

Translator's Preface

DOES THEODOR ADORNO STILL NEED to be introduced? Arguably, he always will, not because he is an obscure figure, but for almost the opposite reason: he may be the last great intellectual whose aim was to synthesize the essential insights of Western philosophy in the interest of a critical social and political perspective. His predecessors in this modern German tradition—Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Walter Benjamin—give an idea of what to expect in Adorno's work. His goal was to revisit their ethical and sociological arguments in light of two enormous twentieth-century experiences: the rise of fascism, culminating in the Holocaust, and the standardizing of "popular" culture as a commodity indispensable to contemporary capitalism. Adorno's early training in musicology gave him unique, often controversial insights into the latter phenomenon.

So wide-ranging were the critical tasks he set himself that Adorno's prose could become necessarily complex. Gerhard Schweppenhäuser has done a magisterial job of elucidating the core elements of

Adorno's thinking. My decision as translator has been to provide my own versions of the direct citations from Adorno. I sought thereby to generate a linguistic continuum that does justice to both Schwepenhäuser and Adorno himself. With the help of my multitalented assistant, Dell Williams, I have provided, at the end, a list of the works cited, as well as an updated list of scholarly books on Adorno in English.

JAMES ROLLESTON
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