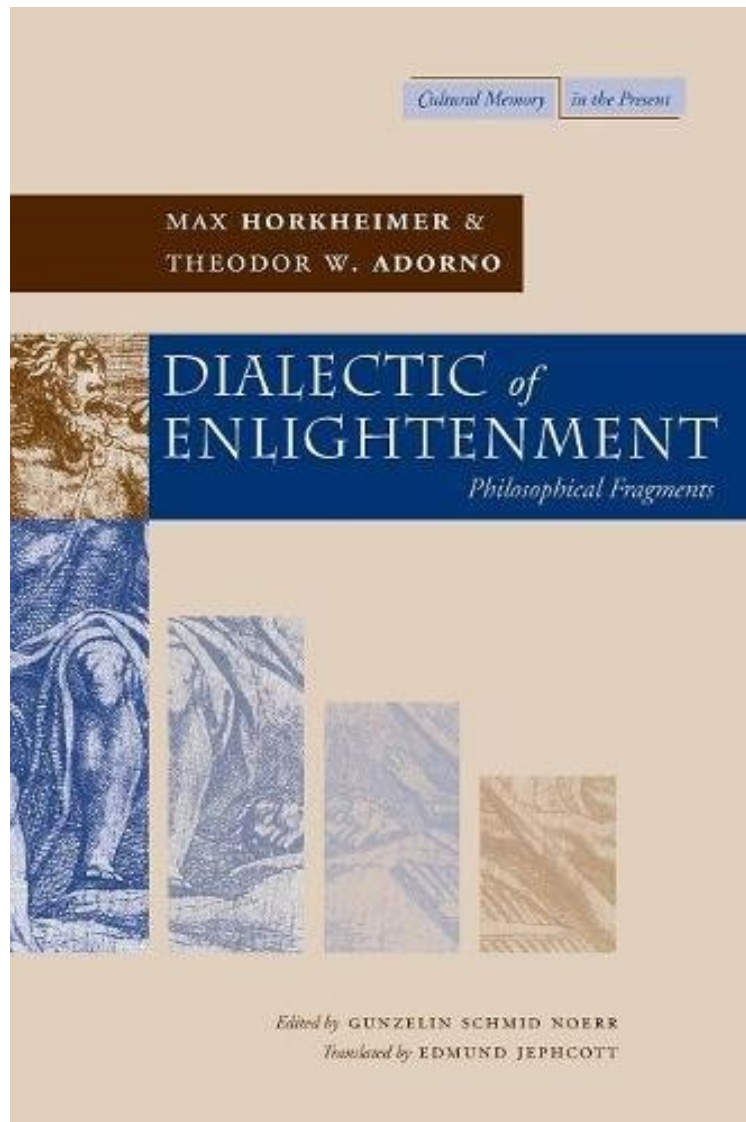


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Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno
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Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno : Dialectic of Enlightenment (Cultural Memory in the Present) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dialectic of Enlightenment (Cultural Memory in the Present):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Great translation, relevant through the decades By the userBI've only read one other translation of the Dialectic, but this one was by far the better one. This is a must read for anyone interested in the evolution of our culture or philosophy. Their critiques of society apply to cultural change and advancement in a rich country in general; this book was relevant several years ago and will still be relevant decades

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By Jack Decoteau
One of the best books for me in several years, easy to read and excellent ideas. Thanks,
29 of 32 people found the following review helpful. A masterpiece of critical theory
By M. A. Krul
Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, both prominents of the Frankfurter Schule of critical theory, wrote this work during WWII. In their own words, the purpose of the book was to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism. Obviously their experiences as Jewish intellectuals fleeing for the national-socialist regime to the United States was a strong impulse for this view, but the book is not limited to a critique of nazism or even totalitarianism altogether. The main subject of the book, though that itself is already difficult to disentangle, is Enlightenment's betrayal of its own liberating capacity. Adorno Horkheimer analyze this by means of various cultural metaphors, which in highly abstract, contradictory and aesthetic language (especially the parts by Adorno) trace the development of Enlightenment and its subsequent 'dark side' throughout an equally metaphorical history of culture and ideas. In a certain sense this may most remind readers not familiar with both authors of Foucault and his use of concepts like the Panopticon to express a view of power relations. The method of Adorno and Horkheimer is however not so much genealogical, as Foucault's is, as dialectical in its idealist form. The book consists of an introduction, two "excursions" and two chapters on the Enlightenment itself, as well as a series of aphorisms provided at the end as "notes and sketches". Each part of the book consists of a very abstract, very metaphysical and almost entrancing analysis of, in turn, the development of Enlightenment as myth out of earlier myth, the form of modern Enlightenment as instrumental reason and mass deception, and the limits of Enlightenment to its own rationality, in the form of anti-semitism. The language of the book is extremely difficult, even in English, and in the best (and worst) traditions of continental philosophy it contains a very great amount of layers and meanings, not all of which are free of internal contradiction. Readers familiar to Situationist works are perhaps best prepared for the effect, which is somewhat similar in method, if not in style, to Guy Debord. The introduction, "The Concept of Enlightenment", posits Enlightenment as thought liberating man from his natural shackles, and creating man as master of the earth. This process of liberation entails at the same time the possibility of man to protect himself from, and understand the workings of, nature, and also mankind's loss of being one with nature. In this process, the self is created as a subjectivity divorced from direct experience of the outside world. Man's memory of this is very vague and distant, but is present in everyone as a certain inchoate feeling of loss. This is also the main subject of the first Exkurs, "Odysseus, or Myth and Enlightenment". The story of the Odysseia is here used in many ways to provide metaphorical expressions for the role of myth in and against Enlightenment. Myths are primitive descriptions of the world, and in being so are already classifications used as a form of instrumental reason, which is the seed of Enlightenment. The role of sacrifice to the Gods, for example, is presented as manipulation of those Gods, and in so doing already expression of an Enlightened mind *avant la lettre*. Odysseus' adventure with the Sirens is metaphor for man's loss as described above: Odysseus, the Enlightened ruler, knows his loss but is constrained by his knowledge from acting on it; and the shipmates, the great mass of modernity, is only vaguely aware of the loss, and are not affected. But Circe, the Cyclops, and many other themes are used besides. The second Exkurs is "Juliette, or Enlightenment and Morality". The works of De Sade, in particular Juliette, here provide an expression of Enlightenment's freeing and therefore contradictory character. Kant is contrasted with Juliette; where Kant is the restrained form of reason, reason as classifying and ordering power, Juliette is reason's destructive power of old orders. Because Enlightenment destroys the validity of any appeal to tradition, religion, etc., it falls pray to itself, in that Enlightenment's appeal to its own absolute values is undermined, in the same way that Juliette uses and is used by Catholicism in undermining it. The third chapter is "Enlightenment as Mass Deception", covering the subject of the culture industry. Here Adorno rants against all the vapid and degraded culture forms he perceives in the United States, although he never states it as valid only for the US, of course. There are many interesting insights and observations about modern culture and still valid ones too in this chapter, but Adorno's general tone is that of the "hochbrgerliche" bourgeois annoyed about the offenses against good taste he sees. Yet to dismiss it based on that would be superficial, even if we cannot agree with Adorno's hatred for radio and jazz. His observations on American movies are very poignant, and in between his cultural criticism he hits on certain relations between the capitalist mode of production, its Enlightenment ideology, and the cultural superstructure that are very worthwhile for a patient radical. The fourth chapter is called "Limits of Enlightenment", and addresses directly the subject of anti-semitism and fascism more generally. Fascism is posited as Enlightenment turned against itself (it must be noted Adorno Horkheimer were among the first to state this, even if it is somewhat of a cliché now). Enlightenment's general instrumental reason knows only power as a measure of behavior. Therefore, it cannot tolerate the existence of groups that thrive, yet never have power, such as Jews and women. Whenever Enlightened society fails to satisfy the needs of its members, their anger is turned against such groups. The last chapter, "Notes and Sketches", is as said a series of aphorisms, familiar to people who have read situationist works, or for example Walter Benjamin's notebooks. Overall, this book is an extremely complex, but very worthwhile philosophical critique of modern culture, and a very pessimistic and negative analysis of Enlightenment and its possibilities. It is hard work to get to the bottom of it, but nevertheless rewarding for any student of philosophy.

Dialectic of Enlightenment is undoubtedly the most influential publication of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Written during the Second World War and circulated privately, it appeared in a printed edition in Amsterdam in 1947. "What we had set out to do," the authors write in the Preface, "was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." Yet the work goes far beyond a mere critique of contemporary events. Historically remote developments, indeed, the birth of Western history and of subjectivity itself out of the struggle against natural forces, as represented in myths, are connected in a wide arch to the most threatening experiences of the present. The book consists in five chapters, at first glance unconnected, together with a number of shorter notes. The various analyses concern such phenomena as the detachment of science from practical life, formalized morality, the manipulative nature of entertainment culture, and a paranoid behavioral structure, expressed in aggressive anti-Semitism, that marks the limits of enlightenment. The authors perceive a common element in these phenomena, the tendency toward self-destruction of the guiding criteria inherent in enlightenment thought from the beginning. Using historical analyses to elucidate the present, they show, against the background of a prehistory of subjectivity, why the National Socialist terror was not an aberration of modern history but was rooted deeply in the fundamental characteristics of Western civilization. Adorno and Horkheimer see the self-destruction of Western reason as grounded in a historical and fateful dialectic between the domination of external nature and society. They trace enlightenment, which split these spheres apart, back to its mythical roots. Enlightenment and myth, therefore, are not irreconcilable opposites, but dialectically mediated qualities of both real and intellectual life. "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology." This paradox is the fundamental thesis of the book. This new translation, based on the text in the complete edition of the works of Max Horkheimer, contains textual variants, commentary upon them, and an editorial discussion of the position of this work in the development of Critical Theory.

'A classic of twentieth-century thought.' Times Literary Supplement 'A sustained and serious critique of Western civilisation.' Times Higher Education Language Notes Text: English (translation) From the Inside Flap Dialectic of Enlightenment is undoubtedly the most influential publication of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Written during the Second World War and circulated privately, it appeared in a printed edition in Amsterdam in 1947. "What we had set out to do," the authors write in the Preface, "was nothing less than to explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." Yet the work goes far beyond a mere critique of contemporary events. Historically remote developments, indeed, the birth of Western history and of subjectivity itself out of the struggle against natural forces, as represented in myths, are connected in a wide arch to the most threatening experiences of the present. The book consists in five chapters, at first glance unconnected, together with a number of shorter notes. The various analyses concern such phenomena as the detachment of science from practical life, formalized morality, the manipulative nature of entertainment culture, and a paranoid behavioral structure, expressed in aggressive anti-Semitism, that marks the limits of enlightenment. The authors perceive a common element in these phenomena, the tendency toward self-destruction of the guiding criteria inherent in enlightenment thought from the beginning. Using historical analyses to elucidate the present, they show, against the background of a prehistory of subjectivity, why the National Socialist terror was not an aberration of modern history but was rooted deeply in the fundamental characteristics of Western civilization. Adorno and Horkheimer see the self-destruction of Western reason as grounded in a historical and fateful dialectic between the domination of external nature and society. They trace enlightenment, which split these spheres apart, back to its mythical roots. Enlightenment and myth, therefore, are not irreconcilable opposites, but dialectically mediated qualities of both real and intellectual life. "Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology." This paradox is the fundamental thesis of the book. This new translation, based on the text in the complete edition of the works of Max Horkheimer, contains textual variants, commentary upon them, and an editorial discussion of the position of this work in the development of Critical Theory.