

*Three steps from the body.* [colloquial expression meaning, to keep one's distance] – Positivism disparages once more the distance of thought to a reality, which reality itself no longer tolerates. By not wanting the hushed-up thought to be anything more than something provisional, a mere abbreviation of what is factually grasped under it, its independence *vis-à-vis* reality disappears, as well as the energy to penetrate the latter. The thought which actually breaks into empirical life, can only happen at a distance from life. While thought relates to facts and moves by critiquing them, it moves no less through firmly held difference. It thereby expresses exactly what is, because it is never entirely just what it expresses. Essential to it is an element of exaggeration, of shooting beyond things, of dissociation from the weight of what is factual, by virtue of which it completes the determination of being, at once strictly and freely, instead of merely reproducing it. Every thought resembles therein play, with which Hegel no less than Nietzsche compared with the work of the Spirit [*Geistes*]. What is unbarbaric in philosophy rests on the tacit consciousness of that element of irresponsibility, of blessedness, which stems from the fleetingness of thought, which continually escapes, what it judges. Such excessiveness is suspect to the positivistic Spirit and handed over to folly. The difference from facts turns into mere incorrectness, the moment of play into a luxury, in a world where the intellectual functions must account for every minute of their time with a stopwatch. However as soon as thought denies its unsurmountable distance and wishes to prove its literal correctness with a thousand subtle arguments, it trips itself up. If it falls out of the medium of the virtual, of anticipation, which cannot be fulfilled by any single actuality, in short, if it seeks to become a simple statement rather than a meaning, then everything which it states becomes in fact false. Its apologetics, inspired by insecurity and a bad conscience, can be rebutted at every step by recourse to that non-identity, which it does not wish to acknowledge, and which nevertheless alone makes it thought. If it wanted to make excuses for distance as if it was a privilege, it would do no better, but would proclaim two sorts of truths, that of facts and that of concepts. That would dispel the truth and denounce thinking. Distance is no security-zone but a field of tension. It manifests itself not so much in slackening the truth-claim of concepts, as in the tenderness and fragility of thinking. What is

called for in regards to positivism is neither cantankerousness nor putting on airs, but rather the cognitive-critical proof of the impossibility of a coincidence between the concept and what fulfills it. The hunt for the account-balancing [*Ineinander-Aufgehen*] of what cannot be reduced to the same denominator is not the perennially striving toil, which beckons to salvation, but naive and inexperienced. What positivism reproaches thinking for, thought has known and forgotten a thousand times over, and only in such knowing and forgetting does it become thinking. That distance of thought from reality is itself nothing other than the precipitate of history in concepts. Operating with the latter without distance would be, amidst all its resignation, or perhaps precisely because of such, the affair of children. For thought must aim beyond its object, precisely because it does not entirely arrive at such, and by assuming that it does arrive, positivism is uncritical, imagining that it carries there out of mere conscientiousness. The transcending thought takes its own inadequacy into account more thoroughly than one steered by the scientific control-apparatus. It extrapolates, however hopelessly, in order to master what is unavoidably too little, by virtue of the overtaxed exertion of what is too much. The illegitimate absolutism which philosophy is reproached for, the allegedly conclusive stamp, originates precisely in the abyss of relativity. The exaggerations of speculative metaphysics are scars of reflecting understanding, and solely what is not yet proven unveils proof as tautology. By contrast the immediate caveat of relativity, what confines itself, what remains in the same delimited conceptual realm, deprives itself through such caution of precisely the limit, which to think is, in Hegel's magnificent insight, the same as to cross. The relativists would accordingly be the true – the bad – absolutists and moreover the bourgeoisie, who would like to insure their knowledge [*Erkenntnis*: cognition] like property, only to lose it all the more thoroughly. Solely the claim of the unconditional, the spring over the shadow, does justice to what is relative. By taking untruth on itself, it leads to the border of truth in the concrete consciousness of the conditionality of human knowledge [*Erkenntnis*: cognition].

T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*