

## Reply to Finlayson Review in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*

*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* does not permit replies to its reviews, which is probably a sound policy. Replies are only productive when both the reviewer and the reviewed are seriously engaged in intellectual exchange and not merely in name-calling or defensiveness. Even in the higher organs of Anglophone commerce of ideas, e.g., the *NYRB* or the *LRB*, responding to a review is rarely worthwhile.

But sometimes there is a pedagogical aim served by such an exercise – i.e., to display how not to write a review. One might say that in most cases a poorly-crafted, lazy review can display that for all to see on its own. Gordon Finlayson's review of *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, a volume that I edited, in the *NDPR* is such a case in all likelihood, at least if the many third-party responses communicated to me, from many of the contributors to the volume as well as others, concerning the review are any evidence. So, it is still perhaps worthwhile to mention a couple of points, since some of my communicants have suggested that I respond.

The review is extremely odd. Finlayson seems to like, to varying degrees to be sure, everything substantive about the book. All of the chapters he deems of interest. There seem to have been four matters that chiefly bother him, discussion of which occur in a hectoring last third of the review. The first of these is the blurb for the book, which he deems allows to the *Companion* more coverage than it affords. He seems to blame me for this and, indeed, if there is blame it probably is mine, since I okayed the blurb (although I neither wrote it, nor oversaw its drafting). Of course the point is silly – blurbs are, well, blurbs and are publishers' ways to advertise – i.e., sell – books. They can be expected to puff a bit, if puffery there is. It's not a big deal. The second apparent concern resides in a single sentence in the short introduction I wrote for the volume, which reads in pertinent part '... Critical Theory remained central to European philosophical, social and political thought throughout the Cold War period.' (p. 1). Finlayson characterizes this as a 'wild assertion' that is 'false'. What is wild and false about it? Apparently that, if one takes this as a factual (Finlayson unadvisedly writes 'historical') claim, it runs aground on the fact, known to everyone, that if one were taking a popularity poll of the most influential or well-known intellectual positions of the mid-twentieth century, Critical Theory would fare rather poorly. Early Critical Theory was of course only known to a small group of German intellectuals; this situation did not fundamentally change in the War years when Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Pollock were U.S. émigrés. What is now widely considered the main theoretical text of early Critical Theory, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was not published until 1947 and then with an obscure press in Amsterdam. Critical Theory first becomes influential in Germany with Adorno's mature works of the 1950s and in America with Marcuse's work slightly later. So, if one were measuring things like 'historical centrality' (my category in the Introduction) in *Tops of the Pops* terms, that might be right. But only the most unthinking reading of what I wrote would yield such implausibility. Not only is the apparently offending clause in the sentence limited to modifying the form of Critical Theory 'passed on to' the second generation of Critical Theorists, if Finlayson had bothered to read the first sentence of the introduction, just

prior to the line just parsed, he would have found: '[c]ritical theory was born in the trauma of the Weimar Republic, grew to maturity in expatriation, and achieved cultural currency on its return from exile [my italics].' In retrospect, and in terms of historical importance, Critical Theory was important even when not directly influential. But even considered in purely chronological terms, what I wrote, i.e., that Critical Theory was 'central to European philosophy' in the Cold War is uncontested. If one dates the Cold War conservatively from the beginning of the Korean War in the late-1940s to *perestroika* in the mid-1980s, Critical Theory was very influential. Adorno's collection *Prismen* put him at the center of philosophical debate in Germany, as did many of his journalist pieces in the *Merkur* and *Neue Rundschau*. Meanwhile, also beginning in the 1950s, Marcuse became a prominent intellectual in the U.S. (In point of fact, Adorno had important impacts in the 50s in the U.S. as well, in virtue of the very positive review of the Adorno-led volume *The Authoritarian Personality* by C. Wright Mills.) The 1960s saw the publication or re-publication of all of Adorno's mature systematic works, as well as his engagements in the positivism dispute in sociology and his involvement in the Darmstadt music scene. All of this falls neatly within the Cold War period, and I have not even mentioned Habermas's important early work.

Third, Finlayson writes that the Introduction is too short and uninformative. Introductions can be all manner of lengths; several Cambridge Companions have introductions of this length. I also wrote a longish first chapter in the volume (which Finlayson grudgingly praises) and my simpleminded notion was that no one in their right mind would want upwards of fifty pages of my prose first off in the volume, when true heavy-hitters like Geuss, Honneth, Rosen and others were in the offing. Needless to say, I stand pat on that decision.

I save the strangest for last. Finlayson also takes exception to the end-matter in the book, specifically to my bibliography. It is a select bibliography (one that, at its outset, references more complete ones), meant for the Anglophone reader (and thus only cites standard edition German texts when available), and concentrating on monographs. Following the house practice of other Companions I exercised my judgment in referencing secondary sources: only highly reliable ones are mentioned and surely not all of such. Apparently the word 'select' escapes Finlayson, for he criticizes the bibliography for being, well, select. A related trifle is that I have a catch-all section of the bibliography that collects together various critical theory primary texts written by authors under the heading: 'post-Habermas'. There are, it seems, two problems with my having done this. First, the authors are too diverse – some may not be *echte* critical theorists to Finlayson's nose. To this I say: diversity is the way of things in Critical Theory. Second—and here I don't really know what to say—Finlayson seems to think that the categorization 'post-Habermas' must mean 'chronologically after Habermas' life'. Of course, we are fortunate that Habermas lives, so there could be no post-Habermas Critical Theory. Of course, what I meant is Critical Theory that has stepped outside the paradigms set out in Habermas's central works of the 1960s-80s. What this opens the door to is the possibility that Habermas can be 'post-Habermas', if he has sufficiently modified his views on certain matters. I don't see any inherent problem with this.