

Music Theory, Larger Issues to Which It May Relate, and an Introduction to Our Book,
Heinrich Schenker's Conception of Harmony

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These are turbulent times for all of us. But for music theorists—especially those of us who work on Schenkerian theory and its history—in the midst of the Covid 19 pandemic and the current focus on Anti-Racism, an Open Letter on Antiracist Actions within SMT has rightly called for us to think about what we do to perpetuate the current power structures. It also suggests that we all think about the works we study, the readings we assign, the interest groups we support, and the students we mentor. We whole-heartedly support these recommendations, but also suggest that we should look beyond music theory's traditional institutions of higher education, professional societies, scholarly journals, pedagogy, and so on—i.e., what music is taught, by whom, and in what ways. Brown begins by showing new ways in which he has used his expertise at Schenkerian theory to address this issue, though it is unlikely that their audiences will be aware of this fact. In particular, these projects rely heavily on Schenker's thinking about elaboration, enlargement, and holism.

Wason then turns to an introduction to our new book, which shows how these ideas were central to Schenker's concept of harmony, as he explained it in his first major work, *Harmonielehre* (1906). Heavily influenced by contemporaneous psychological, legal and historical thinking, Schenker's *Harmonielehre* turned away from 18th- and 19th-century notions of harmony, which equate the study of harmony with that of describing the abstract principles governing chords and chord progressions, and treated it as the conceptual glue that allowed the individual elements of a composition (melodies, motives, chords, counterpoint, etc.) to work together both locally and globally. It was the abstract, structural underpinning of melodic "content" of a work, a conception that was very much like the way the ancient Greeks regarded it—i.e., *harmonia* was the structural basis of *melos* (melodic composition). Schenker was fully aware of this, as he explained in his essay "The Spirit of Musical Technique" (1895):

I am prepared to restore to the word harmony (which the Greeks were the first to use) what was and still is its original and finest meaning. By harmony the imaginative Greeks understood the melody itself, that is, the succession of tones as a whole, together with all the particular elements at work in that succession ... All too often we forget that every succession of tones, every melody, carries its own harmonic credo within itself, and that it expresses this conviction autonomously. (tr. Wm. Pastille)

Heinrich Schenker's Conception of Harmony approaches Schenker's 1906 treatise as a synthesis of ancient ideas and very new and original ones. It translates, for the first time, two preparatory essays for *Harmonielehre* and describes his later views of harmony and the ways in which they influenced and also were ignored by the 1954 abridged edition and translation, entitled simply *Harmony*. Though problematic, *Harmony* was the first published translation of a major work by Schenker, inaugurating the study of his writings in postwar America and Britain, where they continue to be highly influential.