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Author(s): Martin Jay

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The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical Theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism

by Martin Jay

The posthumous appearance of Max Horkheimer's *Notizen* of 1950 to 1969 in the same volume as a new edition of *Dämmerung*, his aphorisms of 1926 to 1931,¹ amply documents many of the transformations of the theoretical and political positions of the Frankfurt School's leading figure. None is perhaps as striking as that of his attitude towards anti-Semitism and what was once known as "the Jewish question." In the later collection, at least a dozen entries discuss these and related issues, often from the very personal vantage point of a survivor of the Holocaust. In contrast, *Dämmerung* virtually ignores anti-Semitism as a problem in its own right and has little to say about the plight of the Jews in Weimar Germany. The one major exception is an aphorism entitled "Glaube und Profit" ("Belief and Profit"), which contains a debunking reduction of Jewish identity to class interests: "As the material base of ghetto life was left behind, the willingness to sacrifice life and property to one's religious belief also became a thing of the past. Among bourgeois Jews, the hierarchy of goods is neither Jewish nor Christian but bourgeois. The Jewish capitalist brings sacrifices to power, just like his Aryan class colleague. He first sacrifices his own superstition, then the lives of others, and finally his capital. The Jewish revolutionary in Germany is not different from his 'Aryan' comrade. He commits his life to the liberation of man."²

The young Horkheimer's facile dismissal of specifically Jewish problems was shared, at least in their written work, by all of his colleagues at the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, whose director he became in 1930. Indeed, their tendency to subsume anti-Semitism under the larger rubric of class conflict persisted throughout the 1930s even after the Nazi seizure of power and their forced emigration to America in 1934. In their collective project of 1935, *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Studies on Authority and the Family), no specific discussion of anti-Semitism was attempted in

1. Max Horkheimer, *Notizen 1950 bis 1969 und Dämmerung Notizen in Deutschland*, ed. Werner Brede, intro. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main, 1974). *Dämmerung* was first published under the pseudonym Heinrich Regius in Zurich in 1934. It was translated along with the notes of 1950-1969 by Seabury Press under the title *Dawn and Decline* (New York, 1978).

2. *Dawn and Decline*, p. 43.

either the theoretical or empirical sections of the work.³ Nor were the Jews mentioned in such Institute treatments of Nazi or *völkisch* ideology as Herbert Marcuse's "Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung" (The Struggle against Liberalism in the Totalitarian Concept of the State) of 1934 or Leo Lowenthal's "Knut Hamsun. Zur Vorgeschichte der autoritären Ideologie" (Knut Hamsun. On the Prehistory of Authoritarian Ideology) of 1937.⁴ And although anti-Semitism was introduced into Theodor W. Adorno's analysis of Wagner, where it was related to the sado-masochistic dynamics of the composer's world view, only fragments of that work appeared in the Institute's journal, its full publication coming not until 1952.⁵

When Horkheimer did finally compose an essay entitled "Die Juden und Europa" (The Jews and Europe) in 1939,⁶ he continued to subsume anti-Semitism under the more general rubric of the crisis of capitalism. The predicament of the Jews, he claimed, reflected the liquidation of the sphere of economic circulation in which they had been particularly active. Moreover, he went on, Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda was directed more at external audiences than internal ones; the German people were themselves not its major target. Not surprisingly, other German Jews more sensitive to the complexities and dangers of the situation, such as Gershom Scholem,⁷ were outraged at the essay which seemed little more than an echo of Marx's controversial remarks in his treatise on the Jewish question of a century before.

In their faithfulness to Marx's own attitude towards anti-Semitism, Horkheimer and his colleagues conformed to a pattern that many observers have noted: the more radical the Marxist, the less interested in the specificity of the Jewish question.⁸ Of all the members of the German socialist movement

3. *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (Paris, 1935).

4. The Marcuse article appeared in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, III, 1 (1934); the Lowenthal in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VI, 3 (1937). In the latter, footnote 1 on p. 330 quotes a remark Hamsun made about Jews, but makes no comment about it. Lowenthal had written earlier for Jewish periodicals and about Jewish issues, but when he joined the Institute, he left this interest behind. Marcuse, in his long career, never discussed Jewish issues or anti-Semitism.

5. "Fragmente über Wagner," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VII, 1/2 (1939); *Versuch über Wagner* (Frankfurt am Main, 1952).

6. "Die Juden und Europa," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, VII, 1/2 (1939). Originally Horkheimer had not wanted to use this title for the essay, only the last ten pages of which actually deals with the Jews. He was persuaded to do so by Adorno, according to the recollection of Gershom Scholem, *Walter Benjamin, Geschichte einer Freundschaft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1975), p. 278. Horkheimer later felt embarrassed by this essay with its frequently quoted phrase, "he who does not wish to speak of capitalism should also be silent about fascism," and chose to omit it from his collection *Kritische Theorie*, 2 vols., ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main, 1968).

7. Scholem, *op. cit.*, pp. 276-8.

8. This pattern is discussed, *inter alia*, in Robert Wistrich, "German Social Democracy and the Problem of Jewish Nationalism, 1897-1917," *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, XXI (1976); Donald L. Niewyk, *Socialist, Anti-Semite, and Jew: German Social Democracy Confronts the Problem of Anti-Semitism, 1918-1933* (Baton Rouge, 1971).

in both the Wilhelmian and Weimar eras, the Revisionists were the most attentive to anti-Semitism as a problem in its own right. And of course, the Institute of Social Research had no use for revisionism in any form. Its members tended as well to hold to another pattern that often accompanied this inverse relationship between radicalism and sensitivity to anti-Semitism: those among them with Jewish backgrounds rarely, if ever, found their ethnic identities significant for their work. Not until the 1950s, when Horkheimer in particular attempted to compensate for his earlier neglect,⁹ was this latter pattern reversed. In addition to the *Notizen* published only after his death, which are mentioned above, he published several essays affirming his commitment to the Jewish community and even alleging that certain aspects of his Critical Theory could be traced to Jewish influences.¹⁰ None of his former colleagues went this far, but it is more than likely that they all shared an awareness of the insufficiency of their prewar attitudes on these issues.

It was, in fact, during the war that their position began to change. Plans were laid for a major project devoted to anti-Semitism,¹¹ and works written under the Institute's auspices such as Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* began to pay more attention to the problem.¹² A brief glance at the latter will show, however, how hesitant the shift was at first. Although *Behemoth* was in some ways, particularly in its critical attitude towards the concept of state capitalism,¹³ at odds with mainstream Institute thinking, its treatment of anti-Semitism seems to have been fairly representative of the general attitude. In the work's first edition, published in 1942, Neumann devoted a chapter to "Racism and Anti-Semitism." He distinguished between totalitarian and non-totalitarian variants of the phenomenon, the former based on "magic and beyond discussion,"¹⁴ the latter preserving "remnants of rationality"¹⁵ and thus open to analysis. The rationality in question was

9. See, for example, "Über die deutschen Juden," in *Kritik der Instrumentellen Vernunft. Aus den Vorträgen und Aufzeichnung seit Kriegsende*, ed. Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main, 1967), originally published in 1961. For a discussion of Horkheimer's later turn towards Jewish themes, see Eva G. Reichmann, "Max Horkheimer the Jew: Critical Theory and Beyond," *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, XIX (1974) and Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London, 1978).

10. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, XXIV (January 5, 1970), Horkheimer claimed that Critical Theory's refusal to name the "other" was derived from the Jewish taboo on naming God or picturing paradise.

11. In 1939 a prospectus was drafted for such a project; it was published in the *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* (the short-lived English language successor to the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*) IX, 1 (1941).

12. *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-44*, rev. ed. (New York, 1944).

13. For a discussion of Neumann's conflict with Pollock over State Capitalism, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-50* (Boston, 1973), pp. 162-67.

14. *Behemoth*, p. 122.

15. *Ibid.*

above all that of economics: the distribution of the spoils among strata of the population necessary for the regime's support, the distorted satisfaction of "the anti-capitalist longings of the German people,"¹⁶ the displacement of the aggressive energies of class struggle, and the justification of eastern expansion. Although Neumann recognized religious sources of anti-Semitism as well as purely social ones, his main emphasis was on its economic rationality. Because of this stress and the concomitant belief that anti-Semitism was manipulated from above rather than spontaneously generated from below, Neumann could reveal that "the writer's personal conviction, paradoxical as it may seem, is that the German people are the least anti-Semitic of all."¹⁷ In this belief, he was at one with his Institute colleagues.¹⁸

In the second edition of *Behemoth*, which appeared in 1944, Neumann appended a section on anti-Semitism in which he acknowledged the new ruthlessness of Nazi policy towards the Jews but still saw it as "only the means to the attainment of the ultimate objective, namely the destruction of free institutions, beliefs, and groups."¹⁹ This view he dubbed "the spear-head theory of anti-Semitism" because of his conviction that the economic goals of the system were still paramount. Many years later, in the last work he was to complete before his untimely death in 1954, Neumann reaffirmed his belief that spontaneous German anti-Semitism was relatively minor.²⁰

That reaffirmation, however, appeared in an essay significantly entitled "Anxiety and Politics," which marked a milestone in Neumann's intellectual development because of its belated acknowledgement of the power of the irrational in political life. Neumann's former colleagues in the Institute had come to the same understanding much earlier. In fact, the increased integration of psychoanalysis into critical theory coincided very closely with the growing attention they began paying to anti-Semitism during the war. For all their agreement with Neumann's stress on the manipulative nature of Jew-hatred, they did not hold to his distinction between totalitarian and non-totalitarian anti-Semitisms, only the latter being amenable to critical analysis because of its rational foundation. Although Horkheimer and the inner circle of the Institute never abandoned the economic dimension of their theory, they came increasingly to stress the psychological aspects of the problems they studied, anti-Semitism in particular.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Interview with Leo Lowenthal, Berkeley, Ca., August, 1968. In the 1939 prospectus for a study of anti-Semitism, the Institute wrote: "While frank disgust for the anti-Semitism of the government is revealed among the German masses, the promises of anti-Semitism are eagerly swallowed where fascist governments have never been attempted" (p. 141).

19. *Behemoth*, p. 551. This attitude was characteristic of the SPD, to whose left-wing Neumann had belonged during the Weimar Republic. See Niewyk, p. 217.

20. "Anxiety and Politics," *The Democratic and Authoritarian State: Essays in Political and Legal Theory*, ed. Herbert Marcuse (New York, 1957), p. 286.

Anticipations of this shift were apparent as early as the fragments of Adorno's Wagner study published in 1939, where the category of sado-masochism, developed in Erich Fromm's contributions to the Institute's work,²¹ was extensively employed. The first systematic efforts to probe anti-Semitism took place in 1943, when the Institute began a massive investigation of American labor's attitude towards the Jews, conducted under the auspices of the Jewish Labor Committee.²² Although a great deal of raw data was accumulated, much of it damaging to the liberal image of American labor, and several drafts were completed, no results were published because of a number of organizational and theoretical difficulties. The experience of using empirical techniques proved invaluable, however, when the Institute's next investigation of anti-Semitism began shortly thereafter, this time under the sponsorship of the American Jewish Committee. In 1944, Horkheimer became the Committee's Director of Scientific Research and launched an ambitious program which culminated in a five-part *Studies in Prejudice*, finally published in 1949 and 1950. One of the volumes, Paul Massing's *Rehearsal for Destruction*,²³ was a traditional historical account of Germany's anti-Semitic movements before World War I, which stressed the importance of the economic depression of the 1873-96 era in stimulating resentment against the Jews. The other four volumes, however, were predominantly psychological in methodology. Two were by non-Institute authors and thus merit no comment here.²⁴ The others were *Prophets of Deceit* by Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman and *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno and three members of the Berkeley Public Opinion Study Group, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford.²⁵

In his introduction to *Prophets of Deceit*, Horkheimer, who oversaw the entire project, argued that because men at present were denied significant political choices, the people themselves did not suffice as an object of study. Instead, those who manipulate them from above must also be scrutinized. Lowenthal and Guterman thus focused on the techniques of demagogic agitators, whose appeals they subjected to a qualitative content analysis using what they called a "psychological Morse code."²⁶ The specific context

21. For a discussion of Fromm's work with the Institute, see *The Dialectical Imagination*, chapter III.

22. For a discussion of the American Labor project, see *The Dialectical Imagination*, pp. 224-6.

23. (New York, 1949). According to Ismar Schorsch, "After twenty-five years, Massing's penetrating and judicious study. . . remains unsurpassed." See "German Antisemitism in the Light of Post-war Historiography," *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute*, XIX (1974).

24. Nathan W. Ackerman and Marie Jahoda, *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (New York, 1950) and Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, *Dynamics of Prejudice: A Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans* (New York, 1950). For a brief discussion of these works, see *The Dialectical Imagination*, pp. 235-7.

25. *Prophets of Deceit* (New York, 1949); *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950).

26. *Prophets of Deceit*, p. 140. The theoretical underpinnings of the code were spelled out more clearly in Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, ed. Geza Roheim (New York, 1951).

was American society, where the potential for mass anti-Semitism seemed sufficiently threatening to justify this careful investigation. Arguing against the assumption that the exposure of deliberate deception was enough to discredit the demagogue, they sought to unmask the arsenal of unconscious devices that accounted for his appeal. Among those discussed was that of the projected enemy, who was conceived of as both strong and weak. The most frequent embodiment of this projection, they claimed, was the Jew, who appeared as both persecutor and quarry in the fantasy world of the agitator. Equated with the “other,” the Jew was the victim of a paranoid projection. His gestures and mannerisms were mimicked by the agitator, who made the vulnerable Jew a “symbol on which he centers the projection of his own impotent rage against the restraints of civilization.”²⁷ As we shall see momentarily, these findings perfectly complemented the more theoretical analysis offered by Horkheimer and Adorno (and partly coauthored by Lowenthal himself) a few years before the publication of *Prophets of Deceit*.

In *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno and his colleagues turned to the character types who would be most receptive to the appeal of these demagogic devices. Although the most ambitious interest of the study was the generation and testing of a quantitative scale to measure the “authoritarian” potential of individuals (the celebrated “F scale”), the authors also developed a specific “A-S scale” to uncover latent anti-Semitic tendencies as well. In fact, the study began with a specific focus on this problem. And although Adorno wrote that “we came to regard it as our main task not to analyze anti-Semitism or any other anti-minority prejudice as a socio-psychological phenomenon *per se*, but rather to examine the relation of anti-minority prejudice to broader ideological and characterological patterns,”²⁸ *The Authoritarian Personality* still contained a significant discussion of the phenomenon in its own terms. In addition to a long presentation of the procedures of the A-S scale by Daniel Levinson, Adorno himself contributed a chapter devoted to the qualitative analysis of the indirect or “screened” interviews conducted on a sample population by the project’s staff. Among his conclusions were that anti-Semitism was subjective and irrational in nature, generally grounded in stereotypically distorted experience, rationalized in moralistic, super-egoistic terms, inclined to the “mythological” confusion of mental dispositions and physical categories, and often linked to “anti-democratic feeling.”²⁹

This last formulation with its uncritical acceptance of the norm of bourgeois democracy, combined with the generally psychologistic orientation of the work as a whole, led some observers to believe that the Frankfurt School had abandoned its Marxist past entirely. Moreover, nowhere in the work was an attempt made to see anti-Semitism in essentially class terms,

27. *Prophets of Deceit*, p. 88.

28. *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 605.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 653.

although the motivations behind it were acknowledged to differ according to social background.³⁰ The study of American labor had convinced Adorno and his colleagues that the problem was no longer confined to one stratum of the social whole. "Sociologically," Adorno wrote, "this syndrome [the authoritarian personality of high scorers on the F-scale] used to be, in Europe, highly characteristic of the lower middle class. In this country, we may expect it among people whose actual status differs from that to which they aspire."³¹

There were, however, frequent suggestions in the work of the Frankfurt School's continued desire to situate the psychological dimension of prejudice in a wider social setting. For example, in discussing the sources of stereotyping and personalization, Adorno wrote: "Ever more anonymous and opaque social processes make it increasingly difficult to integrate the limited sphere of one's personal life experience with objective social dynamics. Social alienation is hidden by a surface phenomenon in which the very opposite is being stressed: personalization of political attitudes and habits offers compensation for the dehumanization of the social sphere which is at the bottom of today's grievances."³² These instances tended, however, to be lost in the work's more subjective approach. Indeed, as Adorno himself recognized, a satisfactory theory of anti-Semitism "could be approached only by recourse to a theory which is beyond the scope of this study. Such a theory would neither enumerate a diversity of 'factors' nor single out a specific one as 'the' cause but rather develop a unified framework within which all the 'elements' are linked together consistently. This would amount to nothing less than a theory of modern society as a whole."³³

Although such a general theory was absent from all the volumes of the *Studies in Prejudice*, Horkheimer and Adorno had attempted in 1944 to isolate the "Elements of Anti-Semitism" in a chapter of their joint work, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.³⁴ Published in 1947, this crucial statement of Critical Theory was generally ignored in America because it was written in German. As a result, the objective complement to the subjective approach of the *Studies* was lost to view until the book was rediscovered in the 1960s by young German New Left followers of the Frankfurt School, a rediscovery which ultimately brought it to the attention of an English-speaking audience as well. Horkheimer and Adorno had perhaps counted on its immediate neglect because it was in "Elements of Anti-Semitism" that they voiced

30. *Ibid.*, p. 638. Here it is argued that the proletarian anti-Semite is likely to identify the Jew with the bourgeois agent of capitalism, while the bourgeois anti-Semite tends to see the Jew as a "misfit bourgeois" who does not belong to modern society. The study's sample was essentially middle-class, but the earlier labor project had given evidence of the former tendency.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 759-60.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 671.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 608.

34. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. John Cumming (New York, 1972); Lowenthal was the coauthor of the first three of the seven sections of this chapter.

sentiments clearly at odds with the liberal orientation of their American sponsors and co-workers. Whereas, for example, *The Authoritarian Personality* refused to investigate the role of the object of anti-Semitism, which had “little to do with the qualities of those against whom it is directed,”³⁵ the theoretical essay entered the dangerous territory in which the contribution of the Jews was also open for discussion. And instead of making vaguely complimentary remarks about liberal democracy, Horkheimer and Adorno reverted to the more traditional Frankfurt School position that liberalism was itself implicated in the rise of fascism.

The overarching theory they presented was, however, far more than an echo of the reductive Marxist approach that had characterized their work through Horkheimer’s “Die Juden und Europa.” In addition to the residues of that position, the Freudian categories they were then applying to their empirical investigations were also in evidence. But beyond both was an analysis grounded in the general argument of the book, which stressed the ambiguous implications of the age-old domination of nature in western culture and the concomitant apotheosis of instrumental reason. To outline the intricacies of that argument is beyond the scope of this essay,³⁶ but certain of its implications for the issue of anti-Semitism must be discussed.

One problem in doing so, however, derives from Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s refusal to organize the arguments they presented in a hierarchical fashion. No attempt was made to weigh the relative significance of each “element” in the compound that was anti-Semitism, nor were the causal links among them fully delineated. Instead, Horkheimer and Adorno offered what might be called a decentered constellation of factors juxtaposed in unmediated fashion. Although brilliant and original in many places, the resulting whole was less than fully satisfying.³⁷ It is nonetheless useful to extract those elements that Horkheimer and Adorno especially stressed, even if a totally coherent and integrated summary of their entire argument cannot be constructed.

Among the most obvious elements in their analysis, and the one perhaps most absent from the *Studies in Prejudice*, derived from the Frankfurt School’s early indebtedness to Marx. “Bourgeois anti-Semitism,” Horkheimer and Adorno wrote, “has a specific economic reason: the concealment of domination in production.”³⁸ Like Neumann in *Behemoth*, they recognized

35. *The Authoritarian Personality*, p. 607.

36. For an analysis, see *The Dialectical Imagination*, chapter VIII; Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York, 1977), pp. 59-62, 178-80, and Christian Lenhardt, “The Wanderings of Enlightenment,” in *On Critical Theory*, ed. John O’Neill (New York, 1976).

37. One of the book’s first reviewers, Heinz L. Matzal, found it the least convincing section. See *Philosophischer Literaturanzeiger*, I (1949). In subsequent discussions of the Frankfurt School’s work, it has not been prominently featured. Carlebach is an exception, and his attitude is generally hostile. See note 4.

38. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 173.

the function of the Jews as scapegoats for anti-capitalist sentiments: “They were the representatives — in harmony with their patriarchal religion — of municipal, bourgeois and finally, industrial conditions. They carried capitalist ways of life to various countries and drew upon themselves the hatred of all who had to suffer under capitalism.”³⁹ Although they were sensitive to the fact that “commerce was not [the Jews’] vocation but their fate,”⁴⁰ an acknowledgement that Marx had callously omitted from his earlier diatribe against the Jews, they nonetheless implicated the Jews — or perhaps, better put, did not exonerate them from — the responsibility for capitalism’s triumph and the reaction it engendered. “They are now experiencing to their own cost the exclusive, particularist character of capitalism.”⁴¹

But beyond this more traditional Marxist approach, with its echo of Bebel’s celebrated remark about anti-Semitism being “the socialism of fools,” Horkheimer and Adorno provided an analysis of the post-bourgeois anti-Semitism that characterized fascism *per se*. Based on earlier Frankfurt School work on the nature of modern authoritarianism,⁴² they argued that fascism represented a more naked form of repression than classical capitalism with its reliance on the mediation of the market place: “Whereas there is no longer any need for economic domination, the Jews are marked out as the absolute object of domination pure and simple.”⁴³ Fascism is an order of undiluted force led by rulers who “long for total possession and unlimited power, at any price.”⁴⁴ These megalomaniacal yearnings produce a certain measure of guilt, however, which is alleviated by claiming that it is the Jews who in fact crave total control.

The long range tendency towards this type of domination, which went through a classical capitalist stage before reaching its apotheosis in fascism, had to be understood in more fundamental terms than the scapegoat theory would allow. For “anti-Semitism is a deeply imprinted schema, a ritual of civilization.”⁴⁵ It is thus to the fundamental dialectic of civilization (or the Enlightenment, as they alternately call it) that Horkheimer and Adorno turned for a deeper explanation.

The essence of that explanation was the equation of civilization with the domination of nature, a domination whose sinister implications were only

39. *Ibid.*, p. 175.

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Ibid.*

42. See especially the theoretical introductions to *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, and Marcuse’s essay cited in note 4.

43. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 168. They also argued, in a manner anticipating Hannah Arendt’s well-known analysis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* of 1951, that the 19th-century Jews had sold their political rights and power for economic security. Accordingly, when the nation-state ceased to protect them in the era of mass politics, they were entirely vulnerable to attack (pp. 171-2).

44. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

then becoming fully manifest. "Those who spasmodically dominate nature," they wrote, "see in a tormented nature a provocative image of powerless happiness. The thought of happiness without power is unbearable because it would then be true happiness."⁴⁶ The Jews are singled out for special attack because they are confused with nature itself, and thus seen as having "happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth."⁴⁷ But ironically, the Jews are not merely identified with the nature that is dominated and envied; they are also closely associated with the process of civilization itself. As was the case with their being scapegoated for the sins of capitalism, here, too, there was a grain of truth, for the Jews were the "colonizers for progress."⁴⁸ From Roman times on, they had promoted civilization and its concomitant domination of nature with "enlightenment as with cynicism."⁴⁹ When nature rebelled against its age-old domination, as Horkheimer and Adorno claimed it did with the rise of irrationalist politics, the Jews were inevitably singled out for revenge. But the revolt of repressed nature was itself turned into yet another manifestation of domination; fascism, in fact, "seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination."⁵⁰ The ultimate significance of this reversal is that the Jews, who were implicated in the original domination of nature, are sacrificed to the demands of a new type of domination which assumes the guise of a rebellion against its traditional form.

In developing the intricacies of this argument, Horkheimer and Adorno introduced a complicated discussion of the role of mimetic behavior in civilization and its distortion in the fascist mimicry of its Jewish victims. They also analyzed the Christian contribution to the process, which they stressed could not be ignored despite the moribund status of the church in the modern world. But their most interesting argument drew upon the psychoanalytic theory they were then applying to the subjective side of anti-Semitism in their more empirical work: "Anti-Semitism is based on a false projection. It is the counterpart of true mimesis, and fundamentally related to the repressed form; in fact, it is probably the morbid expression of repressed mimesis. Mimesis imitates the environment, but false projection makes the environment like itself."⁵¹ This type of false projection was

46. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 175. In a letter Horkheimer wrote to Lowenthal on July 5, 1946, he talked of the mistrust the peasant had of the urban manipulator of language, which he called partly justified. "This distrust," Horkheimer continued, "is an element of anti-Semitism itself, and the Jew who manipulates language so easily is not free from guilt in the prehistory of what you explain as the fascist handling of language. Here, too, the Jew is the pioneer of capitalism" (Lowenthal collection, Berkeley, California).

49. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 187.

equivalent to paranoia, but instead of being a personal problem, paranoia had been politicized in the modern world. To many who succumbed to its appeal, fascism provided a mass delusional system that was mistaken for reality.

However, Horkheimer and Adorno went beyond the purely psycho-analytic reading of paranoid false projections by adding an epistemological dimension to their analysis. Projection, they argued, is not in and of itself at fault, for as Kant in particular had shown, all perception contains a projective moment. But a healthy projection preserves the tension between subject and object, neither reducing the former to the latter, as in the case of positivism, nor vice versa, as in idealism. Reflection on the mediated non-identity of subject and object was, they contended, the key to a healthy, non-dominating enlightenment; accordingly, “the morbid aspect of anti-Semitism is not projective behavior as such, but the absence from it of reflection.”⁵² The domination of nature entailed by a less benign form of enlightenment was thus closely tied to the psychological condition of paranoia and the philosophical tendency of idealism. “Objectifying (like sick) thought contains the despotism of the subjective purpose which is hostile to the thing and forgets the thing itself, thus committing the mental act of violence which is later put into practice. The unconditional realism of civilized humanity, which culminates in fascism, is a special case of paranoid delusion which dehumanizes nature and finally the nations themselves.”⁵³ This argument, which Adorno was later to develop in much greater detail in *Negative Dialectics*,⁵⁴ thus situated anti-Semitism at the culmination of a process at once social, psychological, and philosophical, a process which was the dialectic of the Enlightenment itself. The somber implication of this fact was that it would take nothing short of the reversal of that process to end persecution of the Jews, a conclusion far bleaker than that of the *Studies in Prejudice* with its call for increased education for tolerance. “If thought is liberated from domination and if violence is abolished, the long absent idea is liable to develop that Jews too are human beings. This development would represent the step out of an anti-Semitic society which drives Jews and others to madness, and into the human society. This step would also fulfill the Fascist lie, but in contradicting it: the Jewish question would prove in fact to be the turning point of history.”⁵⁵ In short, once utopia was achieved, anti-Semitism would take care of itself.

The inverse of this proposition, however, did not necessarily hold, as Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledged in a final section of “Elements of Anti-Semitism” added after the war’s end in 1947. That is, the end of Jew-hatred did not entail the liberation of thought from domination and the abolition of violence. For although “there are no more anti-Semites”⁵⁶ now

52. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 193.

54. *Negative Dialectics*, trs. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1973).

55. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 199-200.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

that Hitler has been defeated, the conditions which made fascism possible have not really been changed. The stereotyped “ticket-mentality” that spawned anti-Semitism has survived its decline. Indeed, “the Jewish masses themselves are as prone to ticket-thinking as the hostile youth organizations.”⁵⁷ The content of fascist propaganda, indeed of fascist action itself, is less important than its source in the paranoid false projection that characterizes the domination of nature. “The ticket mentality as such is as anti-Semitic as the anti-Semitic ticket. The anger against all that is different is teleologically inherent in the mentality, and, as the dominated subjects’ resentment of natural domination, is ready to attack the natural minority — even when the social minority is threatened first.”⁵⁸

For Horkheimer and Adorno, then, perhaps the ultimate source of anti-Semitism and its functional equivalents is the rage against the non-identical that characterizes the totalistic dominating impulse of western civilization. The Jews, in other words and in their very refusal to be assimilated, represent an obstacle to the total integration of the “administered world” or “one-dimensional society,” as Marcuse was to call it. In fact, at least Horkheimer came to see the “negative” relation of the Jews to the rest of mankind as a healthy state of affairs. Not surprisingly, this made his reaction to Zionism and the creation of Israel ambivalent, for now the Jews were merely one nation among others: “Jewry was not a powerful state but the hope for justice at the end of the world. They were a people and its opposite, a rebuke to all peoples. Now, a state claims to be speaking for Jewry, to be Jewry. The Jewish people in whom the injustice of all peoples has become an accusation, the individuals in whose words and gestures the negative of what is reflected itself, have now become positive themselves. A nation among nations, soldiers, leaders, money-raisers for themselves.”⁵⁹ Whether or not this lament, with its echoes of Franz Rosenzweig’s much earlier celebration of the Jews as a non-historical people,⁶⁰ was shared by all of his former colleagues, it is clear that Horkheimer was expressing a cardinal tenet of Critical Theory: the prohibition of premature positivity. In his mind, and perhaps in that of certain of his collaborators, the Jews became the metaphoric equivalent of that remnant of society preserving negation and the non-identical. Indeed, Horkheimer came to argue that underlying the Frankfurt School’s refusal to describe the utopian alternative to the present society was the traditional Jewish taboo on naming God or picturing paradise.⁶¹

57. *Ibid.*, p. 207.

58. *Ibid.*

59. “The State of Israel” in *Dawn and Decline*, pp. 206-7. See also, the aphorism entitled “End of the Dream” on pp. 221-2.

60. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trs. William Hallo (London, 1971).

61. See note 10.

The striking disparity between the references to the Jews and anti-Semitism in the two collections of Horkheimer's aphorisms thus mirrored a fundamental shift in the Frankfurt School's attitude. As it moved further away from the traditional Marxist belief in the proletariat as the agent of positive totalization and more towards the conclusion that the best to be hoped for in the present world was the preservation of enclaves of negation, the attention its members paid to the Jewish question increased. Although assertions of a causal relationship between their own status as Jewish survivors and their vision of a negative dialectics "after Auschwitz" can only be speculative,⁶² it is nonetheless clear that at least in Horkheimer's case, the Critical Theorist was understood as "the Jew" of the administered society. And conversely, anti-Semitism became a model of the totalistic liquidation of non-identity in the one-dimensional world.⁶³ In "Elements of Anti-Semitism," Horkheimer and Adorno had written that "the fact that anti-Semitism tends to occur only as part of an interchangeable program is sure hope that it will die out one day,"⁶⁴ but, when that day would dawn, Critical Theory chose not to say. In fact, for the later Frankfurt School, no hopes could be called sure, although the need to hope was no less urgent.

62. For example, see Zoltan Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (New York, 1977), and Arnold Künzli, *Aufklärung und Dialektik* (Freiburg, 1971). They reduce negative dialectics to Adorno's belated guilt over his earlier rejection of Judaism, produced by his surviving the Holocaust, rather than seeing it as an expression of his (and Horkheimer's) positive identification with the Jews.

63. In "Elements of Anti-Semitism," Horkheimer and Adorno wrote, "from the outset there has always been an intimate link between anti-Semitism and totality" (p. 172). This critical attitude towards totality, a term that frequently appeared in their other writings in a more positive light, was indicative of a general shift away from what might be called the Lukácsian tenor of their early work. Instead of using totality in a completely positive sense, they began to recognize its ambiguous relationship with totalitarianism. For more on this issue, see Martin Jay, "The Concept of Totality in Lukács and Adorno," *Telos*, 32 (Summer, 1977) and *Varieties of Marxism*, ed. Shlomo Avineri (The Hague, 1977).

64. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 207.