

Arendt's and Adorno's *philosophy of difference* as a case against normative theories

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Abstract: The philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Theodor W. Adorno can be classified as critical theories that were developed out of confrontation with the totalitarian regimes. Today we can still question their actuality for the present time. To answer this, we, firstly, try to understand how their philosophies were developed. We are convinced that one of the essential aspects was Arendt's and Adorno's confrontation with older normative theories in the field of moral philosophy and political theory, especially with Kant's. Secondly, the shortcomings of normativisms for understanding the catastrophes of the totalitarian era lead us to their new ways of thinking, which were pluralistically oriented and interested in difference rather than identity. By the end, in order to discuss their actuality, we confront their philosophies with new theories arising out of the normative turn.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Theodor W. Adorno, critical philosophy, plurality, non-identity.

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969) are two authors we would like to place into the field of critical philosophy and to assert their similarities despite all of the differences in their original philosophical convictions and their notorious mutual disapproval. Firstly, we would like to argue that their resemblance is due to the critical stance that they both represent, which has a common root in factual confrontation with the political rise of totalitarianisms. In this way, critical philosophy is concerned with «forms of social pathology»² and is therefore closely linked with the critique of the worldly conditions. Thus, it is closely connected with the phenomenal reality and is not parted from the world of appearances, as old normative theories often were. But, certainly, critical theory should not be interpreted as a justification of everything existent. Secondly, we are convinced that after the event of Auschwitz Adorno's and Arendt's philosophies testify to an inherent necessity for the use of a new philosophical thinking and changed views on moral theories, which have to depart from the traditional normative patterns of ethics. For this reason, Adorno and Arendt develop philosophies that can be named *philosophies of difference*. Adorno's turn towards nonidentity thinking is marked by the dangers of the enlightened thought (he stresses «the indefatigable self-destructiveness of enlightenment»³), whereas

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² Axel Honneth: *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Polity, Cambridge 2007, p. 30.

³ Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Verso, New York 1997, p. xi.

Arendt's thoroughly negative evaluation of contemplative philosophies leads to the love of judging.

Since we would like to rethink and defend the relevance of critical theories, in our case especially those of Arendt and Adorno, for the present, we must begin with the reconsideration of the presuppositions on which their critical philosophies stand. If the dangers of totalitarian politics –and by this, we mean all systems, which are exterminating human spontaneity and individuality in favour of repressive totality and unification of all humans– still exist, be it in the old or new forms, then their critical theories are certainly worth reconsidering. The aim of our discussion is to show Adorno's and Arendt's conviction that normative theories are not able to grasp the whole scope of so radically evil and perverted regimes as appearing in the twentieth century. In the first part, we will hence concentrate on their critique of normativism, especially concerning Kant's philosophy. It is through their relentless confrontation with Kant's normative practical reason and his moral philosophy as a whole that Arendt's and Adorno's critical thinking gains its shape. Further, in the second step, we will present their philosophies of plurality and difference and, in the last step, finally, look for the prospects of critical theories and its legitimation.

I.

Through Arendt's and Adorno's departure from Kant's practical reason it is possible to demonstrate why their philosophies diverge from normativism and why after the era of grand atrocities it seems to be necessary to depart from traditional firm suppositions of what the moral principles are and what a good life is. Both philosophers agree that especially in the times of totalitarianisms the shortcomings of Kant's individualistic ethical approach become evident and that his normativism cannot sufficiently protect against terror of unification.

Arendt's critique of Kant is closely linked with his notion of evil, especially radical evil as defined in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Already in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) she objects to how Kant introduced the notion of radical evil, which he was not properly able to reflect and accordingly «rationalized it in the concept of a “perverted ill will” that could be explained by comprehensible motives».⁴ At the time when *The Origins of Totalitarianism* were taking shape, she already doubts that Kant's notion of radical evil could be sufficient for understanding the unsteady era of totalitarian regimes. However, her real shift away from the prevailing philosophies of evil, including Kant's, begins when she coins a new phrase –the banality of evil– during the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* originally published in 1963). The banality of evil, still topical also in her last book *The Life of the Mind* (posthumous edition in 1978), should be understood as her way of breaking with the traditional conceptions of evil: «Behind that phrase [banality of evil], I held no thesis or doctrine, although I was dimly aware of the fact that it went counter to our tradition of thought –literary,

⁴ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. A Harvest Book, San Diego 1979, p. 459.

theological, or philosophic— about the phenomenon of evil». ⁵ The main difference between the banality of evil and past conceptions is a newly accomplished separation between evil deeds and evil motives. ⁶

As a result, it is not possible in the case of totalitarian evil to speak of demonic, monstrous doers, but of their shallowness and especially their thoughtlessness. The connection between the notion of the will and that of the evil thus falls apart in Arendt's conception, which leads her away from Kant's definition of evil as of evil maxims or motives. In his theory, good and evil are always defined in relation to the will and the sole measure of the goodness or badness of a deed is its will. Conversely, Arendt's banality of evil ascertains an entirely dissimilar notion: not the motives of the doer are essential, but only the deeds themselves in their entire monstrosity. Therefore, the banality of evil cannot be characterized with egoism or greed, whereas for Kant, on the other hand, evil still meant an egoistic act that has not undergone universalization. Kant's entire moral theory is centred on the self and its connection to the moral law. Arendt's critique stresses Kant's orientation towards the life of the inner human being, which is in many aspects solipsistic, not directed to the world and without real interest for the plurality of humans.

It is the isolation of human beings, their entire atomization and superfluosity and not the egoistic propositions that are the greatest danger of totalitarianisms and, hence, Kant's practical reason is helpless in preventing them. In addition, it is this fact that makes Arendt sceptic about the use of Kant's moral theory for the political sphere; moreover, she cannot agree that the distinction between good and evil in politics could be based on practical reason. In her *Thinking Diary (Denktagebuch, 1950-1973)* she articulates her doubts about Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*: «It is impossible not to notice that in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and in other Kant's moral essays there is no mentioning of so-called fellow men. It is really just about the Self and the solitary functioning reason. [...] This is named as dispositional ethics [Gesinnungsethik] and dispositional ethics can be justified only in "border-situations", when one can no longer assume the responsibility for the world». ⁷ Because Kant's moral philosophy emphasizes human dignity, self-respect, and pride, it prioritizes the care for oneself and not for others, thus we can speak of his ethics as individualistic, not concentrated on interactions and relations between people and the world, but only interested in individuals and their dispositions. Individualistic ethics cannot properly value the fact of plurality, which is central for Arendt's political theory, and they are not able to grasp the full scope of extreme danger that emerges from this banal shallowness of the mob. In modern mass societies, the phenomenon of the banality of evil indicates why Kant's normativism is not appropriate for, firstly, understanding and, secondly, preventing this modern terror of shallowness.

⁵ Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*. A Harvest Book, San Diego 1978, p. 3.

⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 4-5.

⁷ Hannah Arendt: *Denktagebuch*, Bd 1. Piper, München 2003, p. 125.

Arendt criticizes self-centred ethics and favours the world of appearances and perspectivity. Therefore, her philosophy is also a critique of modern subjectivisms, which in their strivings for autonomy forget the external, natural, social, and political conditionings of humans. Counter to reducing the freedom of human spontaneity to the freedom of the will, she decides for a real outer freedom, which is not absolute but limited with external causes. The sphere of the freedom of the will is conversely utopic, absolute, and existent only in the depths of the self or its fictions. Therefore, she starts to distinguish between political and philosophical freedom.⁸ Philosophical freedom of the will, denoted as I-will, is relevant only for the people as individuals, outside the realm of political community and is marked with the flight from the world. Political freedom, freedom of I-can, is, on the other hand, not a part of volitive functions, but connected with our acting in the world. The meaning of this latter freedom is not in differentiating between good and evil but in realizing the “virtuosity of acting anew”. Self-respect or sovereignty is not its goal: «Where men wish to be sovereign, as individuals or as organized groups, they must submit to the oppression of the will [...]. If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce» and «Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will».⁹ Acting in the plural world of intersubjectivity shows a turning point away from Kant’s normative ethics to Arendt’s philosophy without firm, dogmatic principles.

In many aspects, Adorno’s philosophical position is very similar to Arendt’s critique of Kant’s practical reason. In his book *Negative Dialectics* (1966), the first of three models is dedicated, as the title says, to *The Metacritique of Practical Reason*. Adorno’s negative moral philosophy¹⁰ is established on the grounds of his immanent critique of Kant’s moral philosophy. Adorno interprets Kant’s obedience to the moral law through his logic of domination as already indicated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (together with Horkheimer, 1944). The first part of the argument against Kant’s moral theory emphasizes his deficiency of real spontaneous freedom, since it is obedience to the practical reason and its sheer formality that is crucial for Kant’s theory. «All the concepts whereby the *Critique of Practical Reason* proposes, in honor of freedom, to fill the chasm between the Imperative and mankind –law, constraint, respect, duty– all of these are repressive.»¹¹ The second part of Adorno’s argument goes against Kant’s connection between will and freedom and the supposition that the will is autonomous. In this way, Kant overlooks the freedom of the deeds and takes only the freedom of the will into consideration. Adorno, on the contrary, insists on social-historical influences, which make the subject interwoven into the reality of the world. In this way, Adorno speaks in the same manner as Arendt against solipsism of the subjects.

⁸ See Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*. A Harvest Book, San Diego 1978, pp. 199-200.

⁹ Hannah Arendt: *Between Past and Future*. The Viking Press, New York 1961, pp. 164-165.

¹⁰ Ulrich Kohlmann speaks about *negative Moralphilosophie*. See Ulrich Kohlmann: *Dialektik der Moral. Untersuchungen zur Moralphilosophie Adornos. zu Klampen, Lüneburg* 1997.

¹¹ Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialectics*. The Continuum International Publishing, New York 2005, p. 232.

His aphorism from *Minima moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (1951), that says, «Wrong life cannot be lived rightly»¹² [Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen], speaks in favour of individuals who are not absolutely free, sovereign, and autonomous. In our interpretation, this sentence plays a central role, as it clearly rejects the normativistic background. Adorno's critique of absolutely self-sufficient subjects goes against those conceptions, which exclude all external and objective sides of human individuals. He speaks in favour of subjectivity, which leaves room for corporeality, sensuousness, and heteronomy, which is excluded from Kant's moral philosophy. In this materialistic moment, which Adorno incorporates into his conception of the will, he seizes an important space for spontaneity that was lacking in Kant's work. Not the freedom to follow moral laws is the freedom of which Adorno speaks. The moment of spontaneity is something independent of the subjectivity; it is a somatic moment, a physical addendum, which he terms as *das Hinzutretende*. Habermas adequately demonstrates Adorno's standpoint, as it is not just cognitive but belongs to the domain of *Leiberfahrung*: «Not the rational will as such, but its subjective nature, into which it intervenes, its organic rootedness in the experienced nature of my somatically lived life is the reference basis of the self-hood [Selbstsein] and self-ascription of "always my" actions.»¹³

Adorno speaks about the negative and dangerous parts of Kant's morality in order to find an alternative in an emancipated subjectivity, freed of logic of domination, and hence aims at ethics, which is capable of regarding somatic dimensions of human beings. Additionally he highlights the shortcomings of too individualistic ethics, which forget about social and external reality. He sounds very similar to Arendt when he demands the critique of society and politics as a whole: «In short, anything that we can call morality today merges into the question of the organisation of the world. We might even say that the quest for the good life is the quest for the right form of politics, if indeed such a right form of politics lay within the realm of what can be achieved today».¹⁴

Arendt's and Adorno's viewpoints make a stand against Kant's normative practical reason, which in turn, despite its universality, is a source of private ethics, that is not able to regard the intersubjectivity and plurality of human beings well enough. The other side of Kant's theory is its inability to predetermine and warn against societies in which the terror of totality reigns, since Kant was not able to think about evil deeds out of shallowness and thoughtlessness, but just in connection with evil motives and human egoism. Our world of appearances, both Arendt and Adorno would agree, is much too complex, with too many perspective sides, that we could appropriately grasp it with abstraction and universalization. Not just tyranny of evil but also tyranny of the good embodies logic of domination.

¹² Theodor W. Adorno: *Minima moralia*. Verso, New York 2005, p. 39.

¹³ Jürgen Habermas: "Ich selber bin ja ein Stück Natur" - Adorno über die Naturverflochtenheit der Vernunft. In: Axel Honneth (ed.): *Dialektik der Freiheit*. Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 2005, p. 19.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno: *Problems of Moral Philosophy*. Polity Press, Cambridge 2000, p. 176.

II.

Arendt's and Adorno's critical stance towards old normative philosophies results in their pluralistic and non-systematic thought. Arendt's political theory of plurality and difference is clearly established out of the confrontation with regimes that were the opposite of plurality and oriented towards the terror of unification. Her political philosophy is outlined particularly in her book *The Human Condition* (1958), which helps us to understand why she averted from philosophical freedom and turned to political freedom, as already indicated in the previous section. It is this conception of freedom that is significant for her understanding of politics and her quest for new ways of thinking, which would be as far away from totalitarian modes as possible. For her philosophy, the notion of the world is central, not the world of labour or work, but the world as a place of intersubjectivity and plurality of human beings. She uses the term action to denote this kind of sphere, which is not subordinated to the necessities of nature. Human plurality is the condition for action and it is in this sphere where there is room for real political freedom, which is founded on human mutual discussions and agreements. Real action then is not to be found in physical labour or production, but in active thinking, which preserves the differences between people and looks for agreement instead of unity. However, this can only exist through the means of language and mutual communication.

Arendt's politics is not engaged with a human being in singular, but with people in plural¹⁵; it is thus not derived out of the idea of a family community, as was repeatedly the case in many political theories, but out of difference and not equality between people. Freedom demands that people can be different and still have rights and value, therefore, we can speak about an entirely secular notion of politics by Arendt. Ingeborg Nordmann is convinced about her absolute modernity: «In contrast to her critics, who dismiss her orientation towards the polis and the founding act of American democracy as an anachronistic reminiscence, she is the only theoretician of modernity, who emanates from a radically secular concept of the political».¹⁶ For describing such a secular political place, normative theories are indeed not appropriate, because the perspective character of the world is lost when a theory demands unification, formalisation, and a system. It is therefore suitable to speak about Arendt's narrative method. She respects ancient storytellers like Thukydides, Homer, and Herodotus more than she respects philosophers who were never able to think properly about the political world.

The notion of plurality remains central also in her last book *The Life of the Mind*. Although in this work she is not concerned with the sphere of action and political community *per se*, her interest is nonetheless not directed to the contemplative life but to the *vita activa* and her commitment to the world of

¹⁵ See Hannah Arendt: Was ist Politik? Fragmente aus dem Nachlass. Piper, München 1993.

¹⁶ Ingeborg Nordmann: Einleitung. In: Hannah Arendt: Besuch in Deutschland. Campus, Frankfurt 1994, p. 88.

appearances is thus clearly emphasized. In the field of the political, this active thinking is named as judging, as she speaks of it in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* and such was her envisioned title of the last, unwritten part of *The Life of the Mind*. With judging, she returns to Kant, but in this case not to Kant of practical reason but to Kant of the third critique, *Critique of Judgement*. She tries to expand Kant's aesthetic theory into the political theory and her starting-point is the fact that in the third critique Kant does not speak of a human being as a cognitive or intelligible being, but about people in plural.¹⁷ Arendt uses the idea of Kant's notion of reflective judgement, which starts with particularity and tries to expand it into something general. Owing to the close relation of politics with aesthetics, we can speak of Arendt, with the words of Kimberley F. Curtis, as of «poet of political life»¹⁸ and of her aesthetized politics. The world of appearances needs, because of its manifoldness, aesthetic criteria and not normative, absolute principles. Therefore, the faculty of judging becomes indispensable, when we would like to grasp things anew and without relying on previously established principles.

Adorno's attempt to speak about nonidentical is in many ways similar to Arendt's faculty of judgment, which shares with nonidentity its openness and spontaneity in matters of thinking. The motives for Adorno's conception of nonidentity and negative dialectics are also similar to those of Arendt. Already Adorno's and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the product of reflection about the totalitarian era, where the principle of identity became the principle of dominating over people, nature, and the world as a whole. The dangers of western modes of thought can be detected in instrumental reason, formalization of thinking, and consequently in erasing space for contingency. Therefore, his *Negative dialectics* is a quest for an alternative to identity thought and in this sense can be read as a continuation of his critical process of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

Negative dialectics must be read as an immanent critique of philosophy as *prima philosophia* and as an attempt to begin in another way, out of concrete experience, since everything human beings try to grasp with concepts is more complex than a concept in itself. Therefore, no absolute reduction of something into the concept can be legitimate as such identity thinking would produce totality and in its extreme case a totalitarian society. For this reason, he cannot agree with the idea of constitutive subjectivity and speaks rather about the «priority of the object», but remembering that object is always in relation to a subject. Everything nonidentical must still be thought through concepts, what he names «unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection».¹⁹ Hence, it would be wrong to place Adorno's philosophy into the field of irrationality, because he always wanted to elucidate the mutual relation between the object and the subject and not to erase one in favour of the other. This is also an important difference between postmodernist thinkers and Adorno, since he never wanted to destroy rationality,

¹⁷ See Hannah Arendt: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, p. 13.

¹⁸ Kimberley F. Curtis: *Aesthetic Foundations of Democratic Politics*. In: Craig Calhoun, John McGowan (ed.): *Hannah Arendt & the Meaning of Politics*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1997, p. 28.

¹⁹ Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialectics*. The Continuum International Publishing, New York 2005, p. 13.

only to rethink it in an immanent way. Therefore, his philosophy certainly is critical, but not destructive. Adorno's philosophy was never a philosophy of ignorance or sheer play, because he was primarily concerned about the functioning of our world and ways of living. Here again Arendt and Adorno come together, although Adorno still leaves more room for utopia and truth as displayed in arts and metaphysics. Nevertheless, their striving for the world as a better place on earth makes them differ from postmodern relativism. On the other hand, also different from normative philosophers, because Arendt and Adorno are convinced that better conditions can be achieved only in plural, spontaneous ways, with the help of aesthetic judgment and non-identity.

Adorno's style is, similarly to Arendt, essayistic and aphoristic, as in *Minima moralia*. Both thinkers unite themselves in stressing the idea of difference against unity, changeability against eternity, and both start with the concrete experiences and particularity; therefore, they stay firmly in the world of appearances. Adorno speaks, moreover, with the help of musical metaphors against violent harmony and finds an alternative in atonality. Albrecht Wellmer pictures Adorno's standpoint well: «Adorno's obsession is overcoming the compulsion of identity».²⁰ Finally, we can confirm that both Adorno and Arendt are thinkers of plurality and «defenders of contingency as well as difference».²¹

III

By the end, we can conclude that Arendt and Adorno have detected in Kant's moral philosophy many suspect and dangerous postulates: Adorno relates categorical imperative to the principles of domination and Arendt speaks about the «inhumanity of Kant's moral philosophy».²² It is especially the absoluteness of the categorical imperative that destroys the realm of interhumanity that is strongly underlined in Adorno's and Arendt's philosophy. Dana Villa very directly mentions this standpoint by Arendt: «Rightly or wrongly, Arendt sees the Categorical Imperative as an absolute in the Platonic/authoritarian sense, standing above men and the realm of human affairs, measuring them without any concern for context, specificity, or the "fundamental relativity" of the "interhuman realm"».²³ Moreover, it is also apparent that Adorno was no more indulgent to Kant's formalistic practical reason.

However, despite all we said about their philosophies of difference and about their critique of Kant's moral philosophy they were not only negative about his philosophical presumptions. Adorno refigures Kant's categorical imperative into his "somatic" imperative, derived out of experience and Arendt also finds some positive aspects of Kant's categorical imperative. When Arendt tries to understand Kant's categorical imperative through her reflective judgement, she

²⁰ Albrecht Wellmer: *Zur Dialektik von Moderne und Postmoderne. Vernunftkritik nach Adorno*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1985, p. 164.

²¹ Dirk Auer et al: *Einleitung*. In: Dirk Auer et al. (ed.): *Arendt und Adorno*. Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 2003. p. 27.

²² Hannah Arendt: *Men in Dark Times*. A Harvest Book, New York 1968. p. 27.

²³ Dana Villa: *Politics, Philosophy, Terror*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999, p. 163.

finds in it a universalization that takes into consideration the whole world and is hence no longer so critical about it: «Kant's so-called moral philosophy is in essence political, insofar as he attributes to all men those capacities of legislating and judging that, according to tradition, had been the prerogative of the statesman. Moral activity, according to Kant, is legislation –acting in such a way that the principle of my action could become a general law– [...]. The guiding political principle of this legislative moral activity is the idea of mankind».²⁴ When we ask which actions would produce the world we would like to live in and if our actions can retain the world as a whole, then such an approach is not solipsistic anymore. Categorical imperative can thus be understood as a position that «insisted that every human act had to bear responsibility for all of humanity».²⁵ When Arendt reads Kant's rejection of private maxims, which cannot become universal, as an attempt of introducing the principle of publicness into the philosophy, she becomes even more positively adjusted towards Kant. Here she already sees the very beginning of Kant's later reflective judgment in aesthetics: «Morality here is the coincidence of the private and the public. To insist on the privacy of the maxim is to be evil. To be evil, therefore, is characterized by withdrawal from the public realm».²⁶

As well as Arendt, Adorno also cannot resist Kant's imperative totally; he uses it himself, but already so reshaped that it obtains an entirely different meaning. Adorno raises his “new” categorical imperative: «A new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen».²⁷ Kant's formal and universalistic imperative is replaced with Adorno's “somatic” imperative originating out of concrete experience, which speaks to our sensuality and experience of suffering and not to our rationality. Adorno's imperative is grounded on the experience of physical pain whereas sheer formalistic and rationalistic morality is not able to furnish the memory of great suffering inflicted on humans.

In Arendt's and Adorno's non-normative reading of Kant's categorical imperative, we can see how very important it was for them to avoid a formalistic and systematic approach in philosophy. The development after them showed, on the contrary, a turn into more normative conceptions. For us Habermas's theory is especially interesting, because in it we can see influences of Kant's rationality and universality as well as the influence of Adorno and Arendt. Adorno's influence on Habermas is clear: Habermas signifies the continuation and further development of Frankfurt's critical theory. On the other hand, Arendt's influence also cannot be overlooked, especially through the concept of communication (e.g. in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 1981). For our discussion, it is most important to stress that Habermas, despite his philosophy being much more rationalistically regulated,

²⁴ Hannah Arendt: *Essays in understanding*. Schocken Books, New York 1994, p. 441.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 181.

²⁶ Hannah Arendt: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, pp. 49-50.

²⁷ Theodor W. Adorno: *Negative Dialectics*. The Continuum International Publishing, New York 2005, p. 365.

takes over Arendt's and Adorno's critique of Kant's private and individualistic ethics. Therefore, Habermas's philosophy can be read as an attempt to create a normative theory, but a normative theory that goes against the solipsism of constitutive subjectivity and pleads, on the contrary, for intersubjective normative theory. It seems as if Habermas would like to retain some aspects of Kant's practical reason, but join them with the principles of plurality, intersubjectivity, and communication.

Habermas «assumes a constitutive pluralism of competing ideals of life and value orientations»,²⁸ but with the end conviction that this does not negate normative theory. Kant's categorical imperative stays as an important reference basis for Habermas, but now its universalization is developed on the grounds of discussion and communication of the people involved. The main difference between Adorno's and Arendt's philosophy, on the one hand, and Habermas's is the latter's faith in rationality, which was above all strongly criticized by Arendt and Adorno. Habermas, on the contrary, has faith in the power of rationality, although his normativity is not unchangeably given to people from the beginning, as dogmatists would say, but is created in the human sphere: «Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from models supplied by another epoch; it has to create its normativity out of itself».²⁹ It is this different relation towards Kant's categorical imperative that separates Habermas from Adorno and Arendt: Habermas tries to conserve its rational part, whereas Adorno and Arendt modify it in a way that it becomes more empirical, historically conditioned, and intervened into the world, therefore not being strictly rational.

Habermas accepted and took over Arendt's and Adorno's critique of solipsistic subjectivity and individualistic ethics and exchanged it for a theory of intersubjectivity. How can this step of Habermas's be understood? Have intersubjective normativisms, which already corrected the mistakes of older formalistic normative theories, successfully surpassed the non-normative theories of Adorno and Arendt? We argue not, since Arendt's and Adorno's standpoint seems to still be necessary in those societies that digress from the normal path by becoming too extreme or undemocratic and are hence not willing to listen to rational arguments –in those instances Habermas's theory is less suitable than Adorno's or Arendt's. In those cases, critical theories are needed because they can detect early enough the dangerous and predetermine possible negative outcomes. Normative theories, on the other hand, are useful in essentially normal times, when they can adequately direct the development of the world. However, this is only possible when the will for conducting a pleasant society for all is not lacking. We see the difference between more normatively oriented theories and those more critically oriented in that the former give directions to relatively average societies, whereas the latter are trying to comprehend the origins and causes of digressions from the normal, democratic directions.

²⁸ Axel Honneth: *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*. Polity, Cambridge 2007, p. 104.

²⁹ Jürgen Habermas: *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. MIT Press, Cambridge 1987, p. 7.