

Giovanni Zanotti  
*Contingent Antagonism. A Key to Adorno's Dialectic*

Università degli Studi di Pisa  
Italia  
e-mail: giovanni.zanotti86@gmail.com

Adorno's dialectic is threatened by the apparent contradiction between its idea of reconciliation and a critique so radical that it seems to exclude the very possibility of reconciliation. In my article, I offer an interpretation that seeks a way out of this problem through the concept of a "contingent antagonism". In the first part, I trace the concept back to the young Marx. After, I argue that Adorno's sharpening of the critical standpoint, while eliminating the dogmatic residue still present in Marx and Lukács, also gives rise to the dilemma of a seemingly all-encompassing negativity. Finally, I suggest that the dilemma can be solved if the object of critique is recognized, at the same time, as conceptually irreducible and historically contingent. I also show how precisely this theoretical turn is a moving force for both Adorno's sociological and philosophical thought. I conclude by briefly outlining a way in which Adorno's concepts of contingent antagonism and qualitative change could be developed into a general theory of radical possibility.