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Chapter 1 : Radical Thinkers | Awards | LibraryThing

The Function of Criticism is nothing less than a history and critique of the "critical institution" itself. Eagleton's judgements on individual critics are sharp and illuminating, which his general argument raises crucial questions about the relations between language, literature and politics.

George Berkeley for his project to eliminate all unclear concepts from philosophy Peirce 8: Relevant discussion may be found on the talk page. Please do not remove this message until conditions to do so are met. February Learn how and when to remove this template message A few of the various but often interrelated positions characteristic of philosophers working from a pragmatist approach include: Coherentists hold that justification is solely a function of some relationship between beliefs, none of which are privileged beliefs in the way maintained by foundationalist theories of justification. Not to be confused with pragmatics , a sub-field of linguistics with no relation to philosophical pragmatism. Additionally, forms of empiricism , fallibilism , verificationism , and a Quinean naturalist metaphilosophy are all commonly elements of pragmatist philosophies. Many pragmatists are epistemological relativists and see this to be an important facet of their pragmatism, but this is controversial and other pragmatists argue such relativism to be seriously misguided e. Hilary Putnam , Susan Haack. Anti-reification of concepts and theories[edit] Dewey, in *The Quest For Certainty*, criticized what he called "the philosophical fallacy": This causes metaphysical and conceptual confusion. Various examples are the " ultimate Being " of Hegelian philosophers, the belief in a " realm of value ", the idea that logic, because it is an abstraction from concrete thought, has nothing to do with the act of concrete thinking, and so on. Hildebrand sums up the problem: They argued that idealist and realist philosophy had a tendency to present human knowledge as something beyond what science could grasp. They held that these philosophies then resorted either to a phenomenology inspired by Kant or to correspondence theories of knowledge and truth. Pragmatism instead tries to explain the relation between knower and known. In , [16] C. Peirce argued that there is no power of intuition in the sense of a cognition unconditioned by inference, and no power of introspection, intuitive or otherwise, and that awareness of an internal world is by hypothetical inference from external facts. Introspection and intuition were staple philosophical tools at least since Descartes. He argued that there is no absolutely first cognition in a cognitive process; such a process has its beginning but can always be analyzed into finer cognitive stages. That which we call introspection does not give privileged access to knowledge about the mindâ€”the self is a concept that is derived from our interaction with the external world and not the other way around De Waal , pp. At the same time he held persistently that pragmatism and epistemology in general could not be derived from principles of psychology understood as a special science: Richard Rorty expanded on these and other arguments in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* in which he criticized attempts by many philosophers of science to carve out a space for epistemology that is entirely unrelated toâ€”and sometimes thought of as superior toâ€”the empirical sciences. Quine, instrumental in bringing naturalized epistemology back into favor with his essay *Epistemology Naturalized* Quine , also criticized "traditional" epistemology and its "Cartesian dream" of absolute certainty. The dream, he argued, was impossible in practice as well as misguided in theory, because it separates epistemology from scientific inquiry. Hilary Putnam asserts that the combination of antiskepticism and fallibilism is a central feature of pragmatism. Reconciliation of anti-skepticism and fallibilism[edit] Hilary Putnam has suggested that the reconciliation of anti-skepticism [19] and fallibilism is the central goal of American pragmatism. Genuine doubt irritates and inhibits, in the sense that belief is that upon which one is prepared to act. Inquiry is then the rationally self-controlled process of attempting to return to a settled state of belief about the matter. Note that anti-skepticism is a reaction to modern academic skepticism in the wake of Descartes. The pragmatist insistence that all knowledge is tentative is quite congenial to the older skeptical tradition. Pragmatist theory of truth and epistemology[edit] Main article: Pragmatic theory of truth Pragmatism was not the first to apply evolution to theories of knowledge: Here knowledge and action are portrayed as two separate spheres with an

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absolute or transcendental truth above and beyond any sort of inquiry organisms used to cope with life. Pragmatism challenges this idealism by providing an "ecological" account of knowledge: Real and true are functional labels in inquiry and cannot be understood outside of this context. It is not realist in a traditionally robust sense of realism what Hilary Putnam would later call metaphysical realism, but it is realist in how it acknowledges an external world which must be dealt with. It is high time to urge the use of a little imagination in philosophy. The unwillingness of some of our critics to read any but the silliest of possible meanings into our statements is as discreditable to their imaginations as anything I know in recent philosophic history. Schiller says the truth is that which "works. Dewey says truth is what gives "satisfaction"! He is treated as one who believes in calling everything true which, if it were true, would be pleasant. See Dewey for a "FAQ. Is a belief valid when it represents reality? Copying is one and only one genuine mode of knowing, James, p. Are beliefs dispositions which qualify as true or false depending on how helpful they prove in inquiry and in action? Is it only in the struggle of intelligent organisms with the surrounding environment that beliefs acquire meaning? Does a belief only become true when it succeeds in this struggle? In Pragmatism nothing practical or useful is held to be necessarily true, nor is anything which helps to survive merely in the short term. In other fields of philosophy[edit] While pragmatism started out simply as a criterion of meaning, it quickly expanded to become a full-fledged epistemology with wide-ranging implications for the entire philosophical field. Pragmatists who work in these fields share a common inspiration, but their work is diverse and there are no received views. Philosophy of science[edit] In the philosophy of science, instrumentalism is the view that concepts and theories are merely useful instruments and progress in science cannot be couched in terms of concepts and theories somehow mirroring reality. Instrumentalist philosophers often define scientific progress as nothing more than an improvement in explaining and predicting phenomena. Instrumentalism does not state that truth does not matter, but rather provides a specific answer to the question of what truth and falsity mean and how they function in science. Outline of a Theory of Knowledge was that science does not merely provide a copy of reality but must work with conceptual systems and that those are chosen for pragmatic reasons, that is, because they aid inquiry. Lewis is sometimes called a proponent of conceptual pragmatism because of this. Morris and Rudolf Carnap. The influence of pragmatism on these writers is mostly limited to the incorporation of the pragmatic maxim into their epistemology. Pragmatists with a broader conception of the movement do not often refer to them. The other is reductionism, the theory that each meaningful statement gets its meaning from some logical construction of terms which refers exclusively to immediate experience. Logic[edit] Later in his life Schiller became famous for his attacks on logic in his textbook, Formal Logic. Schiller sought to undermine the very possibility of formal logic, by showing that words only had meaning when used in context. In this sequel, Logic for Use, Schiller attempted to construct a new logic to replace the formal logic that he had criticized in Formal Logic. What he offers is something philosophers would recognize today as a logic covering the context of discovery and the hypothetico-deductive method. Schiller dismissed the possibility of formal logic, most pragmatists are critical rather of its pretension to ultimate validity and see logic as one logical tool among others" or perhaps, considering the multitude of formal logics, one set of tools among others. This is the view of C. Peirce developed multiple methods for doing formal logic. Metaphysics[edit] James and Dewey were empirical thinkers in the most straightforward fashion: They were dissatisfied with ordinary empiricism because in the tradition dating from Hume, empiricists had a tendency to think of experience as nothing more than individual sensations. To the pragmatists, this went against the spirit of empiricism: Pragmatism is sometimes called American Pragmatism because so many of its proponents were and are Americans. William James gives an interesting example of this philosophical shortcoming: The two were supposed, he said, to have so little to do with each other, that you could not possibly occupy your mind with them at the same time. The world of concrete personal experiences to which the street belongs is multitudinous beyond imagination, tangled, muddy, painful and perplexed. The world to which your philosophy-professor introduces you is simple, clean and noble. The contradictions of real life are absent from it. In it, Schiller argues for a middle ground between materialism and absolute metaphysics. These opposites

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are comparable to what William James called tough-minded empiricism and tender-minded rationalism. Schiller contends on the one hand that mechanistic naturalism cannot make sense of the "higher" aspects of our world. These include freewill, consciousness, purpose, universals and some would add God. On the other hand, abstract metaphysics cannot make sense of the "lower" aspects of our world e. While Schiller is vague about the exact sort of middle ground he is trying to establish, he suggests that metaphysics is a tool that can aid inquiry, but that it is valuable only insofar as it does help in explanation. In the second half of the twentieth century, Stephen Toulmin argued that the need to distinguish between reality and appearance only arises within an explanatory scheme and therefore that there is no point in asking what "ultimate reality" consists of. More recently, a similar idea has been suggested by the postanalytic philosopher Daniel Dennett , who argues that anyone who wants to understand the world has to acknowledge both the "syntactical" aspects of reality i. These questions feature prominently in current debates about the relationship between religion and science , where it is often assumedâ€”most pragmatists would disagreeâ€”that science degrades everything that is meaningful into "merely" physical phenomena. Philosophy of mind[edit] Both John Dewey in *Experience and Nature* and half a century later Richard Rorty in his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* argued that much of the debate about the relation of the mind to the body results from conceptual confusions. They argue instead that there is no need to posit the mind or mindstuff as an ontological category. Pragmatists disagree over whether philosophers ought to adopt a quietist or a naturalist stance toward the mind-body problem. Pragmatic ethics Pragmatism sees no fundamental difference between practical and theoretical reason, nor any ontological difference between facts and values. Both facts and values have cognitive content: Pragmatist ethics is broadly humanist because it sees no ultimate test of morality beyond what matters for us as humans. Good values are those for which we have good reasons, viz. The pragmatist formulation pre-dates those of other philosophers who have stressed important similarities between values and facts such as Jerome Schneewind and John Searle. William James tried to show the meaningfulness of some kinds of spirituality but, like other pragmatists, did not see religion as the basis of meaning or morality. On its own terms it argues that ethics always involves a certain degree of trust or faith and that we cannot always wait for adequate proof when making moral decisions. Moral questions immediately present themselves as questions whose solution cannot wait for sensible proof. A moral question is a question not of what sensibly exists, but of what is good, or would be good if it did exist. Wherever a desired result is achieved by the co-operation of many independent persons, its existence as a fact is a pure consequence of the precursive faith in one another of those immediately concerned. A government, an army, a commercial system, a ship, a college, an athletic team, all exist on this condition, without which not only is nothing achieved, but nothing is even attempted.

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Buy The Function of Criticism (Radical Thinkers) by Terry Eagleton (ISBN:) from Amazon's Book Store. Everyday low prices and free delivery on eligible orders.

Click here for the full series. This is most simply true because of the number, depth, and influence of her abundant authored and co-authored and edited and co-edited books, her ever more numerous articles, essays, interviews, dialogues and monologues, and especially her proliferating collaborations; she always seems to be writing yet another book with yet another interesting someone else. Lots of people think with and because of Lauren Berlant. The reason that Lauren Berlant occupies this moment in critical theory so capaciously is that what she really always thinks about is genre. Later, in modernity the novel is usually considered both the origin and result of this shift, genres became modes of recognition – complex forms instantiated in popular discourse, relying on what we could or would recognize collectively, in common – and so subject to historical change and cultural negotiation. No one would accuse Lauren Berlant of being a purely literary critic. If modern literary criticism invented the concept of genre in order to invent itself and I think it did, then Berlant thinks about genre in order to think about the function of criticism at the present time. After all, what forms of desire are not fictive? How could we get out of bed in the morning without taking our fictions with us? Berlant wants that recognition to mean that genres can become the vehicles of social change, or at least of degrees of adjustment. The trick that Berlant recommends is to move through life as if it were the utopian performance of genre. The personal is the generic, but the generic is also personal. The book maps the intimate twists and turns by means of which genre as a mode of cultural creation and interpretation becomes indistinguishable from genre as a shaping force in lived experience. But it turns out that even though *The Female Complaint* is mostly about those especially feminine genres, women have a knack for genre theory as well – for what Arnold would have called criticism – because genre is the stuff of which women, like criticism, are made. The preface to *The Female Complaint* is a bravura performance of that knack. Here are its first two paragraphs: Previous versions of this preface narrated how emotionally thorny it was to write this book. I wrote of myself and of women in my particular family – from Lena and Sadie to Mara and Cindy – who entered femaleness at different historical moments and yet whose styles of being in femininity have contained uncanny similarities. As you can imagine, such resonances raised intensities of attachment, love, protectiveness, gratitude, disappointment, despair, anger, and resentment that created obstacles to lithesome storytelling. This nonintuitive phrase is a major presupposition of *The Female Complaint*. The personal is the general. The personal is generic. These sites of recognition are what make up the genders we seem to be and have: The thing is, genre is a heartbreaker. As those genres come to seem more fictitious and less attainable, the culture of crisis and precarity of most contemporary lives might have alternative possibilities. If the mortgage for the house with the picket fence is unattainable, maybe that genre will give way to more sustainable housing; if weddings are too expensive, maybe there will be fewer disappointed and mistreated brides; queer and trans modes of adaptation in these as in other respects become models for our common survival. Because women are made of such investments, they have a lot of practice in adjustments of scale, and in this way as well women are calibrated to the critical history of the present. We have serious skills in managing the treachery of genre. Some of us more than others. What Berlant writes about Parker in this chapter goes double for Berlant herself: This is to say that for Parker genres were always already normatively organizing, while Berlant and I hope in different ways that this might not always or necessarily be so, at least not if we are good enough critics to imagine an alternative. But what about when the genre at stake is not narrative; what about when it is a poem that does not tell an unfolding story but that instead formalizes and enacts the intractable work of genre? So take my vows and scatter them to sea; Who swears the sweetest is no more than human. And say no kinder words than these of me: And thus they are, whose silly female dust Needs little enough to clutter it and bind it, Who meet a slanted gaze, and ever must Go build themselves a

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soul to dwell behind it. This scar but points the whiteness of my breast; This frenzy, like its betters, spins an end, And now I am my own. And that is best. Therefore, I am immeasurably grateful To you, for proving shallow, false, and hateful. It is as though Parker wants to show that she has mastered poetic convention rather than being mastered by it emotionally. But the process of the poetry is to master the compliant reader until that compliance hits the female complaint. The performance of the as if of genre fantasy is only imaginable for Berlant as a story. Averse to conventionality, but relieved of singularity through it too, sometimes it is all a girl can do to show you a once beautiful shape, a failed conventional form, or an instance of tinny courage that can gesture toward the broken utopian while making you feel the optimism of having an infinite number of second chances at it. The sonnet is not a story; it is a sonnet, and a double-dog-dare-you sonnet at that, announcing its Italianate break between the octave and the sestet and then adding an Elizabethan couplet as a second volta for extra fun. Is it our misogyny that has driven her away, or the misogyny of the guy we assume it was a guy who abandoned her in the first place? Berlant is surely right that the second volta, the closing couplet, performs a masochistic refusal of the question, but that masochism also depends on an inherited genre: Vincent Millay, among many others. In its heyday, the Poetess poem created and was the property of an intimate public sphere very much like the mass publics for melodramas and happy endings Berlant describes so vividly in *The Female Complaint*. The Poetess was the figure that made the personal generic in the first place. But I think that Parker knew that the Poetess sonnet already did what Berlant thinks Parker did, and did it better a century earlier. From that slightly blurry perspective, Parker would be reading the Poetess in the way that Berlant would be reading Parker and, not incidentally, in the way I have been reading Berlant. We are all dizzy dames trying to think our ways out of the genres of which we are made. By thinking with Berlant in the language of the history of poetics in which I feel more at home than in her language of narrative form, I have hoped to demonstrate how thinking with Berlant does not mean agreeing with her. She is much too generous to want your agreement, and her generosity is inspiring. What Lauren Berlant wants is for you to join her in trying to figure out what in the world we can do with and about the genres in which we choose or in which we are forced to live. Melancholia for lost promises, lost genres, impossible worlds may be inevitable, but thinking beyond the melancholic position can be an exhilarating if unstable enterprise. Dorothy Parker between drinks wanted to do that, too, and so do I, though Berlant somehow manages more conviction despite herself than most of the rest of us do on a normal day that such thinking will make a difference, or maybe that the thinking is just worth doing because it is what critics and women do best.

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Not as much as some people think, says Phil Badger. In simple terms, reason got promoted to a higher status than it had hitherto enjoyed, and for some it came to replace faith as the basis of understanding both the physical and moral worlds. Many figures could be taken to embody the core themes of Enlightenment thought, but one, Immanuel Kant did so to such an extent that his ideas have become synonymous with it. This idea has been, and continues to be, one of the most inspiring and also controversial in the history of philosophy. At its foundation is the notion that the world is comprehensible to the human mind. The historical roots of this new individualism are to be found in the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century, which among other things involved the demand that conscience and inner light, rather than the Roman Catholic Church, might guide the life of a person. Demands for tolerance were quite limited, and many new religious groups were themselves intolerant in the extreme, but it was these debates, coupled with the work of Copernicus, Galileo and others, that let the Enlightenment genie out of the bottle. Almost immediately, intellectual battle lines began to be drawn up between those who championed the new ideas, and those who saw them as ill-conceived and dangerous. In so doing, Burke laid one of the foundation-stones of modern political conservatism. Reason alone, so his argument goes, is an unreliable basis for moral action and has a tendency to be easily perverted. In other words, anything may be rationalised, and plausible reasoning might lead us down a slippery slope which ends at the guillotine. The subsequent two and a quarter centuries have witnessed variations upon the same arguments, proposed from a bewilderingly diverse range of perspectives. It is strange indeed to think of an injunction to think for ourselves as the source of so much trouble, and tempting to mount a defence of it which is polemical and facetious. However, this is a temptation worth resisting, because, it turns out, there is much clarity to be gained from treating the critics of the Enlightenment with due respect. In fact, despite their differences, the critics of Enlightenment philosophy share a common distrust of its core idea of the individual. Rather, what constitutes good reason is the product of particular cultural and historical circumstances. These philosophers have little in common, but all share a view of knowledge, agency and rationality which takes the Enlightenment view as fundamentally mistaken. In simple indeed, over-simple terms, the conservatives and communitarians tend to see the Enlightenment as having been too successful, at least as a cultural force, while for the neo-Marxists and post-modernists, the Enlightenment is the story of unfulfilled potential. On the one hand, the Enlightenment delivered the goods in terms of our technical understanding of the world and our capacity to manipulate it. However, it failed spectacularly to provide us with the moral understanding to avoid replicating the barbarity of less technological ages on ever-more-grotesque scales. The id is no child of reason, and reason was just not up to the philosophical job of doing anything else than rationalising and excusing its petulance. For Burke, the hubris of reason had led to the guillotine; but for Adorno, the Enlightenment journey led to Auschwitz and its gas chambers. For Nietzsche, and later, his postmodernist disciples, the failure of the Enlightenment was a failure of philosophical courage. Once it had undermined the pretensions of earlier dogmatic beliefs, the field should have been open for a liberation of thought and morality from the notion of certainty itself. However, philosophers such as Kant failed to go the extra mile, instead constructing systems which would replace old repressive certainties with new ones, this time sanctified by reason rather than faith or the authority of the ancients. The apparent inability of reason to provide solid foundations for morality, an inability postmodernists tend to see as liberating, has been depressing for conservatives and communitarians alike. The idea of the individual using his or her own reason to seek out moral truth, perhaps aided by like-minded people, is for such thinkers dangerously misguided. As the most prominent liberal philosopher of the twentieth century, Rawls has been a perennial target of both conservative and communitarian criticism. Put bluntly, he thought that if denied knowledge of their gender, ethnicity, sexuality or other aspects of identity,

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nobody would wish the establishment of a state in which sexism, racism or other discrimination might be tolerated, because they might become its victim. From this point of view, these particulars constitute the individual and are not merely contingent, as Rawls assumed. If so, moral reasoning can only validly take place against the background of particular cultural practices and traditions. Morality is reduced to a consumer choice, in which each individual finds their own path in more or less splendid isolation. This charge is explicitly levelled by MacIntyre in his book *After Virtue*, where he calls for a return to a morality in which virtue, defined by shared cultural norms, is the guiding ideal of human life. However, not content with effectively accusing liberalism of nihilistic individualism, both writers also claim that it is guilty of a pernicious cultural imperialism. After all, the aim of Rawls, and, before him, Kant, was to come up with universally valid conclusions about justice which would receive the assent of all rational people, regardless of their culture. Thus only one kind of society could be seen as just, and others were automatically to be judged as nearer or further from this ideal. The consequence of this thinking was to empower Western imperialism to continue its repressive and destructive ways, underpinned by an apparently liberal ideology of individual rights. Berlin argued in *Two Concepts of Liberty* that there were, in effect, two kinds of liberalism. One form, which was not really worthy of the name, aspired to establish a shared moral truth on the grounds of rational consensus between autonomous individuals. Yet this is impossible, for reasons we have already rehearsed. What is rational is not a universal resource, but is a culturally-defined one. By contrast, the proper basis for liberalism was to be found in the recognition that there is only a messy kaleidoscope of disparate and incongruent ways of being, which would forever resist the urge to bring about consensus. Thus great ideals of progress and perfectibility in human institutions have to be given up in the face of real human lives and the impossibility of establishing the superior rationality of any one set of incommensurable values. The Enlightenment and its ideological child, liberalism, stand accused of both a corrosive moral scepticism and a tendency to absolutism. We have seen how these charges have curiously similar origins. The treatment for this pathology is to become modest again: We need to look to our own cultural resources to bind ourselves to one another, as we did in the past. This is at best an illusion, and at worst a recipe for utter horror. The illusion comes from the fact that to see any past moment as one of unanimity and social peace is to have no knowledge of history. Gray makes this point himself in his critique of communitarian philosophy. By their natures, societies are characterised by sectional interests and conflicts. As both Marxists and postmodernists realise, power gives certain groups the ability to define reality and life for everyone else. The idea of an idyllic kind of shared way of life is no more than a balm, poorly covering repeated eruptions of conflict and repression. Thus we can see that the charge of relativism, long levelled at liberals, is actually true of their accusers. The difference is about where relativism starts and ends. For communitarians and conservatives, relativism is only dubious when individuals make individual moral decisions. Tolerate the Individual The issue of the proper relationship between the group and the individual is the central question of political philosophy. Liberals of every stripe are apt to favour the individual. Individuals are the kinds of things that are capable of suffering, and this fact seems pretty important to some of us. Churches, community organisations and so on are all very well, but their help is often conditional on beneficiaries accepting particular values or passing certain tests. Sometimes, as the USA has found in respect of the issue of race, the state has to actively protect the individual from the community. They charge that a liberal ideal of perfection drives a kind of intolerance of difference. Their mistake is in thinking that the liberal ideal is applicable to individuals rather than legal frameworks or constitutions. We ought to be intolerant of intolerant regimes and cultures, while promoting the rights of individuals to make varied and contradictory choices for themselves. Value pluralism only really works at the level of the individual, because accepting intolerant values at the level of the group means accepting that some of the individuals in the group are going to be discriminated against. One wonders for example how Gray might respond to the execution of homosexuals in Iran. Enlightenment liberals have no difficulty in holding a regime to an ideal standard of tolerance, but for Gray and communitarians such as MacIntyre, there are no such standards to apply. The central problem remains that of finding a perspective from which to make

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judgements about social, political and cultural institutions that is more than a vantage point from within them. Three possible ways forward suggest themselves. We have already largely ruled this out. Another option involves the Aristotelian notion that human life has an ultimate purpose or telos. Institutions and practices which restrict the ability of the individual to function in or move towards this telos could be deemed illegitimate. Aristotle had a pretty limited idea of what the ideal human life should be like, and adopting such notions as our yardstick is likely to result in some pretty authoritarian conclusions. The third option, proposed by the great English liberal John Stuart Mill, is a kind of revised Aristotelian position, in which individuals are still supposed to have a telos, but one specific to them rather than one general to human beings. Thus, for Mill there was no one ideal of human development, only ways of being particular to each of us. However "and here is the space for critical perspective" political and cultural institutions can be judged on the extent that they are cognisant of this pluralism. Perhaps so; but certainly none favours tolerance to the extent that liberalism does. For this reason, we ought to value liberalism as approaching the ideal more closely than any other. Liberalism is not necessarily, and, for me, should not be, about promoting a minimal state, so much as attempting to remove those barriers to the full flourishing of the individual which cripple so many lives in our grossly unequal societies. For now, the central point is that the meaning of our lives, however informed by social practice, custom, and so on, sometimes transcends such contexts. For liberals, what we are and what we choose to be are things which states, communities and institutions have no business regulating, save to the extent that our choices and natures impinge on others. However, it is a principle we must return to and reaffirm any time the lives of individuals are afflicted by the overwhelming power of the group. Not as much as some might think!

Chapter 5 : Radical Thinkers Series by Theodor W. Adorno

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