR = *Difference and Repetition*

HTS = *Hegel, Three Studies*

ND = *Negative Dialectics*

WP = *What is Philosophy?*

Introduction

In the introduction to *The Science of Logic*, Hegel asks the question of how one can have a discipline, namely, philosophy, that does not have any presuppositions. He reaches the conclusion that the only way for philosophy to protect itself from taking certain things for granted is to keep in view the specification of the project itself as part of the project. In other words, we must remember that philosophy has a critical element, which is largely directed at itself. Each time we approach a philosophical problem, we must check if we are taking intuitions for granted and ask ourselves if we are imposing our selves on the problem in order to come up with a solution instead of letting the object co-constitute the problem and solution. Hegel also insists that philosophy deals with concepts, which are not to be understood as unchanging Platonic forms or universals that unify different objects but rather as dynamic, reality-structuring entities that arise at the same time as we come into contact with reality. I believe these conditions—namely, the critical and conceptual nature of philosophy—should be centered in the way we understand philosophy today. I am interested in what the obstacles that prevent us from accessing these conditions for philosophical thinking might be and how (or whether) these obstacles can be overcome.

Theodor Adorno and Gilles Deleuze are likewise concerned with the mischaracterization of philosophical thinking. The similarity of their concerns about the Hegelian dialectic as a constricting force combined with the contrast in the way they aim to resolve them provides fertile ground for getting closer to an answer for the question posed above. Historically, both Adorno and Deleuze are writing during a time when the status of philosophy as a political tool was under debate. After the

appropriation of Nietzsche's philosophy by the National Socialists and Heidegger's explicit support of the party, it was necessary to pose the question of what philosophical thinking entails once again.

Adorno's work with Horkheimer deals extensively with the deterioration of reason throughout the history of philosophy. In his solo work *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno denounces "identitarian thinking", which is a type of thinking that subsumes all its objects under categories and denies the multiplicities inherent in the world. This type of thinking is linked to fascism and dictatorship, as it is representative of a hegemonic order that suppresses dissimilarity.

Deleuze, similarly, devotes a large part of his main philosophical work, *Difference and Repetition*, to an examination of what he sees as the predominant "image of thought". This image of thought presents philosophical thinking as the height of common sense, as connected to truth and good nature. Instead of dealing with concepts, thought is presented as dealing with opinions, which are full of subjective presuppositions. What this leads to, then, is that philosophy is misrepresented as a way of thinking that upholds commonsensical opinions instead of fulfilling its project of "breaking with *doxa*" (DR, 134). In other words, philosophy loses its critical element. Thus, both Adorno and Deleuze see the two conditions of philosophical thinking mentioned above as in need of emphasis for subsequent philosophizing.

Another connection between the philosophers is emphasized by Deleuze himself. In a work titled *What is Philosophy?* co-written with Felix Guattari, the authors note that philosophy as they understand is "closer to what Adorno called "negative dialectics"" because in it "exchange, consensus, and opinion vanish entirely" (WP, 99). It will become more clear what the authors mean as we further investigate the resonances between the work of Deleuze and Adorno. For now, it is enough to say that

Deleuze praises Adorno for constructing a system that resists the forces that prevent philosophy from becoming uncritical and totalizing. Deleuze and Guattari further link negative dialectics to “utopia”, pointing out that philosophy “takes the criticism of its own time to the highest point” when it is utopian (ibid). In this work, I want to focus precisely on the possibility of (cognitive) utopia in the two philosophers’ systems and what they see as potentially interfering with it.

Adorno provides two definitions of utopia that will guide my project, saying first that “regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction” (ND, 11). “Dialectics” here clearly refers to Hegelian dialectics, which describe the movement from contradiction to its resolution that Hegel thought to be characteristic of all parts of thought. The free state of thought, then, is free from dialectics.

Secondly, Adorno states that “the cognitive utopia would be to use concepts to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it their equal” (ND, 10). While at this point the definition appears obscure, it is at least clear that the notions of dialectic, concept, and the nonconceptual are connected for Adorno through the idea of utopia. The nonconceptual, in this case, is not to be understood as the realm of sense experience that is yet to be categorized. It is also certainly distinct from the analytic definition of the nonconceptual as encompassing the realm of sensory qualia. Rather, it seems to be a realm posited at the same time as the concept but impossible to reach

from within philosophy; it is what the concept “fails to cover, what its abstractionist mechanism eliminates, what is not already a case of the concept” (ND, 8)¹.

What is interesting about these definitions in relation to Deleuze’s conception of philosophical thought is that he similarly sees Hegelian dialectics as in tension with the correct approach to thought and insists that the nonconceptual is necessarily posited at the same time as the concept, or at the same time as the process of philosophizing begins. Just like Adorno, Deleuze speculates that the nonconceptual (what he also calls the “prephilosophical”, but without the temporal dimension implied in “pre”) is “perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself” (WP, 41). The biggest difference between the two philosophers is perhaps that, while Adorno treats these conditions as realizable only in a state of utopia, Deleuze does not see such a stark contrast between the world now and the world as utopia. For Deleuze, then, the cognitive utopia is always already present, even if it is constantly being challenged by mistaken conceptions of thought. Adorno, on the other hand, despite formulating the concept and conditions for a cognitive utopia, remains hesitant about the possibility of its realization under present conditions.

The starting point of my project is thus Adorno’s concept of a “cognitive utopia”, which is supposed to refer to the situation when thought is at its most free; in other words, when philosophical thinking most fully exhibits the conditions mentioned above. My paper is structured around the two

¹One might object that the emphasis on the nonconceptual steps away from Hegel’s strict focus on concepts as the structuring blocks of reality. Indeed, Adorno himself states that “the matters of true philosophical interest at this point in history are those in which Hegel, agreeing with tradition, expressed his disinterest. They are nonconceptuality, individuality, and particularity” (ND, 8). However, I see it more as an extension of Hegel’s requirement on philosophical thought rather than a necessarily opposing view. A rejection of dialectics is also, of course, a stepping away from Hegel’s philosophical project. However, by opening my project using Hegel’s conception of philosophy I do not mean to commit to a Hegelian framework at large.

definitions of this cognitive utopia mentioned above—the first one having to do with dialectics and how it constrains thought and the second with the relationship between the conceptual realm and the realm of the “nonconceptual”. In the first chapter, I examine Adorno and Deleuze’s critiques of Hegelian dialectics, claiming that while their critiques are similar, the former chooses to reform dialectics whereas the latter abandons it altogether. In the second part, I focus on the authors’ theorization of the nonconceptual, demonstrating that for Deleuze it is the source of philosophy’s creativity while for Adorno it is the result of a corrosion of society in the capitalist mode of production. The third part of the paper deals with the concept of utopia in Adorno and Deleuze more broadly, evaluating the philosophers’ attitudes towards the possibility of utopia, with the latter being more hopeful than the former. Finally, I evaluate the comparison and argue that we should look to Adorno’s thought to understand the difficulties we face in doing philosophy in a way that honors the features essential to it—its relationship to concepts and its critical nature—but to Deleuze’s thought for an optimism that we can actually overcome these difficulties.

Despite the resonances outlined above, there is not a large pool of literature putting Deleuze and Adorno in conversation. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Deleuze was a strict anti-Hegelian whereas Adorno acknowledged his indebtedness to Hegel. One can also much less readily refer to Deleuze as a Marxist than one can to Adorno. At the same time, Adorno cannot be said to strictly be either. He represents, perhaps less radically than Deleuze, a departure from both schools of thought. Ultimately, I believe a comparative analysis of the two thinkers will bring us closer to an understanding of how philosophy should be approached today in a way that does justice to its reality-constituting and -altering potential.

Chapter 1: Deleuze and Adorno on Dialectics

Both Deleuze and Adorno see Hegel as perpetuating a totality with regard to the way thought functions through his theory of dialectics. Dialectics is totalizing because it attempts to subsume everything under its structure, just as any kind of generalized subsumption is dangerous because it suppresses multiplicity. As a response to this issue, Deleuze chooses to simply step away from dialectics altogether. Adorno, on the other hand, reformulates it into what he calls “negative dialectics”, which is meant to deny the third, unifying movement of Hegelian dialectics and bring forward the contradiction, or the second movement. I agree with both that the totalizing nature of dialectics is dangerous and argue that Deleuze’s approach of ignoring dialectics is disingenuous, even if it ends up affording him more freedom in theorizing philosophy. Adorno’s attempt to restructure dialectics from within, on the other hand, situates him in a historical context but at the cost of leading to a confusing and confused theory.

A good entry-point into the philosophers’ positions on Hegelian dialectics is the critiques that Catherine Malabou mounts against Deleuze’s and Gillian Rose against Adorno’s understanding of dialectics. Ultimately, both Malabou and, less enthusiastically, Rose, see Adorno and Deleuze as seriously engaging with the Hegelian notion and as sharing an urge to free thought from unity and forced coherence. Malabou boldly asks if Deleuze might be doing precisely what he sees as lacking in Hegel. His critique, she says, is “univalent and univocal”, which is precisely Deleuze’s issue with dialectics (Malabou, 115). Instead of considering the fact that Hegel’s dialectical movement honors multiplicity by dealing extensively with contradiction, Malabou notes, Deleuze reduces it only to its unifying movement. She is mostly working with later texts, such as *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is*

Philosophy, but as early as *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze positions dialectics as an opposite multiplicity. He notes, “Pluralism sometimes appears to be dialectical—but it is its most ferocious enemy, its only profound enemy” (Deleuze 1983, 8). Whether Deleuze’s argument succeeds is debatable but it is clear that Malabou recognizes that Deleuze attacks Hegel’s dialectics because he sees it as flattening the difference inherent in thought.

It appears, however, that Malabou does not consider another dimension of Deleuze’s analysis. Namely, that dialectics is unphilosophical not only because it subsumes difference under a totality but also because it implies working with opinions as opposed to concepts. Malabou only gestures to the fact that Deleuze sees his concept of difference as in some way distinct from a dialectical movement in Hegel’s system, but then goes on to flatten the difference. When talking about the ambiguity of Deleuze’s critique of Hegel, she says the critique can “be analysed just as easily as an instance of the dialectic (a unity that denies itself), or as a differential force” (Malabou, 119). However, what if it is not “just as easy” to analyze something as part of dialectics as it is to acknowledge the difference inherent in it because those two devices are meant to function for different types of entities?

As previously mentioned, “opinion” for Deleuze is entirely anti-philosophical because the role of philosophy is to question commonly held opinions rather than to perpetuate them by taking them as the basis of the method of philosophy. In *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze overtly calls out the opening of the project of *The Science of Logic* with “pure being” as an opinion-based beginning because it holds the presupposition that everyone shares an understanding of what “being” means and because it is “a beginning only by virtue of referring all its presuppositions back to sensible, concrete, empirical

being” (DR, 129). In other words, Hegel’s beginning is nothing more than an expression of his subjective experience.

Deleuze further claims, “The dialectic claims to discover a specifically philosophical discursiveness, but it can only do this by linking opinions together” (WP, 80). In other words, dialectics only stays in the realm of opinion and does not actually operate with concepts. He notes,

If philosophy is paradoxical by nature, this is not because it sides with the least plausible opinion or because it maintains contradictory opinions but rather because it uses sentences of a standard language to express something that does not belong to the order of opinion or even of the proposition.² (WP, 80)

Here, Deleuze is clearly positioning philosophy against opinion and against the dialectical method of maintaining “contradictory opinions”. He sees the dialectic as preventing access to what “does not belong to the order of opinion”, or what goes beyond subjective experience, already from its very first movement. Malabou, thus, ignores that Deleuze does not just see dialectics as suppressing difference but rather that also accuses it of preventing a true philosophical project from unfolding because dialectics cannot go beyond only comparing opinions.

One might object to the charge that Hegel is operating with opinions, noting that Deleuze ignores Hegel’s identification of mediation with immediacy and his purposeful and insightful beginning with pure being which is at once “mediated” (based on common-sense observations) and “immediate” (devoid of pre-judgements). Perhaps this is another sense in which he sidesteps the multiplicity inherent in Hegel’s thought? Hegel, quite persuasively, spends much of his introduction

²Adorno says something that resonates very strongly with this: “To be insisted upon, against both, would be the goal they pursue in vain: to counter Wittgenstein by uttering the unutterable. The plain contradictoriness of this challenge is that of philosophy itself, which is thereby qualified as dialectics before getting entangled in its individual contradictions. The work of philosophical self-reflection consists in unraveling that paradox” (ND, 9).

to the *Logic* showing that nothing that is immediate is unmediated and that there is an immediacy to every unmediated object. Thus, one might think that Deleuze's objection that "pure being" is not in fact immediate but rather mediated, and thus exists only in the realm of opinion, misses the point of Hegel's whole project and, once more, looks over the multiplicities inherent in dialectics.

However, I believe this objection is baseless because Deleuze sees Hegel's concept of mediation as also already subsumed by the logic of opinion. To make this claim, Deleuze references what he identifies as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel, both of whom he takes to be saying that Hegel "does not go beyond false movement—in other words, the abstract logical movement of 'mediation'" (DR, 8). Instead of the false movement, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, and Deleuze along with them, want to make metaphysics "act", which means,

It is not enough, therefore, for them [philosophers] to propose a new representation of movement; representation is already mediation. Rather, it is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representation; it is a question of making movement itself a work, without interposition; of substituting direct signs for mediate representations... (DR, 8)

This explanation contains a different level of critique aimed at dialectics than the one outlined by Malabou. Namely, the philosophers claim that Hegel's mediation falls into "representation" because it describes a recognizable type of movement instead of forging her ways of expression, which should be characteristic of philosophy. Rather than operating with "mediate representations", "direct signs" must be the basis of philosophy, which I believe simply means taking things as they are directly, without categorizing them under a specific type of movement. Deleuze thus sees Hegel's notions of mediation and immediacy as already subsumed under the logic of the dialectic and thus unable to escape opinion.

Relatedly, dialectics, for Deleuze, is simply ontologically secondary to difference. He states that dialectics is related to the notions of “opposition, resemblance, identity, and analogy”, all of which are “only the effects produced by presentations of difference” (DR, 145). In Deleuze’s system, thus, it is not the case that, as Malabou states, we can position differential force against dialectics because the latter is derived from the concept of difference. In fact, the issue Deleuze is addressing is precisely that difference, despite being ontologically prior, is overlooked and taken to be secondary. Deleuze then states that “the project of the philosophy of difference” is “to rescue difference from its maledictory state” (DR, 29). What he means is that, in part because of the prevalence of dialectics, difference is relegated to the realm of ontologically non-foundational concepts, which leads to only a narrow understanding of what the movement of thought can look like.

Deleuze, thus, sees nothing worth salvaging in Hegelian dialectics. Ultimately, however, Malabou is right that the only way to productively talk about Hegel in relation to Deleuze is to recognize the former’s shadow over Deleuze’s thought. In general, it seems impossible to say that Deleuze is able to completely side-step Hegel in his analysis. As Malabou points out, simply by virtue of the fact that Hegel is treated in a way that is so different from the way Deleuze approaches Nietzsche, Kant, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Bergson—namely, an outright refusal to engage in any way beyond a rejection as opposed to a sustained study—he is positioned as exceptional and, therefore, in some way constitutive of Deleuze’s project. While Deleuze makes compelling points about the unity forcibly imposed by the dialectic, his project still remains indebted to a conception of philosophical thinking found in Hegel, and that cannot be sidestepped simply through a refusal to engage with Hegel.

Turning to Adorno, it is immediately clear that he is much more sympathetic to Hegel than Deleuze. Adorno praises Hegel for achieving “a magnificent extension of the practice of critical philosophy beyond the formal sphere” (HTS, 86). In other words, he applauds Hegel for recognizing that philosophy as a discipline reaches into and constitutes all areas of life and not just some distinct philosophical realm. At the same time, however, he has a similar critique to Deleuze’s. Rose names Adorno as the one who “inaugurates” Nietzsche as the great anti-Hegelian thinker, with Deleuze being perhaps the most prominent heir of this inauguration, as evidenced by the quotes discussed above. More specifically, Adorno sees dialectics as a totalizing force that obscures the multiplicity and negativity inherent in the world. He states that Hegel “evaded the supreme critical moment, the critique of totality, of something infinite and conclusively given” (HTS, 86). Just as Deleuze, Adorno believes Hegel to set in motion a totalizing conception of philosophical thought.

Adorno has a more complex attitude towards dialectics because he still believes that dialectics without its third, unifying movement accurately represents the current state of the world, even if dialectics do not exist in the aforementioned “cognitive utopia”. He states, “In dialectics... it is not total identification that has the last word, because dialectics lets us recognize the difference that has been spirited away. Dialectics can break the spell of identification” (ND, 172). He has hope, therefore, that dialectics can be presented in a way that pushes against the totalization that both he and Deleuze identify in the way Hegel presents dialectics. The inauguration of “negative dialectics” is supposed to highlight the anti-identitarian dimensions of the concept.

Negative dialectics potentially offers a solution by taking out the positive, unifying element of Hegelian dialectics and insisting instead on the negativity and incoherence inherent in the world.

Adorno states,

We are blaming the method for the fault of the matter when we object to dialectics on the ground ... that whatever happens to come into the dialectical mill will be reduced to the merely logical form of contradiction, and that ... the full diversity of the noncontradictory, of that which is simply differentiated, will be ignored. (ND, 5)

Here, Adorno is saying that dialectics can be salvageable if it is treated as a “method”, rather than as the structure of thought and thus of reality, as it is treated in Hegel. Because Adorno treats dialectics as a method, he is able to approach it surgically and excise parts he does not see as reflecting the current state of affairs. Namely, he implies that there is a way to deal with the rigid category of contradiction in Hegelian dialectics by noticing that dialectics cannot subsume everything. Contradiction, as that which indicates the “untruth of identity” (ND, 5), is what Adorno wants to amplify and complicate as something that goes beyond its simple “logical form” and emphasizes that which is differentiated.

In his engagement with Hegel, and specifically with contradiction, Adorno invokes the tripartite structure of dialectics, which moves from the abstract, to the dialectical (here in the sense of strictly “oppositional” or “contradictory” and not the idiosyncratic Hegelian sense, which is meant to refer to the full movement), and finally to the speculative. An example of this dialectical movement is sketched out early in the *Logic*. Pure being is identified as the abstract beginning, the most immediate starting-point. Next, pure being is revealed to contain nothingness within it, giving rise to a contradiction and the second, dialectical moment. Finally, becoming is presented as the unity of being and non-being that transcends them both, and is the speculative moments of the dialectic. The second,

dialectical movement of the structure, without the forced unity and coherence of the third, is what Adorno sees as worth salvaging through an emphasis that contradiction brings to the forefront a multiplicity that is overshadowed by the third movement.

Gillian Rose's reading of Adorno zeroes in on precisely this feature of his critique. She claims that Adorno, by halting the dialectic at its second stage, does not actually "give himself up" to dialectics. Instead, he "judges it", which prevents him from entering into the realm of the speculative, the only stage in Hegel's system that is "truly philosophical" (Rose 2017). Here, Rose is contrasting judgment with Hegel's speculative philosophy to underscore Adorno's misappropriation of Hegel. More specifically, since Hegel describes the union of judgment and concept as the requirement for syllogistic reasoning³, Rose is highlighting that Adorno rejects the move that would qualify his thought as properly philosophical in Hegel's conception.

Adorno is explicit about being at once situated within Hegel's system while at the same time critiquing it. He calls this, following Hegel, the "immanent method". He notes that "we have no power over the philosophy of Being if we reject it generally, from outside, instead of taking it on in its own structure—turning its own force against it, in line with Hegel's desideratum" (ND, 97). In other words, the only acceptable way for him to push back against the issues with Hegelian dialectics is to stay within the arena of Hegel's thought. However, if Rose is right, and Adorno fails to actually think philosophically because he remains stuck in a deficient type of thinking, what he ends up with might not be a new way to approach dialectics but rather a mangled theory. The approach to dialectics as a

³ Syllogisms and syllogistic reasoning is what characterizes philosophical thinking for Hegel. A syllogism cannot be illustrated by an example because it is meant to be understood not as a conclusion reached through inference, but as the very unifying moment, or what links together a concept and a judgment and a subject and predicate.

“method” as opposed to a reality-structuring principle leads only to a misunderstanding of Hegel’s project. Adorno’s attempt to provide “a revised conception of the dialectic” (HTS, xxxvi) leaves him with an internally confused system.

Ultimately, even if both Adorno and Deleuze misunderstand Hegel’s dialectics, it is clear that Hegel’s theory has a tendency to be interpreted in a totalizing way. The unifying force of dialectics certainly aligns with the hegemonic political order of Nazi Germany that both Deleuze and Adorno were reflecting on in their writing. Adorno’s approach of slightly reforming dialectics, while impressive in its attempt to theorize from within and thus remain firmly grounded in the historical milieu, does not help with resisting the totalizing force inaugurated by Hegel. Deleuze’s approach of completely ignoring dialectics, on the other hand, undersells Hegel’s brilliance and his influence on Deleuze’s thought. At the same time, as it will become clear in the next section, Deleuze’s move of rejection allows him more creativity in actually theorizing philosophical thinking.

Chapter 2: The Centrality of the Nonconceptual

In the previous section, I demonstrated that Adorno and Deleuze have similar critiques of Hegel's dialectics; namely, they both claim that dialectics in the way Hegel conceptualizes it diverts attention from the difference inherent in the world. I further showed that Adorno believes he can adjust dialectics to be reflective of social contradictions by getting rid of its third, unifying moment, and inaugurating negative dialectics. Deleuze, on the other hand, chooses to side-step dialectics altogether, claiming that dialectical reasoning is subordinate to a more pure version of philosophical reasoning. Next, we must investigate the philosophical consequences of the philosophers' rejection of dialectics in its Hegelian form.

The main reason why Adorno chooses to modify dialectics, emphasizing its negative element, rather than do away with it completely, is because the movement from the nonconceptual to the concept happens dialectically. In other words, the formation of concepts on the basis of the nonconceptual proceeds in a dialectical way, through contradiction. Since, as previously mentioned, philosophy is the formation and investigation of concepts, rejecting Hegelian dialectics has discipline-defining consequences for philosophy as a whole. Without negative dialectics, Adorno thinks, it would be impossible to explain the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual. Deleuze, on the other hand, rejects dialectics altogether, which is why he is able to articulate the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual without making use of Hegel's system.

In this section, I first show that both Adorno and Deleuze see the nonconceptual as guiding their critical philosophy. Next, I demonstrate that they see Hegel's description of nonconceptuality as

deficient in different ways. Adorno believes that Hegel's system becomes an unreachable ideal due to historical circumstances, namely the development of capitalist society. For Adorno, thus, philosophers have no choice but to focus on the nonconceptual, which is something that Hegel does not do.

Deleuze, on the other hand, sees the nonconceptual as an ever-present condition and consequence of philosophy that has a neutral or even positive status. Hegel's omission of the nonconceptual is, for Deleuze, a result of Hegel's aforementioned reliance on opinion in his theorization of the concept.

Finally, I investigate the philosophers' conceptualizations of the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual. I argue that Adorno's modified version of dialectics, while allowing for an emphasis on the importance of the nonconceptual, fails to support a positive account of the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual. Deleuze's theorization of the nonconceptual, on the other hand, allows better access to the ideal of philosophical thinking shared by the two philosophers.

The movement between the nonconceptual and the concept is central to the project of philosophy for both Adorno and Deleuze. As mentioned previously, the philosophers agree that philosophy is centered around working with concepts. At the same time, both see philosophy as existing in the hold of a certain conception of philosophical thought that tries to smooth over incoherence and provide a sense of intelligibility that is not actually present in social structures. One way that this smoothing-over operates is through subordinating the nonconceptual to the concept. Put more simply, philosophy fails when the concept is taken to be more primary than the ground on which this concept stands, or when the concept is seen as fully identical with the nonconceptual.

For example, if the concept “state” is taken to be identical with its citizens, there is a large group of non-citizens and undocumented people that is overlooked, even though they are the “nonconceptual”, those who allow for the state to be what it is. This example demonstrates the potential gap between the object and the concept. Another way to think about how the subordination of the nonconceptual to the concept happens in more everyday circumstances is, if we see an object that is shiny, has circular things attached to it at the bottom, and has a certain shape overall, we immediately assume that it is a car. The urge to identify something that resembles a car as a car right away, without leaving open for a moment the possibility that it might be something different, demonstrates the everyday fetishization of concepts.

Adorno’s critique of “identitarian thinking”, which has been referenced in passing above, is targeting precisely the issue of privileging the concept over the nonconceptual. Identifying the concept with the nonconceptual is guided by an urge to say “what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents” rather than by a genuine attempt to “say what something is” (ND, 149). What I take Adorno to mean by this is that the homogenization of the social order under capitalism is linked to the way that concepts are taken to be fully descriptive of their objects. Leaving any room outside of the concept is seen to lead to disorder. For Adorno, however, the reality of what something is can only actually be reached through the type of externality that is characteristic of the nonconceptual. Moreover, he claims that representation is not the end goal of philosophizing insofar as philosophy is understood as working with concepts. Rather, focusing on representing something actually distracts from saying what it is because representation prevents creation.

Likewise, Deleuze's discussion of the pernicious, mistaken "image of thought" that permeates philosophy is aimed at uncovering the drive towards recognition and familiarity (as opposed to difference and creation, which guide Deleuze's philosophy in general) that underpins this image. Like Adorno, he is concerned with the way that representation, as a recognizable form, is taken to be the paradigmatic tool of philosophical thought. This is an issue because, for Deleuze and Adorno both, there is a kinship between representation and identity. Deleuze states at the outset of *Difference and Repetition*, "The primacy of identity ... defines the world of representation. But modern thought is born of the failure of representation, of the loss of identities" (DR, xix). As established before, Deleuze, like Adorno, sees identity as a threat to difference and as a perpetuation of *doxa*, or the current state of things (DR, 146). An insistence on representation is thus an insistence on identity between the concept and the nonconceptual, which does not actually exist. Another way to think about it, is if representation is positioned as at the center of the philosophical project, there is no space for the contemplation of the nonconceptual. Thus, just as Adorno, Deleuze wants to bring the nonconceptual to the fore.

Both philosophers formulate a conception of philosophy that is positioned against the approach of identifying the representation with what is represented, or the concept with the nonconceptual. Instead, they believe philosophy must focus on the nonconceptual and thus dive into non-identity, which, given that philosophy is often thought to be answering questions and uncovering truths, makes it a rather contradictory project. Rather than being guided by recognizable forms of thinking, notes Deleuze, "philosophy develops in paradox" (WP, 82). He further elaborates that the relationship between the concept and its ground is one of mutual presupposition, and thus the project

of philosophy does not have an identifiable goal in the form of “truth”, but rather its goal is in exploring the realm of the concept and thus, simultaneously, the realm of the nonconceptual.

Adorno echoes this sentiment, identifying the project of philosophy as the attempt to reach the nonconceptual. He notes,

Though doubtful as ever, a confidence that philosophy can make it after all—that the concept can transcend the concept, the preparatory and concluding element, and can thus reach the nonconceptual—is one of philosophy’s inalienable features and part of the naivete that ails it. (ND, 9)

In other words, philosophy is defined through a conflict—it is at once the study of concepts and also the attempt to transcend concepts altogether and reach the nonconceptual. Thus, both Deleuze and Adorno see the nonconceptual as a necessary, central feature of philosophy that is frequently overlooked. For both, centering nonconceptuality underscores the transgressive nature of philosophy because it reveals its near-impossibility as a project. Despite the similarities outlined above, I claim that Adorno and Deleuze’s theorizations of the nonconceptual are different in that the former sees it as the result of a corruption of the social order, whereas the latter sees it as indicative of the creativity inherent in the project of philosophy⁴. I will demonstrate this by looking at the two philosophers’ critiques of Hegel’s treatment of “concept”.

Adorno sees the nonconceptual as undertheorized in Hegel due to the Hegelian tendency towards unity, which also manifests in his treatment of the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual. Even though the nonconceptual is not present in Hegel’s work as a term, Adorno

⁴ Here and further in this work I am purposefully avoiding bringing Kant’s terms into the discussion because I believe it would complicate rather than illuminate Deleuze and Adorno’s critiques of Hegel. In general, it is clear that both Adorno and Deleuze draws on Kant for a lot of their critiques and, unsurprisingly, both tend to find his distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal, or the way things are in themselves and the way we understand them, more conducive to an engagement with the nonconceptual than Hegel’s identification of the two.

identifies it as the starting point of Hege's project that then unfolds through a dialectical movement. When Hegel begins the *Logic* with "being", claims Adorno, he has in mind a nonconceptuality, or something that "points beyond itself" (ND, 102). Dialectics is the process by which the nonconceptual becomes more concrete and eventually solidifies into a concept. "Being" is taken as the abstract beginning in Hegel's project in the *Logic* and is subsequently revealed to be meaningless without its contradiction—non-being, or nothingness. Eventually, being shows itself as part of becoming, the third, unifying movement of the dialectic. Being, thus, moves from an undifferentiated, abstract term and becomes more concrete, just as the nonconceptual always haunts the concept.

When talking of nonconceptualities, Adorno also has in mind what remains when an object fails to fully go into its concept. This remainder, the mismatch between the object and the concept, is what he refers to as the "nonconceptual", and what he sees as being under-theorized in Hegel's discussion of concepts. Due to this omission, Adorno claims, the concept is taken to be identical to the nonconceptual. For Adorno, this autarky of the concept is what characterizes political hegemony, which leaves little room for rebellion and revolution. In putting these claims forward, Adorno is making observations about the state of society at the time he was writing. According to him, in the present state of things (in other words, in capitalist society), objects cannot go into their concepts fully.

Gillian Rose provides a useful example that further explicates what the nonconceptual is for Adorno, showing that it is a result of an undesirable transformation. She states,

if the object is society, that society as it is now is an object which does not fulfill its concept. The concept is not equal to nor congruent with the object which it identifies. But that concept is what the object has by itself, that is, the properties it could potentially have. These properties are what it 'would like to be'. (Rose 1978, 45)

In other words, there is a gap between what the object should be in order to live up to its concept and what it actually is. Society has been so deformed by the capitalist mode of production that it does not match the concept of society. The nonconceptual is, thus, a reflection of the fissure between concept and object. Because the nonconceptual reflects the state of affairs, it must be the focus of philosophical reflection, or what Adorno calls the matter of “true philosophical interest” (ND, 8). If it is ignored, one runs the risk of participating in authoritarian thinking and fetishizing the concept. Philosophy must, then, “extinguish the autarky of the concept” and “rip the blindfold from our eyes” (ND, 12).

With this in mind, Adorno defines his project as that of reversing the relationship of subordination and positioning the nonconceptual as more important than the concept while staying true to his method of “negative dialectics”. He states,

To refer to nonconceptualities—as ultimately, according to traditional epistemology, every definition of concepts requires nonconceptual, deictic elements—is characteristic of the concept, and so is the contrary: that as the abstract unit of the noumena subsumed thereunder it will depart from the noumenal. To change this direction of conceptuality, to give it a turn toward nonidentity, is the hinge of negative dialectics. (ND, 12)

In other words, negative dialectics is meant to highlight that it is not only that the concept requires the nonconceptual, but also that the nonconceptual would not exist without the concept. The second type of relationship prevents the identification of the concept with the nonconceptual because it shows that the establishment of the concept also necessarily brings forth a ground that exists outside it. The second relationship is also positioned against the first type of relationship without identifying them, meaning the relationship between the two remains non-identical. The second stage of the dialectic, the stage of contradiction, is thus preserved without needing to move into the third, which

would imply the unity of the concept and the nonconceptual. Thus, Adorno believes that through an application of negative dialectics, the nonconceptual can be brought into the foreground.

Once again, however, Adorno finds himself in the curious predicament of using Hegel's concepts and critiquing them at the same time. He believes the nonconceptual to be the central concern of philosophy while at the same time thinking that, ideally, it would not need to be. In "reversing" the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual, Adorno wants to call the reader's attention to the way they co-constitute each other. However, the way he theorizes the nonconceptual contradicts Hegel's system to such an extent that it can no longer be taken as a re-articulation. Rather, it appears as a wholly new system with different concepts.

More specifically, Adorno's theorization of the nonconceptual as what arises as a result of the non-identity between the object and its concept goes against the way Hegel envisions the concept. It is, of course, Adorno's goal to step away from Hegel's absolute idealism, but because he relies so heavily on Hegel's conceptual apparatus, it appears as though he simply misinterprets Hegelian notions. In the case of the concept, Hegel is clear that it exists prior to the object. He states,

we do not form the concepts at all and that the concept in general is not to be considered something that has a genesis at all... It is wrong to assume, first that there are objects which form the content of our representations and then our subjective activity comes along behind them, forming the concepts of objects by means of the earlier mentioned operation of abstracting and gathering together what is common to the objects. On the contrary, the concept is what is truly first and things are what they are, thanks to the activity of the concept dwelling in them and revealing itself in them. (Hegel, 238)

This quote demonstrates that the way Adorno approaches the relationship between the concept and the object, describing them as two separable entities, goes completely against the way Hegel envisioned it. Instead, Hegel sees the object as secondary to the concept, but constituted at the same time as the

concept itself, since concepts reveal themselves through objects. Adorno's reasoning suggests that there is a misidentification between the concept and its object, but that is clearly impossible in Hegel's system since the two do not make sense unless they are considered together. Thus, even if Adorno's observation of the splitting of reality under capitalism is accurate, it cannot be understood through Hegelian terms.

Moreover, Hegel clearly sees concepts as "active", as entities that "dwell" and "reveal themselves". Adorno's theorization of concepts as those entities that objects fail to go into, on the other hand, clearly suggests that concepts are static and unchanging. The separation of the concept and the object, thus, also suggests that, while objects are able to change depending on historical circumstances, concepts remain the same. This conceptualization once again contradicts Hegel's understanding of concepts.

Rose calls what results from Adorno's maneuvers "a logic of disintegration" because, rather than providing a comprehensive anchor between the concept and the nonconceptual in a way that honors their difference, Adorno only rejects Hegel's approach. Rose continues, stating that Adorno's reformulation "does not tend to the identity in the difference between each object and its concept; instead, it is suspicious of all identity" (Rose 2017). What she is gesturing to is that, in the case of Adorno, stepping away from Hegelian dialectics leads to incoherence in trying to theorize the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual.

Turning now to Deleuze, we recall that he rejects dialectics completely, even if it is unclear if he is able to fully side-step dialectics in his philosophy. He feels capable of rejecting dialectics because he does not see the dialectical movement as descriptive of the movement between nonconceptuality

and the concept. This move gives him a lot more freedom than Adorno feels he has. Deleuze uses his ontological notions of difference and repetition, he introduces the idea of the “plane of immanence”, which both explains the relationship between the concept and the nonconceptual and, just as Adorno saw as crucial, centers the nonconceptual in philosophy as a discipline.

Deleuze’s critique of Hegel’s approach to concepts focuses on the full movement between the concept and the nonconceptual rather than just the feature of identity that Adorno is concerned with. Deleuze claims that Hegel “remains in the reflected element of ‘representation’, within simple generality” and “represents concepts instead of dramatizing Ideas”, thereby creating “a false theatre, a false drama, a false movement” (DR, 10). Before proceeding, it makes sense to mention that the contrast between “Ideas” and “concepts” is a feature of Deleuze’s earlier writing that does not carry through to *What is Philosophy?*, where he clearly identifies concepts as the tools and objects of philosophy and steps away from the terminology of “Ideas”. It is likely that he wanted to step away from the term “concept” in *Difference and Repetition* because it is so central to Hegel’s work. For our purposes, in the quote above we should understand “Idea” as referring to what we would commonly mean by concepts and “concept” as referring to the way concepts are understood in Hegel specifically.

Returning to the quote, it is clear that, for Deleuze, the way Hegel describes the dialectical movement of the formation of concepts is based on opinion rather than actually descriptive of the reality of concept-formation. The falsity of this movement is underscored by Deleuze’s use of the word “representation”, since, as mentioned above, representation is part of the same complex as identity and prevents true philosophizing. Rather than getting to the truth of movement, Hegel, once again, relies on opinion and falls into the false image of thought by describing the relationship between

the concept and the nonconceptual in terms that stay within a subjective understanding of movement.

As discussed in the previous section, Deleuze sees opinion-based approaches to philosophy as preventing a true, creative process from happening.

Instead of the dialectical movement, Deleuze proposes repetition and difference as the ontological principles of the creation of concepts. He articulates the way his philosophical system approaches the creation of concepts by first claiming, surprisingly in agreement with Hegel, that concepts must be taken as objects themselves. Deleuze states,

Empiricism is a mysticism and a mathematicism of concepts, but precisely one which treats the concept as object of an encounter, as a here-and-now, or rather as an Erehwon from which emerge inexhaustibly ever new, differently distributed 'heres' and 'nows'. Only an empiricist could say: concepts are indeed things... I make, remake and unmake my concepts along a moving horizon, from an always decentred centre, from an always displaced periphery which repeats and differentiates them. (DR, xx)

There is a clear reference to Hegel in this passage in the sentence “only an empiricist could say: concepts are indeed things”, since Hegel's idealism lends itself to treating concepts as constitutive of reality more than other systems. In a way, then, Deleuze's treatment of concepts is closer to Hegel's than Adorno's because Deleuze commits himself to treating concepts as “things”, which, for an empiricist, are the building-blocks of reality. Deleuze does not differentiate between the concept and its object. Rather, he sees the concept itself as an object and the center of an encounter, which echoes Hegel's positioning of the concept as that which is revealed in an encounter through an object. However, the way Deleuze approaches concepts is still different from Hegel's due to Deleuze's focus on repetition.

After the concept is positioned as central to an encounter, Deleuze stresses that it becomes constituted and reconstituted through repetition with difference as the underlying principle. In other

words, concepts exist in a state of repetition, with each repetition of a concept not being identical to the previous. As mentioned above, they are “made, remade, and unmade” “along a moving horizon”, which I take to mean several things. Firstly, concepts are not rigid, static entities; rather, they are always undergoing a process of coming together, crumbling, and being rebuilt once again. The implication of this conceptualization is that the concept is identical with the object because both are constituted during an encounter. Once again, there are, perhaps surprising, resonances between this account and Hegel’s theorization of the concept as existing in a constant state of movement. Both Deleuze and Hegel insist on the aliveness concepts (Hegel even compares concepts to plants that grow from a seed), whereas Adorno’s account locks them in place as ahistorical entities despite Adorno’s efforts to draw attention precisely to the way historical circumstances change the way the concept relates to the object.

Thus, in the quote above, Deleuze also implicitly addresses the worry that Adorno expressed in his critique of Hegel but failed to reconcile in the final version of his theory. Namely, because in Deleuze’s system the concepts come to be “along a moving horizon”, there is space for historical contingency. Take, for instance, the example that Rose provides to help the reader understand Adorno’s worry about the non-identity between the concept and the object. She explains that, for Adorno, the object “society” no longer goes into the concept “society” because of the way the capitalist mode of production leads to a general state of alienation. Deleuze, rather than introducing the chasm between the object and its concept, would say that the concept of “society” has changed because the “moving horizon” that underlies its creation has changed. Instead of taking the corrupt state of society as a sign that the object has changed, he believes that the concept itself comes to be approached from a different angle.

Thus, unlike Adorno's nonconceptual, which is a result of a deformation of the social order, the nonconceptual for Deleuze is imagined as "an always displaced periphery" that can shift and change, thereby giving rise to different concepts. Because this space is described as a "periphery", Deleuze agrees with Adorno on the fact that it is rather undertheorized. For Deleuze, however, this undertheorization is not only a consequence of the image of thought that dominates the way philosophy is done by many, but it is also in the nature of the nonconceptual in general. While Adorno recognizes that philosophy is borne out of the paradox of wanting to transcend the concept to reach the nonconceptual, for him this paradox has a tragic quality. For Deleuze, on the other hand, it is simply descriptive of the creative project of philosophy.

Deleuze's attitude towards the nonconceptual can further be explained through his term "the plane of immanence". He defines it as "a fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates", a plane "upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance" (Deleuze and Guattari ..., 255). The use of words that gesture to movement once more bring forth the activity that Deleuze sees as characteristic of both the concept and the nonconceptual. This movement is unrestricted by the rigid structure of dialectics but is presented as a much more creative, unpredictable "dance" and "stirring".

This plane is not transcendent with respect to the concept, hence the term "immanence". Rather, it is established at the same time as the concept while also being the ground for philosophy as a whole. Deleuze notes that the plane is "not a program, design, end, or means: it is a plane of immanence that constitutes the absolute ground of philosophy" (WP, 41). If the concept and the nonconceptual are established at the same time, then they are both equally the concern of philosophy.

Deleuze calls this plane “prephilosophical”, explaining that “prephilosophical does not mean something preexistent but rather something that *does not exist outside philosophy*, although philosophy presupposes it” (WP, 41). He then makes an even stronger claim, that this prephilosophical aspect is “perhaps closer to the heart of philosophy than philosophy itself” (ibid.), thereby stepping away from the primacy of the concept. Thus, Deleuze, like Adorno, attempts to center the nonconceptual by stepping away from Hegel’s theorization of the dialectical movement between the concept and the nonconceptual.

Let us finally illustrate these ideas and use, once again, the example of “society” used by Rose. As previously established, for Adorno, the concept “society” seems to stay the same throughout history, whereas the object, the way society itself operates, is what changes. For Deleuze, there is no discussion of objects, and concepts themselves are thought to change depending on the configuration of the “elements and materials” and their dance on the plane of immanence. With the penetration of the capitalist mode of production into increasingly more areas of life, the concept “society” itself changes. What this implies is that the aforementioned “periphery” that gives rise to concepts has shifted and now, in order to understand how to transform the concept of society, philosophers must turn exactly to the prephilosophical, or nonconceptual, and invent a concept that reflects what society must be. Adorno, thus, has a tragic view of the central status of the nonconceptual, whereas Deleuze sees it as an opportunity for creation. The former seems less conducive to reaching a free form of philosophical thinking.

Chapter 3: Utopia: Possible or Virtual?

It has become clear from the investigations in the previous sections that both Adorno and Deleuze are trying to formulate philosophies that resist the totalizing forces that were partly put upon philosophy by Hegel. More specifically, both see Hegelian dialectics as a constricting force on philosophical thinking. The reason the critique of dialectics takes such a central role in both of their projects is that it directly connects to the way concepts, the building blocks of philosophy, come to be and how they relate to what both refer to as “the nonconceptual”. So far, I have argued that Adorno’s unwillingness to step away from Hegelian terminology hinders his efforts to liberate philosophical thinking from forced unity and coherence, whereas Deleuze approach, characterized by stepping away from the idea of dialectics altogether, while at first appearing rushed, lends itself much better to building a path towards philosophical thinking freed from totalizing forces.

In this section, I will investigate what the philosophers’ critiques of Hegel and their positioning of the nonconceptual as central to the project of philosophy entails. More specifically, both seem to be aiming towards a kind of utopia, or what Adorno terms explicitly a “cognitive utopia”, which I take to mean a utopia of philosophical thinking. I claim that Adorno believes it useful to think of utopia as an unreachable state that provides a horizon against which philosophy must be done. Otherwise, he does not think philosophy can succeed. Deleuze, on the other hand, treats utopia as an ever-present state that can be reached through a certain configuration of “materials” on the plane of immanence.

The paradox of utopia in general is that, as soon as one is able to describe utopia, then it no longer stands for something that is radically different from the world as it is now. Adorno, just as Marx, who was often accused of undertheorizing what a communist society would look like, is guided precisely by this concern. For Adorno, utopia is so inexpressible that he finds himself forced to theorize in a way that is locked in Hegel's categories. His immanent method, discussed in the previous section, means that he cannot abandon Hegelian terminology, even if he wants to. He states,

the ineffable part of the utopia is that what defies subsumption under identity—the “use value,” in Marxist terminology—is necessary anyway if life is to go on at all, even under the prevailing circumstances of production. The utopia extends to the sworn enemies of its realization. Regarding the concrete utopian possibility, dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction. (ND, 11)

In this quote, Adorno reveals that dialectics would not be descriptive of the “right state of things”.

Contradiction, and thus also non-identity, both of which are emphasized by Adorno in his formulation of negative dialectics, would ideally not characterize ontology. Along similar lines, Adorno notes that a cognitive utopia would be “to use concepts to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it their equal” (ND, 10). As discussed in the previous section, Adorno clings on to dialectics precisely because it has to fulfill its mediating role between the concept and the nonconceptual. Under the conditions of utopia, however, it seems as though concepts themselves play the role of mediation between concepts and the nonconceptual. Thus, utopia, in one way, has only a tangential impact on the way philosophy must be done now, since there is no way for us to formulate it with the currently-available conceptual apparatus.

On the other hand, Adorno sees utopia as necessarily informing philosophical inquiry as a foundational element. He compares utopia to Marx's “use value” in the quote above. “Use value” is a

concept that, although it in some way refers to something that is more primary than the commodity form (a form that exists only under capitalism) because it means the literal usefulness of a product, exists only in the context of the commodity form and, thus, in the capitalist mode of production.

What this implies is that utopia is a part of the current system in the way that the use value is part of the capitalist system. It refers to something that is beyond the system and is a foundation for it, but nevertheless can be understood only in the context of this system. Because of this, utopia cannot be “subsumed under identity” and has something “ineffable” about it. Moreover, utopia’s foundational property is what allows for life to “go on at all”. Because it is both a foundation for life and only understood from within it, philosophy must pay attention to it. Thus, it is a state that casts a guiding shadow on philosophical thought without directly interfering in it.

Adorno gives further reason for this interpretation by saying that utopia must be understood through its proximity to possibility and non-being. He states,

Utopia, as the consciousness of possibility [41], adheres to the concrete, the unspoilt. Its path is blocked by possibility, never by immediate reality; this explains why it always seems abstract when surrounded by the world as it is. Its inextinguishable colour comes from nonbeing. Thought is its servant, a piece of existence that extends, however, negatively, into that which does not exist. (Adorno 2008, 210)

Utopia is said to be “the consciousness of possibility”, which I take to mean that utopia is non-actualized. Adorno then states that utopia “adheres to the concrete” and appears abstract only “when surrounded by the world as it is”. It is never blocked by “immediate reality” but rather by possibility. At first, this seems to suggest that utopia is explicitly present in reality. However, here he also explicitly states that utopia “comes from nonbeing” and extends into “that which does not exist”, which implies that utopia is somehow at once actualized and non-actualized.

Adorno's identification of utopia with possibility is part of his more general critique of Hegel's distinction between abstract and real possibility. Adorno claims,

According to Hegel's distinction between abstract and real possibility, only something that has become real is actually possible. This kind of philosophy sides with the big guns. It adopts the judgment of a reality that always destroys what could be different. (HTS, 83)

In this quote, Adorno is pointing to Hegel's ignorance towards possibility as something non-actualized. Without spending too much time explaining Hegel's concepts, "abstract possibility" is possibility considered outside of its relation to actuality. Like anything labeled "abstract" in Hegel's system, it is not a concept that he sees as central or descriptive of the role of possibility in his philosophy. "Real possibility", on the other hand, results from the mediation between possibility and actuality and implies that possibility must be understood through its relationship to actuality and reality⁵. What Adorno is pointing to, then, is that Hegel recognizes only "real possibility", or the type of possibility that is intertwined with actuality. For Adorno, Hegel privileges actuality over possibility by subordinating abstract possibility to real possibility.

Ignoring possibility as an independently-standing characteristic means utopia would have to be treated as actualized. As previously mentioned, for Adorno utopia cannot be actualized because it is the "consciousness of possibility", and extends "into that which does not exist". Stating that utopia is actualized, then, means "siding with the big guns", or "destroying what could be different". In other words, closing the door on possibility as something that eludes actuality means accepting the hegemonic order. Adorno goes even further, noting that Hegel's theorization of possibility creates the

⁵ Although there might be debate on whether actuality and reality are different concepts in Hegel, for the purposes of this discussion, I treat them as equivalent.

conditions for apologetics, or “the legitimization of what exists” (HTS, 82). Both of these comments are in line with Adorno’s general critique of Hegel outlined in the previous sections.

Adorno’s approach, unlike Hegel’s, centers utopia as a state that at once is possible, in the sense of being non-actualized, and has tangible effects on reality. Deleuze’s way of treating utopia gives a name to this ambiguous status.

Deleuze’s theorizing of utopia in *What is Philosophy?* is very clearly informed by Adorno’s thought. However, unlike Adorno, he does not give utopia such an ineffable status. Even though for him there is also an untheorizable nonconceptuality that is identified as utopian and turns out to be the main focus of philosophy, he does not see utopia as transcendent to the world as it is now. Instead, he sees it as rooting philosophy in the present moment and located in the realm of the “virtual”.

Just as Adorno, Deleuze sees utopia as a historically-dependent state that informs the way philosophy must be done. He states that utopia “designates that conjunction of philosophy, or of the concept, with the present milieu” (WP, 100). He further identifies it as that which “links philosophy with its own epoch, with European capitalism” (ibid.). It is clear that Deleuze sees utopia as historically dependent. Not only that, but he also connects it directly to the capitalist mode of production, clearly continuing Adorno’s train of thought. Thus, for Deleuze, utopia is also central to the project of philosophy. In fact, it is what tethers philosophy to its historical context.

What is missing from Deleuze’s theorization of utopia, however, is the negative element of Adorno’s theorization. More specifically, Deleuze does not see utopia as unreachable, even if he recognizes that it attempts to move beyond whatever context it refers to. He notes that utopia “stands for absolute deterritorialization but always at the critical point at which it is connected with the

present relative milieu, and especially with the forces stifled by this milieu” (WP, 100). For Deleuze, then, even though utopia “stands for absolute deterritorialization”, which simply means that it attempts to move away from social configurations as they exist, it is still firmly rooted in the “present milieu”, or in the historical context and material conditions that characterize it. What is more, Deleuze’s utopia is specifically concerned with those forces that are “stifled” in a particular situation. This echoes Adorno’s sentiment that utopia extends to the “sworn enemies of its realization”. Thus, the philosophers both see utopia as in some way at odds with the world as it is now, but Deleuze’s insistence that it is the link between philosophy and the current world is what pushes utopia out of the world of possibility. Instead of imagining utopia only as an indescribable ideal, he insists that it is always concretely present in the way we philosophize.

The positive nature of Deleuze’s account is further revealed when one considers his theorization of the virtual. Deleuze does not explicitly connect the virtual and utopia, but I claim that a lot of his discussion of utopia is informed by the way he understands virtuality. First, let us clarify what Deleuze means by the virtual, for which we turn to his work on Henri Bergson. Drawing largely on Bergson, Deleuze formulates the virtual as a much richer concept than the possible. Just as Adorno points out in his critique of Hegel, Deleuze notes that the possible is often taken to be not only subordinate to the actual but also less productive because it is “not real”. He believes that there is a need for a different concept that refers to a realm that is real but nonetheless inaccessible because it is unactualized. The virtual is an infinite, moving plane, containing “all possible particles and drawing out all possible forms, which spring up only to disappear immediately, without consistency or reference, without consequence” (WP, 118). The virtual, thus, is a plane like the possible that is not

opposed to the real but rather to actuality⁶, or to what has already crystallized from the multiplicity of the virtual.

The actualization of the virtual, moreover, defines the work of philosophy. The process of concretization of the virtual is one of actualization, or becoming actual, whereas for the possible the same process is called realization, or becoming real. Deleuze claims that the former allows for greater creativity than the realization of the possible because the real is always thought to be “in the image” of the possible, whereas the actualized “does not resemble the virtuality that it embodies” (Deleuze 1991, 97)⁷. The actualization of the virtual, thus, allows for the type of creativity that is needed to the creation of philosophical concepts.

Because philosophy is fundamentally predicated on utopia, as established above, utopia must exist in the virtual realm. The way Deleuze talks about the virtual in *What is Philosophy?* substantiates my claim. He states, “Now philosophy wants to know how to retain infinite speeds while gaining consistency, by giving the virtual a consistency specific to it... By retaining the infinite, philosophy gives consistency to the virtual through concepts” (WP, 118). In other words, the task of philosophy is, through the invention of concepts, to attempt to honor the infinity of the virtual. This suggests that utopia is most productively understood as existing in the virtual realm.

Notice that the virtual realm satisfies Adorno’s requirements for utopia as both unreachable and foundational. We do not have access to the virtual, or that which is not actualized, but, at the same

⁶ Unlike Hegel, Deleuze makes it clear that the actual and the real are distinct because he does not see the latter as a useful concept in general.

⁷ I do not focus on examining this claim here because, for the purposes of this work, I only want to explain what Deleuze means by virtuality and connect it to his notion of utopia rather than weigh in on the question of whether Deleuze’s arguments with respect to virtuality are sound.

time, the virtual is the raw material for the actual. What sets Deleuze's theorization apart, however, is that, because he rejects the realm of the possible, which is also the not-real, in favor of the realm of the virtual, which is real, utopia becomes positioned as a state that is within reach. Unlike Adorno's confusing attempt to explain it as both possible and actual, Deleuze's virtual manages to cover the features of utopia that both philosophers see as most descriptive of it.

One might point out that Deleuze's attitude towards utopia trivializes it because he does not treat utopia as radically different from the state of the world now. It does not seem to me that if something is presented as more readily available that means it is trivial. Instead, I believe for Deleuze there is a constant reinvention of philosophy and thinking, so what defines utopia changes all the time. The smaller differences that arise from this reinvention are treated as significant and as reflecting changes in the social landscape. Adorno, on the other hand, sees utopia as relevant on a much larger scale, only as that which will be accessible after the revolution. Thus, one can just as easily say that Adorno overlooks the more "trivial" manifestations of utopia as that Deleuze trivializes utopia.

Relatedly, one might note that, because Adorno stays closer to the Marxist tradition than Deleuze, he is trying to say that the material conditions have to change before we can reach anything that resembles a cognitive utopia or a utopia of philosophizing. Deleuze, on the other hand, does not stick to this requirement and so is able to be more optimistic. However, it does not seem to me like the difference can be explained only through their varying attitudes to Marxism. It seems to me as though Deleuze recognizes the constrictive nature of material conditions and in no way positions the mind as more primary than the material realm. What he is more willing to say than Adorno, however, is that

even within the present material conditions there are openings that allow for a different way of thinking and acting, which, as a result, allows for more optimism with respect to change⁸.

⁸ There is a lot more that can be said with regard to Adorno and Deleuze's differing attitudes towards historical materialism, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. What I want to emphasize in this work is that both philosophers think philosophy exists against a backdrop of utopia, but for one this utopia is located in the realm of non-being whereas for the other it is fully real.

Conclusion and Final Remarks

In this work I showed what Deleuze meant when he said that his project is closest “to what Adorno called “negative dialectics”” (WP, 99). In other words, by examining the resonances between Deleuze and Adorno’s approach to philosophical thought, I demonstrated that Deleuze, to a large extent, builds on Adorno’s project, staying committed to what he sees as the work of philosophy. Namely, he creates concepts that try to resolve the issues that are brought up by Adorno. At the same time, I tried to avoid treating Adorno’s philosophy only as a jumping-off point for Deleuze’s theorizing, but rather emphasize that he is the one who provides the strongest critique of identitarian thinking through a deep, sustained engagement with Hegel, the philosopher who most comprehensively formulated a theory of philosophizing.

In the first chapter, I showed that Adorno and Deleuze have a similar critique of dialectics in that they see it as constricting philosophical thought through its unifying element, in the case of Adorno, and through its general systematic nature, in the case of Deleuze. I further argued that Adorno’s approach of reforming dialectics, while it emphasizes the broken nature of capitalist society, does not achieve the kind of clarity that is necessary for the description of philosophical thought. I claimed that Deleuze’s approach of sidestepping dialectics altogether takes Adorno’s critique to its logical conclusion, but his tendency to ignore the influence that Hegelian dialectics have had on philosophy in his own theorizations betrays a certain anxiety. At the same time, being unencumbered by dialectics allows Deleuze to have more freedom in theorizing thought, which is what I discussed in the second chapter.

In the second chapter, I demonstrated that Deleuze and Adorno both see the nonconceptual as a central idea for philosophical thought and try to formulate its relationship to concepts, the building blocks of philosophy. Deleuze uses his freedom from dialectics to formulate the “plane of immanence” as the schema that characterizes the immanent relationship between concepts and the nonconceptual. He approaches the nonconceptual as that which gestures at the creativity of philosophy. Adorno, on the other hand, identifies the nonconceptual as central because it is the consequence of a deformation of the social order. He tries to use negative dialectics to describe the fissure between the concept and the object that leads to the nonconceptual, separating the concept from the object along the way. Unlike Deleuze, Adorno stays committed to Hegelian notions, even though that leads him to untethering concepts from objects, which has no place in Hegel’s system.

Finally, I argued that Deleuze builds on Adorno’s conceptualization of cognitive utopia by freeing utopia from the realm of the possible. In his discussion of utopia, Adorno reveals that, in a state of utopia, dialectics would not describe the present state of things and the concept would be united with its object, but because utopia exists in the realm of the possible, we have no way to reach it. Whereas Adorno sees utopia as dealing with non-being and thus the not-real, Deleuze locates utopia in the virtual, which is a realm that is fully real but non-actualized. Thus, by treating utopia as pertaining to the virtual rather than the possible, Deleuze highlights philosophy’s subversive potential.

As the summary above has made clear, in this paper I have expressed a preference for Deleuze’s approach to nonconceptuality and formulation of a cognitive utopia, which I will now qualify. Firstly, the project of this work has been to try to understand what the obstacles to philosophical thinking might be and how we should understand thought in a way that illuminates these obstacles while at the

same time helping overcome them. Adorno's approach to this question is that of holding on to the way that philosophy had been understood leading up to the time when he was writing while, at the same time, modifying this conception of philosophy so as to point to the destruction that social relations have endured. More specifically, his attempt to reformulate Hegel's dialectics is meant to highlight the brokenness of the world and position philosophy as a nearly-impossible project. As Rose argues and as discussed in all three sections, Adorno leaves little room for formulating how to overcome this brokenness.

Deleuze also provides a strong critique of certain prior approaches to philosophy that deal with representations and are based on opinion. However, because he imagines himself as providing a whole new ontology and thus a new image of philosophical thought, he is able to stress not only philosophy's revolutionary goals but also the creativity already inherent in the right type of philosophical thought. Both the concepts of the "plane of immanence" and the "virtual" and their centrality to Deleuze's conception of the project of philosophy emphasize that philosophy posits a rich realm of constantly-moving ideas, thoughts, perceptions, and sensations. Thus, Adorno's vision of philosophy, while it is meant to emphasize its transformative potential, ends up only drawing attention to all the ways philosophy is blocked from fulfilling its potential, whereas Deleuze manages to call attention to the ways that philosophy interacts with and constructs the world in positive ways.

Secondly, remember that the operative definition of philosophy in this paper, namely that it is a discipline that deals with concepts and aims to be critical of its objects as well as of itself, was formulated based on Hegel's philosophy. This means that Adorno and Deleuze's attitudes towards Hegel are central in assessing their respective theories of philosophical thinking. The philosophers

agree on the fundamental features of philosophy that are emphasized by Hegel while also providing critiques of his methods. Adorno sees Hegel's system as worth salvaging, which leads to a certain pick-and-choose attitude with regard to what Adorno adapts to his own project and what he sees as not reflective of social reality. Deleuze, on the other hand, is categorically opposed to dialectics, attempting to write philosophy without drawing on Hegel. As previously mentioned, Malabou unearths the influence that Hegelian philosophy has on Deleuze and in the discussion of Deleuze's understanding of concepts, I also pointed out that he ends up much closer to Hegel than Adorno in his understanding of concepts, even if he still critiques certain aspects of Hegel's theory. Thus, whereas Adorno tries to reform Hegel's theory from the inside, Deleuze presents a whole new theory that aims to be fully divorced from Hegel's. I find Adorno's approach helpful in maintaining a connection to the philosophical theories that had a vast impact on the way philosophy is approached more broadly. Deleuze's approach, on the other hand, is useful in terms of looking forward to stepping away from the totalizing theories of the past.

What is most important to stress, then, is that the analysis above revealed that it is not that Deleuze and Adorno are after conflicting outcomes or even using contradictory methods. The differences between their approaches also cannot be explained only by saying that one is a more orthodox Marxist than the other, or that Deleuze is just a French "post-structuralist" (a highly contested claim in itself) with all the attached connotations of ant-Hegelianism and anti-subjectivity whereas Adorno is not. In fact, if one considers the history of philosophy, Adorno and Deleuze are much closer in terms of their influences and the questions they are concerned with than the vast majority of philosophers writing even just in the 20th century. Thus, it seems as though Adorno's

critical, pessimistic attitude had to exist for Deleuze's unencumbered theorization of philosophical thought to come into being. Before proposing a full theory of what philosophical thought ought to look like once it is freed from dialectics, identitarian thinking, one has to work through these obstacles from within, just as Adorno attempts to do.

The discussion above has shown that the question of what philosophical thought is and how it should be approached is one that cannot be considered outside of Hegel's philosophy and, at the same time, must move beyond Hegelian dialectics. It has also demonstrated that not only concepts but also the nonconceptual must be the center of philosophy in order to avoid the pitfall of fetishizing the concept and erasing what escapes it. Finally, it has shown that philosophy is inherently characterized by its utopian element.

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