

# *The Judaic Element in the Teachings of the Frankfurt School*

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## INTRODUCTION

In dealing with the question of the Judaic element in the teachings of the Frankfurt School, one does well to proceed as the Hebrew script does, that is, from right to left.\* First, there should be a highly compressed account of what the Frankfurt School was about, and, second, an explanation of what is meant by the teachings of the Frankfurt School, that is, the theoretical content of the School. Finally, we take up the main business at hand, that is, the examination of the Judaic element in the work of three Frankfurt School theorists: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Erich Fromm.

Even in the case of such a relatively modest and at times descriptive task as this has to be, a social scientist and historian of ideas is bound to refer to the methodology applied. The approach will follow several lines of investigation, most notably that of the sociology of knowledge, i.e., the “existential determination of ideas” approach. If Hegel is right in saying that “to comprehend what is, is the task of philosophy [and] whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; and philosophy is [but] its own time comprehended in thought”,<sup>1</sup> then this is particularly true of the thinkers of the Frankfurt School. We might add to Hegel’s dictum that each social philosophy is and remains limited and/or influenced by the historical conditions, and, subjectively, by the physical and mental constitution of its originator.

A perusal of the writings of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, for example, can be quite instructive. The titles of their research papers often refer to problems directly relating to Jewish existence and experience, starting with Horkheimer’s ‘The Jews in Europe’ (1939), continuing with ‘Elements of Anti-Semitism’ (1942–1944), a chapter from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, up to the seminal study, *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) by Adorno and co-workers. After their return to Germany in 1950, the concern remains, resulting in papers like ‘The Arrest of Eichmann’ (1960), a retrospective essay on ‘The German Jews’ (1961), and further, the ‘Postscript’ to a volume, *Portraits of German-Jewish*

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<sup>1</sup>Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, transl. T. M. Knox, New York 1967, p. 11.



"Geistesgeschichte" (1961), the more directly religion-related treatises such as 'Theism and Atheism' (1963), 'Religion and Philosophy' (1966), and, finally, Adorno's 'Education after Auschwitz' (1966), only to give a selective list.

### THE STORY OF THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Those first encountering the term Frankfurt School may be puzzled by the references at one point to the Institute for Social Research of Frankfurt, and then to Frankfurt School, or to Critical Theory. The complaint that people "should be told what the Frankfurt School is about" is thus a justified one.<sup>2</sup> It is generally accepted by now that "for any analysis of the sixties and seventies it is crucial to understand the role of the Frankfurt School".<sup>3</sup>

The Frankfurt School, or Critical Theory, represents a significant philosophical-sociological trend on the twentieth-century Western intellectual scene. The story of the School took place in three different geographical settings and within different socio-political contexts, ranging from Weimar Germany to the New York City and California sojourns and after the Second World War the Federal Republic of Germany.

The institutional origins of the School go back to Frankfurt a. Main and the year 1923 when the *Institut für Sozialforschung* was established through a private endowment and in affiliation with the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University of Frankfurt a. Main. Bertolt Brecht, the acid-tongued German playwright, told the story as follows:

"A rich old man, the grain speculator, Weil, dies, disturbed by the miseries on earth. In his will, he leaves a large sum for the establishment of an institute to investigate the sources of that misery, which is, of course, he himself."<sup>4</sup>

Brecht, the Marxist, may have taken some poetic liberty with the facts but he was not absolutely off the target. The rich old man was Herman Weil, at one time economic adviser to the German Imperial Army. Later he attempted to establish business connections with the new state, Soviet Russia, in the form of grain imports from the Ukraine. (In this, he may be considered a somewhat less successful version of Armand Hammer of Occidental Petroleum, with his dealings with the Soviet Union from Lenin's time onwards.)

The fifty-year history of the Frankfurt School may conveniently be divided into three distinct periods, each named after a director who not only put his indelible mark on the philosophy and politics of the Institute but also led the School's fortunes through different historical settings and geographical locations.

The first period, from 1924 to 1930, is called the "Grünberg era," named after Carl Grünberg who was born in Galicia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and received his education in Vienna. This labour historian gave the

<sup>2</sup>John Leonard, review: 'Brecht. A Biography. By Klaus Völker', *The New York Times*, 7th December 1978.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism*, Ithaca-London 1982, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup>Bertolt Brecht, *Arbeitsjournal 1938-1942*, Werner Hecht (ed.), vol. I, Frankfurt a. Main 1973, p. 443.

Institute for Social Research an orthodox – to be sure, not Jewish but – Marxist orientation. The Grünberg era was dominated by politically committed Marxist Institute members such as for example, Henryk Grossmann and the only Gentile member of the Institute, Karl August Wittfogel. Grünberg considered Marxism both as a *Weltanschauung* and as a research method and perceived his times as a transitional period from capitalism to socialism. The Institute was truly interdisciplinary: among its members were philosophers, economists, sociologists, psychologists and literary scholars. Most of these scholars had a Jewish middle- or upper-middle class background, and they were either active in or at least sympathetic to left-wing politics in Weimar Germany.<sup>5</sup>

After illness forced Grünberg to give up his directorship in 1928, there followed a short interim period with Friedrich Pollock at the helm. The second phase commenced in 1931 with Max Horkheimer assuming directorship. Horkheimer outlined the main tasks of the Institute as the investigation of the inter-relationship between the economic base of capitalist-industrial society, the psychic development of the individual and cultural phenomena from a critical perspective.<sup>6</sup> This clearly meant a shift in the theoretical and political orientation of the Institute, due partly to changing historical conditions (the withering away of revolutionary movements) and partly to Horkheimer's personality. Obviously, it was easier to become a revolutionary during the upheavals and continuing revolutions of a Europe after the First World War than a decade later, in the counter-revolutionary Europe of the 1930s. This is not the place to discuss the problem of the participation of Jewish intellectuals in the European labour movements, a topic usually discussed under the heading 'Jews and Socialism', which has had from the beginning a revolutionary and a reformist wing, represented by Karl Marx and Eduard Bernstein.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that during the revolutionary upheavals all around Europe, brilliant Jewish intellectuals were in the forefront of activism: there were Leon Bronstein-Trotsky in Russia, Rosa Luxemburg in Germany, and Georg Lukács in Hungary. Making a choice and explaining the motivation behind it is a difficult problem both for the individual involved and for the social scientist who subsequently attempts to unravel the complexity of it. Gershom Scholem discussed later the problem as he witnessed it in his own family:

"We were four brothers. Two of them took after my father. One of them was even more German than my father, a right-wing German nationalist, a *Deutschnationaler*. The other one merely wanted everything to be all right; he had no special ideals. My third brother . . . opted for the Revolution. He was killed in Buchenwald by the Nazis, as a former Communist Party *Reichstag* deputy . . . Why was one brother attracted to German Social Democracy and the other to Zionism? I don't know. This is the sort of personal decision that nobody can explain."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Ulrike Migdal, *Die Frühgeschichte des Frankfurter Instituts für Sozialforschung*, Frankfurt a. Main-New York 1981.

<sup>6</sup>Zoltán Tar, *The Frankfurt School. The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno*, chapter 1, New York 1985, and the excellent concise introduction: Tom Bottomore, *The Frankfurt School*, London-New York 1984.

<sup>7</sup>See Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews. The Dilemmas of Assimilation in German and Austria-Hungary*, London-Toronto 1982.

<sup>8</sup>Gershom Scholem, *On Jews and Judaism in Crisis*, New York 1976, p. 3.

Horkheimer reflected on this problem too and tried to explain the weighing of the alternatives this way: "The revolutionary career is not a series of banquets . . . nor does it hold the promise of interesting research . . . or salaries. . . ." He concluded that it is rarely chosen by people who are merely talented but do not possess "superhuman faith".<sup>9</sup> Unlike Marx, Trotsky, Luxemburg or Lukács, Horkheimer clearly thought himself to be "merely talented". With the rise of Nazism, the Institute and its members were forced out of Germany. Lewis Feuer has recently reported how the *Institut für Sozialforschung* was transferred to Morningside Heights in New York City in affiliation with Columbia University, a move that was facilitated by the ample means at the Institute's disposal.<sup>10</sup>

It was during the Institute's years in exile that Horkheimer formulated the tenets of Critical Theory, as a special brand of humanistic-Marxist social theory and philosophy. As was the case with many Western intellectuals in the late 1930s, Horkheimer's Institute exhibited a gradual turning away from Marxism. Space does not permit a critical analysis of the theoretical accomplishments and/or shortcomings or even a summary of the major works of the second phase of the Frankfurt School. A few remarks are in order, though, about the shifts in emphasis in the Frankfurt thought, no doubt resulting from the Nazi takeover and the commencement of the final solution of the "Jewish Question" in Hitler's Germany. The changing attitude and perception is recorded in Horkheimer and Adorno's joint work in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The earlier hopes about the possibility of a rational and just society had given way to despair. The world was conceived of as the decay of one's own existence. The authors tried to explain why "mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism".<sup>11</sup> The parallel study, *Eclipse of Reason* by Horkheimer records the universal feeling of fear and the diminishing hope that the "subject" (man) will ever be able to assert himself and resist the all-powerful manipulation in a society of total bureaucratisation.<sup>12</sup> As another kind of shift, the second phase also saw the gradual incorporation of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and conceptualisation, which culminated in the study, *The Authoritarian Personality*, conducted by Adorno and a team of co-workers. (The study was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee as part of a series 'Studies in Prejudice', under the directorship of Horkheimer.)

The adjustment of Institute members to the new *Heimat* took diverse forms as was the case in general among the émigré intellectuals, who ranged from noted academics to successful businessmen to failures.<sup>13</sup> Adorno's case is an exemplary one for the maladjusted intellectual. His book, *Minima Moralia*,

<sup>9</sup>Heinrich Regius (Max Horkheimer), *Dämmerung. Notizen in Deutschland*, Zürich 1934, pp. 74–75.

<sup>10</sup>Lewis S. Feuer, 'The Frankfurt Marxists and the Columbia Liberals', *Survey*, vol 25, No. 3 (Summer 1980), pp. 156–176.

<sup>11</sup>Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, transl. by John Cumming, New York 1972, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York 1947, p. vi.

<sup>13</sup>See Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (eds.), *The Intellectual Migration*, Cambridge, Mass. 1969; Anthony Heilbut, *Exiled in Paradise. German Refugee Artists and Intellectuals in America from the 1930s to the Present*, New York 1983; Lewis A. Coser, *Refugee Scholars in America. Their Impact and Their Experiences*, New Haven–London 1984; and Mathias Greffrath, *Die Zerstörung einer Zukunft. Gespräche mit emigrierten Sozialwissenschaftlern*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1979.

records his reflections and perceptions of himself as a "stranger" here, and is not by accident subtitled *Reflections from Damaged Life*.<sup>14</sup> During their sojourn in New York City, the Institute members consciously tried to maintain a German island of culture; and with the exception of its last volume in 1940–1941, the journal of the Institute, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, was published in German.<sup>15</sup>

With Horkheimer and Adorno's return to West Germany in 1950, the third phase of the Frankfurt School began.<sup>16</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno were invited to return to Germany as part of the reparation efforts of the Adenauer government. The Institute was re-established at the University; and Horkheimer became the rector of the University, a post he held until 1953. Horkheimer and Adorno became highly visible figures in West Germany's cultural life. They devoted themselves to a deeply felt mission, namely, to re-educate the public and to educate a new generation of German intellectuals. (As stated in the 1969 Preface to the new edition of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "This book was written in America, whence we returned to Germany, convinced that there we could achieve more, in practice as well as in theory, than elsewhere.") Their critical-social-theoretical approach has, in the opinion of many critics and friends alike, contributed to the radicalisation of the new generation of German students. Horkheimer and Adorno's collaboration continued in Frankfurt until Horkheimer's retirement in 1958 and even after, until Adorno's death in 1969, the year that marked the end of the Frankfurt School.

### THE JUDAIC ELEMENT IN FRANKFURT THOUGHT

Let us now turn to that which mainly concerns us here, the discussion of the Judaic element in the Frankfurt thought. It should be made plain from the outset that this aspect of the Frankfurt School was accorded relatively little attention in the critical literature on the School.<sup>17</sup> We take as the point of departure the cryptic remark of Gershom Scholem in his autobiography, entitled *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*, that the Institute for Social Research of Max Horkheimer was one of the most remarkable "Jewish sects" that German Jewry produced.<sup>18</sup> Scholem was a close friend of Walter Benjamin, and he also knew all the other members of the Institute; moreover, he has been one of the

<sup>14</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, transl. E. F. N. Jephcott, London 1974.

<sup>15</sup>See Jürgen Habermas, 'The Frankfurt School in New York', in Judith Marcus and Zoltán Tar (eds.), *Foundations of the Frankfurt School of Social Research*, New Brunswick, N.J. 1984, pp. 55–65.

<sup>16</sup>Tar, *The Frankfurt School*, chapter 3.

<sup>17</sup>See the pioneering articles: Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, 'Max Horkheimers Stellung zum Judentum', *Emuna*, VIII, 6 (November–December 1973), pp. 457–460; Eva G. Reichmann, 'Max Horkheimer the Jew. Critical Theory and Beyond', in *LBI Year Book, XIX* (1974), pp. 181–195; 'Max Horkheimer', in Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism*, London 1978, pp. 234–257; Martin Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School. Critical Theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism', *New German Critique*, No. 19 (Winter 1980), pp. 137–149; Ehrhard Bahr, 'The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School. The Failure of Critical Theory', in Judith Marcus and Zoltán Tar (eds.), *Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, pp. 311–321; and Carl-Friedrich Geyer, *Kritische Theorie*, München 1982, chapter 9, 'Auschwitz als Schlüsselerefahrung'.

<sup>18</sup>Gershom Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*, Frankfurt a. Main 1977, p. 167.



foremost of Judaic scholars of the twentieth century and consequently we ought to take his remark seriously. We will attempt to elaborate on this in some detail.

The basic fact remains to be considered that almost all members of the Institute have come from assimilated middle- or upper-middle-class German-Jewish families. It is also a fact that the great scientific and philosophical accomplishments of Jews in Europe since the French Revolution were produced by assimilated Jews who strove to identify themselves with liberal and radical movements in order to be completely absorbed in European culture. The two reactions of European Jewry to its emancipation in the post-French revolutionary era were: first, the attempted total assimilation into the existing social order, and, second, the intellectual critique, namely, the endeavour to measure "that order with its own professed ideas". Horkheimer at one point made the remark: "Assimilation and criticism are but two moments in the same process of emancipation."<sup>19</sup>

Most of the retrospective appraisals conclude that the idea of assimilation turned out to be an illusion. "Jews have not assimilated into 'the German people,' but into a certain layer of it, the newly emerged middle class," states Jacob Katz in his reflections on the problem, quoting in fact from his 1933 dissertation at Frankfurt University.<sup>20</sup> The members of the Frankfurt School were assimilated to different degrees; some of them came from families who were observant Jews and/or had an early involvement with Jewish organisations (Zionist or other); others had no Jewish identity and the awareness first came with the rise of Nazism, and/or the subsequent Holocaust, as was the case with Adorno. Among the Institute members, one could draw up a spectrum of possible groupings, ranging from strong to no identifiably Jewish influences.

Under the heading "strong influence," we could list Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal and Erich Fromm. The group with "no" or "minimal" Jewish influence would include the economists such as Friedrich Pollock, Henryk Grossmann and Arkady Gurland. Then we have the "in-between" category: Horkheimer, Adorno and Herbert Marcuse.

Our concern will be with three members of the Institute or Frankfurt School, namely: Max Horkheimer, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno and Erich Fromm. The principle of selection was that they were perforce the central figures in the School's history, and that they represent a continuity in the history of the School: Horkheimer, 1931–1960; Adorno, 1938–1968; and Fromm, 1928–1938. They had the power that was responsible for directions in the work and thought of the Institute. It is clearly the case with Horkheimer and Adorno, both one-time directors of the Institute.

**Max Horkheimer.** A certain chronology of Horkheimer's intellectual career may be helpful. The 1920s were years of youthful existentialism, complete with

<sup>19</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, transl. Matthew J. O'Connell et al., New York, p. 108. See also Thorstein Veblen, 'The Intellectual Preeminence of Jews in Modern Europe', in *The Portable Veblen*, ed. by Max Lerner, New York 1948; and M. Polanyi, 'Jewish Problems', *The Political Quarterly*, XIV, No. 1 (January–March 1943), pp. 33–45.

<sup>20</sup>Jacob Katz, 'German Culture and the Jews', *Commentary*, February 1984, pp. 54–59.

Jewish consciousness; the 1930s show him as an eclectic Marxist, with "subterranean" Jewish influence. The 1940s brought the philosophy of despair, under the impact of the Holocaust, and the 1960s brought with them an intensification of Jewish consciousness and influence. Hans Mayer, one-time collaborator of the Institute, characterised it as "a return from an excursion into an alien world . . . to bourgeois origins, to parents . . . to Judaism".<sup>21</sup>

The essence of traditional Judaic thought is usually summed up in four major themes: First, ethical monotheism, that is, the unconditional character of the ethical demands. In Leo Baeck's words: "Judaism is not only ethical but ethics constitute its principle and essence." Second, awareness of the historical mission, the consciousness of being the chosen people, that is, Messianism. Third, the idea of *zedakah*, which "connotes justice and beneficence fused into a unity". Fourth, concern with social justice.<sup>22</sup>

These themes – ethical commitment, Messianism, concern with social justice – can be traced throughout the history of Frankfurt thought from the 1930s to its demise in the late 1960s. Horkheimer repeatedly asserted the primacy of ethics over epistemological and ontological issues. In his words: "Matter in itself is meaningless: its qualities cannot provide the maxims for the shaping of life either in regard to the commandments or to the ideal . . . Knowledge yields no models, maxims or advice for an authentic life."<sup>23</sup> Before coining the term "Critical Theory" in 1937, Horkheimer called his theory a "materialist" one, which had a special meaning for him. Materialism does not mean the ontological primacy of matter over consciousness and is "not tied down to a set of conceptions of matter". Problems of materialist philosophy are essentially determined by the tasks to be mastered at a specific historical moment. What did he mean by "tasks"? "Tasks" mean, in this case, "changing the concrete conditions under which men suffer and in which, of course, their soul must become stunted". Thus, *justice* and *injustice* were a major concern in the early phase of Critical Theory. Horkheimer stated in 1933 that "past injustice will never be made up; the suffering of past generations receives no compensation".<sup>24</sup> Four years later it is reiterated in the following version: "And even after the new society shall have come into existence, the happiness of its members will not make up for the wretchedness of those who are being destroyed in our contemporary society."<sup>25</sup>

Critical Theory proper was offered by Horkheimer in the New York City exile of the Institute, in an article of 1937 and was seconded by Herbert Marcuse.<sup>26</sup> Critical Theory means historical continuity with the critical philosophy of German idealism and Marx's critique of the political economy of capitalist society. Critical Theory as an attitude means that the theorist is guided by the maxim that ". . . the thrust toward a rational society is innate in every man". It

<sup>21</sup>Hans Mayer, 'Einige meiner Lehrer', *Die Zeit*, No. 13, (25th March 1977), p. 16.

<sup>22</sup>Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism*, New York 1970, p. 195.

<sup>23</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, transl. Matthew J. O'Connell et al., New York 1972, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup>Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, pp. 32 and 26.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 251.

<sup>26</sup>Max Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in *Critical Theory*, pp. 188–243.

also means that the theorist is to promote progress towards a just society. Such argumentation is in line with Jewish Messianism, starting with the Old Testament prophets and continuing up to modern Jewish revolutionary intellectuals. Clearly, the historical circumstances (1937!) were inhospitable to any such aspiration and pessimism and withdrawal were the result. As Horkheimer expressed it: "Truth has sought refuge among small groups of admirable men. But these have been decimated by terrorism . . ." <sup>27</sup> The cornerstone of Judaic thought, the will for social justice, drove the young Horkheimer towards Marxism as the only realistic alternative to the menacing totalitarianism of the Right, that of Hitler in the Germany of the 1930s. Ten years later, the brutal practices of the leftist totalitarianism of Stalinism repelled him from Marxism.

Horkheimer emphasised the theme of *Mitleid* (compassion) with all suffering creatures and wrote in 1933: "Men might . . . overcome pain and illness . . . but in nature the reign of suffering and death will continue." <sup>28</sup> Thus, as late as 1960, Horkheimer explicitly states that in his interpretation of Judaism, the two basic themes are constitutive: suffering (*Leid*) and the refusal to accept violence. He declared: "No people has suffered more than the Jews . . . The refusal to accept violence as a proof of the truth is a perennial trait in Jewish history, and Judaism has turned the suffering it endured in consequence in its own unity and permanence . . . Suffering and hope have become inseparable in Judaism." <sup>29</sup> The culmination of the theme suffering is found in the following declaration of Horkheimer: "The anonymous martyrs of the concentration camps are the symbols of humanity that is striving to be born. The task of philosophy is to translate what they have done into language that will be heard . . ." <sup>30</sup>

Another aspect of Judaic heritage that Horkheimer explicitly refers to is the *ban on images* that follows the Second Commandment. In this, he sees the difference between Marx's Jewish legacy and that of his own thought, and states: "In my opinion, Marx was influenced by Judaic Messianism while for me the main thing is that God cannot be depicted . . . but is the object of our yearning." On another occasion Horkheimer makes explicit the connection between Judaism and Critical Theory as follows. "This utter caution in dealing with the name of God . . . is Jewish heritage?" he was asked. "Yes," he answered, "and in the same way this utter caution has become an element of our social theory which we called Critical Theory . . ." <sup>31</sup>

Much has been made of Horkheimer's ambivalent attitude towards Israel but it might find its explanation in the "over-identification" with European culture as well as in his life-long rejection of nationalism of any kind. He was of the opinion that the rise of Zionism was facilitated by a loss of faith in the possibility

of a cultural-political pluralism, accentuated and accelerated by the extreme nationalism and militarisation in the twentieth century. Horkheimer wrote: "The Zionist movement, which distrusted the chance of pluralism and the culture of the autonomous individual in Europe, represented a reaction of Jewry upon the possibilities opened up in the last century, a reaction that was radical and was a resignation at the same time. It is the saddest aspect of recent history both for Europe and Jewry that Zionism was proven right." <sup>32</sup> Horkheimer recognised the immediate and immense historical significance of the establishment of the Jewish state, but he could not quite reconcile this fact with the Old Testament prophecy about the Promised Land. He reflected on the problem in one of his very last lectures as follows: "The Bible states, after all, that the righteous people of all nations will be led by the Messiah to the land of Zion. I still think about how the state of Israel – which I definitely stand up for – should interpret this prophecy of the Old Testament? Is Israel then the Zion of the Bible? As things stand, the solution to this problem might lie in the fact that the persecution of the Jews . . . continues in spite of Israel. Israel is a land in distress just as the Jews have always been a people in distress. For that reason one has to stand up for Israel. The decisive fact for me is that Israel gives asylum to many people. But as far as I am concerned, it remains questionable that the existence of Israel is the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament." <sup>33</sup> It was certainly not accidental but rather symbolic that Horkheimer delivered his last lecture, a few weeks before his death, on Judaism, in the *Israelitische Cultusgemeinde* in Zürich. <sup>34</sup>

*Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno.* To discuss the Jewish element in the life and work of Adorno presents a more complex and problematic issue. He was half-Jewish, son of a German-Jewish wine merchant and of an Italian Catholic mother who was an aspiring singer. (It is now known that at one time in his youth, he contemplated conversion to Catholicism.) <sup>35</sup> Almost no Jewish influence can be traced in Adorno's pre-1940 work but this changed after the commencement of the "final solution of the Jewish Question", that proved to be the catalysing event for Adorno. The closing chapter in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, of which he was a co-author, is devoted to the theme of antisemitism. From the 1940s on, we find numerous references and explicit statements on Judaic themes and concerns in Adorno's work. He concludes his book, *Minima Moralia* (which Jürgen Habermas called his most "subjective work"), with a statement that is steeped in Judaic thought: "The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world of redemption: all else is reconstruction,

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 237–238.

<sup>28</sup>Cited in Tar, *The Frankfurt School*, p. 54.

<sup>29</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, p. 122.

<sup>30</sup>Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, p. 161.

<sup>31</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*, Hamburg 1970, p. 77. 'Was wir "Sinn" nennen, wird verschwinden. Spiegel-Gespräch mit dem Philosophen Max Horkheimer', *Der Spiegel* Nos. 1–2 (1970), p. 81.

<sup>32</sup>Max Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft*, Frankfurt a. Main 1967, p. 309.

<sup>33</sup>Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsucht . . .*, pp 77–78.

<sup>34</sup>Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich, 'Max Horkheimer – ein Leben "um der Wahrheit willen"', in *Israelitisches Wochenblatt* (Zürich), 13th July 1973, p. 29.

<sup>35</sup>T. W. Adorno's letter to Ernst Krenek (7th October 1934), in *Theodor W. Adorno & Ernst Krenek Briefwechsel*, ed. by Wolfgang Rogge, Frankfurt a. Main 1974, p. 46.

mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light."<sup>36</sup>

There is the well-known quotation from Adorno that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric".<sup>37</sup> But it is his later work, the *Negative Dialectics*, which contains some of the most tortured reflections on his existence as a survivor: "Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to screaming; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems. But it is not wrong to raise the less cultural question whether after Auschwitz you can go on living – especially whether one who escaped by accident, one who by rights should have been killed, may go on living."<sup>38</sup>

We have touched upon the question of Horkheimer's adherence to the "ban on images". Adorno's writings also demonstrate the presence of this traditional Judaic theme, expressed in his *Negative Dialectics* as follows: "The materialist yearning to comprehend the thing aims at the opposite: it is only in the absence of images that the full object could be conceived. Such absence converges with the theological ban on images. Materialism brought that ban into secular form by not permitting one to picture utopia positively: this is the content of its negativity."<sup>39</sup>

*Erich Fromm.* In understanding Fromm, we are presented with an entirely different background and consequently, with differing manifestations of Jewish influence both in its nature and in intensity. If we can call it that, Fromm was, so to speak, "predestined" to having the Judaic elements maintain a predominant place in his life and work.<sup>40</sup> He is a descendant of a long line of rabbis on both parents' sides; his father's ancestry, for example, goes back to the great Rashi (traceable through twenty-eight generations). He grew up in an Orthodox home; and while attending the *Gymnasium* and the university, he received intensive training in talmudic studies from famous rabbis: Ludwig Krause, Nehemiah Nobel and Salman Rabinkow.<sup>41</sup> The strong interest and lasting influence of his background culminated in a dissertation entitled *Das jüdische Gesetz*, supervised by the sociologist Alfred Weber.<sup>42</sup>

Fromm in time turned to psychoanalysis; and in his book, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, he explains why he did so. The personal experience of the young man ranged from the suicide of a neighbour to the hysteria of the First World War,

<sup>36</sup>Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia* . . . , p. 247.

<sup>37</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, transl. Samuel and Shirley Weber, London 1967, p. 34.

<sup>38</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, transl. E. B. Ashton, New York 1973, pp. 362–363.

<sup>39</sup>Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup>For a concise introduction to the life and work of Erich Fromm see Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1983.

<sup>41</sup>As Erich Fromm wrote: "I received my fundamental orientation concerning the Hebrew Bible and the later Jewish tradition from teachers who were great rabbinical scholars . . .", in Erich Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods*, New York 1966, pp. 12–13.

<sup>42</sup>Erich Fromm, *Das jüdische Gesetz. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Diasporajudentums*, unpublished dissertation, Heidelberg University, 1922.

and man's inhumanity to his fellow man. The question of "how is this all possible" made him turn to Freud for an answer. The war years changed him from a child to a man making the question more urgent: "How is it possible? How is it possible that millions of men continue to stay in the trenches, to kill innocent men of other nations? . . . When the war ended in 1918, I was a deeply troubled man who was obsessed by the question of how war was possible, by the wish to understand the irrationality of human mass behavior, by a passionate desire for peace and international understanding."<sup>43</sup>

Even his interest in Marx is linked with his religious background and Fromm explains why in the following way: "I was brought up in a religious Jewish family and the writings of the Old Testament touched me and exhilarated me more than anything else I was exposed to . . . I was moved by the prophetic writings, by Isaiah, Amos, Hosea; not so much by their warnings and their announcements of disaster, but by their promise of the 'end of days', when nations 'shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more' . . . The vision of universal peace and harmony between all nations touched me deeply when I was twelve and thirteen years old."<sup>44</sup>

After having joined the Institute for Social Research, Fromm attempted to lay the theoretical foundations for a "materialist psychoanalysis", as he called it, that was supposed to be a marriage between Freudian and Marxian ideas. Fromm's affiliation with the Frankfurt Institute lasted ten years, from 1928 to 1938. During this decade, there was a so-called "subterranean" Judaic influence in the sense of the Weberian notion of *Wertbeziehung* (value relevance). In the 1930s, the order of the day was for the Frankfurt Institute to come up with a theoretical explanation for the rise of Nazi barbarism in Germany, "the land of poets and thinkers", Lutherans and Catholics. To be sure, no unified "theory of fascism" emerged as a product but there were several (perhaps complementary) theoretical approaches such as, for example, Franz Neumann's *Behemoth* (1942), which focused on the political process, or Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), representing a kind of philosophy-of-history explanation. Much earlier, though, Fromm and other members of the Institute, pioneered a social-psychological approach resulting in the volume, *Studies on Authority and Family*, published in German in Paris in 1936. The study stressed the "authoritarian character type" of the masses that followed Hitler and that was considered the necessary if not sufficient precondition for the rise of Nazism. At this particular juncture, in the face of the marching masses intoxicated with fascist slogans, Fromm's main concern still seems to be to find answers to the question of his youth: "How is this all possible?" To be sure, the (Marxian) positive utopia of "universal harmony" among men was upstaged by the recall of "prophetic writings" with "their warning" and expectation of "disaster".

<sup>43</sup>Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, New York 1963, pp. 7–8.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5.



Following his departure from the Institute in 1938 (as the direct result of Adorno's joining the Institute), Fromm became a practising analyst, living on Central Park West in New York City, maintaining a close friendship with Clara Thompson, Karen Horney and others; and is said to have entertained them often by singing ("soulfully") *hasidic* songs. Later he moved to Mexico City and built up an Institute of Psychoanalysis in 1949. He went on to write extensively on theoretical problems of social psychology and to lecture around the United States. Together with Herbert Marcuse, he became a political activist in the 1960s, an opponent of the Vietnam war and an advocate of nuclear disarmament. Fromm thus can be said to have remained faithful to his youthful concern for justice and non-violence.

Judaic influences remain up to the last phase of Fromm's career. His book, *You Shall be as Gods*, which is subtitled *A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and its Tradition* (1966), recaptures Fromm's religious orientation. He elaborates herein on the theme that captured him in his youth, and states: "The Old Testament is a *revolutionary* book because its theme is the liberation of man . . . It is a book which has proclaimed a vision for man that is still valid and waiting realization."<sup>45</sup> Fromm tried to hold on to the humanistic content of Judaism and attempted to synthesise this humanistic content with other intellectual and religious currents: Marxism, Christianity and Zen Buddhism. He believed that "Marx's aim, socialism, based on his theory of man, is essentially prophetic messianism in the language of the nineteenth century". The beauty of an idea is in the eyes of the beholder, and Fromm looked at Marxism with the prophets' eyes of the Old Testament.

We have on several occasions referred to "subterranean" Judaic influences.<sup>46</sup> What is meant by a covert or "subterranean" link to Judaism in the teachings of the Frankfurt School, and what is its manifestation? Attempt has been made to reconstruct – or identify – this link along two lines, the first of which we choose to call the *Wahlverwandschaft* (elective affinity) issue, and the second, the *Wertbeziehung* (value relatedness) issue. As to the first issue: Jürgen Habermas, a second generation Frankfurt theorist, tried to clarify the close and extremely fruitful relationship between German idealism and Jewish philosophers in an essay in which he spoke of a sort of elective affinity. Well prepared to deal with the problematic by his dissertation on Schelling, Habermas has come to recognise the series of "subterranean" impulses that established the linkage between the *Kabbalah*, the Protestant mystic, Jakob Böhme, the German Protestant philosopher of German idealism, Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, the German-Jewish Karl Marx, up to the Schellingian influences in the work of the German-Jewish philosopher, Ernst Bloch. In fact, Habermas himself found it "astonishing how productively central motifs of the philosophy of German Idealism shaped so essentially by Protestantism can be developed in terms of

<sup>45</sup>Fromm, *You Shall Be as Gods* . . . , p. 7.

<sup>46</sup>I borrow this term from Professor Irving Howe, who wrote about the "deep subterranean links of Georg Lukács to Existentialism" in his 'Preface' to Georg Lukács's *The Historical Novel*, Boston, Mass. 1963, p. 8.

the experience of the Jewish tradition". By bringing the heritage of the *Kabbalah* into the Protestant philosophy of German idealism, the most Jewish elements of the philosophy of a Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Ernst Bloch or Walter Benjamin are at the same time the "authentically German" ones, states Habermas.<sup>47</sup> Since Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig had played an influential role in the development of Frankfurt thought, the linkage is an important point to consider.<sup>48</sup>

The *Wahlverwandschaft* problem in turn is part of a larger problematic, usually referred to as the question of "German-Jewish symbiosis". Selma Stern speaks of the post-Enlightenment situation when the "Jews achieved some sort of synthesis between Judaism and European culture". This was possible at the end of the eighteenth century because the Jew's "demand for civil, social and economic equality were in harmony with the literary, pedagogic and philosophical concepts of his age. The ideas of Reason and Enlightenment, of Deism and Humanism were not foreign to the spirit of Judaism. It was not difficult to reconcile and harmonize the moral doctrines of Kant with the moral doctrines of the Talmud, the fervor of Schiller with the fervor of the prophets . . ."<sup>49</sup>

The problem of elective affinity was discussed by Werner J. Cahnman, the noted German-Jewish sociologist, in one of his last papers, entitled, 'Schelling and the New Thinking of Judaism'.<sup>50</sup> As the title indicates, one has to go back to the early nineteenth century and trace the line of development leading up to the Frankfurt thinkers. To reconstruct this line of development requires a close textual reading and exegesis; no attempt can be made here and now towards such a reconstruction. Only the highlights can be mentioned: *kabbalistic* beliefs fell into disrepute in the German-speaking areas of Central Europe as the eighteenth century witnessed the collapse of its carriers, the Sabbatian movement and of the Frankist movement, itself derived from Sabbatianism. In consequence, the subterranean continuation of the *kabbalistic* tradition commenced in Germany; it came to the fore in the "garb of romantic philosophy" as the combination of that Jewish tradition with "national-cultural" ideas, meaning that it continued but in a new language. Schelling is identified by Cahnman as the key figure, as the catalyst of this new trend in Jewish thought. The illustration is provided by Schelling's 1815 lectures on the 'Philosophy of Mythology' and the 'Philosophy of Revelation'. One of the basic ideas put forth was that "God and world cannot be grasped conceptually but must be recognised as a reality." The formulations that stipulated that God and world, time and becoming, promise and fulfilment are interwoven amounted to a "positive philosophy of comprehensive reality". The influence of the philosophy

<sup>47</sup>Jürgen Habermas, 'Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen', in *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, Frankfurt a. Main 1971.

<sup>48</sup>See Arthur A. Cohen, *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*, New York 1964, chapter two: 'The German-Jewish Renaissance'.

<sup>49</sup>Selma Stern, *The Court Jew*. transl. by Ralph Weiman, Philadelphia 5710/1950, p. 241.

<sup>50</sup>Werner J. Cahnman, 'Schelling and the New Thinking of Judaism', in *American Academy for Jewish Research. Proceedings*, vol. XLVIII, Jerusalem 1981, pp. 1–56.

and personality of Schelling on the thinking of the representatives of the "second emancipation" in Germany (called both by Cahnman and Horkheimer the "conservative emancipation") has been well-documented by Cahnman along with its having emanated from *kabbalistic* sources. The line stretches up to the twentieth century when the explicitly religiously orientated Franz Rosenzweig combined "positive philosophy" with modern existentialism and the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen "had proceeded from the world of pure thought to the realistic conception of the correlation Man-God", according to Cahnman.

For obvious reasons, we cannot go into the problem of the influence of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* on Horkheimer's critique of science and technology. Suffice it to say that Horkheimer is but the last in a long line of German thinkers to yearn for a lost totality. (In the classical-humanistic tradition of German culture, the fascination with Greek totality and harmony has a long history, and this is exemplified in the works of Winckelmann, Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel and Marx – right up to Georg Lukács, who was trained in the German intellectual tradition.) Schelling's *Philosophy of Nature* had as its central conception "life" from whose point of view nature was to be considered; nature was not to be described or measured but to be understood in its significance and meaning in the purposeful system of the whole. For Horkheimer, the concept of science had to be formulated in a way "that expresses human resistance . . .".<sup>51</sup>

As to the second aspect of the subterranean link with Judaism, Max Weber's notion of *Wertbeziehung* (value relevance) provides the key. Invoking the authority of Hegel, we said that every philosophy, and we may add, every social science, is its own time comprehended in thought. The question still remains: how does that happen? Since social reality is complex and infinite, it cannot be comprehended in its totality. Wrestling with this problem, Max Weber, the great German social scientist, arrived at a solution of sorts with the introduction of the concept *Wertbeziehung*. This signifies simply that the social scientist is guided by his/her values (religious, secular or other) when studying a segment of societal reality in his/her aim to arrive at an understanding and a meaningful interpretation of that particular segment under investigation. In the words of Max Weber, "all knowledge of cultural [and social] reality is always knowledge from a particular point of view".<sup>52</sup> For the practising social scientist, *Wertbeziehung* means a selection of research problems in accordance with the values of the scholar.

As referred to at the outset of this paper, a perusal of the life-work of not only Horkheimer and Adorno but also of Fromm illustrates Weber's contention that the values of the scholars are in accordance with the selection of the problems

<sup>51</sup>In this connection mention can be made of Professor Sidney Hook's letter of 23rd September 1982 to Zoltán Tar: "Your linking of Horkheimer *et al.* to German *Naturphilosophie* shows real insight. It had not suggested itself to me even though I realized that they Hegelianized Marx to absurdity."

<sup>52</sup>Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, transl. and ed by E. A. Shils and H. A. Finch, New York 1949, p. 81. According to Professor Lewis A. Coser's masterful summary, "Weber insisted that a value element inevitably entered into the selection of the problem an investigator chooses to attack. There are no intrinsically scientific criteria for the selection of topics; here every man must follow his own demon . . . *Wertbeziehung* (value relevance) touches upon the selection of the problem, not upon the interpretation of phenomena . . ." In Lewis A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*, New York 1977, p. 221.

they intend to deal with. Although it was not until the last phase of Horkheimer and Adorno's life-work that explicit references to Judaism were made and indebtedness to Judaic thought was indicated, their perception of philosophy as critique, their emphasis on the problematic of suffering, *Mitleid* and redemption, and their treatises on the questions of assimilation, antisemitism, post-Holocaust existence certainly attest to a knowledge gained from a particular point of view.

### INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

To return to the point of departure, it would appear that a thorough study of the Frankfurt thinkers not only vindicates Hegel's dictum but also that of the great German-Jewish political scientist (Karl Marx) who stated more than a hundred years ago that "the tradition of all past generations weighs like a mountain on the minds of the living".<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the tradition we discussed played its role in the teachings of the Frankfurt School as a conscious and subconscious influence by sensitising these thinkers to the real problems of their own age, such as alienation, manipulation, oppression, bureaucratisation, totalitarianism, and, finally, the threat of annihilation not only of Jewry but also of mankind. In sum, the major legacy of the Frankfurt School – derived from the Judaic tradition and Jewish experience – is the humanist concern that remained constant throughout the School's history.

<sup>53</sup>Cited in Werner Blumenberg, *Portrait of Marx*, New York 1972, p. 7.



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