Presses:

Bloomsbury/Edinburgh/Columbia/SUNY/Cambridge/University of Chicago/Routledge

Dear XXX:

I am writing to propose a book manuscript in philosophy. The working title is *Adorno and the Question of Theology*. The book’s central idea is that the rich if puzzling amount of theology in Adorno’s writings has generally been sidelined by philosophers, but when reconstructed by the terms of Adorno’s explicit aims, a unique “constellational” theology emerges as a central feature of his “negative dialectics.” Clarifying this constellational theology provides promising direction for contemporary problems in critical theory, such as charges of Eurocentrism and feminist critiques, on the one hand, and on the other, navigating theological moorings in a post-secular age.

Most chapters are adapted from my dissertation. The target audience is primarily professional philosophers, critical theorists, and religious studies scholars and graduate students in these disciplines, and secondarily, the educated public.

I am currently a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Bar-Ilan University, where I hold the President’s Scholarship for outstanding doctoral students. I expect to submit my dissertation within the coming months. Since 2022, I’ve also held the position of Junior Fellow at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. I was previously a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Northwestern University, on full fellowship, and I received my MA in Philosophy from Northwestern in 2005. I have published in *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy*, and have reviews forthcoming in *Philosophy in Review* and *Philosophy Now*. I’ve presented papers at the Critical Theory Roundtable and the APA, and most recently, at Princeton University and Bar-Ilan University. I’ve attached my CV to this email for your consideration.

I will also be contacting a few other elite presses with this proposal. Thank you for your consideration, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

Rachel Kontorovich Rosner

Doctoral Candidate, Bar-Ilan University

Junior Fellow, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute

**Working Title:**

*Adorno and the Question of Theology*

*//or//*

*Theology in Constellation: Adorno’s Negative Dialectics*

**Overview of the Work:**

Theodor W. Adorno, the most influential “first generation” Frankfurt School critical theorist, is typically regarded as a secular thinker, yet his texts are replete with theological language and motifs. Despite this, questioning the importance of his use of theological ideas in the context of his theoretical aims remains understudied by philosophers. To this end, my book provides a philosophical reconstruction of theological aspects in Adorno’s comprehensive philosophy. In contrast with leading scholarship on the topic, I show his use of theological language and ideas extends beyond biographical, historical, or philological interest. Instead, I argue it is best understood as {i} a response to his claims about the crisis of reason in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; {ii} integral to negative dialectics; and {iii} is best reconstructed, in his own terms, as a *constellation point* in negative dialectics. I propose this reading is most consistent with Adorno’s central theses and philosophical aims. It also contrasts with leading interpretations that either map him onto theological positions, such as negative or inverse theology, or categorize him as an ardent secularist, using theological terms only rhetorically. Finally, I suggest {iv} my reading offers a promising if not challenging contribution to current debates in Critical Theory that make recourse to Adorno in their reckoning with questions of religion, the post-secular, and modernity’s “normative deficit.”

**Chapter Summary:**

Introduction

I. Introduction to the Book

II. Relevance and Contribution to Scholarship

III. Argument of the Book and Chapter Roadmap

*The introduction provides a summary of the problem at hand: how do we make sense of the vast amount of theology in Adorno’s work, and why has so little philosophical energy been devoted to this topic? I situate this question in the history of Adorno’s reception by Anglophone philosophers; in the context of Adorno’s own reticence about his use of theological terms and motifs; and in the context of a recent, growing cottage industry of literature that takes up this topic, both in critical theory and in other disciplines. I conclude the chapter with a window into my main argument, how it is different than other positions, and a roadmap of the book’s chapters.*

Chapter 1. Reading Adorno: Construction of Form and Content

1.1 Form and Content

1.2 Immanent Critique

1.3 Adorno in Context

1.4: Thinking in Constellations

1.5: Toward a Working Definition of ‘Theology’

1.6 Summary

*This Chapter argues that a first clue to the significance of theology in Adorno’s philosophy is to look at his precise style of writing, where the manner of presentation is critical to the explication of conceptual content. Thus, theological language and motifs cannot be easily explained away as inconsequential to his philosophy, or as mere rhetoric. I further introduce two important features to my argument: Adorno’s idea of the constellation, which is fundamental to his material and conceptual approach to philosophy, and my working definition of ‘theology’. Theology can be tracked in Adorno’s philosophy two ways: his explicit use of primarily negative theological terms, and more thematically, expressed as a sense of ultimate non-identity that forms the crucial “hinge” of his negative dialectics.*

Chapter 2. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as the Crisis of Reason

2.1 “The Concept of Enlightenment”

2.2 Instrumental Rationality

2.3 The Crisis of Reason

2.4 Summary

*This Chapter argues that to understand the significance of theology in Adorno’s philosophy we must first understand the arch of Adorno’s philosophical project, which is framed by his early work, Dialectic of Enlightenment. In this text we see his account that modernity’s Enlightenment reason is in crisis. I argue that it is in terms of this crisis that we should understand his search for an alternate model of reason and critique, from within the problematic ruins of a damaged and damaging instrumentalized reason. This search, I argue, explains his development of a “negative dialectics.”*

Chapter 3. *Negative Dialectics* as a Response to the Crisis of Reason

3.1 What is Negative Dialectics?

3.2 Subject and Object

3.3 *Negative* Determinate Negation: Harboring the Nonidentical in Dialectics

3.4 Nonidentity as a Constellation Point

3.5 Negative Dialectics and Theology

3.6 Theology as a Constellation Point in Negative Dialectics?

3.7 Summary

*This Chapter introduces Adorno’s negative dialectics as a response to the crisis of reason. I argue that in negative dialectics, the text and the philosophical approach, we see two tracks of theology at work: in explicit, negative theological language, and in terms of the “nonidentical,” the “hinge” of negative dialectics. Bringing into play the model of the constellation, I ask what it would mean to understand theology as a constellation point in negative dialectics.*

Chapter 4. Aesthetics and Negative Dialectics

4.1 *Aesthetic Theory*

4.2 Instrumental Reason and the Culture Industry

4.3 Aesthetic Heteronomy and Autonomy

4.4 Autonomous Art and Determinate Negation

4.5 Nonidentity and the Shudder

4.6 Theological Aspects in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory

4.7 Theology as a Constellation Point in Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory

4.8 Summary

*This Chapter introduces Adorno’s aesthetics in the context of negative dialectics, namely as a concrete, social, and material-affective search for nonidentity that is the counterpart to his search for the nonidentical conceptually, via a negative philosophy. Adorno finds in certain kinds of artworks and through aesthetic experience, as “the shudder,” a somatic, subjective encounter with radical nonidentity. In Adorno’s aesthetics, I argue, we find the same two-tracks of theology as in negative dialectics. I argue we can understand theology as a constellation point in his aesthetics, as a part of Adorno’s comprehensive philosophy.*

5. Adorno and the Question of Theology: Critical Theory Today

5.1 Adorno: Theology in Constellation

5.2 Back to Adorno: Adorno, Religion, and Contemporary Critical Theory

5.2 Theology as Rhetoric, or: Adorno the Thoroughgoing Secularist

5.3 Negative Theology and Inverse Theology

5.4 Theology as Normativity for Post-Secular Reason

5.5 Constellational Theology as a Response to Post-Secularism

5.5 Summary and Conclusion

*This Chapter puts together the book’s demonstrative claims about the significance of theology in Adorno’s comprehensive philosophy, sketching a picture of his ‘constellational theology.’ I then turn to the relevance of this understanding for contemporary critical theory, which shows a ‘return to Adorno’ in its growing concerns to bridge theological sources of normativity and modernity’s post-secular, disenchanted reason. I consider three leading interpretations of theology in Adorno and argue their relative strengths and weaknesses. I conclude by considering how my reading is both a more accurate reconstruction of Adorno’s stance and offers critical advantages over leading positions. Key features suggest what we might call a humble transcendence; a porosity of identity that refutes hegemony; and a refusal to abide by the misleading post-secular dialectic between the secular and the profane.*

**Estimated Length:**

200-220 pages

**Comparable/Competing Works:**

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