

## Introduction: Adorno and Ethics

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Interest in the writings of Theodor W. Adorno has increased over the past decade. To some extent this can be attributed to the fact that Adorno's writings are now accessible to a wider audience, since more of his works have appeared in English translation over the past ten years.<sup>1</sup> New translations of texts that were previously available in English but widely deemed inadequate have also

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1. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Beethoven: The Philosophy of Music*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity, 1998); Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz, trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Theodor W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. Richard D. Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, ed. Christoph Gödde, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Adorno, *Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason,"* ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concept and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schröder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); and Adorno, *Sound Figures*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

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been published.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, new editions have appeared that gather together a range of Adorno's writings.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrent with the publication of Adorno's texts in English, developments in literary theory changed the face of Adorno scholarship. For example, as cultural studies gained in prominence, scholarship focused new and less single-mindedly denunciatory attention on Adorno's writings on popular culture, astrology, and mass media.<sup>4</sup> Feminist analyses of Adorno's writings appeared.<sup>5</sup> Other studies brought together the writings of Martin Heidegger and Adorno.<sup>6</sup> As Jacques Derrida's popularity increased, so too did the number of studies exploring the imbrication of his and Adorno's works.<sup>7</sup> In addition to these various approaches, over the past decade collections of essays have appeared that update Adorno scholarship.<sup>8</sup> The Adorno renaissance

2. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

3. See *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); and Theodor W. Adorno, *Can One Live after Auschwitz? A Philosophical Reader*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

4. See Miriam Hansen, "Mass Culture as 'Hieroglyphic Writing': Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer," *New German Critique*, no. 56 (1992): 43–75; and Deborah Cook, *The Culture Industry Revisited: Theodor W. Adorno on Mass Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996).

5. See Andrew Hewitt, "A Feminist Dialectic of the Enlightenment: Horkheimer and Adorno Revisited," *New German Critique*, no. 56 (1992): 143–70; Sabine Wilke and Heidi Schlipphacke, "The Construction of a Gendered Subject: A Feminist Reading of Adorno's Aesthetic Theory," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity: Essays in Adorno's "Aesthetic Theory,"* ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 287–308; and Maggie O'Neill, ed., *Adorno, Culture, and Feminism* (London: Sage, 1999).

6. See Fred R. Dallmayr, "Adorno and Heidegger," *Diacritics* 19, nos. 3–4 (1989): 82–100; Hauke Brunkhorst, "Adorno, Heidegger, and Postmodernity," in *Universalism versus Communitarianism: Contemporary Debates in Ethics*, ed. David Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), 183–96; Alexander García Düttmann, *The Memory of Thought: An Essay on Heidegger and Adorno*, trans. Nicholas Walker (London: Continuum, 2002); and Samir Gandesha, "The 'Aesthetic Dignity of Words': Adorno's Philosophy of Language," in this issue.

7. See Sabine Wilke, *Zur Dialektik von Exposition und Darstellung: Ansätze zu einer Kritik der Arbeiten Martin Heideggers, Theodor W. Adornos und Jacques Derridas* (New York: Lang, 1988); and Christoph Menke, *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. Neil Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

8. Huhn and Zuidervaart, *Semblance of Subjectivity*; Max Pensky, ed., *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); Dirk Auer, Lars Rensmann, and Jutta Schulze-Wessel, eds., *Adorno und Arendt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); Tom Huhn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

reached a high point in 2003 with conferences, biographies, and other publications commemorating the centenary of his birth.<sup>9</sup>

A thorough engagement with the ethical merits of Adorno's thinking, however, has been strikingly absent. Some forays had been made into this area of inquiry, for example, by Derrida and Judith Butler when they gave the Adorno lectures in 2001 and 2002, respectively, as well as in studies by Simon Jarvis and J. M. Bernstein.<sup>10</sup> In a time marked as much by renewed ethical concerns as by a resurgence of interest in Adorno's work, it seemed worthwhile to pick up the thread woven by these lectures and writings. Thus the conference "Adorno and Ethics" was held at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2003, and out of the papers delivered there grew the present issue.

While Adorno has often been cast as the most philosophical and least political of the Frankfurt School theorists,<sup>11</sup> the contributors to this issue indicate that these two categories are not mutually exclusive. Adorno's aesthetic theory, especially his defense of "high modernism," has been criticized by many scholars as inimical to genuine, concrete, and substantive political, social, and ethical engagement. This collection brings together the work of scholars from such diverse fields as sociology, history, philosophy, and literature who depart from this line of argumentation and reveal instead the political and ethical dimensions of Adorno's writings.

9. Conferences took place in Frankfurt am Main, of course, as well as in Bela Horizonte, Brazil; Berkeley, California; Bogotá; Copenhagen; Madison, Wisconsin; Tel Aviv; Toronto; and Zürich, among many other places, and the following biographies appeared: Detlev Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: Ein letztes Genie* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003); Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2003). Another biography has appeared since: Lorenz Jäger, *Adorno: Eine politische Biographie* (Munich: dtv, 2005). The following volumes grew out of the conferences in Frankfurt and Tel Aviv: Axel Honneth, ed., *Dialektik der Freiheit: Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005); Moshe Zuckermann, ed., *Theodor W. Adorno: Philosoph des beschädigten Lebens* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004).

10. Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), esp. 111–14, 185–88; J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

11. An exception is the new book by Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

