

**Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, Max Pensky  
(eds.), *A Companion to Adorno*, Hoboken, NJ:  
Wiley Blackwell, 2020, 680 pp., Hardcover  
ISBN: 978-1-119-14691-9, 162.40 €**

*Önder Kulak (Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski")*

*A Companion to Adorno* provides a fresh look at Adorno and various interpretations of his work. The editors, Peter Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky have gathered contributions from notable authors known for their scholarship on Adorno. This extensive work contains forty articles classified under the headings "Intellectual Foundations," "Cultural Analysis," "History and Domination," "Social Theory and Empirical Inquiry," "Aesthetics," "Negative Dialectics," and "Ethics and Politics," all addressing main issues in the debates around Adorno.

The first part, "Intellectual Foundations," begins with a biographical article by Peter Gordon chronicling the life of the philosopher, along with comments on their connections to his philosophy. The following article by Roger Foster, consisting in an examination of Adorno's early period, may be read as a continuation of Gordon's contribution. Foster addresses the inaugural lecture at the University of Frankfurt that Adorno delivered in May 1931 and analyses the philosopher's early thought. Foster considers Adorno's ties to previous philosophers, but also to the social history of Germany. He explains that, although Adorno was influenced by figures such as Weber and Lukács, his thought was also largely a response to bourgeois idealism. Besides these contributions, the first part also contains interesting articles from Marcia Morgan and Sherry Lee, the former of which treats of Adorno's readings of and commentaries on Kierkegaard, whereas the latter discusses the influence of the Second Viennese School on Adorno's philosophy of music. The article by Alexander Stern is, in my opinion, the most outstanding contribution of the first part. Stern provides an examination of the contradictory relationship between Benjamin and Adorno, claiming, in contrast to many works on the issue, that Benjamin's philosophy of language is central to the break between the two philosophers. Benjamin's

main idea, he says, is that human language is not something isolated and independent, but rather something located “in a global ontology of expressive media” (p. 52). Stern explains how Adorno departed from this idea.

The first article of the second part—“Cultural Analysis”—belongs to Fred Rush, who focuses on music, cinema, and television to explain the main lines of Adorno’s view of the culture industry. Although the article contains passages about radio, a fuller treatment of this medium could have been included. Andrew Bowie’s article treats the perennially popular issue: Adorno’s critique of jazz. Bowie presents detailed empirical information in his article and uses it to argue that Adorno’s research on jazz was empirically limited. Moreover, Bowie criticizes Adorno from different angles and convincingly argues that Adorno could not realize the potential of jazz in terms of content while insisting on certain particular forms in music. He thus arrives at the conclusion, *contra* Adorno, that there are examples of both the culture industry and critical art in jazz, as in every form of music, and provides many examples of the latter. The second part also includes contributions from Fabian Freyenhagen, Shannon Mariotti, and Charles Clavey, which draw the attention of the reader to politics.

The third part of the volume, “History and Domination,” contains six articles, the first of which, by Martin Jay, focuses on the relationship between Adorno and Blumenberg. Jay shows that Adorno’s concept of “nonconceptuality” may be read together with Blumenberg’s arguments, except in some distinct points. The article thus attempts to compare the philosophers with reference to that concept and the relevant arguments. Iain MacDonald’s contribution is an examination of Adorno’s philosophy of history, considering his critical readings of Kant, Hegel, and Marx. MacDonald’s starting point is Adorno’s opposition to Marx, which turns on the surpassing of class society through the progression from capitalist society to the transitional stage(s). MacDonald demonstrates that Adorno offers another path, while maintaining the essential parts of Marx’s critique of capitalism. He explains this attempt as depending mostly on the critique of Hegel: Adorno re-evaluates the Hegelian dialectic and justifies his own alternative reading of history with reference to the ontology that arises from this critical process. The philosopher also draws inspiration from Kant’s idea of peace and serenity and includes that consideration in his alternative. Adorno thus indicates

a possible exit in the progression of history towards a better future. The contributions of Michael Thompson and Martin Shuster are not limited to the subject of the third part; the issues explored therein are relevant to all the parts of the companion. Thompson explains the influence of Weber and Lukács from different aspects and Shuster examines the essentials of the critique of Enlightenment, especially by focusing on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Also interesting are articles by Pierre-François Noppen about the anthropology of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and by Andrew Huddleston about the aesthetic model of social critique. The latter, which is complementary with the previous part, touches on the issues of the culture industry and mass culture on one side, and the critique of *kitsch* and the specification of the artwork on the other.

The fourth part, “Social Theory and Empirical Inquiry,” consists of articles that concentrate on the main concepts and arguments of Adorno’s social philosophy and his contributions to the empirical side of the social sciences. The articles of David Jenemann, Matthias Benzer & Julian Krause, Eli Zaretsky, and Jacob Norberg are particularly focused on the latter issue. Peter Osborne’s article, which aims at explaining the influence of Marx on Adorno, distinguishes itself for its broader content. Osborne differentiates between the general comprehension of social philosophy and sociology as a science in the Frankfurt School. The author then examines the Adorno-Marx relation. Here an examination of “commodity” and “reification” takes central place. The last section of Osborne’s article is a comparison between the ontologies of Adorno and Marx from the point of view of the former.

The part on Aesthetics may be divided into two categories. The first concerns the essentials of aesthetics according to Adorno. This category contains contributions from Owen Hulatt, Eva Geulen, and Peter Uwe Hoehdahl. Hulatt discusses the autonomy of the artwork and the problem of how an artwork gains its unique character, i.e., its autonomy. And Geulen analyses *Aesthetic Theory* and the lectures given by Adorno in 1958 and 1959. Hoehdahl examines Adorno’s aesthetics as a whole from his early to his late period. Besides these contributions, the articles by Henry Pickford, Richard Eldridge, Michael Gallope, and Richard Leppert, represent a second category concerned with particular issues, namely “literary criticism,” “modernism,” “music,” and “opera,” respectively.

The sixth part on Negative Dialectics is the most prominent part of

the companion. It begins with Terry Pinkard's article, which seeks an answer to the question "What is negative dialectics?" Pinkard focuses on Adorno's re-evaluation of Hegel. After a long introduction on the contradiction of being and thought and of subject and object, Pinkard presents a fluent summary of the Hegelian dialectic of the concepts *limit* and *limitation*. He examines Adorno's commentaries and critique of Hegel before coming to a conclusion regarding the question. The article contains remarkable points, one of which is Hegel's critique of Schelling's philosophy of identity, Adorno's critique of Hegel, and how Hegel's critique of Schelling can be levelled against Hegel himself. The article also contains passages providing a safeguard against the interpretation of Adorno and Hegel as two distinct poles. Pinkard shows the influence of Hegel on Adorno, even in Adorno's critique of Hegel. Additionally, this part contains comparisons between Adorno and Heidegger, and Adorno and Kant by Espen Hammer and J. M. Bernstein. In combination with Pinkard's article, the contributions by Max Pensky, Brian O'Connor, and Peter Gordon do much to deepen the reader's understanding of negative dialectics.

The last part of the companion, entitled "Ethics and Politics," contains four articles. The first contributions belong to Christian Skirke and Maeve Cooke, who deal with two important topics in Adorno debates, namely the phrase "after Auschwitz" and the radical transformation of society. In addition, Kathy Kiloh and James Finlayson contribute interesting articles on the materialist ethics of love and moral solidarity in Adorno. Skirke's contribution, which I deem to be the most important of this part, focuses on how Adorno reads the catastrophe of Auschwitz as a milestone in history. In the first section, he analyzes the statement that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (p. 568). Another section is devoted to interpretations of the statement. Skirke shows that what Adorno argues is that the individual bears the negative mediation of the catastrophe and that what needs to be done is to remove that mediation. Skirke explains that the main consequence of Auschwitz for ontology, according to Adorno, is the new social structure making future events like Auschwitz possible. The article further contains a section about education that touches upon Adorno's understanding of education as a means to change the individual so as to prevent possible future Auschwitzes.

In general, the companion offers a worthwhile and rewarding read-

ing for those interested in philosophy and the social sciences. But, although the volume contains several noteworthy contributions, it is not without lacunae. For example, the “Cultural Analysis” part is not satisfying at all and appears weak in comparison to the other parts. Another problem is the “Editor’s Introduction,” which only gives a long commentary on Adorno. An introduction covering the articles and explaining the purpose of the companion as a whole would have been more appropriate. The book nevertheless offers a skillful contribution to the Adorno debate and deserves the attention of the reader.