

Adorno, Theodor (1903 - 1969)

German philosopher who also wrote on sociology, psychology, and musicology.

Adorno obtained a degree in philosophy from Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt in 1924. His early writings, which emphasise aesthetic development as important to historical evolution, reflect the influence of [Walter Benjamin](#)'s application of Marxism to cultural criticism. After teaching two years at the University of Frankfurt, Adorno immigrated to England in 1934 to escape the Nazi persecution of the Jews. He taught at the University of Oxford for three years and then went to the United States (1938), where he worked at Princeton (1938-41) and then was co-director of the Research Project on Social Discrimination at the University of California, Berkeley (1941-48). Adorno and his colleague Max Horkheimer returned to the University of Frankfurt in 1949. There they rebuilt the Institute for Social Research and revived the Frankfurt school of critical theory, which contributed to the German intellectual revival after World War II.

One of Adorno's themes was civilisation's tendency to self-destruction, as evinced by Fascism. In their widely influential book **Dialectic of Enlightenment** (1947), Adorno and Horkheimer located this impulse in the concept of reason itself, which the Enlightenment and modern scientific thought had transformed into an irrational force that had come to dominate not only nature but humanity itself. The rationalisation of human society had ultimately led to Fascism and other totalitarian regimes that represented a complete negation of human freedom. Adorno concluded that rationalism offers little hope for human emancipation, which might come instead from art and the prospects it offers for preserving individual autonomy and happiness. Adorno's other major publications are **Philosophy of Modern Music** (1949), **The Authoritarian Personality** (1950, with others), **Negative Dialectics** (1966), and **Aesthetic Theory** (1970).

