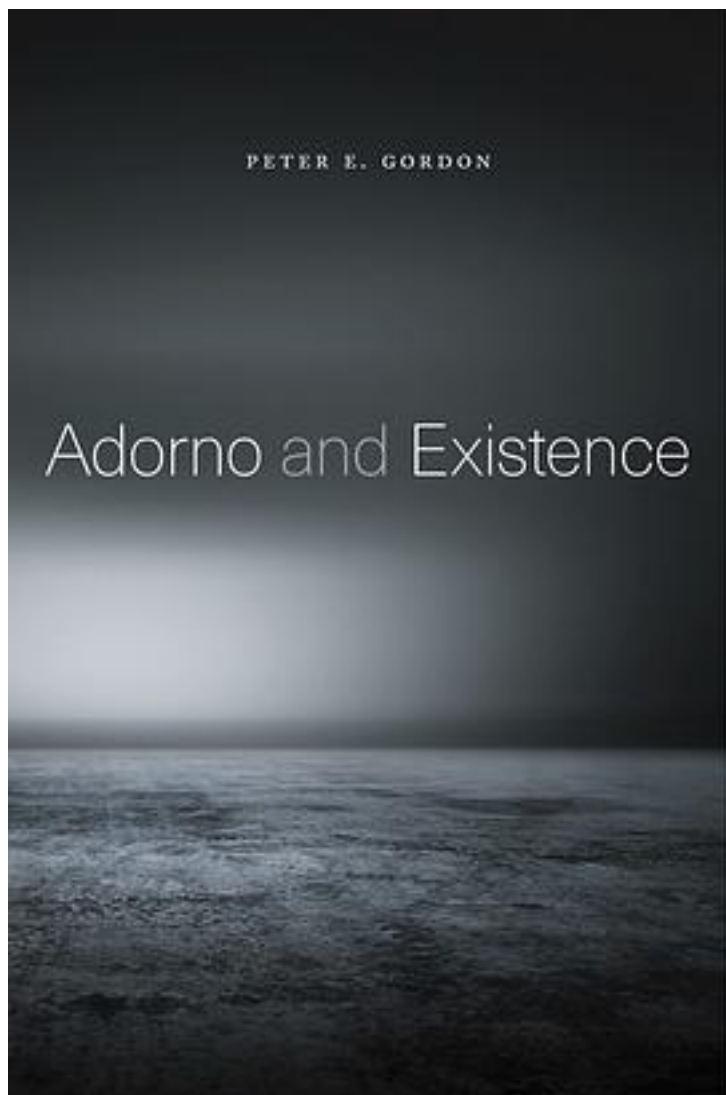


Adorno and Existence



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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 to 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 idealism so as to grasp “the primacy of the object.” Exercises in “immanent critique,” Adorno’s writings on Kierkegaard, Husserl, and Heidegger present us with a photographic negative—a philosophical portrait of the author himself. In *Adorno and Existence*, Peter E. Gordon casts new and unfamiliar light on this neglected chapter in the history of Continental philosophy.

Reviews:

“Adorno and Existence struck me as almost inevitable: how is it that no one had thought to write this necessary book previously? With a rare combination of narrative brio and analytic insight, Peter Gordon tracks Adorno’s repeated confrontations with Kierkegaard, Husserl, Heidegger, Kafka, & co. This is a fine, even irreplaceable study with a superb and riveting final chapter.” —Jay Bernstein, *The New School*

“This extraordinary study is a marvelous interpretation of the whole of Adorno’s philosophical thinking by making convincingly clear to what surprising degree it is dependent on some constitutive ideas of Kierkegaard. Gordon successfully integrates two aims, the systematic re-interpretation of Adorno’s philosophy and the subtle reconstruction of his intellectual development. This is a tour de force for which Peter Gordon deserves highest admiration.” —Axel Honneth, *University of Frankfurt and Columbia University*

“On first reading Adorno’s early study of Kierkegaard, Walter Benjamin intuited that it was ‘very possible that the author’s later books will spring from this one.’ When Adorno reissued it many years later, he admitted to Ernst Bloch that it had ‘the character of a dream-like anticipation.’ With Peter Gordon’s arresting new interpretation of Adorno’s life-long struggle with Kierkegaard’s legacy, a struggle generating the dynamic force field of theology, aesthetics and social critique he called negative dialectics, we can understand for the first time how right both of these observations actually were.” —Martin Jay, *University of California, Berkeley*

作者介绍:

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