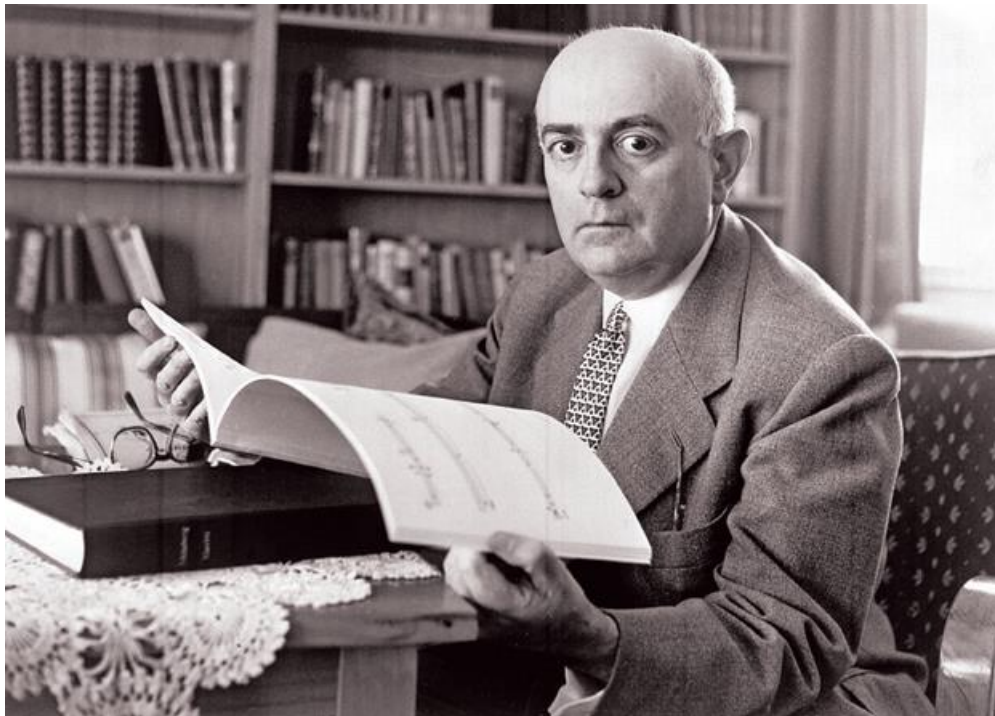


Adorno - The Tragic End. By Dr. Ibrahim al-Haidari *

Adorno was a critical philosopher but after returning from years in Exile in the United State he was then considered part of the establishment and was condemned by the student movement of 1969. The Iraqi sociologist, Dr. I. al-Haidari was studying sociology in Germany during the 60s and early 70s when he wrote his Ph.D. thesis. He attended the lecture by Adorno when a group of protestors invaded the lecture Hall. Three females went to the stage where Adorno stood. they took off their jackets and bared their chests. Al-Haidari witnessed this incident and wrote this article on the thought of Adorno and his tragic end with the Student Revolution of the late 60:



Adorno's name has been connected, together with the name of Max Horkheimer, with the founding of the “**Institute of Social research**” at Frankfurt University. It became known afterward as the “Frankfurt School” in Critical Sociology. He became a professor of philosophy and aesthetics and later on assisted Horkheimer in the administration of the Institute. They both cooperated in developing and enriching the **Critical Theory**. Adorno, together with Ernest Bloch and Horkheimer, are considered the leading German philosophers after the Second World War.

Adorno worked towards establishing the foundations and principles of the Critical Theory of **Frankfurt School** and he worked towards presenting a social critical theory that is not an empirical science only, but a critical social science that realises the dreams of the middle class in Europe in its struggle for freedom, social struggle and the end of injustice. Also called for these values and principles not to be kept at the theoretical level, but they must be brought to the level of practice. These values shouldn't be compromised by any authority, since its aim is the self-mastery of the human being in its pure essence, in order to raise a universal social consciousness that will carry on the responsibility of social change.

Adorno was born in Frankfurt (1903-1969). He studied philosophy, music and sociology in his hometown. Due to his frequenting music and artistic circles in Vienna at an early age and his special interest in the techniques of the Twelve-Tone which was developed by Schoenberg since 1922, Adorno came to be known as a critic and a theoretician of modern music. He was also a philosopher, a social scientist and social critic who had left his marks on the history of philosophy and social criticism in Germany and beyond; to Europe and America.

The thoughts of Adorno can be understood in view of the Frankfurt School in philosophy and sociology on one hand and to his artistic sensitivity and his aesthetic outlook on the other hand. All this made him the philosopher he is, with universal relevance to Aesthetic critique of modernity, Negative Dialectic, Mass Culture and beyond to his critical questions about Reason, Rationality, Totalitarian Politics and the social and cultural conflicts that came out of Modernity.

Adorno was hugely influenced by the Hegelian dialectic. Despite being considered a leftist philosopher, he didn't believe in the possibility of realising socialism in reality. The task of the philosopher, as practiced by him, is concentrated around criticism, not only social criticism, but the different schools and trends in philosophy, literature, modern art and music, as well as the main traditional crafts.



Horkheimer and Adorno

Adorno started his philosophical project by cooperating with Horkheimer. He started from a critical stand and started to analyse the reasons for the failure of the bourgeoisie revolutions in Europe. But he changed after that to the study of the theory of knowledge and aesthetics to combat the Nazi ideology and its applied forms which it has nurtured and developed to extend its totalitarian hegemony over society. He directed his attack against the traditional philosophy which has been emptied of its revolutionary function and role. Philosophy, as Adorno sees it, has become a superstructure for **Idealist systems** as it has been represented in the ideas of the Marburg school of philosophy, **Existentialism and Positivism**. These trends which came under attack by Adorno, made human beings sieged by the contradictions of **Subjectivity and Identity**, and pushed Adorno to the study of condition of the oppressed and alienated individual and the problematic of his consciousness, in an attempt to get philosophy out of its irrelevant formal situation and to present an example of material analysis, which was a negative stand to the methodical German Existential philosophy as represented by the **Ontological Existentialism** of Heidegger, as well as, Karl Jaspers.

Adorno immigrated after the rise of Hitler to power. He studied philosophy at Merton College, Oxford University. He planned to write a Ph. D. thesis on the philosopher Edmund Husserl. But during this period, he wrote a paper on Karl Mannheim's Sociology of Knowledge and another on Avant guard Music for Vienna Music magazine and one on Jazz for the Frankfurt *Zeitschrift fur Sozialforschung*. He then immigrated to America in 1938 to work with Horkheimer in the branch of the **Institute of Social Research** in Columbia University. When the Second World War ended, he returned to Frankfurt in 1949. He became the director of the **Institute of Social Research** in Frankfurt until his death on the 6th of August 1969.

Adorno took up his academic responsibilities after his return to Germany, and started to rebuild the intellectual structure of the Federal Germany. He started writing on different issues related to the critical theory and reflect a certain distinguish take on the philosophy of art. He understood aesthetic to be more than a theory of art, and took it to be, much like Hegel, a special kind of relationship between Subject and Object. He became the thinking conscience of Germany during the fifties and sixties, side by side with Horkheimer and Marcuse. He symbolised in his character the Committed Intellectual who destroys the given and problems of his age and to aspires to building instead new place and new problematics.

Exile was for him a catalyst for his thought and an enrichment of his theoretical works, especially when he lived in America and so at first hand the problems of the Capitalist system in one of its highest applications. This has created a reaction within him that led him to a critical analysis of the nature of the capitalist society, as well as the nature of art and its place in a society that has reached to a very advanced consumer phase. He also made a connection between artistic production in all its forms, contents and appearances and the means of media, propaganda and advertising, all in its relation to the economic role played in society by all this.

We can summarise his critical theses in three complex and inter-related dialectics: the dialectic of reason, negative dialectic and aesthetic theory. They form a complex conceptual dialectic for the critique of Modernism and Post-Modernism. Adorno follows in all this his **immanent critique**, in the sense of a critique of traditional philosophy and a critique of the human being who is cornered by the contradictions of subjectivity and identity.

Adorno started with a critique of traditional philosophy and then moved to the critique of the social situation of the alienated and oppressed individual which goes beyond the limits of the problematics of consciousness that governs him and society. And so, Adorno brings down philosophy from its high abstraction to make deal with the social situation, in an attempt to make a dialectic connection of theory and praxis.

Adorno spent most of the last twenty years of his life in western Germany after the division of Germany. He used to give advises to the new generation so that Germany does not fall again in the hands of Nazism or Fascism or the totalitarian ideology, after he became, together with Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas and others, the intellectual conscience of Germany". **They took it on themselves to analyse the ideology of Capitalist Modernity that led to destruction and disaster.** Their revolutionary views which was Marxist in its

outlook became the ideological base of the protest movements, by students, workers and far left and were used as constant slogans for combating Capitalism in advance industrial countries.

Writing on the protests of the student movements in the late sixties when I was a sociology student at Frankfurt University in Western Germany (then), reminded me of one important incident that I witnessed closely. Adorno started giving his talk on aesthetic when three girls wearing leather jackets approached the stage with red flowers in the hand of each and started to take off their jackets and stood naked and then each one presented her red flower to Adorno in a sarcastic theatrical manner. They were protesting against his views which were purely theoretical and did not touch the praxis in the social reality. He wasn't, for them, a radical intellectual who would get involved with the students in their marches in Frankfurt streets. Instead, he was trying to calm them down with his "revolutionary" views. They accused him of being conservative thinker who made a compromise with the bourgeois. There was no option left to Adorno but to step down from the stage and leave the lecture theatre in a shock. A symbolic tragic end to his philosophical project. He became despondent died few months later after a heart attack. He was in his sixty fifth year.



Female students bar their chest



Adorno Under attack

(*) Dr. Ibrahim al-Haidari is an Iraqi-British social science scholar. He studied sociology at the University of Baghdad as one of the few still living students of the late Prof. Ali al-Wardi who established Sociology as subject area at the Faculty of Arts in Baghdad University in the fifties of last century. He then continued his postgraduate studies at the J.W. Goethe University in Frankfurt/M and at the Free University of Berlin. After terminating his studies he went back to Baghdad and worked as Professor for Sociology at the Baghdad University. By the end of the seventies of last century he left to Algiers to work as Professor for Sociology. Since 1995 he is living in London devoting himself to research and writing about social issues mainly in Iraq and Arab world.

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