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FOSTER, Roger. *Adorno: The Recovery of Experience*. SUNY Series in Contemporary Continental Philosophy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007. x + 236 pp. Cloth, \$70.00—Theodor W. Adorno's writings resist interpretation. Their challenges stem in part from the unusual range he covers and the innovations he introduces into various fields: aesthetics, cultural studies, epistemology, ethics, literature, musicology, psychology, and sociology. Difficulties also arise from Adorno's idiosyncratic appropriations of complex works by Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger. The most crucial source of resistance, one that unifies the ones just mentioned, comes from the radical character of Adorno's critique of modernity.

Roger Foster argues that Adorno's critique of modernity seeks "a recovery of spiritual experience." This aim is "the unifying core to Adorno's strikingly multidisciplinary oeuvre" (p. 2). Foster unfolds his interpretation in three stages. The first three chapters introduce Adorno's project and compare it with central ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Walter Benjamin. The next three chapters contrast Adorno's project with Edmund Husserl and Henri Bergson's unsuccessful attempts to do justice to spiritual experience. Foster sets this contrast in sharp relief by tracing affinities between Adorno and Marcel Proust. Then Chapter 7 and the Conclusion argue that Adorno's approach has significant advantages over those of John McDowell and Jürgen Habermas, both of whom remain trapped, like Husserl and Bergson, in a "failed outbreak" from epistemology.

The English translation of Adorno's book on Husserl uses the title *Against Epistemology* to translate *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* ("On the Metacritique of Epistemology"), thereby turning Adorno's dialectical "metacritique" into an oppositional "against." This single mistranslation encapsulates many of the ways in which Adorno has been misunderstood. The most egregious misunderstanding regards him as an opponent of modernity. But, Adorno does not straightforwardly oppose modernity, any more than he simply stands against epistemology. He undertakes a dialectical metacritique of both. A metacritique, as he conceives it, starts from within that which is criticized. To pretend that one could oppose modernity and epistemology from the outside would lead to one of the failed outbreaks that Foster describes.

To an unwary reader, however, the term "spiritual experience" might suggest an external position: in English "spiritual" has come to connote something otherworldly or mystical or vaguely religious. That, however, is not what Adorno wishes to recover. Foster uses "spiritual experience" to translate Adorno's Hegelian "*geistiger Erfahrung*." The alternative translation—"intellectual experience"—would be worse. "Intellectual" suggests something disembodied and disengaged, which is precisely what Adorno questions. So one must read past the translation to Adorno's conception of what needs recovering.

As Foster explains, Adorno develops a mode of philosophical writing in which particular objects of interpretation come to express an "immanent universal." To engage in such interpretation is to have spiritual experience. Modernity makes spiritual experience increasingly difficult to attain. This is because the modern world is marked "by a

transformation in the structure of experience," a transformation aided and amplified by "the theoretical self-understandings of that world produced by philosophy" (p. 3). Hence the path to spiritual experience goes through a critique of both modernity's "disenchantment" of the world and philosophy's epistemological support of disenchantment. Only through such a critique—through what Adorno calls a "negative dialectic"—can philosophical writing help an immanent universal come to expression.

Foster demonstrates with admirable clarity that, unlike Husserl's critique of natural-scientific reductionism, Adorno thoroughly problematizes the epistemic subject, showing it to be the product of a complex sociohistorical process. Unlike Bergson, Adorno explains why the conditions of modernity do not support immediate qualitative experience. Husserl and Bergson inadvertently ratify the disenchantment they resist. Similarly, McDowell's "attempt to reconcile mind and world fails because it does not truly get beyond constituting subjectivity" (p. 8). Even Habermas loses sight of "the disclosive potential of language" (p. 202) that Adorno deploys in his search for spiritual experience.

Foster's book stands out as an exposition and defense of Adorno's project. It is weaker, however, as a critical examination. Two concepts in particular deserve additional scrutiny. One is the notion of an immanent universal. Although the notion makes sense as a crystallization of historical tendencies illuminated by constellations of concepts, one wonders how it can perform the normative role both traditionally accorded to universals and required by Adorno's own critique. The concept of suffering is also problematic. At times Foster seems to suggest that suffering is simply the disruption of experience brought about by a societally induced alienation between subject and object. Yet the strong motivating force that "suffering" has in Adorno's writings points to something stronger, namely, the suffering of those who are dominated and oppressed.

In other words, Foster puts the sociopolitical import of a negative dialectic in very soft focus. Yet it does show up. In that sense he achieves the combination of communication and expression that an Adornian recovery of spiritual experience requires. His ambitious interpretation succeeds in its own terms. Shedding new light on Adorno's project, Foster shows why it deserves ongoing attention.—Lambert Zuidervaart, *Institute for Christian Studies and University of Toronto*.