Emancipation in Post-Marxism: Reactivating Radical Democracy's Emancipatory Spirit

Wel, Kylian van

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Kylian van Wel

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Kylian Karim Nelson van Wel
s1355481

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Supervisor: Dr. Rozemund Uljée

Universiteit Leiden

Credits for the illustration go to my dear aunt Friederike Kimmerle

To Heinz — *without whom I would not have taken this journey*
and
To Caroline — *without whom it would never have been possible*

Contents

Preface

In the opening passage of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx and Engels proclaimed that "a spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism".[1] I would like to suggest that this spectre was in fact not the spectre of communism, but the spirit of emancipation merely taking the shape of communism at that time. It is up to us to decide its shape in the present.

[1] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 473.

Introduction

One of the most prominent and notorious thinkers of emancipation is without question Karl Marx, whose critical analysis of the social conditions of his time gave rise to a call for emancipation whose relevance and power more or less reaches to this day on and further. With a sharp eye for both the emancipatory and the exploitative dimensions of modernity and industrialized society, Marx expounded a theory of emancipation that envisaged a social struggle that would at last result in the genuine *human* emancipation of man rather than the merely formal and contradictory achievements of bourgeois society.[2] It is by no means possible here to describe its complexities nor the different routes that this tradition of emancipatory thought has taken.[3] Instead, I want focus on a specific reappropriation of Marxism that emerged in the 1980's and gained significant attention in more recent political theoretical and philosophical debates in democratic theory.

Two prominent thinkers of this philosophical tradition are Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who came to adopt the label of *post-Marxism* for the theoretical position they were defending.[4] Post-Marxism is a term used to refer to a specific strand of political and social theory with a particular Marxist background. More specifically, one could say that post-Marxism is the label for "writers with an explicitly Marxist background, whose recent work has gone beyond Marxist problematics and who do not publicly claim a continuing Marxist commitment".[5] Laclau and Mouffe, to whom this description fits very well indeed, describe their relation towards Marxism as a *reactivation* of the Marxist categories in the light of the developments that society has gone through and especially the failure of Marxism to successfully capture the developments of contemporary capitalism with traditional Marxist categories.

To reactivate Marxist theory in this sense involves the deconstruction and reevaluation of some of its core categories, which is why Laclau and Mouffe characterize their post-Marxist approach as "the reappropriation of an intellectual tradition, as well as the process of going beyond it".[6] This 'going beyond' Marxism entailed that —most notably under the influence of post-structuralism— they departed from some of Marxism's core features such as its rationalism, (class) essentialism, economic determinism, and the dialectical conception of history, while some other Marxist categories received a careful revisitation, most importantly the notions of antagonism and hegemony. In this sense, one could indeed say that the theory Laclau and Mouffe expound is just as much *post*-Marxist as it is post-*Marxist*.[7]

Now, what interests me is the question whether, after all this restructuring of its theoretical foundations, the emancipatory spirit that inhabited Marxism could still be found in the contemporary tradition of post-Marxism. This does of course not amount to the question whether the theory of

[2] An early distinction of these different kinds of emancipation appeared in: Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 26–52.

[3] For an overview, see: Göran Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?* (London ; New York: Verso, 2008).

[4] Admittedly, my discussions later on in this thesis come to focus more or less on the kind of post-Marxism as it has taken shape in the later works of Chantal Mouffe. While I do not claim to fully do justice to the separate positions developed by Laclau, I continue to speak of 'Laclau and Mouffe's' post-Marxism since my main source of inspiration lies in their original co-written book that stands at the foundation of post-Marxism and also because all later works provided by Mouffe remain closely tied to this original work written together with Laclau.

[5] Therborn, *From Marxism to Post-Marxism?*, 165.

[6] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2014), ix.

[7] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, xxiv.

emancipation that we find in Marxism, with its notion of the alienated subject who finds its ultimate redemption in communism, can still be traced in post-Marxism. Although post-Marxism's political strategy retains a significant socialist character[8], too many of the intentions and presuppositions of the original Marxist theory of social emancipation have been abandoned to speak meaningfully of its continuation. What I want to do instead, is to examine whether in the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism any substantive theory of emancipation is still possible.

As will become clear in the upcoming chapter, in its process of going beyond Marx, the theoretical framework of post-Marxism has emptied itself of many of the categories used to account for the possibility of a theory of emancipation, without explicitly arguing how its new categories and concepts relate to the possibility of emancipation. Yet, the core objective of Laclau and Mouffe has still remained to provide an outline and political logic for a renewed progressive and emancipatory politics for the Left. Hence my question, even if Laclau and Mouffe have managed to provide an adequate political strategy for the Left —of which I am convinced that they have— to what extent is their theoretical framework still capable of accommodating a substantive theory of emancipation?

The upcoming chapters are all devoted to this question. My attempt to tackle the question of emancipation in post-Marxism is split up into two parts. The first part consists of a chapter that goes deeper into the political theory and philosophy of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism and examines to what extent we can draw the outlines of a theory of emancipation from their work. The second part contains two chapters that seek to criticize and enhance the preliminary theory of emancipation established in chapter one. Both chapters are structured by the critiques and lessons we can draw from two highly critical philosophers who have been confronted with similar issues as Laclau and Mouffe, respectively Friedrich Nietzsche and Theodor W. Adorno. In chapter two I turn to Nietzsche in order to critically reconsider post-Marxism's commitment to radical democracy. I identify and erase two problems of post-Marxism's uncritical commitment to democracy, thereby enhancing its ability to finally embrace the full potential of its emancipatory logic and consistently justify its own commitment to the democratic discourse. In chapter three I draw on the works of Adorno in order to answer the question whether emancipatory critique is even a genuine possibility in the post-Marxist theoretical framework. Here I come to provide two models of emancipatory critique that are compatible with the post-Marxist framework. I also deal with the question whether these models of critique can be genuinely *emancipatory*, again turning to Adorno to show us the way out of our predicament. In the concluding chapter I return to the initial question on the possibility for a post-Marxist theory of emancipation by considering whether the concepts gained in chapter two and three allow me to further develop the preliminary theory of emancipation established in chapter one.

[8] Ibid., 162.

Part I *Emancipation in Post-Marxism*

Chapter One
Radical Democracy as Emancipatory Project

This first chapter seeks to provide the theoretical framework for a discussion that will occupy me throughout the present and the following chapters. That is, the question *whether a theory of emancipation is possible within a post-Marxist theoretical framework*. In order to properly address this question, it must first be elaborated what post-Marxist political theory entails and then how, if at all, it can be seen to support a theory of emancipation. The text is split up in two sections. In the first section I will provide a general account of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist political thought. Their political thinking crystallizes in their project of a 'radical democracy', which will be my general point of reference in the search for a post-Marxist theory of emancipation. However, in order to secure the intelligibility of this discussion, and also to introduce the theoretical background against which Laclau and Mouffe's political thinking takes place, I will first elaborate on some key concepts that Laclau and Mouffe make use of in their theory. The second section takes up the final task of this chapter. I will here try to identify post-Marxism's potential to support a theory of emancipation by examining its ability to answer three core questions: 'what is emancipation?', 'who is to emancipate from what?', and 'why emancipation?'. I take these three questions —call them respectively the question of definition, the question of direction, and the question of reflection— to provide the parameters for determining whether any meaningful theory of emancipation can be based upon post-Marxist political theory.

I.I Radical Democracy and Hegemonic Struggle

In their influential work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (first published in 1985) Laclau and Mouffe sought to set out a new political strategy for the Left based on the idea of a 'radical democracy'.[9] They argued that it has been due to a failure of the Left to grasp the political logics at play, and consequently, its failure to adapt to the increased complexity and proliferation of contemporary social struggles, that a neo-liberal discourse has been able to dominate the political common sense in most of Europe and the U.S. In contrast to classical Marxist political thought —especially its class essentialism, economic determinism, the prospect of a (proletarian) revolution, and more generally the conviction of the intelligibility of the social— Laclau and Mouffe introduced an anti-essentialist approach to politics that accepts the radical plurality and indeterminacy of the social. This new political logic was meant to provide a new strategy for the Left which involved the construction of a new progressive political imaginary. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the Left needed to disrupt the continuity between Marxism and the simple logics of the 'Jacobin imaginary' which pursued a revolutionary politics based on the notion of two clearly defined opposed social identities, and instead construct a new *radical democratic political imaginary* that recognizes the plurality of progressive social struggles in line with what they call 'the *democratic revolution'*.[10]

In the *preface to the second edition* (first published in 2001) Laclau and Mouffe reassert the relevance of their initial theoretical commitments as they demonstrate how their reactivation of Marxism copes with the socio-political developments since the first publication of their book and how the project of radical democracy provides a highly critical alternative to the contemporary dominant

[9] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*.
[10] Ibid., 136.

perspectives on democracy of both Habermas and Rawls.[11] Even more recently, Mouffe has provided an illuminating account of how radical democracy makes sense as a political strategy for the Left in what is perhaps the biggest shift in contemporary (Western) politics, 'the populist moment'.[12] I want to examine whether this promising approach to political theory and philosophy also provides a fruitful basis for a post-Marxist theory of emancipation. Before I turn to the discussion of Laclau and Mouffe's central idea of a 'radical democracy', however, some explication of the political logic that underlies their theory is in place.

The Discursive Construction of the Social: Antagonisms and Hegemony

In order to make sense of Laclau and Mouffe's conception of the political some key concepts and ideas must be clarified. On a general note, it is important to understand that Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist approach to political/social theory involves a form of *discourse theory* that is largely inspired by the field of post-structuralism. For Laclau and Mouffe "every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence".[13] This, of course, does not mean that they deny any reality outside of thought, but merely that all our experience of reality, and hence all the meaning we attach to it, is mediated through discourse. This does not only affect us mentally (i.e. the conclusion that the way we think of the objective world is discursively constructed), but also *materially*, as the very way we construct our (social) world is the effect (and reproduction) of discourse.[14] Laclau and Mouffe thus expand the application of discourse theory beyond the mere analysis of meaning in linguistic terms. Instead, they present their theory as a theory of the discursive construction of meaning of what they broadly refer to as 'the social'. Their presentation of it in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* revolves around three core concepts*: articulation, antagonism,* and *hegemony*.

Let us start with ***articulation***. The precondition for the possibility of articulation is the idea that all meaning and identity is *contingent* and *precarious*. For Laclau and Mouffe, any object, phenomenon, or social identity acquires meaning in terms of its *difference* to other objects, phenomena, or identities. Each differential point as such plays a *relational* role in a larger system of meaning. Their meaning and their relation to others, however, is not pregiven or permanently fixed, but must rather be conceived of as the product of a social process of establishing fixity, constructing a relatively stable system of meaning that remains vulnerable to contestation and reinterpretation.

Articulation, against this background, is defined by Laclau and Mouffe as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice"; discourse, accordingly, is defined as "the structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice".[15] Articulation is thus best seen as the practice of establishing a particular kind of fixation of meaning. For this practice to be possible, the meaning of the object of articulation must be permeated by contingency and precariousness, for if a system of meaning were firmly and permanently fixed by pure relations of necessity no practice of alteration in the system would be possible. This contingency is explained by pointing out that any articulation of meaning can only exist as the exclusion of alternative meanings. These alternative meanings constitute what Laclau and Mouffe call a 'surplus of meaning' that always subverts the total fixation of a particular articulation. This terrain of exteriority that necessarily subverts the stability of any discursive formation is referred to as the *field of discursivity*, and provides the scene for the ever present possibility of contesting any attempt at the

[11] Ibid., vii-xix.
See also: Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London; New York: Verso, 2009).
[12] Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London; New York: Verso, 2018).
[13] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 93.
[14] Ibid., 94, 95.
[15] Ibid., 91.

fixation of meaning. It is this ineradicable possibility of competition with alternative articulations that renders any system of meaning ultimately precarious.[16]

The discursive construction of the meaning of 'society' is thus never finished. This leads Laclau and Mouffe to conclude that "the social *is* articulation insofar as 'society' is impossible". [17] *Society is impossible*, because no system of differences can permanently fix the meaning of society, so all experience of society can only be the experience of particular discursive articulations that are at the same time subverted by a surplus of meaning. This core notion of society as the impossibility of an objective and sutured social totality, leads us to the second concept to be explained: ***antagonism***. According to Laclau and Mouffe, the impossibility of society does not *merely* follow from its contingent and precarious construction as described earlier. Instead, more has to be said about the constant subversion of any attempt to fix a unified understanding of society —that is, about the aspect of necessary failure of any attempt at 'closure' of the system of differences.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, the ultimate impossibility of society at acquiring its meaning must be seen as an effect of the penetration of the social structure by what they call 'relations of antagonism'. Any social identity or subject position that occupies the social space sees himself confronted with a plurality of discourses. Some elements of these discursive formations, however, can come into conflict with alternative articulations from its field of discursivity. If this opposition is such that the two articulations mutually exclude one another, an antagonism arises. So the impossibility of closure is not merely the result of the plurality of articulations, but of the ineradicable fact that some of these articulations cannot exist together.

Antagonisms, according to Laclau and Mouffe, are in this sense the very "experience of the limit of all objectivity".[18] The idea of antagonism as the 'limit of objectivity' is made clear very well by Laclau and Mouffe when they contrast it with two other forms of opposition, *real opposition* and *contradiction*. Both these forms of opposition share the fact that they entail relations of opposition between *full objectivities —real* in the first and *conceptual* in the latter case. Antagonism, by contrast, is characterized by the very fact that it entails the *impossibility* of full objectivity on either side of the relation: A *cannot become* fully A because of the presence of B and vice versa.[19] The impossibility of the social is best described in terms of relations of antagonism, as opposed to a relation of real opposition or contradiction, because the social fails to become a fully fixed and sutured space, not because of some opposition to another objectivity, but exactly because *it fails to become a full objectivity* by itself as its internal structure is deeply permeated by *antagonistic relations that subvert its full objectification*. Importantly, these antagonistic relations that prevent the full realization of society are (paradoxically) constituted *within* the social. So, to say that society is impossible, means so much as to say that the meaning of society is so deeply dispersed over a plurality of discourses, some of them antagonistic, that it no longer makes sense to speak of the possibility of "society" as a fixed object of meaning —there will always be antagonisms subverting the closure of its system of meaning.

This brings us to the last concept to be discussed: ***hegemony***. The concept of hegemony emerges as a specific form of articulatory practice, so we must think of hegemony too as a practice of the fixation of meaning. However, not every articulatory practice is hegemonic. Hegemonic articulatory practices are those practices that take place around the articulation of elements governed by antagonisms. In fact, it is the articulation of elements to either side of the antagonism that characterizes an articulatory practice as hegemonic.[20]

Now, in order to understand the full potential of hegemony in the discursive construction of meaning let us briefly recapitulate. Our experience of the social, according to Laclau and Mouffe, is discursively constructed. The meaning that a discourse provides of this social experience follows the structure of a system of differential points that each acquires its meaning through its difference to

[16] Ibid., 97, 98.
[17] Ibid., 100.
[18] Ibid., 108.
[19] Ibid., 111.
[20] Ibid., 122.

other differential points. The meaning of these differential points and their relation to others is not stable and pregiven, but instead contingent upon particular discursive articulations that fix their meaning in a particular way, thereby creating a field of discursivity comprising of the alternative articulations that have been excluded. Any social experience is therefore confronted with a plurality of discursive articulations, many of which who relate antagonistically to each other. These antagonisms between discourses subvert the fixation of meaning of both discourses. Now, hegemony is the specific form of articulation that seeks to *resolve* an antagonism by establishing the *dominance* of one of the two conflicting discourses over the other.[21]

So a hegemonic intervention manages to bring temporary closure in the meaning of something that is in fact radically open and precarious. However, it only manages to fix the meaning of something by *suppressing* its actual plurality of meanings, or in other words, a hegemonic articulation assumes the representation of a totality while that totality is actually radically incommensurable with that representation.[22] The key insight from this notion of the hegemonic construction of social reality is that any fixation of meaning is ultimately the product of a hegemonic power struggle and as such, that any universality, any collective identity, or any 'political common sense' is contingent and thus prone to rearticulation. This is exactly what Laclau and Mouffe seek to exploit in their project of 'radical democracy'.

Radicalizing Democracy

The core message of Laclau and Mouffe's radical democratic approach is: 'Back to the hegemonic struggle'.[23] They argue that the Left should work towards a new democratic imaginary by articulating democracy's radical potential that it inherits from the so-called 'democratic revolution'. According to Laclau and Mouffe, during the rise of democracy since the French Revolution the democratic principles of freedom and equality have taken central positions in most political imaginaries and as such have become important concepts in the assertion and questioning of legitimacy. Consequently, a central mode of political struggle under the democratic imaginary has consisted of the emancipatory appeal to democracy's egalitarian logic, that is, the claim from various collective identities that 'We are equal too!'.

The emergence of this new egalitarian logic has thus provided a new discursive structure against which other (preceding) discursive structures can be revisited and as such new antagonisms between discourses could arise.[24] These antagonisms have been the breeding ground for a *variety of new social struggles*. For example, democracy opened up the possibility for a (renewed) feminist struggle, as *by itself* there was no antagonism in the exercised dominance of men over women. It is only after the manifestation of the presumption of 'equality among all citizens' professed by the democratic imaginary that 'women' as a collective identity could establish an antagonism with the preceding discursive structure that legitimized sexual inequality and male dominance. On a most basic level one could say that the central aim of the project of radical democracy is to enable the Left to expand and absorb this plurality of social struggles by *deepening* the democratic revolution, that is, by calling for the *radicalization of 'democracy' in terms of the extension of the struggle for freedom and equality to a plurality of social relations*.[25]

However, simply promoting the egalitarian logic of the democratic revolution is not enough to provide a political strategy for the Left. After all, the egalitarian character of the democratic revolution does not at all imply that democratic struggles will be compatible with the progressive character of the Left. As more recent events also demonstrate, demands for equality can be articulated in a right wing populist discourse just as well as they can be articulated in a progressive radical democratic

[21] Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, "Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory," in *Discourse Analysis: As Theory and Method* (London: SAGE, 2002), 20.

[22] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, x.

[23] Ibid., xix.

[24] Ibid., 143.

[25] Ibid., xvi.

discourse.[26] It is therefore the task of the Left to construct a radical democratic discourse that allows the Left to *annex* democratic demands whose partisan character are by themselves undecided. This brings us back to Laclau and Mouffe's core idea: *hegemonic struggle*. The only way to counter the demise of the Left and bring a halt to the corresponding hegemonic dominance of neo-liberalism is not to dispense with liberal democracy in favour of socialism, but to provide a radical democratic counter-hegemony that articulates liberal-democracy in the image of the democratic revolution. The political strategy that Laclau and Mouffe propose for the Left in this sense amounts to the *radicalization* of democracy, a project which in their logic includes *the hegemonic construction of a new radically democratic common sense.*

Before we move on, let me expand briefly on how these hegemonic practices take place. Two aspects of the creation of meaning are of key importance here: first, the articulation of differential points through the appropriation of floating signifiers and nodal points, and second, the construction of antagonisms through the logics of difference and equivalence.

The concept of a *floating signifier* is essential in Laclau and Mouffe's understanding of articulation and is closely connected to what is already discussed as the idea of a field of discursivity. The character of a 'floating' signifier indicates that an element in a system of meaning, a signifier, can never be fully fixed to a signified. Instead, these signifiers have a floating character as they can come to signify a variety of things throughout different discourses depending on their concrete articulation. Some signifiers have a more important role in the discursive fixation of meaning than others because of their weighty effect in the relational system of meaning. These 'privileged' signifiers are called *nodal points*.[27] The construction of these nodal points is at the very basis of any practice of articulation, and therefore, of hegemony. It is clear, for example, that for establishing a new political common sense the articulation of the meaning of concepts such as 'democracy', 'freedom', 'equality', 'the people', 'citizenship' etc., are of key importance. The meaning of many of these concepts seem ossified in their contemporary neo-liberal articulation, but Laclau and Mouffe show that their floating character can be regained and their meaning can once again become the object of hegemonic struggle.

Second is *the logic of difference and equivalence*. As we have already seen, for an articulatory practice to be defined as hegemonic, the articulatory practice must be concerned with the articulation of elements to either side of an antagonism between discourses. How and where these antagonisms emerge, however, is also part of the hegemonic strategy. The way these antagonisms operate can be understood, according to Laclau and Mouffe, by the opposed logics of difference and equivalence. The *logic of difference* builds on what has already been discussed in the beginning of this chapter, namely that every object or social identity acquires its meaning through its difference to other differential points. The *logic of equivalence*, by contrast, teaches that sometimes various differential points share a specific equivalence among each other that gives them all a *second meaning* that transcends and at the same time subverts their original meaning. What is peculiar about this kind of collective identity formation, is that it is structured by a relation of *negativity*.[28] To be A, in this respect, entails not being B. As this already illustrates, relations of equivalence can give rise to social antagonisms due to their simplification of a pluralistic social space into camps of clearly demarcated opposing collective identities.[29] It is these practices of the articulation of nodal points and the construction of collective identities by establishing chains of equivalence among anti-neoliberal democratic demands that Laclau and Mouffe consider to be the core of their hegemonic strategy for radicalizing democracy.

[26] Ibid., 152; See also: Mouffe, *Left Populism*.
[27] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 99.
[28] Ibid., 114, 115.
[29] Ibid., 117.

I.II. Radical Democracy as Theory of Emancipation

This second section focusses on the question to what extent 'radical democracy', as the crystallization of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist political thought, can be seen to support a theory of emancipation. This will be assessed by subjecting the role that emancipation takes in their theory to the questions of definition, direction and reflection. These questions are intended as mere heuristic devices and derive from my basic assumption that since emancipation involves movement —cf. *ex-mancipare*—, then a philosophical theory about this movement should at least be able to explicate its *specific understanding* of it (definition) as well as *who is going where* (direction) and *why* (reflection). I want to emphasise here that I do not seek to identify Laclau and Mouffe's radical democratic project *as* a theory of emancipation —if that was their intention they would have presented it in this way themselves. Rather, my aim is to examine to what extent their approach supports or conceals a post-Marxist theory of emancipation. So although I naturally try to remain as close as possible to Laclau and Mouffe's works, my purpose here is not strictly exegetical.

Radical Democracy and Emancipation: the Definitional Problem

From what has been discussed in the previous section, it is clear that Laclau and Mouffe's goal in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was to establish the theoretical basis, as well as a political strategy, for a reactivation of an emancipatory politics that has lost its momentum in classical Marxism. However, no concrete account of emancipation in this context has been provided. This can partly be explained by the fact that the authors in this book are concerned with the question how an emancipatory *politics* is possible, rather than the question of emancipation itself. Another difficulty lies in the theory's anti-essentialism. In this respect the theory again reveals its *post*-Marxist character. In contrast to Marx, for whom emancipation can roughly be defined as the overcoming of man's self-alienation from his essence as 'Gattungswesen', Laclau and Mouffe maintain that there is no such human essence that we can appeal to as all experience of reality is discursively constructed.[30] A definition of emancipation that is acceptable for Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework must therefore refrain from any reference to such essentialisms that provide the goal of emancipation.

So it is clear that, although concerned with emancipatory politics, Laclau and Mouffe did not seek to set out a substantive theory of emancipation, and especially not one of a classical Marxist type. Elements for an anti-essentialist definition of emancipation, therefore, must be drawn indirectly from their works. One starting point, I suppose, could be found in Laclau and Mouffe's discussion of the democratic revolution, which stands at the very base of their radical democratic approach to politics. According to Laclau and Mouffe, to account for the rise of the democratic revolution —and its accompanying proliferation of emancipatory struggles— is to "identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination".[31] This tells us two things about the type of emancipatory struggle that Laclau and Mouffe place at the heart of their theory.

The first element for a post-Marxist understanding of emancipation that can be identified here is that the precondition for emancipatory struggles is not to be sought in the existence of some a priori essentialism that we can appeal to, but rather in the existence of *specific discursive conditions* that *enable* emancipatory struggles to emerge. As noted earlier, Laclau and Mouffe take the rise of the democratic imaginary over the last two centuries to have provided these conditions for our time: "it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality".[32] This, of course, does not mean that emancipatory struggles are only possible under a democratic discourse, rather it emphasizes the *contingency* of emancipatory struggles.

[30] Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd Edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 66–125.

[31] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 137.

[32] Ibid., 138.

It is because the democratic discourse articulates some relations of subordination as *oppressive* —that is, as antagonistic to the democratic principles of freedom and equality for all— that a plurality of struggles to overcome this oppression become possible. So *whenever we speak about 'emancipation' in a post-Marxist sense, we are referring to the contingent emancipatory struggles that are made possible by a specific discursive formation.* The concrete meaning of these struggles then, is of course also contingent on how they are discursively articulated.

This brings us to a second element for a post-Marxist understanding of emancipation, the explication of what these discursive conditions for emancipation are. As we have seen in the previous section, for Laclau and Mouffe, emancipatory struggles need to be articulated entirely in the context of a progressive and radically democratic counter-hegemony in order to challenge the current neo-liberal hegemony. By placing the element of democratic conflict that was at the heart of the democratic revolution back into their understanding of democracy, radical democracy seeks to facilitate the constant possibility for the contestation of power relations in the form of an ongoing struggle for equality and liberty. This core commitment to the democratic revolution reveals the discursive conditions that Laclau and Mouffe put forward for emancipatory politics to be possible. Emancipation, in this sense, refers to *emancipation as made possible by the democratic discourse*.

So here we have identified two elements of the post-Marxist understanding of emancipation: (1) that the emergence of emancipatory struggles is bound to its discursive possibilities, and (2) that the discursive possibilities for emancipation of our time are those presented by the democratic revolution. This means that in terms of radical democracy, emancipation is perhaps best defined as the *overcoming of relations of oppression through the struggle for equality* as *made possible by the democratic discourse*.

The Question of Direction

Now that we have a (preliminary) definition of emancipation in post-Marxism it must be established *who* is being emancipated, that is, who the *subject* of the emancipatory struggles is. Two considerations are of great importance here.

First of all, it should be noted that whenever Laclau and Mouffe use the term 'subject', they are referring to a "*subject position* within a discursive structure".[33] The term 'subject position' is used to describe those positions of social experience designated to a subject by a specific discourse.[34] Laclau and Mouffe are thus aware of the fact that, if all experience is contingent on discourse, the category of 'subject', by the lack of any a priori meaning, must be prone to this contingency too. This does of course not mean that there is no real subject who is being emancipated, but only that any experience of emancipation exists as the emancipation of a subject within certain discursive possibilities. That is, emancipation can only be understood in terms of emancipation *as woman* or *as worker* etc.

The second consideration is that, in contrast to classical Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe are no longer concerned with the emancipation of a single privileged social agent. Instead, *emancipation is possible from a plurality of subject positions*. This much is also clear from our discussion of the hegemonic strategy in the previous chapter, which as we have seen basically amounts to 'the construction of chains of equivalence *among the plurality of social struggle*s by articulating their radically democratic and anti-neoliberal dimension'. By establishing these relations of equivalences the discursive conditions can be created for the emergence of a *collective struggle* on the Left. Although this project has a strong socialist dimension, it embraces, through equivalence, the emancipation of a variety of subject positions such as those concerned with feminism, ecological struggles, gay rights, racial struggles; basically any struggle that can be articulated as the progressive struggle for the extension of freedom and equality. No privileged subject position can be identified in the struggle for emancipation, precisely because —and this is one of the core insights of Laclau and

[33] Ibid., 101.
[34] Jørgensen and Phillips, "Laclau and Mouffe.", 15.

Mouffe's— *the emancipatory subject has to be constructed hegemonically*. In practice, it could be the case that a specific subject position becomes the nodal point for a variety of social struggles, but the crucial difference to Marxism remains that this subject position has no a priori or essentialist emancipatory status, but is rather contingent upon hegemonic practices.

The second part of the question of direction is concerned with *direction* in the strict sense, that is, where the subject of the emancipatory struggle should be heading towards. The most adequate way to address this question seems, again, to be revealed by contrasting Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxist approach with classical Marxism. Whereas for Marx emancipation was oriented towards an inevitable communist revolution and a consequent resolution of all social antagonisms, Laclau and Mouffe are committed to the idea that there is no prospect for a fully reconciled society as antagonisms are not only insurmountable, but *constitutive* to the very possibility of society.[35]

So there are two radical breaks with the Marxist account of emancipation here. First of all, Marx's notion of the designated proletarian subject and his revolutionary role in terms of causing a radical rupture is replaced for Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which involves the contingent constitution of the emancipatory subject and demands more gradual and precarious shifts of power.[36] There is also no longer the desire to free the people from their "false consciousness", as in this new political logic all subject positions have an ideological dimension, which is exactly the domain where hegemony operates. Second, Marx's conviction of the prospect for a classless and hence harmonious society is abandoned for the notion of the persistence of social antagonisms. The direct conclusion that one can draw from this is that *full* emancipation —as long as one identifies it with a total resolution of conflict or durable overcoming of oppression— is never possible. The political will always remain a site of power struggle, and hence, new antagonisms and new forms of oppression will arise. The point for radical democracy, however, is to keep the ever present possibility of emancipation open by institutionalizing this conflictual and precarious nature of the social.

The Question of Reflection

This brings us to the last question to be discussed, that is, the *why* question. How this question is exactly to be addressed depends on the kind of theory of emancipation one seeks to set out. For a purely *descriptive* theory of emancipation it would suffice to ask why people *actually* struggle for emancipation. Answers to this question could be provided from a variety of disciplines including the field of political theory, but also sociology or descriptive psychology. A *normative* theory of emancipation, however, needs to address the question why or whether people *should* struggle for emancipation, or at least it must give some account of what is desirable about (the possibility) of emancipation. This normative question has a distinctively philosophical dimension.

Clearly, Laclau and Mouffe did not seek to set out a theory of emancipation in this latter sense. Indeed, one could say that Laclau and Mouffe's work is mainly to be considered as a contribution to political *theory*, as it especially aims to provide a more adequate understanding of the social and presents a novel political strategy that follows from it. Yet, their theory also has a significant normative character. Two clear elements of normativity involve the advocacy of *democracy* and the importance of *conflict*. Especially in her later works Mouffe calls for what she has there come to refer to as 'an agonistic model of democracy', implying that she believes that this model is at least preferable to (1) non-democratic alternatives, and (2) democratic alternatives that neglect the constitutive role of conflict such as those advocated by Rawls or Habermas.[37] Despite these elements of normativity, however, the theory of radical democracy does not explicitly hold any normative

[35] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, xvii, xviii.
Cf. Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto."
See also: George Comninel, "Emancipation in Marx's Early Work," *Socialism and Democracy* 24, no. 3 (November 2010): 60–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300.2010.513612.

[36] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 75–78.

[37] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 98-105.

claims about emancipation, so if we want to examine whether post-Marxism provides an answer to the question 'why emancipation?' in the normative sense we must again try to abstract it from the theory.

Let us take a closer look at the elements of normativity that I just described. Why should we adopt a model of agonistic democracy in the first place? According to Mouffe, agonistic democracy corresponds better to what post-Marxism takes to be the nature of 'the political' than competing conceptions of democracy. Agonistic democracy recognizes that antagonisms are an ineradicable part of the political. Democratic politics, in this view, always revolves around the creation of an 'us' versus a 'them', i.e. the question of inclusion and exclusion. Contemporary approaches to democracy tend to eradicate this element of conflict by means of rational deliberation and finding overlapping consensus (most notably Rawls and Habermas and their respective followers), thereby erroneously assuming that it is possible to reach the point of a fully inclusive 'we'. These views, according to Mouffe, are not only based upon an ill-conceived take on the nature of politics, they also profess a defective account of democracy.[38] By trying to eradicate conflict, they eliminate what is at the heart of democracy: *real* democratic contestation. These rationalist approaches are in a sense undemocratic, argues Mouffe, because:

> "when democratic confrontation disappears, the political in its antagonistic dimension manifests itself through other channels. Antagonisms can take many forms and it is illusory to believe that they could ever be eliminated […] a lack of democratic contestation over real political alternatives leads to antagonisms manifesting themselves under forms that undermine the very basis of the democratic public sphere".[39]

Instead of trying to eradicate conflict, Laclau and Mouffe allow conflict to take a central role their conception of democracy. Drawing on Claude Lefort, they argue that it is precisely because democracy facilitates the possibility of conflict that the locus of power truly becomes an *empty space*.[40] Although the locus of power will always be appropriated by a prevailing hegemonic formation, and as such there will always be power inequalities, no social entity can assume his power as naturalized and durably fixed as his claims will always remain contestable. Democracy, conceived in this way, thus strikes the balance between full closure of the social space —i.e. absolute identity, a fully inclusive 'we', viz. totalitarianism— and a total lack of reference to unity—absolute pluralism. The central question for liberal democracy, should never be how to eradicate power and conflict, but how to facilitate this 'us versus them' confrontation in a way that is compatible to liberal democratic values.[41]

Now what does all of this mean for a theory of emancipation? We know that for Laclau and Mouffe, the possibility of conflict should always be preserved. Consequently, there should always be a possibility for emancipation. This possibility is provided by the liberal democratic discourse through its constitutive principles of liberty and equality for all. Whereas the demand for equality operates on the logic of democratic equivalence (i.e. asserting a form of sameness), the demand for liberty reserves space for difference (i.e. otherness, plurality).[42] To assert the rights to liberty and equality thus basically amounts to the assertion of the respective right to be different and the right to be the same. Accordingly, it is the demand for *liberty* that allows for *pluralism*, and the demand for *equality* that allows for *emancipation*. To call for emancipation, in this sense, involves the demand for a renegotiation of the established us/them discrimination based on the demand for equality. The struggle for emancipation, conceived from this post-Marxist perspective, is thus a *democratic practice par excellence*. Furthermore, the commitment to respect the *possibility* for emancipation —i.e. to respect

[38] Ibid., 93.
[39] Ibid., 114, 115.
[40] Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1988).
Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 170, 171.
[41] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 101.
[42] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 168.

the existence of a plurality of legitimate social spaces from whence emancipation is possible— is what is characteristic for *liberal* democracy. Here we find our answer to the question why emancipation is valuable for radical democracy: respecting the possibility and actual struggle for emancipation are at the very heart of the radical democratic conception of liberal democracy. The virtue of such an agonistic conception of liberal democracy is exactly that it allows for the continual competition among social struggles, thereby keeping power relations in flux so that emancipation is always a possibility. Conversely, it is only because of the existence of these ongoing emancipatory struggles that the idea of *agonistic* democracy makes sense. This normativity, however, is very limited because the value of emancipation is only asserted instrumentally and is thus derived from the normative value of liberal democracy.

At least two questions immediately arise. First of all, if the normativity of emancipation is derived from its instrumental value for democracy, then we should at least continue by asking: what does this relation between emancipation and democracy exactly entail and how can this commitment to democracy as site of emancipation be accounted for in the first place? Secondly, even if post-Marxism has provided a political logic for emancipatory struggles and a reason for engaging in them, it still has not given any justification for the idea that emancipatory critique is possible in a post-Marxist framework, while its departure from nearly all emancipatory categories in classical Marxism has at least made this idea suspicious.

So as it seems, post-Marxism falls short in fully accounting for the question why we should strive for emancipation, which is not remarkable because it has no intention to do so. The following chapters therefore seek to analyse and correct some of the shortcomings of this preliminary post-Marxist theory of emancipation, especially with respect to the issues concerning what I have here called 'the question of reflection'. In the upcoming chapter, I will critically re-consider post-Marxism's commitment to radical democracy as the site of emancipation, more specifically I will criticize its appeal to democratic egalitarianism as emancipatory logic and subsequently re-evaluate how it could account for its commitment to democracy. Then, in the third chapter, I will critically analyse whether the post-Marxist theoretical framework can actually account for the possibility of genuinely emancipatory critique. In the concluding chapter, I will return to the initial question of 'why emancipation' and explore whether my considerations in these chapters finally allow for a more substantive account to be given of why we should continue with emancipatory critique.

Part II *Critiques and Lessons*

Chapter Two

Lessons from Nietzsche:

On Critical Emancipation and the Radicalization of Pluralism

In the previous chapter I have provided an outline of what could be called 'a post-Marxist theory of emancipation'. I concluded that Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework of 'radical democracy' can be seen to support such a theory of emancipation, but that it falls short in answering the question *why* we should strive for emancipation. As we have seen, post-Marxism's response to this question has been constructed in terms of its core commitment to a radical and agonistic democracy.

The present chapter uses a Nietzschean perspective to take issue with this uncritical commitment to radical democracy as site of emancipation. The first section of this chapter *problematizes post-Marxism's commitment to the democratic egalitarian logic* as political logic of emancipation. Drawing on a Nietzschean critique of democracy I will argue that Laclau and Mouffe failed to remain critical when it comes to assessing the value of democracy's egalitarian logic for a truly emancipatory politics. Against their commitment to equality as principle of emancipation I will suggest that perhaps, in our place and time, the emancipatory potential of the principle of equality has been exhausted, and that instead, in a Nietzschean fashion, it is now the principle of freedom — understood as the respect for pluralism— that provides the possibility for genuine emancipation. The task of the second section then is to examine how, if at all, post-Marxism can accommodate this strong demand for pluralism by *critically assessing the compatibility of this Nietzschean demand for pluralism with the post-Marxist conception of agonistic pluralism*. I argue that, although Mouffe's more recently developed conception of agonistic democracy fails to accommodate such radical pluralism, the Nietzschean demand for pluralism is not incompatible with the theoretical framework of post-Marxist radical democracy per se. My claim, inspired by the more radical conception of agonism provided by Nietzsche, is that post-Marxism's commitment to radical democracy as site of emancipation can only be maintained if this commitment is itself accounted for agonistically. That is, the conditions for critical emancipation that the post-Marxist theory of emancipation demands can only be fostered if radical democratic contestation can freely take place on the hegemonic level, which means that even the value of democracy itself cannot be exempted from agonistic critique.

II.I. The Exhaustion of Democracy's Emancipatory Potential

As we have seen, radical democracy places itself in the trajectory of the democratic revolution. That is, its emancipatory logic draws on the appeal to the egalitarian imaginary that the democratic discourse over the last two hundred years has come to provide—equality of all citizens. Laclau and Mouffe's emancipatory politics exploits the fact that the rise of this political imaginary has allowed for a vast proliferation of emancipatory struggles that all based their demand for emancipation on the call for the extension of the principle of equality. As such, the emancipatory potential of the democratic principle of equality seems indisputable. However, in this section I want to challenge this assumption as I argue that Laclau and Mouffe have failed to *critically* assess the value of the principle of equality for genuine emancipation. I turn to Nietzsche in order to show that, despite its proven emancipatory power, the principle of equality is not the only nor the privileged principle for emancipation that the liberal democratic discourse has to offer. More precisely, I want to draw upon an interesting equivocation in Nietzsche's attitude towards democracy in order to formulate a critique of, and provide a remedy to, the contemporary exhaustion of democracy's emancipatory potential.

Equality as Emancipatory Principle

In order to formulate my critique of the exhaustion of democracy as emancipatory political imaginary I must first expand on an observation that I made in the previous chapter, namely that Laclau and Mouffe draw upon democracy's *egalitarian logic* in order to account for its emancipatory potential. How is it exactly that the principle of equality operates as a thrust for emancipatory struggles? We have seen that, for Laclau and Mouffe, the democratic discourse provides the 'discursive exterior' against which emancipatory struggles in the form of a democratic-egalitarian critique become possible.[43] It is against the assumption of equality of all citizens that the democratic discourse articulates inequalities —that alternatively could have been articulated as legitimate— as oppressive. That is, due to the assumption of equality under the democratic discourse an *antagonism* arises with respect to discourses that articulate some inequalities as legitimate. Out of this antagonism emancipatory struggles may emerge that seek to overcome the antagonism by asserting the equality of their subject position. *My claim here is that what gives the principle of equality its emancipatory power in Mouffe's account is its capacity to arouse an equivalential effect.*

To make sense of this claim, it is important to stress what Mouffe calls the *paradoxical* nature of liberal democracy.[44] For Mouffe, liberal democracy is a paradoxical configuration that results from the articulation of two political traditions that stand in radical tension to one another: *liberalism* and *democracy*. She argues that it is important to realize therefore, following the insight of Carl Schmitt, that when we talk about equality:

> "we need to distinguish between two very different ideas: the liberal one and the democratic one. The liberal conception of equality postulates that every person is, as a person, automatically equal to every other person. The democratic conception, however, requires the possibility of distinguishing who belongs to the demos and who is exterior to it; for that reason, it cannot exist without the necessary correlate of inequality".[45]

It is the latter usage of equality —the democratic one— that Schmitt thinks is most adequate, as it is the only type of equality that exists as a real political possibility. Mouffe follows Schmitt in his assertion here that "it is through their belonging to the demos that democratic citizens are granted equal rights, not because they participate in an abstract idea of humanity".[46] This struggle over inclusion and exclusion that Schmitt emphasises has indeed become central to Mouffe's view of liberal democratic emancipatory politics, as she too holds that it is only in the context of democratic inclusion and exclusion that the assertion of the principle of equality is *politically* relevant.[47]

This means that the assertion of the democratic principle of equality presupposes a reference to some kind of social homogeneity. Indeed, for the emancipatory potential of the democratic principle of equality to be effective, there must be some kind of social grouping, some line of social demarcation —e.g. citizenship— with reference to which one can claim 'I am the same as you, treat me as your equal!'. From this observation it is easy to see that an appeal to equality in this sense is just as much an assertion of *sameness* or *inclusion*. We can also see that the struggle for equality has a hegemonic character. To call for equality amounts to the articulation of a new meaning of 'us', in other words, it involves the construction of a new collective identity and a new 'common sense'; one that *includes* the previously excluded and thereby emancipates him from the oppression. However, although democracy's egalitarian character indeed provides a logic of emancipation, to solely draw on this logic for democracy's emancipatory potential reveals a lack of critical attitude as it fails to be attentive to the downside of this emancipatory logic, or rather of its *exhaustion*. In order to demonstrate this I will draw on an interesting equivocation in Nietzsche's attitude towards democracy

[43] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 138.
[44] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 1–16.
[45] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 39.
[46] Ibid., 40.
[47] Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, 42–45.

that reveals both a thorough critique as well as a new optimism for liberal democracy's emancipatory potential.

Nietzsche's Critique of the Emancipatory Potential of Democracy

In the presentation of my Nietzschean argument I will draw on a very lucid analysis of Nietzsche's attitude towards democracy provided by Herman Siemens.[48] In his discussion of Nietzsche and democracy, Siemens describes an equivocation in Nietzsche's works that could reflect a critical yet productive turn in his assessment of democracy's emancipatory claims. Siemens argues that, for Nietzsche, the emancipatory value of democracy always lies in the capacity to provide resistance to concentrations of power by enhancing pluralism. An equivocation arises, however, when we consider that, at first, Nietzsche seems to sympathize with democracy's emancipatory potential as a site of pluralism, while later he comes to reject democracy as he increasingly identifies it with despotism and herd-morality.[49] Siemens argues that underlying Nietzsche's rejection of democracy —and the accompanying pessimism with regard to its emancipatory potential—are two considerations: (1) the insight that the democratic emancipation from despotism only establishes a new concentration of power, this time in the name of "the people"; i.e. the tyranny of the despot is simply replaced by the tyranny of the people, and (2) the estimation that democracy will not really promote pluralism after all, but uniformity.[50] Perhaps the clearest formulation of this critique of democracy is provided in a Nachlass note written in 1880:

> Je mehr das Gefühl der Einheit mit seinen Mitmenschen überhand nimmt, um so mehr werden die Menschen uniformirt, um so strenger werden sie alle Verschiedenheit als unmoralisch empfinden. So entsteht nothwendig der Sand der Menschheit: Alle sehr gleich, sehr klein, sehr rund, sehr verträglich, sehr langweilig. Das Christenthum und die Demokratie haben bis jetzt die Menschheit auf dem Wege zum Sande am weitesten gefahren. Ein kleines, schwaches, dämmerndes Wohlgefühlchen über Alle gleichmäßig verbreitet, ein verbessertes und auf die Spitze getriebenes Chinesenthum, das wäre das letzte Bild, welches die Menschheit bieten könnte? Auf der Bahn der bisherigen moralischen Empfindung unvermeidlich. Es thut eine große Überlegung noth, vielleicht muß die Menschheit einen Strich unter ihre Vergangenheit machen, vielleicht muß sie den neuen Kanon an alle Einzelnen richten: sei anders, als alle Übrigen und freue dich, wenn Jeder anders ist, als der Andere; die gröbsten Unthiere sind ja unter dem Regimente der bisherigen Moral ausgetilgt worden — es war dies ihre Aufgabe; wir wollen nicht gedankenlos unter dem Regimente der Furcht vor wilden Thieren weiterleben. So lang, allzulang hieß es: Einer wie Alle, Einer für Alle. (KSA 3[98], 1880)

Siemens identifies four features that stand out in this note, two of which I want to emphasize here, namely (1) that democracy enhances *uniformity at the exclusion of difference*, and (2) that Nietzsche's rejection of democracy is not wholesale, but only *insofar as it ceases to aid the future of humankind*. Democracy has historically served a legitimate task, but "the crudest monsters" have been eradicated, and now we run the risk of simply becoming herd-animals living under a thoughtless regime of fear for wild beasts. These two points inform my 'Nietzschean' critique of post-Marxist radical democracy. Let me now develop this critique in more detail.

As Siemens has made clear, Nietzsche seems to object to the emancipatory potential of democracy as soon as the emphasis shifts from democracy as a means of promoting pluralism and resisting concentrations of power, to democracy as the promotion of uniformity —that is, Nietzsche becomes convinced that democracy's credo "Gleichheit für Alle" has the practical effect of

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[48] H. W. Siemens, "Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy (1870—1886)," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, no. 38 (2009): 20–37.

And, H. W. Siemens, "Yes, No, Maybe So... Nietzsche's Equivocations on the Relation between Democracy and 'Grosse Politik,'" in *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche's Legacy for Political Thought*, ed. Herman Siemens and Vasti Roodt (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 231–68.

[49] Siemens, "Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy," 23–25.

[50] Ibid., 25-27.

"Gleichmachung Aller".[51] For Nietzsche this is a problem because in his account, in contrast to Laclau and Mouffe, it is in democracy's capacity to enhance *pluralism where its emancipatory potential resides*. Although Laclau and Mouffe recognized that, in a liberal democracy, the demand for democratic equality needs to be *balanced* by a demand for liberty, they fail to recognize that *the demand for liberty (pluralism) also has an emancipatory potential of itself*.[52]

But how could the demand for pluralism account for a logic of emancipation? What is clear from Siemens' discussion is that Nietzsche has lost his confidence in democracy as a site of genuine pluralism. Indeed, in his later works Nietzsche's critique of democracy becomes even more radical, eventually reducing democracy merely to 'a hatred of authority' and even ascribing a nihilistic character to it.[53] According to Siemens, this pessimism of democracy as a site of pluralism signals an interesting turn in Nietzsche's thoughts on emancipation. Whereas in his earlier period Nietzsche saw democracy as a way of challenging the concentration of power on the part of a despotic ruler, *he now (re)turns to individual exceptionalism as a site of emancipation* as he regains confidence in the "Einzelnen" or "Ausnahme-Menschen" to provide resistance to the concentration of power located in 'the people'.[54] This position seems remarkably compatible with Laclau and Mouffe's conception of a radical and *plural* democracy, where the demand for pluralism entails that there should always be an opening of social spaces from whence such resistance is possible. The key difference, however, is that for Laclau and Mouffe pluralism merely consists in the opening of social spaces so that any hegemonic construction of a "we" can be contested and replaced by a new one. That is, pluralism only keeps the hegemonic struggle *going*, but has no emancipatory logic of itself. For Nietzsche, by contrast, pluralism seems to have its own emancipatory potential. The emancipatory logic of equality has been exhausted, "*die gröbsten Unthiere sind ja unter dem Regimente der bisherigen Moral ausgetilgt worden — es war dies ihre Aufgabe*". As an alternative, we should learn from Nietzsche to recognize the emancipatory potential of difference, that is, of *pluralism as the condition for human exceptionalism and creativity to emerge*.

Nietzsche thus teaches us that we must be aware of the fact that the type of emancipation that the democratic revolution professes, although effective in its time, also comes with a cost: the diminishing of diversity.[55] What is at stake here for Nietzsche, is a concern that post-Marxism has abandoned along with its rejection of Marxist essentialism: *the emancipation of humankind*. The actual weight one should attach to this Nietzschean argument of course depends on how seriously one takes Nietzsche's concerns of the "Verkleinerung" of humanity. My point, however, is to stress that if we want to continue to think of emancipation as a *critical* enterprise, this "downside" of the democratic egalitarian logic —enhancing uniformity at the cost of diversity— should at all times be considered when committing to democracy's emancipatory claims. In Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism, this consideration has escaped critical scrutiny. What post-Marxism can learn from Nietzsche in this respect, is that although the principle of equality has served well as a principle of emancipation under the name of the democratic revolution, it is not the only emancipatory logic that we can appeal to. This section has argued that there is at least one other source of emancipation: pluralism.

[51] Ibid., 26.
[52] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 168.
[53] Siemens, "Nietzsche's Critique of Democracy," 28.
[54] Ibid., 29, 30.
[55] Ibid., 31.

II.II. Radicalizing Pluralism

In the previous section I argued that, following Nietzsche's concern of democracy's tendency of breeding uniformity, there arises a strong counter-demand for pluralism as emancipatory principle. When applying this argument to Laclau and Mouffe's theoretical framework, two questions arise. First of all, it must be examined what this strong demand for pluralism would actually entail in terms of an emancipatory politics. Secondly, an assessment is in place to what extent this strong demand for pluralism is compatible with radical democracy.

According to Siemens, Nietzsche's demand for pluralism is best understood in light of his perfectionism, that is, in light of Nietzsche's repeating demand to affirm and enhance human life.[56] Democracy, as we have seen in the previous section, poses a threat to this project as it breeds uniformity and hence is increasingly seen by Nietzsche as a movement towards nihilism. In order to counter this trend, Siemens argues, Nietzsche imagines the rise of a community of philosopher-legislators who must fulfill the task of the creation of new meaning and values.[57] A 'new Enlightenment' is needed, Nietzsche proclaims,

> "die alte war im Sinne der demokratischen Heerde. Gleichmachung Aller. Die neue will den herrschenden Naturen den Weg zeigen" (KSA 27[80], 1884).

In another note, Nietzsche is more explicit about this task:

> § Grundgedanke: die neuen Werthe müssen erst geschaffen werden — dies bleibt uns nicht erspart! Der Philosoph muß wie ein Gesetzgeber sein. Neue Arten. (Wie bisher die höchsten Arten (z.B. Griechen) gezüchtet wurden: diese Art „Zufall" bewußt wollen)
> …
> § Periode der großen Versuche. Menschen, mit einem eignen Werth-Kanon. Institutione Züchtung höherer Menschen (KSA 35[47], 1885).

My intention here is to examine to what extent the core Nietzschean insight presented here —that the leveling tendency of democracy should be countered by the 'life affirming and -enhancing' tendency of a pluralistic force of exceptionalism, greatness and creativity— can be integrated in Laclau and Mouffe's conception of a radical and plural democracy. It is my conviction that such integration is possible.

I contend that the relevance and applicability of Nietzsche's political concerns, which I believe are often wrongly dismissed as apolitical, can come to make more sense if we consider them in terms of what Mouffe calls: *the affective level of politics*. Stressing the hegemonic character of politics, radical democracy recognizes that politics is largely about the creation of collective identities and the construction of a specific 'common-sense'. The upshot of this hegemonic approach to politics is that the exercise of political power is no longer dogmatically restricted to formal political institutions. Instead, we become more attentive to the *affective level* of politics. What matters for politics is what binds us to a collective identity, which is ultimately not a matter of rational argumentation but a matter of feeling or commitment.[58] We have seen that the creation of collective identities often involves the establishing of a chain of equivalence through the articulation of a common democratic demand. However, Mouffe refers to other factors that are important for the creation of collective identities, such as critical art[59] and charismatic leadership[60].

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[56] Siemens, "Nietzsche on Democracy," 235.

[57] Ibid., 239.

[58] Mouffe, *Left Populism*, 75–77.
and generally chapter three of: *The Democratic Paradox*.

[59] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London ; New York: Verso, 2013), 104, 105.

[60] Mouffe, *Left Populism*, 70.

I believe that it is in this move towards affective politics that we can draw our connection to Nietzsche. As soon as we recognize the project of the creation of identity and meaning as an object of politics —which is exactly what Laclau and Mouffe allow us to do— it also becomes possible to envisage Nietzsche's comments on the rise of the philosopher-legislators in terms of a counter-hegemonic strategy that embraces the Nietzschean task of combating the leveling tendency of democracy by "legislating" new values and meanings. Although such strategy is not likely to actually involve the rise of a community of philosopher-legislators as envisaged by Nietzsche, the construction of new meaning that is central to Nietzsche's approach is in fact recognized as a fundamental feature of the post-Marxist approach to politics.

This brings us to the last question to be discussed, that is, the question whether the demand for pluralism that underlies the possibility for such a Nietzsche-inspired counter-hegemony is still compatible with radical democracy. Let us thus compare the kind of pluralism that radical democracy can provide with the kind of pluralism that is needed to foster the possibility for critical emancipation as I described above. As we have seen, in Laclau and Mouffe's radical democratic theory the respect for pluralism involves the element of *agonism*. In chapter one I have addressed that Laclau and Mouffe draw on Claude Lefort's insight that under conditions of democratic agonism the locus of power becomes an 'empty space'. Since power is no longer placed in the single hands of a transcendent guarantor (e.g. the king as representative of God's will), there is no longer an assured foundation of power, and thus there has opened up an "unending process of questioning".[61] Indeed, Mouffe emphasizes, "what is specific and valuable about modern liberal democracy is that, when properly understood, it creates a space in which this confrontation is kept open, power relations are always being put into question and no victory can be final".[62] Pluralism in radical democracy is thus not something to be overcome, but rather to be respected or even radicalized by allowing a plurality of social spaces to exist and enhancing their possibilities for resistance. The notion of pluralism adhered to in radical democracy is *radical*, according to Laclau and Mouffe, "only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy".[63]

But is the kind of pluralism that radical democracy actually adheres to with its concept of agonism really as radical as they here profess? In her later works, Mouffe becomes more explicit about the *limits* of pluralism. In *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe argues that, although conflict is indeed constitutive to democratic politics, the type of conflict that is referred to from the perspective of 'agonistic pluralism' is a conflict between 'adversaries' rather than 'enemies'. "An adversary", she continues: "is an enemy, but a legitimate enemy, one with whom we have some common ground because we share adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality".[64] So, the limits of pluralism under radical democracy are clear: democracy should allow for social contestation, but only among those identities that share adhesion to its basic principles of liberty and equality. In other words, radical democracy embraces radical pluralism, but only to the extent that this is a pluralism of liberal democrats.

Mouffe is right to emphasize that her 'agonistic' approach is superior to the 'deliberative' approaches of Rawls or Habermas, because she at least recognizes that the limits she places on pluralism are the result of a *political* decision, whereas Rawls and Habermas try to disguise their forms of exclusion under the veil of rationality or morality. Indeed, just as conflict is an ineradicable part of democratic politics, so is exclusion, and it would make sense for a democratic regime to exclude those views who are essentially undemocratic. But why should this political decision be fixed in advance, rather than being left to the actual forces of democratic politics? When Mouffe is

[61] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 170.
[62] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 15.
[63] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 151.
[64] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 101, 102.

precluding anti-liberal and inegalitarian struggles from the legitimate contest for democratic power, is she not in fact diminishing the 'emptiness' of the locus of power that agonistic pluralism needs to maintain in order to call itself *radical*? Indeed, it seems that Mouffe has shifted in her later works on 'agonistic pluralism' from the notion of 'contest under the conditions of *radical pluralism*' as it was still presented in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, towards a notion of 'contest *inter pares*'. Conflict and contestation, in this latter view, can only arise with respect to the different *interpretations* of the democratic values of equality and freedom, rather than having *the value* of these principles themselves as primary object of contestation. This kind of naturalized consensus on democratic values only seems to diminish radical democracy's emancipatory potential. I suggest, and this will be my second lesson from Nietzsche, that radical democracy should regain its critical emancipatory potential by replacing Mouffe's limited conception of agonism for a more radical Nietzschean understanding of agonism. It is to this argument that I will devote the final part of this chapter.

The role of the *agon* in Nietzsche's thinking, and the question to what extent to this concept can be appropriated for a 'Nietzschean' political philosophy, is obviously too complex and equivocal to be dealt with within the constraints of this thesis.[65] Instead, I want to consider a specific aspect of Nietzsche's agon as it emerges in *Homer's Wettkampf* and assess whether it can be of aid for radical democracy. This discussion of agonism, as I take it, stands out in demonstrating Nietzsche's efforts to elaborate on the agon's *productivity* as well as on its *limits*.

In Homer's Wettkampf, Nietzsche describes the role of contest in ancient Greek culture and ethics, and how the Greeks differ in that respect from our Modern culture. The main difference, Nietzsche writes, is that the Greeks still saw value in conflict and strife: "Der Kampf und die Lust des Sieges wurden anerkannt: und nichts scheidet die griechische Welt so sehr von der unseren, als die hieraus abzuleitende Färbung einzelner ethischer Begriffe z.B. der Eris und des Neides". In order to make sense of this claim, Nietzsche refers to the two goddesses 'Eris' that appear in Hesiod's works: a 'good' and a 'bad' Eris. The bad Eris is the goddess that is responsible for cruel war and strife at the cost of the annihilation of the other. The good Eris, by contrast, is placed on earth by Zeus because she is good for mankind. She is the goddess of competition and envy; feelings that make us want to excel and exceed the other. This distinction between different kinds of strife reveals at the same time the productivity and the limits of contest. One the one hand, good contest provides the incentive for people to excel and flourish, even jealousy and envy are valuable for the Greeks in this respect. Yet, at the same time, this kind of contest does have limits. The first one is clear, contest —in order to be good contest— must be of a *moderate* kind, i.e. it must take the form of a 'Wettkampf' rather than a 'Vernichtungskampf'. Second, Nietzsche asserts, this Greek notion of contest presupposes *pluralism*: "Das ist der Kern der hellenischen Wettkampf-Vorstellung: sie verabscheut die Alleinherrschaft und fürchtet ihre Gefahren, sie begehrt, als Schutzmittel gegen das Genie — ein zweites Genie.".

Let us now examine how this conception of agonistic pluralism that Nietzsche inherits from the Greeks relates to the agonism provided by Mouffe, and most importantly, how the former could enhance the latter. A great Nietzschean critique of Mouffe's conception of agonism has already been provided by Christa Davis Acampora.[66] The main thesis of her essay related to Mouffe is that Mouffe's radical democratic conception of pluralism is too restricted, or rather, Nietzsche's conception of agonism is *too radical* to fit the radical democratic theory provided by Mouffe. Acampora here too takes issue with Mouffe's rather problematic move of exempting the desirability of the democratic values of freedom and equality from agonistic critique. I believe Acampora puts it exactly right when she says that:

> "What is problematic for those committed to the (democratic) good of agonistic exchange is having a hierarchy of values that exempts itself from the need to ground its authority agonistically. It should also

[65] For an overview of this topic, see: H. W. Siemens, "Nietzsche's Political Philosophy: A Review of Recent Literature," *Nietzsche-Studien* 30, no. 1 (2001), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110172409.509.

[66] Christa Davis Acampora, "Demos Agonistes Redux," *Nietzsche-Studien* 32, no. 1 (2003), https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110179200.374.

> be clear that the Nietzschean objection to Mouffe's version of agonistic pluralism is not her establishment of limits. Nietzsche envisions numerous constraints on the *agon*, but he would not grant the exclusion of prospective agonists intent on defending a different vision of what should constitute judgment in the agonistic arena."[67]

So similar to my critique, the charge is not *that* Mouffe places limits on agonistic pluralism, but that she places them *non-agonistically*. However, whereas Acampora leaves it there and takes Nietzsche's radicality as an incompatibility with Mouffe's radical democracy, I believe that we can take Nietzsche's insights on the agon to enhance radical democracy's potential for critical emancipation. The obvious way is by first going back to radical democracy's original position of 'agonism as contestation under conditions of radical pluralism', which was already remarkably close to Nietzsche account of radical pluralism. This, however, brings us right back to the question of 'limits', because, as Acampora rightly emphasizes, the radicality that Nietzsche ascribes to agonistic pluralism might just be to ask too much from any conception of radical democracy to accept. How then can we conceive of the limits of agonistic pluralism, while not jeopardizing the respect for genuinely *radical* pluralism that is fundamental to radical democracy and its potential as a site for critical emancipation?

According to Lawrence Hatab, such limits can already be found in the logic of Nietzschean agonism itself, that is, in the logic of *competition* (good Eris) which condemns messy conflict (bad Eris). To compete, according to Hatab, includes a notion of *agonistic respect*, that is, to respect the other as competitor without whom there would be no competition at all, and hence without whom one's own conditions to excel could not exist.[68] Similar to Nietzsche's remarks on *ostracism*[69], agonistic respect allows for the exclusion of those who seek to engage in 'bad' conflict with us, because they pose a risk to the future of the productive practice of agonism.

But are these Nietzschean limits really compatible with a theory of radical democracy? That is, if radical democracy would indeed embrace radical agonistic pluralism of the Nietzschean kind, would we still be properly speaking of a model of *agonistic democracy* or would this instead, as Acampora suggests, better be conceived of as a model *democratic agonism*? I believe that the answer to this question can be provided in an entirely "Mouffean" fashion. The extent to which we can still speak of an agonistic democracy or of a democratic agonism, simply depends on the specific articulation of the two constitutive elements of liberal democracy. The point that I want to stress here, is that coming to terms with the paradoxical nature of liberal democracy forces any radical democratic approach to accept that both sides of the paradox have an emancipatory logic *as well as* a destructive one. That is to say, both sides of the paradox come with their own risks: an overemphasis on equality might lead to excessive homogeneity, whereas a too strong articulation of pluralism means that democracy could die at its own hands. The limits posed on either side, however, can only be understood as the result of contingent configurations of political power, that is, of a specific hegemonic articulation. The crucial point of the argument here, is that the limits posed on pluralism can only be compatible with the commitment to respect *radical* pluralism if these limits are themselves accounted for *agonistically*, that is, if they are the result of a hegemonic struggle under conditions of radical pluralism. It is exactly within this context of ongoing hegemonic struggle where post-Marxism's capacity for emancipation lies. Embracing the full range of these emancipatory possibilities, therefore, tragically also includes embracing its risks.

[67] Davis Acampora, "Demos Agonistes Redux," 386.

[68] Lawrence J. Hatab, "Prospects for a Democratic Agon : Why We Can Still Be Nietzscheans," *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 24, no. 1 (2002): 142, https://doi.org/10.1353/nie.2002.0013.

[69] See: *Homer's Wettkampf*.

Chapter Three

Lessons from Adorno:

On the Possibility of Radical Emancipatory Critique

One of the core tenets of the previous chapters has been that the emancipatory potential of radical democracy is located in the anti-essentialist idea that all meaning is the product of a hegemonic struggle that takes place under conditions of genuinely *radical* pluralism, and therefore that any oppressive hegemonic formation is always contestable. The present chapter seeks to zoom in on a theoretical issue that arises in response to this post-Marxist theory of emancipation: the question on the actual possibility of emancipatory critique in an anti-essentialist framework. My discussion of this issue is split up into two sections. Section one discusses the question on the possibility of emancipatory *critique*, that is, the question what kinds of critique (if any) are possible within a post-Marxist framework. The second section discusses the question on the possibility of *emancipatory* critique, or rather, whether these forms of critique can be genuinely emancipatory.

But before we move on, let me explain why the question on the *possibility* for emancipatory critique poses a problem for the post-Marxist theory of emancipation provided here. In order to present this problem, I believe it is helpful to draw a parallel to a critique raised by Habermas in response to Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. One of the core theses of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* concerns the self-regression that is inherent in the Enlightenment, perhaps best covered by the sentence: "Myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts into mythology".[70] Adorno and Horkheimer's account of the dialectic of enlightenment contains a devastating critique of Enlightenment rationalism, arguing that the project of enlightenment, understood as the 'Entzauberung der Welt' through processes of rationalization, is ultimately self-destructive as it comes to realize that the world cannot be fully captured rationally. Enlightenment, characterized by its demythologizing attitude, is a mythical relation to the world after all that emanates from the same fundamental fear of nature as mythology does and just like mythology ultimately fails to master this fear, which is why enlightenment reverts back into what it denounces as myth. This conclusion implies a strongly pessimistic attitude of Adorno and Horkheimer with regard to the capacity of human reason for enlightening the world.

Habermas, calling the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer's 'blackest book', recognizes a *performative paradox* in their critique of the Enlightenment. This paradox resides in the specific attempt to 'enlighten' the Enlightenment about itself. In the claim that the exercise of human reason is nothing but an act of self-preservation —that is, the unmasking of human reason as a faculty of *instrumental* reason that tries to overcome the mythical fear of nature— Adorno and Horkheimer destroy their own standpoint from which they were able to exercise critique in the first place. After all, as Habermas insists, if one's critique of human reason becomes total, yet one does not want to relinquish the 'enlightening' power of critique, one occupies the paradoxical spot of making use of a form of critique that one has declared dead in the same instance. Hence, Habermas asserts:

> "If they [Adorno and Horkheimer] do not want to renounce the effect of a final unmasking and still want to *continue with critique*, they will have to leave at least one rational criterion intact for their

[70] Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*, trans. John Cumming, Reprinted (London; New York: Verso, 2016), xvi.

> explanation of the corruption of *all* rational criteria. In the face of this paradox, self-referential critique loses its orientation."[71]

Now, a similar objection could be made against Laclau and Mouffe. Just like Adorno and Horkheimer, Laclau and Mouffe can be considered to fully assimilate reason to power. However, for Laclau and Mouffe, the total assimilation of reason to power does not follow from a genealogical chain to a fundamental drive of self-preservation, but is the result of the theoretical commitments of their *discourse theory*. As we have seen in chapter one, Laclau and Mouffe make the total claim that *all experience of reality is constituted as an object of discourse*.[72] In addition to that, they commit themselves to the anti-essentialist view that all meaning of (social) reality is created, fixed or specified through practices of articulation that have no other constitution prior to, or outside the contingency of their own act of articulation.[73] Indeed, it has been one of the core objectives of Laclau and Mouffe's joint work to show that any (social) objectivity rather than being inherently rational, is merely the expression of a contingent manifestation of power. This mutual collapse between objectivity and power is precisely what Laclau and Mouffe mean by 'hegemony'.[74] Just like Habermas' critique of Adorno and Horkheimer, one could object to Laclau and Mouffe that by their totalizing claim that 'all is hegemony', Laclau and Mouffe abide in the same aporetic situation as Adorno and Horkheimer, because they too seek to sustain emancipatory critique while the very tools to provide critique with are being declared dead.

For Habermas, the aporetic situation where the early Frankfurt School and, as I have tried to show, Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism find themselves in can and should be avoided:

> "Anyone who abides in a paradox on the very spot once occupied by philosophy with its ultimate groundings is not just taking up an uncomfortable position; one can only hold that place if one makes it at least minimally plausible that there is *no way out.* Even the retreat from an aporetic situation has to be barred, for otherwise there is a way — the way back."[75]

For Habermas, the way out indeed is the way back, as he is convinced that Adorno and Horkheimer are too pessimistic and fail to appreciate the achievements of Enlightenment rationalism. In this chapter, however, I seek to demonstrate that Laclau and Mouffe, as well as Adorno, have found their own 'way out', thus providing two models for philosophical emancipatory critique that are compatible with the full assimilation of objectivity to power.

III.I. Two Models of Critique: Exteriority and Immanence

The first move towards an alternative 'way out' of the state of aporia is to examine what kind of critiques are *possible* within a theoretical framework that assimilates objectivity to power. I suggest that Laclau and Mouffe as well as Adorno indeed already provide such a possibility for critique, and although both models of critique have different philosophical underpinnings (post-structuralist discourse theory for Laclau and Mouffe, and Marxist/Hegelian dialectics for Adorno) I want to make the case that Adorno's insights can be shown to be highly productive as an additional model for critique in the post-Marxist theoretical framework adhered to in this thesis.

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[71] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, Reprinted (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 126, 127.

[72] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 93.

[73] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 95.

[74] Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995): 259–65.

[75] Habermas, *Discourse of Modernity*, 128.

The First Model. Exteriority and Contextualism

Let me begin with the model of critique that can be derived from Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse. The central claim that will be defended here is that a possibility for critique follows from a *relation of exteriority between discourses*. As described in chapter one Laclau and Mouffe assert that the egalitarian critique made possible by the democratic imaginary was able to criticise the status quo because the democratic discourse existed as the 'discursive exterior' to the predominant discourse.[76] That is, a particular configuration of power becomes problematic, once its discursive presuppositions are challenged by another discourse, and discrepancies between its legitimation stories and perceived power are starting to emerge. Criticizing or defending certain ideas or institutions in this sense can indeed no longer assume a position of universal morality or rationality, but should rather be placed in the discursive context of certain shared beliefs or forms of life.[77] Embracing contextualism, however, does not lead to Habermas' objection of the incapacity to discriminate between forms of power. Indeed, as Mouffe asserts, we can still discriminate between just and unjust political regimes.[78] All contextualism demands, is that we recognize that these judgements have no universal validity, because they are contingent upon specific discursive conditions which testify of a particular contingent configuration of power. Indeed, we can still continue with theory and critique, we only have to be more realistic with regard to the foundations of our own judgements. Rather than assuming that we can reveal the *real and timeless* truth we should realize that our judgements ultimately testify of the dominance of a specific manifestation of power.

In order to clarify the model of critique provided, I want to draw a parallel to a point made by Bernard Williams in his discussion of legitimacy and normativity in political realism.[79] For Williams, the question of legitimacy is always contextual. This is what allows him to present liberalism as simply 'our modern response' to the legitimation demand that arises when exercised power is asserted as authority.[80] This implies that liberalism is not necessarily 'the best' political doctrine, but rather that it simply happens to provide a legitimation story that '*makes sense'* to us '*here and now'* as an instance of legitimate authority. Now, I take Williams' concept of 'makes sense' to be normative in a way that is illustrative for how Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory allows for normativity. The concept of 'makes sense' for Williams, is certainly not normative when we apply it to cases that are far remote from our own conditions. The concept surely can be *evaluative* in this respect, but it is certainly not *normative* in the sense that we cannot take it to be a guidance for other people's behaviour. However, when we apply the concept of 'makes sense' to our own conditions, Williams continues, the concept does become normative. After all, what makes sense to us as a structure of legitimately exercised power, typically is the power structure that we think we *should* accept.[81] Any power structure that does not conform to the concepts and ideas that make sense to us here and now is suspicious as it cannot explain to those affected by power why they shouldn't revolt. So for Williams, contextualism and normativity are compatible, because what 'makes sense' to us here and now (almost tautologically) provides the measure for what legitimation for power we find acceptable.

Now, what 'makes sense' to us is precisely the product of discourse and the object of hegemonic struggle according to Laclau and Mouffe's theory, and thus it must be seen to have the same conflictual and precarious constitution that characterizes any objectivity. So it is important to stress that what 'makes sense' is itself dynamic as it is always subject to discursive shifts. Indeed, the possibility for critique emerges when what makes sense for A does not make sense for B or when the legitimation stories that legitimize the power of certain institutions no longer make sense to its subjects. As has been stressed earlier, this kind of critique presupposes some element of exteriority, for

[76] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 138.
[77] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 66.
[78] Mouffe, *Democratic Paradox*, 62, 63.
[79] Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed: Realism and Moralism in Political Argument*, ed. Geoffrey Hawthorn (Princeton Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008).
[80] Williams, *Realism and Moralism*, 9.
[81] Ibid., 11.

it is only due to a discrepancy between discursive structures that what makes sense to A fails to make sense to B. The kind of normativity that accompanies this model of critique, however, should be recognized for what it is—the expression of power.

The Second Model. Immanence and Negativity

The second model of critique that I want to address is one adhered to by Adorno. Let me explain this second critical model by elaborating on its two key features: immanence and negativity.

The concept of *immanent critique* can be traced from the Frankfurt School through Marx all the way back to Hegel. However, I cannot discuss the complexities of that genealogical chain here. Instead, my emphasis will be on a core element of the general idea of immanent critique, that is, its specific way of providing a form of critique that draws on standards that are *internal* to the social practices it seeks to criticize.[82] Internal critique is contrasted with *external* critique, which seeks its standards for critique external to the practices being criticized. Instances of external critique often involve an appeal to objective standards derived from rationality or universal morality against which the social practice under scrutiny can be criticized. The first model of critique described above, however, can also be considered as a form of external critique, as it seeks to criticize practices and institutions from a position that is at least partly outside the discursive structure that seeks to account for them. The method of immanent critique utilizes internal criticism in order to analyse and reveal discrepancies between theory and social practice, and tries to link these discrepancies to contradictions in the internal logic of the theory. Whereas the external form of criticism that I described under the first model tries to resolve the problem arising from the assimilation of objectivity to power by simply *accepting* that its standards for critique are reducible to power, immanent critique tries to *dodge* the problem by not appealing to external standards for critique at all. Instead, it merely demonstrates the inadequacy of a theory or practice *considered from its own standards* and tries to detect possibilities for emancipation therein.

The second feature of the kind of critique propounded by the early Frankfurt School, and especially by Adorno, is *negativism*. Negativism is for Adorno the only possible philosophical position after the orthodox Marxist predictions for social development have failed to realize themselves and the social world, rather than moving towards freedom, came to suffer under the terrors of Fascism and Nazism.

> "After everything the only responsible philosophy is one that no longer imagines it had the Absolute at its command; indeed philosophy must forbid the thought of it in order not to betray that thought, and at the same time it must not bargain away anything of the emphatic concept of truth. This contradiction is philosophy's element. It defines philosophy as negative."[83]

Adorno's move towards negativism on the one hand signals his pessimism towards the capacity of human reason for enlightening and liberating the world, while on the other hand it testifies of his reluctance to abandon the Enlightenment project. How critical philosophy is still possible, despite his deep pessimism, is accounted for by Adorno in his work of *Negative Dialectics*. In the preface Adorno writes: "*Negative Dialectics* is a phrase that flouts tradition. As early as Plato, dialectics meant to achieve something positive by means of negation […] This book seeks to free dialectics from such affirmative traits without reducing its determinacy".[84] In order to understand this it is important to consider how negative dialectics differs from traditional dialectics. Dialectics traditionally seeks to establish *identity* between concept and object, ultimately in the form of a synthesis. Contradictions negating the concept are being reconciled so that something positive can be established: identity

[82] For a decent overview of this topic see: Titus Stahl, "What Is Immanent Critique?," *SSRN Working Papers*, 2013, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2357957.

[83] Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 7.

[84] Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973), xix.

between concept and object. To Adorno, this practice of 'identifying' indeed demonstrates the basic structure of how thought works: "the appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify".[85] However, what traditional dialectics neglects, is that this striving for identity involves the suppression of difference, that is, it forces identity upon that which is in fact non-identical. The fact that we will always be confronted with contradictions is thus not simply an anomaly in a concept, but rather the sign of difference refusing to be subsumed under the identifying concept, that is, a sign of *non-identity* indicating the untruth of identity.[86] Whereas traditional dialectics focuses on producing something positive through the negation of difference, negative dialectics focuses on the ineradicable moment of non-identity thereby providing resistance against the totalizing tendency of identifying thought. As a method of critique, negative dialectics is thus not in need of grounding its normativity on any external standards, because indeed: "Dialectics is the consistent sense of non-identity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint".[87]

Although the second method of critique described here emanates from a different philosophical tradition than the one adhered to by Laclau and Mouffe, I believe that its critical insights can still be appropriated by Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Immanent negative critique, then, would refer to a form of critique that 'remains within the boundaries of a specific discursive structure'. Admittedly, it is questionable whether in discourse theory critique can indeed every be exercised from a position that is fully "immanent", as there is no such thing as a single separate subject position that is not being constituted by a plurality of discourses.[88] However, I take this point to be trivial for assessing the compatibility of immanent critique with discourse theory, because what seems fundamental to the possibility of immanent critique is not the exact immanence of the subject positions criticizing, but rather the possibility of criticizing a social practice *against its own standards*. In other words, appropriating immanent critique for discourse theory would amount to a form of critique that criticizes ideas and practices against the standards that *make sense to its defenders* as justifications for these ideas and practices. While Laclau and Mouffe's hegemonic strategy has mainly focussed on the possibility of external critique by mobilizing subject positions that are antagonistic to a capitalist or neo-liberal hegemony, immanent critique additionally allows for a critique internal to capitalist or neo-liberal discourse by articulating its internal contradictions and the forms of oppression that arise from them.

III.II. Why Still Critique? or, A Way Out

The previous section has discussed the possibility for two models of emancipatory critique within a philosophical framework that assimilates objectivity to power. However, it may be objected that this does still not provide a real 'way out', because a fundamental element is missing: even though I have shown that *critique is still possible*, I have not yet provided any account of whether these forms of critique are actually *capable of emancipation*. For *emancipatory* critique to be meaningful in this sense, we must not only show that critique is possible, but we must also justify some kind of belief that any *progress in terms of liberation* that is implicit in the concept of *emancipatory* critique is actually possible.

The problem with the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe, however, is that ultimately we are unable to know whether critique can actually involve genuine progress. First of all, the idea of progress simply seems incompatible with the anti-essentialist nature of post-Marxism, because (1) there is no a priori standpoint that allows us to fix meaning of such an event independently of any discursive position, and (2) due to the precariousness of any discourse new antagonisms will always

[85] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 101, 102, 108.

arise and new forms of oppression will emerge.[89] From this perspective, the focus on agonism as the locus of emancipatory politics in Laclau and Mouffe's political theory begins to strike us as meaningless. After all, why should we continue to engage in agonistic struggles if our successes do not amount to progress in terms of overcoming oppression in the long run? It is to this issue that I will devote this last section, and I believe that we must again turn to Adorno for showing us the 'way out'. By drawing on what Fabian Freyenhagen calls Adorno's 'ethics of resistance'[90] I will argue that we can give meaning to post-Marxism's commitment to the notion of agonism and the emancipatory potential that resides in it. Turning to Adorno in this way allows me to tackle a central issue for post-Marxism that it has yet failed to resolve: to justify the idea that *through critique progress is possible*.

The Way Out: Optimism, Self-Critique, and Progress

Similar to Laclau and Mouffe, the idea of emancipatory progress is problematic for Adorno. One core aspect here is his problem of ideology. Whatever we do, Adorno maintains, we can never fully detach ourselves from the badness that we want to overcome (we rather even unwillingly contribute to its reproduction). Even our most radical emancipatory thoughts will be *ideologically distorted* in this way, for we simply cannot stop the badness of the world we inhabit from influencing our mental and practical capacities that we use for trying to overcome it.[91] According to Freyenhagen, this predicament even leads Adorno to conclude that there is 'no right living' in this world: we are too deeply implicated in the "guilt context [Schuldzusammenhang]".[92]

However, I believe that Adorno also provides a way out. According to Freyenhagen the predicament that I just described leads Adorno to recommend a 'suspended form of life', which appears as the only progressive attitude that is consistent with the insight that there is no right living in a wrong world. To live a suspended life does not at all imply a life of passivity, as those who do nothing are implicated in the badness just as much.[93] Instead, Freyenhagen stresses, a suspended form of life implies that one should do whatever one can to *resist* the bad, or *not to join in*, under the awareness that this attempt will always be unsuccessful to some extent.[94] One passage from Adorno's lectures on the *Problems of Moral Philosophy* particularly stands out in support of this reading:

> "Above all, no one can promise that the reflections that can be entertained in the realm of moral philosophy can be used to establish a canonical plan for the good life because life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live the good life in it or to fulfil his destiny as a human being. Indeed, I would almost go so far as to say that, given the way the world is organized, even the simplest demand for integrity and decency must necessarily lead almost everyone to protest. I believe that only by making this situation a matter of consciousness – rather than covering it up with sticking plaster – will it be possible to create the conditions in which we can properly formulate questions about how we should lead our lives today. The only thing that can perhaps be said is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds. Other than this negative prescription no guidance can really be envisaged. I may add that, negative though this assertion is, it can hardly be much more formal than the Kantian injunction that we have been discussing during this semester. So what I have in mind is the determinate negation of everything that has been seen through, and thus the ability to focus upon the power of resistance to all the things imposed on us, to everything the world has made of us, and intends to make of us to a vastly greater degree. Little else remains to us, other than the power to reflect on these matters and to oppose them from the outset, notwithstanding our consciousness of our impotence."[95]

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[89] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony*, 160–61.

[90] Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 162–86.

[91] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 59–61.

[92] Ibid., 61.

[93] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 243.

[94] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 164.

[95] Theodor W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 167, 168.

Now, I want to make the case that it is by providing the *political* translation of such an ethics of resistance that post-Marxism's emphasis on agonism as the locus of emancipatory struggles can derive its meaning. Let me briefly recapitulate. Agonism in post-Marxism entails the idea that conflict, rather than in need of being suppressed or overcome, should take a central place in politics in the form of agonistic contest under conditions of radical pluralism. Agonistic contestation prevents sedimentation of power as it keeps power relations in flux. Even though a specific hegemonic formation may assert its dominance during a specific period, its manifestation of power always remains contestable. Emancipatory critique plays a central role in these processes of agonistic contestation, because it seeks to overcome the forms of oppression that arise under a specific hegemony and as such constitutes a form of agonistic contestation. The predicament described in this chapter, however, puts the reason for continuing with these emancipatory practices into question because there can be no prospect of any progress in terms of emancipation whatsoever. Simply put, why should we continue with critique, if all we can achieve is to replace one hegemonic structure for another while we are unable to tell whether this would amount to genuine social progress? I believe we can solve this problem for post-Marxism by considering *three lessons* that we can take from Adorno.

The first lesson concerns Adorno's *optimism*. Although our predicament seems to forestall any optimism about genuine social progress, it does not prevent us from trying to resist the badness we encounter in the world. As Freyenhagen insists, "the first step of resistance is to realise that our unfreedom is collectively self-imposed".[96] This means that it is through critical reflection of our own social practices that we can begin to bring about social change in terms of resistance of everything that has failed the critical examination of the most progressive minds. For Adorno, this resort to *ethics as a form of resistance* is clearly grounded on his epistemological negativism:

> "We may not know what absolute good is or the absolute norm, we may not even know what man is or the human or humanity – but what the inhuman is we know very well indeed. I would say that the place of moral philosophy today lies more in the concrete denunciation of the inhuman, than in vague and abstract attempts to situate man in his existence"[97]

It is because our perspectives of the good are ideologically distorted that Adorno builds his ethics on the denunciation of the bad. For post-Marxism, however, this move is more problematic. Whereas the concept of ideology is for Adorno still connected to the Marxist notion of 'false consciousness' — implying that 'true' consciousness is still possible— post-Marxism entirely rejects the possibility of undistorted knowledge. As Laclau clarifies, in post-Marxism any discursive closure —and hence any concrete fixation of meaning— is necessarily ideological, although this term is no longer used in a pejorative connotation.[98] This means that our conception of the bad is just as much prone to ideological distortion as our conception of the good. However, this does not diminish the applicability of Adorno's *underlying claim* that the bad, possessing a certain kind of immediacy, has by itself sufficient normative force for providing reasons to resist it.[99] Especially our experience of physical suffering, as Adorno asserts, by itself "tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different".[100] Despite his optimism Adorno's pervasive optimism teaches post-Marxism that critique does have a determinate goal: the resistance of badness. Taking our predicament seriously, however, puts emancipatory critique in a very delicate spot. Exercising critique, in terms of providing continual resistance against what we perceive as the bad, is always done under the awareness that we can only *hope* to bring about genuine social change, let alone that it will be change for the better. Therefore, we should be cautious about anyone, including ourselves, who claims to be the only one in

[96] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 169.
[97] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 175.
[98] Ernesto Laclau, "Ideology and Post-Marxism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 2 (2006): 114, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310600687882.
[99] Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 211–14.
[100] Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 203.

the right. Indeed, "true injustice is always to be found at the precise point where you put yourself in the right and other people in the wrong. Hence Adorno stresses, to abstain from self-assertiveness […] seems to me to be the crucial thing to ask from individuals today".[101] This is why *optimism* about the possibility for emancipatory critique should always be paired with *modesty*.

This brings me to the second lesson to be learned from Adorno: *self-critique*. A major concern for Adorno —and as I have addressed, this is even more true for Laclau and Mouffe— is that the way we experience the world is always ideologically distorted. Even though in post-Marxism the concept of ideology is no longer used in a pejorative sense, the concern remains very much alive that if we want to exercise critique, we should be aware of the fact that our own positions might be just as much infected by the ideology of the social practices that we criticize. This means that if we want to *use critique to resist the bad* we should not only direct our critique towards the positions that we compete with, but we should also scrutinize our own positions and the way they may contribute to (re)producing the badness that we seek to overcome.

The third and perhaps most important lesson that post-Marxism can draw from Adorno involves Adorno's notion of *progress*. My suggestion thus far has been that by conceiving of agonism as the continual practice of resistance of the bad, we at least do what we can in our current predicament to establish the best possible social structures and institutions, while remaining highly self-critical at that. Yet the question remains: 'what is the point of all this effort, if we don't have the slightest prospect of gaining progress?'. Afterall, in Laclau and Mouffe's anti-essentialist conception of the social, there is no a-priori social goal that our emancipatory struggles move towards, nor is there any reason to believe that once a specific form of oppression has been overcome no new forms of oppression will arise. This is where we turn to Adorno for our third lesson, which concerns a critical rethinking of the notion of progress. In his chapter on progress, Adorno traces the notion of progress back, all the way to Augustine, to find that there is a very pervasive teleological element in our understanding of progress. Ever since Augustine, but also traced back to the works of Kant and Benjamin, Adorno recognizes that there is a strong notion that the idea of progress involves the idea of *movement towards redemption*.[102] In the Enlightenment too, Adorno argues, it is redemption in terms of freeing humanity from the mythical fear of nature that is seen as the "transcendent *telos* of all progress".[103] Adorno goes on by taking a rather nuanced position in this regard himself. We only have to recall the critiques presented in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to see why Adorno is at first highly critical of the possibility of this kind of progress. However, at the same time he asserts that we cannot dispense of the conviction that progress seems to be linked to the idea of redemption. Adorno here comes to reappropriate the idea of progress in a way that is peculiar to his emphasis on the negative moment in dialectics:

> "The explosive tendency of progress is not merely the Other to the movement of a progressing domination of nature, not just its abstract negation; rather it requires the unfolding of reason through the very domination of nature. […] The possibility of wrestling free is effectuated by the pressure of negativity. On the other hand reason, which wants to escape nature, first of all shapes nature into what it must fear. The concept of progress is dialectical in a strictly unmetaphorical sense, in that its organon, reason, is one; a nature-dominating level and a reconciling level do not exist separate and disjunct within reason, rather both share all its determinations."[104]

In this sense, it is conceivable that even though we might be incapable of directly initiating progress in the conventional sense, we can still conceive of progress in a *negativistic way*, that is, the initiation of *progress mediated by critique*. Here we can begin to see how our continual attempts to criticize and resist the bad can link up with the idea of progress. Progress is not our positive movement towards a

[101] Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 169.
[102] Adorno, *Critical Models*, 145–48.
[103] Ibid., 148.
[104] Ibid., 152.

determinate goal, but rather the consistent negation of badness as we progress, a movement that is determinate nonetheless. As such, progress only "wants to cut short the triumph of radical evil, not to triumph as such itself".[105] By opening up space for the continuous possibility for conflict and resistance post-Marxism may not overcome the bad as such, but it can at least foster the conditions wherein any manifestation of the bad will always meet its worthy opponent—critique. The reason for continuing with emancipatory critique must then ultimately be sought in this notion of progress, which would still be guided by its telos of redemption, but is only to be found in terms of the consistent negation of badness: the *prevention of catastrophe*.[106] By keeping power in flux, we might not eradicate the bad, but we can at least avoid the manifestation of its excesses.

[105] Ibid., 160.
[106] Ibid., 144.

Conclusion

Radical Democracy as Theory of Emancipation Revisited

In the first chapter I have drawn the outlines for a theory of emancipation from the theoretical framework of Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism. We have seen that this preliminary theory had several shortcomings, especially with regard to answering the question *why* we should continue to strive for emancipation. In this concluding chapter I will assess whether the concepts and ideas gained from my discussions of Nietzsche and Adorno allow me to further substantiate the preliminary theory of emancipation while remaining loyal to the theoretical commitments of post-Marxism. My attempt to formulate the outline of a theory of emancipation was structured around three questions: the question of definition, the question of direction, and the question of reflection. For my purpose here, I take the first two questions to be sufficiently dealt with in terms of laying down the basics for an anti-essentialist understanding of emancipation. More pressing, however, is the revisitation of the third question—that of reflection. In particular, the following issues need to be addressed.

In terms of post-Marxism's commitment to radical democracy as emancipatory logic, I argue that two changes in the preliminary theory of emancipation are needed. First of all, with regard to post-Marxism's bias towards democratic egalitarianism as democracy's emancipatory logic, I argue, inspired by Nietzsche's critique of democracy, that in order to embrace the full emancipatory potential of radical democracy post-Marxism should also take seriously the emancipatory potential that resides in the liberal democratic demand for *pluralism*. In order to do that, I suggest that post-Marxism should *radicalize* its conception of agonistic pluralism, drawing its lessons from Nietzsche's conception of the *agon*. That is, if radical democracy really wants to live up to its own commitment of providing a conception of democracy that is genuinely *radical* and *plural* it should refrain from any pre-political constrains on agonistic pluralism. Radical democracy can only foster these conditions for genuinely *radical* pluralism if its own commitment to democracy is itself also accounted for agonistically, meaning that the *value* of liberal democracy should also remain contestable by competing hegemonic struggles. It is only by embracing its full range of emancipatory possibilities and by recognizing its own precariousness as hegemonic project that the kind of emancipation proposed by the post-Marxist theory of emancipation and its commitment to radical democracy becomes truly *critical*.

The second issue concerns whether genuinely emancipatory critique is still even a possibility in the anti-essentialist framework adhered to by post-Marxism. This issue is dealt with in the third chapter. Drawing on the Habermassian objection to totalizing critique I problematized the idea of emancipatory critique in the post-Marxist framework by arguing that, if all objectivity is assimilated to power, critique has no criterion left to validate its own position. Indeed, critique would lose its meaning because there is no way to discriminate between different forms of power, and hence, any exercise of critique would ultimately amount to 'yet another assertion of power'. In the first section of chapter three I have responded to this objection by demonstrating two models of critique that are compatible with the post-Marxist assimilation of objectivity to power, finding their sources of normativity respectively in contextualism and negative immanent critique. However, to account for the possibility of *emancipatory* critique also includes that, besides showing that critique is still possible, one must also show that critique can still be *genuinely emancipatory*. This is what the second section of chapter three sought to do. I argue that the possibility of *emancipatory* critique in post-Marxism makes sense once we interpret the practice of exercising such critiques as constituting the political variant of Adorno's 'ethics of resistance'. By continually resisting forms of oppression that have been

critically scrutinized we at least do what we can in our current predicaments to create the best possible social structure for ourselves, under the awareness that we can neither fully eradicate the bad nor arrive at any final destination of the good. The main problem for considering whether these practices of resistance can be genuinely *emancipatory*, however, is their alleged incapacity to bring about any genuine *progress in terms of emancipation*. Following Adorno, I argue that we can best capture the concept of progress here by defining it negativistically. Applied to the post-Marxist theory of emancipation this entails that we can actually initiate progress through our practices of critique, as it contributes to keeping power relations in flux. Through our continual resistance of forms of oppression, we also resist the attempt of any power structure to ossify and assume its power as naturalized, thereby preventing any form of oppression from becoming excessive. Criticizing oppressive hegemonic structures in this way does not lead to a social reality that is less hegemonic, but it at least allows us to give expression to the fact that this hegemonic structure and the forms of oppression that accompany it are ultimately collectively self-imposed and hence contestable. Indeed, whereas our lessons from Nietzsche have made the post-Marxist account of emancipation truly *critical*, turning to Adorno has made it *self-critical*. To what extent our emancipatory practices of resistance actually amount to genuine emancipatory progress can only be known *a posteriori*, but in the meantime, emancipation has gained a determinate goal: the prevention of catastrophe, and in optimistic times, the prevention of relapse.

Complementing the post-Marxist theory of emancipation with the insights of Nietzsche and Adorno finally allows us to provide a response to the question why we should still engage in emancipatory critique: the continual and (self-)critical exercise of emancipatory critiques as enabled by the radical democratic imaginary can in fact initiate progress in terms of preventing forms of badness and oppression from naturalizing. The ultimate aspect of progress in these emancipatory practices lies not in finally reaching utopia, but in the prevention of catastrophe from happening here and now. How these emancipatory struggle will take shape remains thoroughly contingent as their conditions of emergence as well as their content are entirely of a hegemonic nature. Post-Marxism in this sense merely provides the *theory* for emancipation, its concrete shape is decided by how we come to articulate it in practice.

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