ABSTRACT
MORAL IMAGINATION AND ADORNO: BEFORE AND AFTER AUSCHWITZ

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In the aftermath of national or international tragedies, appeals for action such as, “Never Forget” or “Never Again” are ubiquitous. Theodor Adorno makes a similar call in the wake of the Holocaust, proclaiming that all education should be focused on the prevention of another genocide. While most would agree with such a statement, practically how do we respond to such a call, specifically in light of Adorno’s work? Answering this question is at the heart of this project and I argue that imaginative memorials can fulfill Adorno’s criteria for post-Auschwitz education.

I first present a theory of moral imagination by relying on contemporary accounts of the theory and then show how it complements Adorno’s work, specifically by offering an explanatory foundation to a number of his claims. I reveal that many of Adorno’s observations about the world are supported by recent advancements in the understanding of imagination and I argue that the combination of contemporary accounts of moral imagination and Adorno’s thought is mutually beneficial.

After the two theories have been sufficiently discussed and integrated, I focus on Adorno’s arguments regarding education post Auschwitz. Adorno argues that we should investigate how such a horror could occur, and who these people were that committed acts of genocide. Such information will be helpful for the prevention of another Auschwitz because we can attempt to overcome the values and ideas of those who perpetrated genocide.

This dissertation adds to the discussion by first, fleshing out Adorno’s discussion of the characteristics that led to the Holocaust and second, arguing for a specific form of education that meets all of the criteria of Adorno’s post-Auschwitz education: memorials that stimulate the visitor’s imagination. In order to make this point, I highlight specific Holocaust memorials that are imaginative and argue for their efficacy. My goal for the project is to actualize Adorno’s post-Auschwitz education initiative through imaginative memorials.