



Dialectic of Enlightenment as Sport: The Barbaric Urge within Sports, Religion, and Capitalism

Tom Donovan

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In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno set out to "explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." Philosophy teacher Tom Donovan (PhD UCRiverside) offers a fresh reading of that classic text showing that it is first and foremost a critique of the metaphysical urge. Describing our world of "stupid consumption, mindless entertainment, and perverted games and relationships" he notes, "these sorts of games have no end game, as fantasy spectators never really win, and yet they don't see it because they are too busy watching the other lose. This is the secret of class society. As long as there is someone below you, then lack of reconciliation doesn't hurt so badly." Citing the Super Bowl, Clippers owner Donald Sterling, basketball players like LeBron James, plus the Kardashians, mega churches, and comedians like Jon Stewart, Donovan gives us a new understanding of our age and how the broken threads that are today's Capitalism, religion, and sports contribute to unraveling the fabric of Modernity. Against readings that claim that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a simple critique of instrumental reason that ultimately undermines rationality itself, Dr. Donovan argues that the real critique is aimed at the metaphysical urge itself. As such, rationality itself is not the target of attack nor is the notion of enlightenment. Taking Adorno's and Horkheimer's example of the Marquis de Sade, the author observes, "...Sade can only find pleasure in domination. The fear of the outside has morphed into fear of a reconciled world, fear of a world where everyone treats each other as ends in themselves. A society like this can tolerate porn but not socialism, a society like this won't miss the ice-caps but wouldn't miss the Super Bowl, a society like this lets civilization sink into barbarism so long as they can watch *The Bachelor*. Stylistically this book attempts to rationally mimic the fragmentary nature of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* so that through form and content the argument of the book will emerge dialectically. Readers will see that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* actually offers a positive conception of enlightenment and a philosophical instance of the use of dialectics. The book is for readers interested in critiques of capitalism and religion, and sports in America, as well as Marxism and Critical Theory. It will intrigue academics interested in the Frankfurt School and the idea of the "Metaphysical Urge."

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