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Adorno and Existence

By Peter E. Gordon

Harvard University Press. Hardcover. Condition: New. 230 pages. From the beginning to the end of his career, the critical theorist Theodor W. Adorno sustained an uneasy but enduring bond with existentialism. His attitude overall was that of unsparing criticism, verging on polemic. In Kierkegaard he saw an early paragon for the late flowering of bourgeois solipsism; in Heidegger, an impresario for a jargon of authenticity cloaking its idealism in an aura of pseudo-concreteness and neo-romantic kitsch. Even in the straitened rationalism of Husserl's phenomenology Adorno saw a vain attempt break free from the prison-house of consciousness. Most scholars of critical theory still regard these philosophical exercises as marginal works, unfortunate lapses of judgment for a thinker otherwise celebrated for dialectical mastery. Yet his persistent fascination with the philosophical canons of existentialism and phenomenology suggests a connection far more productive than mere antipathy. From his first published book on Kierkegaard's aesthetic to the mature studies in negative dialectics, Adorno was forever returning to the philosophies of bourgeois interiority, seeking the paradoxical relation between their manifest failure and their hidden promise. Ultimately, Adorno saw in them an instructive if unsuccessful attempt to realize his own ambition: to escape the enchanted circle of..



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