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**PERSONALITY, AUTHORITY, AND  
SOCIETY:  
REMARKS ON THE ANALYSIS OF  
AUTHORITARIANISM AND PREJUDICE IN  
THE SOCIAL SCIENCES**

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Social Thought & Research, 1998, Vol. 21, No. 1-2

When Max Horkheimer delivered his welcome address to the newly matriculated students at Frankfurt University in 1952, he remarked that although the country's cities lay in ruins, the social conditions that had originally made Auschwitz possible remained in effect. Against this development, the Rector maintained, there was "no antidote except understanding". He warned the young students against the "narrow-mindedness of specialization" and urged them to remain faithful to the "critical spirit and reflection on the whole" (Horkheimer 1985, p. 381). Such exhortations had not been heard at the institution in years. Only with the return of the most important members of the former *Institute for Social Research*, which had been plundered and then dissolved by the National Socialists, was critical social theory of the Frankfurt variety able to reestablish itself in Germany. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, long reluctant to leave their North American exile, had finally decided to return. At precisely those universities that had been National Socialist strongholds, they attempted to combine advanced methods of American social research with European philosophical-historical critique they had practiced so successfully in the United States. The trip had been postponed time and again as a result of political considerations; nonetheless, Horkheimer at last decided to take the gamble that led to the renewal of a unique tradition of social-philosophical

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research and education. To the reproach and claims that a Jewish Diaspora had no place in Germany he was in the habit of responding -- as is evidenced by a recently published collection of his late letters -- that if everything in Germany was already so bad, he certainly did not want to exacerbate to this state of affairs by staying away.

The analysis of anti-Semitism already constituted a methodological key to Frankfurt-School critical social theory in the period prior to the Second World War. In empirical studies carried out by scholars from various disciplines, philosophical concepts were supposed to prove their worth. The most extensive and ambitious of these investigations remains the series *Studies in Prejudice*.<sup>2</sup> Researched and written in the United States in the late forties, this collection can be viewed as supporting evidence for the philosophical reflections presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* five years earlier. In a 1944 letter to Horkheimer, Adorno outlined the urgency of the task at hand: "to get on the track" of the new social rationality that found expression in National Socialism, "to uncover its irrational character", because, according to Adorno, "the theory of contemporary anti-Semitism also depends to a large extent on its interpretation."<sup>3</sup> An intensive theoretical investigation into the

<sup>2</sup> A total of five studies were published, though a larger number had been planned initially. They include: 1. Ackerman, Nathan W. and Marie Jahoda: *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder - A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*, New York 1950. A 135 page analysis of the relationship between childhood experiences and behavior bound to authority. 2. Adorno, Theodor W., Else Frenkel-Brunswick, D.J. Levinson, and R.N. Sanford: *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York 1950. An extensive, 990 page work addressing the nature and role of totalitarian structures of character in the population. Best remembered for the development of scales designed to allow, though indirect questioning, the analysis of psychological (and thereby societal) predispositions toward authority-dependent behavior. The investigation combines North American methods of empirical social research with European history of ideas. 3. Bettelheim, Bruno and Morris Janowitz: *Dynamics of Prejudice. A Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans*, New York: 1950. A second, 227 page psychoanalytic study on structures of prejudice in soldiers who fought in the Second World War. 4. Löwenthal, Leo and Norbert Gutermann: *Prophets of Deceit. A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator*, New York: 1949. A 148 page, comprehensive social-psychological analysis of the content of the radio speeches and brochures of fascist agitators, who had been particularly active on the West Coast of the US in the thirties. 5. Massing, Paul W: *Rehearsal for Destruction*, New York 1949. A 285 page [historiography] of political anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany, in which Massing interprets the transformation of anti-Semitic ideology within the context of economic and political developments.

<sup>3</sup> A letter from Adorno to Max Horkheimer dated November 1944. Max Horkheimer Archive, Frankfurt/Main (hereafter MHA).

problem of authoritarian cognitive structures had already taken place in the thirties, as part of the Institute's *Studies on Authority and Family*. In the early forties, reports of the extermination of European Jews appeared with increasing frequency, and the exiled members of the Institute decided to retrace the steps that had led to barbarism. In an initial proposal for the newly devised "Anti-Semitism Project", Adorno made it clear that the aims of this research program far exceeded those of quantitative empirical social research: "It appears that in our epoch humans are undergoing transformations much more profound than can be explained by psychology. It is as if the very substance of humanity has been transformed along with the foundations of society. . . Today, religious emancipation of the middle classes, with all of its manifestations of "progressiveness", has itself been revealed as a dehumanizing force."<sup>4</sup>

In light of the new societal conditions, theoretical work grounded in an orthodox notion of false consciousness had become unproductive, because a traditional enlightenment-based ideology critique was unable to keep pace with the totalization of ideology. Therefore, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, it could not be a question of interpreting false consciousness as a "basic attribute of mankind", since such an understanding would "legitimize, so to speak, delusion as natural law." Critical theory takes as its starting point precisely this structural weakness in the traditional critique of prejudice, insisting on a *shift in the function of ideology as well as its critique* in the face of developed capitalist conditions of production -- but without the abandonment of enlightenment traditions. This step becomes necessary because the "essence of ideology itself" is recognized as bourgeois, as "objectively necessary and at the same time false consciousness, as the interpenetration of the true and the untrue" (Adorno and Dirks 1968) and as an affirmation of the status quo.

Initially, this insight complicates the theoretical project, since critique of ideology, understood "as the confrontation of ideology with its own truth, is only possible insofar as the former contains a rational element on which critique can expend its energy." The task of the critique of authoritarian attitudes and of

<sup>4</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Begründungsentwurf" MHA VI. 1D. 94.

the religion of everyday life<sup>5</sup> can no longer be a simple refutation of those ideologies. Rather, in the face of the predominant cultural-industrial forms, it is "more advisable," according to Horkheimer and Adorno, "to analyze upon which dispositions in individuals they place their bets, what they endeavor to arouse in these individuals, and that is infinitely different from the official rhetoric". Because, following the crisis in bourgeois society, the traditional concept of ideology appears to lose its object, the investigation must now turn toward the 'faithless faith' of the individual in pure existence, a hermetic 'second nature' -- this is the project of *Studies in Prejudice*.

The social-psychological orientation of the investigations required the further development of categories from psychoanalysis, whose ancillary position within a materialist theory of society had earlier been outlined in the institutes journal -- the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* -- by Erich Fromm. Fromm, who developed his arguments in debates of Freud's works carried out with his institute colleagues. He argued that social-psychological phenomena should be understood as "processes of active and passive adaptation of the drive-apparatus to the socio-economic situation. ... Social psychology must explain the shared -- socially relevant -- psychic attitudes and ideologies -- and in particular their unconscious roots -- by examining the influence of economic conditions on libidinal urges (Fromm 1932, pp 39-40). This specific methodological orientation guides the subsequent analyses of authority and prejudice by the members of the institute. The Frankfurt authors take as their starting point the notion that the emotional bonds of individuals are subject to the same shifts as general social relations and that their function is transformed as well with the changing libidinal structures of society. "They stop functioning as putty and become plastique," wrote the prescient Fromm (Ibid.). Initially the investigations addressed the genesis of *modern anti-Semitism* and the traces that this modernization had left behind in the human psyche. A simple identification of *traditional Jew-hatred* with modern anti-Semitism was unthinkable, because the latter was viewed as a general metaphor -- one that had to be conceptually decoded -- for prejudice and authoritarian consciousness. In opposition to

<sup>5</sup> This concept has been developed by Detlev Claussen. See for example (1987; 1995).

then fashionable explanations of ethnic or religious prejudice based on 'centuries old' antipathy, especially as propounded by the positivist sociology of religion, Adorno rightly pointed out "that it is impossible to construct an immediate connection between the religious anathema pronounced against Jews and today's administrative planning of the liquidation of 'inferior races'".<sup>6</sup>

The five *Studies in Prejudice* emerged out of an ambitious interdisciplinary program that began in 1944. After having read through the texts, Adorno insisted, that it be clear to the reader what an anti-Semite was. Following the materialist traditions of the psychologically informed theories of prejudice found in Bacon, Locke and Helvétius, the authors undertook an historical review of the phenomena of prejudice and marginalization, anti-Semitic ideology and mass extermination. The goal of this undertaking is twofold: on the one hand, to reconstruct the forms taken by these phenomena under specific socio-historical conditions; on the other hand, to find appropriate demarcations for general trends of individuation, domination and the formation of consciousness. The results are not only valid for the late forties, the period in which the works were written; they point to a structural moment of societal development. As late as 1970, twenty years after completion of the studies, Herbert Marcuse argued for their continued relevance. In the preface to the second American edition of *Prophets of Deceit*, he writes: "continued progress on the road to more prosperity, more comfort, and more aggression seems to go hand in hand with the progress of this malaise -- a persistence which testifies to the actuality of this study" (Marcuse 1970, pp. v-viii). Following this approach, the central issue for the authors becomes the extent to which the structure of prejudiced appropriations of reality are subject to historical shifts, as well as the mechanisms by which anti-Semitic marginalization is barbarized to the point of mass extermination. Approaching the problem from a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives, the *Studies in Prejudice* present several explanatory frameworks. Unfortunately, none of these have received adequate attention in either the United States or Germany. Yet precisely in light of contemporary debates over the fate of affirmative action in the United States or the self-understanding of Western European

<sup>6</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Remarks on *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, Sanford", MHA VI. 1. D 74.

immigration societies -- which has been seriously put to the test in the framework of European unification -- a reexamination of these critical studies is important, because they fall victim to neither particularistic idealizations nor monolithic dogmatism.

Taken together, the *Studies in Prejudice* represent a materialist, interdisciplinary research program, in which empirical investigations are productively combined with ethically committed intellectual history and ideology critique. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for the aforementioned central thesis of the project -- *that modern anti-Semitism and traditional Jew-hatred relate to one another only through a series of complex mediations* -- can be found in Paul W. Massing's contribution to the project, *Rehearsal for Destruction*. In this study, Massing describes the modernization of anti-Semitism and the corresponding structures of prejudice in the German Reich after 1871. *Rehearsal for Destruction* provides exemplary illustrations of this dynamic against a backdrop of political and economic transformation, pointing to the qualitatively new (abstract) conditions in the modern, commodity-producing societies of Europe. In the period prior to the turn of the century, attacks on Jews in the German Reich still constitute a means to political ends. Political conservatives, monarchists and the nobility consciously make use of such attacks in order to combat the liberal ('Jewish') press and weaken revolutionary positions in the years leading up to the 1890s, as well as to impede general political reforms (Massing 1949). With the emergence of a *völkisch anti-Semitism*, however, the political frame of reference for anti-Semitic agitation shifts toward an anti-state and anti-parliamentary position, which receives ideological support from nationalistic and 'Western' ideals. Henceforth the 'Jewish Question' is styled as a national problem, leading to demands for the revocation of the emancipation laws as an essential prerequisite for 'German redemption'. The qualitative difference here rests above all in the attempt to draw a formal distinction between Germans and Jews converted, with the help of racist legislation, *Jews into foreigners*. At this point, these reactionary classificatory strategies are still accompanied by the ethnic ideals of conservative Protestantism.<sup>7</sup> Trusting in the

<sup>7</sup> The attempt at an historical comparison of the strength of anti-Semitic agitation in Protestant and Catholic regions of Europe before secularization might open up a perspective on the way in which the processes of modernization are handled in different religious contexts. From this perspective one could develop

stability of the Christian world, this Protestantism continues to base its discrimination against Jews on their alleged 'nihilistic spirit' rather than on biological or 'racially determined' differences. Only in the last years of the nineteenth century does radicalized *völkisch* anti-Semitism break with the stabilizing, conservative and religious tradition of the anti-Semites. The anti-statist turn against the 'ruling classes' leads to increasingly distorted perceptions of society.

The biologisation of religious revelation and a social-Darwinist hierarchisation of human races provide the superficial legitimation for the claims of one 'racial' community to rule over others, turning the oppression of the Jewish 'other' into a dictate of nature. The metaphors of 'Jewish subversion, perceived as quasi-biological and independent of historical constellations should also be understood within this discursive and ideological context. 'Aryan blood' becomes hypostatized as the guarantee of survival in a threatening social environment and is simultaneously coupled with the putative destiny of world domination. Anti-Semitic pogrom or the fall of the nation -- this is the choice that emerges from an intensification of social competition in a system whose history has been replaced by the mythical dream of a society of non-competitive solidarity that is at the same time powerfully expansive, and whose members still believe they can establish the modern state on the basis of secure, small-scale private property. Massing's investigation pinpoints an historical rupture, when national ideologies no longer suffice as the foundation and the unifying frame of reference for a modern polity, and the metaphysical vacuum historically created by secularization has to be ideologically filled.

It is at precisely this moment that structures of prejudice assume a mediating function within the societal dynamic. With the subsumption of the social under the logic of domination, elements of subjectivity are forced to submit to the imperatives of instrumental reason and social organization. With regard to the United States, Horkheimer described the effects of such a dynamic by pointing out that they lead to a state of affairs in which the "united executive administration of industrial forces tends to dominate all of economic life: production, distribution

materialist categories that avoid the positivism characteristic of the sociology of religion following Max Weber.

and also ideology. . . . With the abolition of the sphere of distribution, another category tends to disappear, that of the individual" (Horkheimer 1946, p.8).

Consequently, the three social-psychological analyses (*The Authoritarian Personality*, *Dynamics of Prejudice* and *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*) investigate the transformation of personality structures in mass society. Although the absence of a standardized terminology leads to occasional inconsistencies between the texts, the convergence of the various authors' conceptual interpretations nonetheless points to a shared methodological foundation. It derives from the assumption of *dynamically constituted structures of character and prejudice* that impact the different layers of consciousness and perception as well as the structure of individuals' needs. To this extent, clearly delineated, static conceptions for the *Studies in Prejudice* would be inadequate in any case, since they lack the flexibility necessary to grasp these complex and dynamic processes. By the same token, the term 'anti-Semitism' itself functions as a metaphor, designating a range of intolerant behavior toward a (more or less arbitrarily) chosen minority that must first be constituted as a threat in the consciousness of the prejudiced individual. Such an ambitious program cannot be realized solely on the basis of individual social-psychological studies, because anti-Semitism is not a "purely 'psychological problem'". Rather, a social criticism that takes anti-Semitic phenomena as its starting point must focus on those places "where social and psychological causation merge," because "the fate of the world is determined, to a great extent, by the operation of economic laws beyond the control of man, rather than by the 'nature' of man, whatever that term may connote" (Ibid., p. 9).

Faithful to this prescription, the authors of *Dynamics of Prejudice*, Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, concentrate on the mechanisms through which the individual evaluates and processes social experience (cf. Bettelheim and Janowitz 1950, p.104). In focusing on these mechanisms, they analyze one important aspect of subjective appropriation of reality. Their investigation does not, however, reflect back on the actual social occurrences that the interview subjects had interpreted and categorized according to their own specific reservoir of experience. It remains instead at the level of an immanent ego-analysis of individuals, without inquiring into the societal basis

of this analysis. Nathan W. Ackerman and Marie Jahoda make use of similar metaphors in their psychoanalytic study, *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder* (Ackerman and Jahoda 1950, p.104). Such a straightforward application of individual clinical results to existing general conditions may, in the short term, help combat anti-Semitism and further the project of enlightenment. Particularly in the years immediately following the war, this approach was not without a certain moral legitimacy.

On a theoretical level, however, this limited horizon belies the complex process through which critical theory itself was constituted. Horkheimer and Adorno were well aware that a psychologistic labeling of the "pathologies" of modernity was inadequate. Rather, in keeping with the self-reflective intent of critical social philosophy, the object of criticism must – in the sense of a performative consummation of theory -- be supposed to programmatically explicate itself. This is because the simultaneously immanent and systematic intent of critical social theory stands in opposition to change understood solely as an immanent reform of existing conditions. The transformation of conditions must be possible at any moment, because theory is, as the philosopher Helmut Reinicke remarks, "in permanent rebellion against its own positivity. As long as it aspires to practical relevance, it must transcend itself" (Reinicke 1988, p. 225). Taken as a whole, however, the *Studies in Prejudice* do not fall short of this goal. They address particular aspects of individuation and social history, remaining conscious of the possibility that "a relentless study of the instinctual dynamics of the personality" might "reveal that the very same social forces make for the disintegration of individual identity and for the degeneration of civilization" (Horkheimer 1946, p. 10). Adorno as well, in his remarks on *The Authoritarian Personality*, offers an extensive reflection on this methodological and theoretical problem. Here he argues that "the ultimate source of prejudice has to be sought in social factors which are incomparably stronger than the 'psyche' of any one individual involved. . . . Our detailed analysis of subjective patterns does not mean that, in our opinion, prejudice can be *explained* in such terms. On the contrary, we regard the analysis of objective social forces which engender prejudice as the most pressing issue in contemporary research into anti-minority bias."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Remarks on The Authoritarian Personality by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford", MHA VI. 1. D 72.

Arising from these considerations, the individual studies provide theoretically and empirically rich interpretive models for addressing a more general question – one that follows from the tradition of Enlightenment critiques of prejudice – namely, what is the relationship between unsuccessful secularization and emancipation? *The Dynamics of Prejudice*, to give just one example, refers to the relationship between intolerance and “indifference to religion” (Bettelheim and Janowitz 1950, p. 52) and interprets the disintegration of a binding moral codex as conducive to anti-Semitic modes of thought. This observation finds confirmation on a political-historical level in Massing’s work. Massing, it will be recalled, discussed the radicalization of *völkish* anti-Semitism that occurred as the mitigating influence of conservative and religious traditions became increasingly irrelevant.<sup>9</sup>

A further important insight of Bettelheim’s and Janowitz’ aforementioned analysis derives from its utilization of a dynamic concept of prejudice, which allows the authors to point out the way in which social transformations often overtax the individual’s ability to adapt to new societal demands. As a result of this situation, “rapid mobility either upward or downward is positively related to inter-ethnic hostility” (Ibid., p. 61). This dynamic factor is of particular significance for two reasons. First, reflections on the sources of prejudice and anti-Semitism must never posit a direct, discrete link to the economic exploitation of the individual, but must always consider the highly mediated relationship between these phenomena. Second, the unrealizable demands for adaptation placed on the individual pave the way for the flawed notion that one is *exclusively* a victim of prevailing conditions, a notion that, in authoritarian personalities, is accompanied by a belief in the immutability of these conditions. Societal institutions are to a large extent perceived as so far removed from individual interests and as so overwhelming, that it seems “impossible ‘for one person to try to change it’” (Ibid., p. 67).

This preconditioned loss of the individual’s ability to conceive of himself as part of a social community with the confidence and

<sup>9</sup> Bettelheim and Janowitz find further supporting evidence for this thesis in interviews with those war veterans for whom religion plays a significant role. They are “significantly more tolerant than the rest of the sample” (Ibid., p. 51).

strength to challenge existing conditions reinforces the status quo and makes an identification with the institutionalized forms of domination all the more necessary. In accordance with this logic, state power not only guarantees the protection of individuals, as Hobbes argued; it also becomes the object of an identity-preserving cathexis. In *The Dynamics of Prejudice*, the authors point out that openly totalitarian forms can quickly supplant existing parliamentary ones when – as was the case in the Weimar Republic – identification with the system of government no longer prevails. With the help of a dynamic concept of prejudice, it is possible to show – and this is the central thesis of the investigation – that relative ego strength “is considerably more important in conditioning attitudes of tolerance than the social and economic factor of competition” (Ibid., p. 85, 151). Interestingly, these results accord with Freud’s observations of compulsive acts and the practice of religious rituals. He traces both of these phenomena back to the “repression of an activated drive”, which leads to an “expectant fear of the future” that can only be processed neurotically or religiously.<sup>10</sup> Thus additional supporting evidence is provided for the hypothesis that societies organized largely according to the principle of competition by no means generate prejudiced patterns for individual perception of reality directly, but only through a series of mediations. These patterns appear to be transmitted *not merely* through competitive conditions that can be experienced immediately, but primarily through the individual’s view of social reality and his corresponding *perception of self as victim*.

The challenge arising from a precise determination of the relative strength of social and subjective elements lies in identifying potentially emancipatory tendencies within this field of tension, and, above all, in ascertaining the extent to which autonomous subjectivity can even constitute itself under the conditions of capitalist production and the culture industry. Bettelheim and Janowitz formulate their response cautiously and in general terms, claiming that although it is incorrect to assert “that ethnic intolerance is a consequence of the capitalist system, ethnic intolerance occurring within a capitalist society will nevertheless be deeply influenced by the character of that society” (Bettelheim and Janowitz 1950, p. 163). The limitations

<sup>10</sup> Freud’s “Zwangshandlungen und Religionsübungen” in *Studienausgabe*, Vol. VII, p. 15.

of an immanent approach also constrain the study *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder*, in which Ackerman and Jahoda rely exclusively upon the problematic concept of "irrational anti-Semitism" (1950, p. 6). Such a notion fails to capture those elements of instrumental reason that have clearly been incorporated into anti-Semitic consciousness.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Adorno's study provides a more precise interpretation of the shift from prejudiced perception of reality to irrationally destructive frenzy. He incorporates into his analysis the corresponding interests of the ruling class, pointing out that "the decisive objective aspect of present-day anti-Semitism is the fact that it cannot possibly be attributed to spontaneous impulses of the population. It is a carefully pondered, rationalistically concocted doctrine, promoted from above, that utilizes powerful socio-psychological dispositions in the masses. The difference between modern anti-Semitism and anonymous historical trends is precisely this rationality in the irrational".<sup>12</sup>

The strength of *Anti-Semitism and Emotional Disorder* lies in its analysis of the stigmatization of 'foreignness' and the socialization process by which this stigmatization enters individual consciousness (Ackerman and Jahoda 1950, p. 44). Even in the early phase of their development, the family conditions children to rationalize "the absence of affectionate human relations and the existence of hostility as difference in group membership" (Ibid., p. 44).<sup>13</sup> The projection of hostility

<sup>11</sup> The need for a more differentiated approach becomes apparent, to give just one example, in reading a letter of Hitler's from September 19, 1919. Here he comments that "a purely emotional anti-Semitism will find its ultimate expression in the form of pogroms. The anti-Semitism of reason, however, will necessarily lead to the methodical . . . elimination of the privileges of the Jew. . . . Its ultimate, unalterable goal, though, must be the removal of the Jews themselves." Quoted in Jäckel, Eberhard (Ed.): Adolf Hitler. *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924*, Stuttgart 1980, p. 89. These affirmative formulations already intimate the murderous single-mindedness of modern anti-Semitism.

<sup>12</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Remarks on *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, Sanford", MHA VI. 1. D 74. The Author refers in this passage to Massing's historical review of the phenomenon in the framework of the *Studies in Prejudice*.

<sup>13</sup> These attempts at sublimation are, however, increasingly under pressure from the surplus, unassimilable potential, because "rationalizations of 'forbidden impulses', such as the drive for destruction, never completely succeed" (Adorno et al 1950, p. 676).

onto the 'alien' Jews in the process of failed individuation can therefore be seen as the expression of radically egocentric individuals lacking sufficient self-confidence. As the authors write, "the parasitic self of these patients induces them to live as though their immediate surroundings were part of their selves or they a part of their surroundings" (Ackerman and Jahoda 1950, p. 76).<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the inner-psychic analysis, despite its strengths, tends to eclipse the social determinants of prejudiced behavior; nonetheless, the social-psychological studies do provide a differentiated diagnosis of damaged subjectivity in bourgeois societies.

Adorno takes a different tack in *The Authoritarian Personality*, placing his confidence in the possibility of a democratic and ultimately more rational ego structure, toward which progress can and must be made. This strikes him as particularly important since, as he argues, "the rational system of an objective and thoughtful man is not a thing apart from his personality" (Adorno et. al. 1950, p. 10). Unfortunately, he fails to further develop these positions. Whether such an abstract, preliminary formulation can do justice to the demands of a "materialistically grounded theory of subjectivity" (Schmidt 1988, p. 264) and needs must remain unresolved.

A primary source of difficulty for the construction of a theory that proceeds from ideology critique lies in the previously mentioned dynamism of the anti-Semitic perception of reality. As Adorno writes, it is a "structural element of anti-Semitic persecution that it starts with limited objectives, but goes on without being stopped" (Adorno et. al. 1950, p. 624). Against this tendency toward a generalization of individual prejudice into socially dominant patterns of behavior or interpretation, critical social theory must insist on the possibility of *difference*.<sup>15</sup> The homogenizing force of anti-Semitism can only be contained through a subjectivity aware of the *impossibility of perfect identity*, in the hope that humans as subjects represent "the limit

<sup>14</sup> The identification of self and environment leads unavoidably to a distortion in the perception of social reality. In one of the discussions that formed the background for *The Authoritarian Personality*, an interview subject explained, "I would like the Jews if they didn't exhibit typically Jewish characteristics."

<sup>15</sup> This is above all a topic in the "Culture Industry" chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, especially in the second, unpublished part. Cf. Adorno (1981, pp. 299-335).

of reification" and that the stereotyped thinking of anti-Semitic ideology must each time seize them compulsively. As Adorno had already noted some years earlier, "the hopeless effort of repetition offers the only sliver of hope that the repetition will not be in vain, that man cannot be subjugated after all" (Ibid., p. 331).<sup>16</sup> He takes up this thought again in *The Authoritarian Personality* when he discusses the stigmatization of "less prejudiced" individuals as "eccentric". This label refers to that which "is 'different', to what is branded as slightly abnormal by standards of conformity, but which expresses individualization, the development of human traits which have not been pre-formed, as it were, by the social machinery of contemporary civilization" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 651). In alienated mass society, it is precisely this 'strangeness' that reveals a moment of non-identity and stability, where stereotypical conformity is transcended and the conditions for the possibility of autonomy emerge. But the idea of an "absolute individual per se, completely identical with itself and with nothing else, is an empty abstraction" (Ibid., p. 682 [emphasis in original]) constructed by prejudiced consciousness. In the inner-psychic attempt to cope with concrete conflicts and needs, this abstraction increasingly takes on the quality of a quasi-religious conception. As sociologist Detlev Claussen remarks, "identity as a demand of anti-theoretical needs can only be the result of psychic action that denies material reality. Identity . . . is achieved only in the grave."<sup>17</sup>

The inescapable need for an identity-stabilizing position in the face of inscrutable social conditions results in class- or group-identification, which, according to Adorno, must of course be understood as a "psychological variable" that can become quite

<sup>16</sup> While Adorno refers in this passage to the repetition compulsion in industrial mass culture, the elements of stereotyping largely correspond to those of prejudiced thinking.

<sup>17</sup> Claussen, Detlev: *Grenzen der Aufklärung*, p. 126. For inexplicable reasons, this text, probably the single most significant continuation of the critique of anti-Semitism developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, has not yet been translated into English. Claussen's work, which has since its initial appearance been expanded and republished in a second edition, offers the most consistent and the most advanced contemporary critique available of authoritarian social structures and their genesis. Cf. also Claussen, Detlev: *Unterm Konformitätszwang. Zum Verhältnis von Kritischer Theorie und Psychoanalyse*, Bremen 1988 and *Vom Judenhaß zum Antisemitismus. Spuren einer verleugneten Geschichte*, Darmstadt 1987.

self-sufficient and dynamic, detaching itself from the concrete social experiences of the individual when history gives rise to a new social environment. So too do the economic foundations of modern societies often transform themselves more quickly than the corresponding ideological forms. In his contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality*, Daniel J. Levinson describes a common "traditional conservative' ideology on the part of the participants in the study, despite the fact that "the actual politico-economic situation has changed considerably from the one, fifty or more years ago, to which the ideology refers" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 172). Those scholars contributing to the study see in the increasing diversification a "general trend of Western civilization", one with corresponding implications for the subject formation of individuals. Contradictory societal trends lead to the constitution of ambivalent personalities. These are characterized on the one hand by the fear of failure and defeat in competition with others, but also by an "identification with the underdog" based on inherited, though currently obsolete patterns for interpreting reality (Ibid., p. 177, 484). Adorno spoke elsewhere in similar terms, when he made his well-known remark on the "sociological miracle" of National Socialism that allowed adherents to feel as though they belonged simultaneously to the elites and the masses. A problem arises from these insights for the investigations in question here, indicated by Max Horkheimer in his remark that "a mere appeal to the conscious mind does not suffice, because anti-Semitism and the susceptibility to anti-Semitic propaganda spring from the unconscious" (Horkheimer 1946, p. 2). Appellative or enlightenment-based argumentative strategies find themselves in the paradoxical position of wanting to utilize the authority of their insights to change the perceptions of authoritarian personality-type individuals who can only become more flexible in their encounters with reality through a stronger identification with pre-given, conformist patterns of thought.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, the studies direct their attention to a comparison of behaviors in other social contexts, distinguishing, for example, between prejudiced and prejudice-free individuals as regards violence, especially violence in connection with sexuality. While prejudice-free individuals perceive and judge violence according to a "moral frame of reference", prejudiced individuals commonly associate sexuality and aggression. As the authors explain, sexuality "is perceived as aggressive and threatening.

<sup>18</sup> On the dilemma posed by this position cf. Adorno *et. al.* (1950, p. 486).



Aggression is aimed at the body of the victim, without reference to personal relationships or to psychological meanings for aggressor or victim." This approach is productive, because an anti-sensualist reservoir of experience and reified subject relations appear to indicate a state of consciousness characterized by weak super-ego control and a correspondingly high likelihood that "unsocialized impulses" will break through the surface. By the same token, there is much evidence to indicate that "open sensuality" is a function of a prejudice-free personality (Ibid., pp. 566ff, 572).

In this context, the psychoanalytic studies raise a number of significant theoretical questions, such as the possibility of a materialist-based "emancipatory sensuality" in a time where individuals tend to adopt an exclusively mythical relationship toward their own desensualized desires and needs, one that has pre-conditioned by the various institutions of the culture industry. Because of their narrowly defined scope, however, the psychoanalytic studies alone can offer no substantive answers. The beginnings of a response, however, are discernible in the contributions made to the studies by core members of the Institute for Social Research, for example in Leo Löwenthal's summary passages on anti-Semitic agitation and Adorno's reflections in *The Authoritarian Personality*.

The theoretical insight of the *Studies in Prejudice* – that only reflection on the mechanisms of integration<sup>19</sup> can provide the starting point for a critical overcoming of the repressive effects of these mechanisms – gives rise to a further question: Is it even possible to conceive of a dialectical notion of social conformity in which the tension-filled relationship between critical sociability and conformist stereotyping is abolished? The associations made by some of those interviewed when describing an emancipation from socially imposed conventions would seem to speak against this. Only in combination with death can these individuals imagine true self-realization. When asked what they would do in the last six months of their lives, they responded, "Exactly what I please" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 574). The break with convention, the assertion of one's own

<sup>19</sup> This usage in no way implies a self-enclosed concept of integration, as has more than once been imputed to critical theory. As late as 1959, following the *Studies*, Adorno maintained that "because integration is ideology, it remains brittle even as ideology" (Adorno 1990, p. 101).

interests against the overwhelming power of the social, is perceived as life-threatening.<sup>20</sup> In this context, simple strategies of enlightenment, not to mention well-intentioned manipulation, only serve to strengthen these convention-bound behaviors and attitudes. Thus Adorno criticizes at one point in his contribution the anti-fascist strategies of unions in the United States, which he describes as "indoctrination in anti-discrimination" (Ibid., p. 269). In the final chapter of the study, this criticism is made more explicit in the argument the fascist potential cannot be overcome by the "manipulation of people" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 975). Instead, if the authoritarian subjugation to the status quo is to be overcome, an enlightenment conscious of its own limits must carve out a space for reflection on the position of the individual within the societal framework. This is because, as Adorno explains, "the high-scoring [i.e. prejudiced, MW] subjects do not seem to behave as autonomous units whose decisions are important for their own fate as well as that of society, but rather as submissive centers of reactions, looking for the conventional 'thing to do', and riding what they consider 'the wave of the future'. This observation seems to fall in line with the economic tendency toward gradual disappearance of the free-market and the adaptation of man to the slowly emerging new condition."<sup>21</sup> These new conditions, which define societies organized on the basis of competition, also influence the identity-construction of individuals. Following the breakdown of traditional religious orientations and behavioral models, "religion does not play such a decisive role within the frame of mind of most people as it once did; only rarely does it seem to account for their social attitudes and opinions" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 727). And yet, although religion no longer appears to provide models for social action or determine social behavior, this holds only on a superficial level. Only in the exceptional case does the absence of explicit religiosity correspond to a real emancipation from religious structures of thought. As the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* point out, "the general trend towards religious indifference does not constitute altogether a break

<sup>20</sup> This is also evidenced by the recourse to religion taken by prejudiced subjects in the face of their own death. Cf. (Ibid., p. 575. Footnote 5). To facilitate differentiation, the researchers introduce a categorization of underlying psychic tendencies, distinguishing between "ego-assimilated" and "ego-alien" individuals (p. 595).

<sup>21</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Remarks on the *Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford", MHA VI. 1. D 72.

between religious persuasion and our main problem." Thus it must be supposed "that on a deeper, more unconscious level the religious heritage, the carry-over of old belief and the identification with certain denominations still make themselves felt" (Ibid., pp. 727, 281). In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno speak in a similar way of anti-Semitism as "a deeply imprinted schema, a ritual of civilization; the pogroms are true ritual murders" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, p. 171).

Adorno suggests implementing these insights in an investigation of the concept of belief, in order to pinpoint those moments in modern civilization's process of secularization that miscarried and, following the displacement of collective religious belief, paved the way for authoritarian consciousness. In his formulations one finds outlined the foundation for a theory of the religion of everyday life: "It would be a tempting task to analyze the change of meaning undergone by the word 'belief'. It illustrates most clearly religious neutralization. Formerly the idea of belief was emphatically related to the religious dogma. Today it is applied to practically everything which a subject feels the right to have as his own, as his 'opinion'. . . without subjecting it to any criteria of objective truth. The secularization of 'believing' is accompanied by arbitrariness of that which one believes: it is molded after the preferences for one or the other commodity and has little relation to the idea of truth. . . . This use of belief is almost an equivalent of the hackneyed, 'I like it', which is about to lose any meaning" (Adorno *et. al.* 1950, p. 742, italics mine). Adorno formulates in this passage an emphatic notion of truth, without, however, restricting the scope of his societal critique. The theoretical difficulty of the described development lies less in the loss of meaning of religious forms than in the fact that religious models for interpreting social reality are no longer subject to the principle of practicability. They function as a kind of (previously religious) doctrine of pre-stabilized harmony within the secularized context of a competition-based economy. Because they have become detached from their material foundations, stereotypes based on prejudiced thinking and individually processed experience take on a life of their own. While these stereotypes correspond to inner-psychic conditions, they fail accurately to reflect external, objective reality. Against this backdrop of a pre-structured perception, social experiences are, so to speak, existentialised, and the moral strength of religious convictions, previously a

source of a common reality, is supplanted by a diffuse and distorted facsimile. The only way out of this psychic cul-de-sac is a supposedly liberating about-face, even if this movement is no longer linked with the idea of social transformation, but only with the compensatory requirements of individual aggression. These forms of the authoritarian processing of social experience find their ideological expression in comments such as Hitler's that "one can only die for an idea that one does not understand".

Here enlightenment runs up against its limit, frustrated by the unifying force of the societal de-mythologization process, which "liquidates traces of animism earlier and more radically than it does the philosophical idea of the Absolute". Even the critical content of a materialist atheism proves "obsolescent in a world the objective spirit of which is essentially areligious." The qualitative transformations that accompany the failed liberation from religion simultaneously shift the meaning of anti-Semitism, with the result that "what was one of the decisive impulses of the eighteenth century Enlightenment may function today as a manifestation of provincial sectarianism or even as a paranoid system." According to the investigations discussed here, one of the wellsprings of anti-Semitic ideology lies in the long term effects of class structure. In other words, the fact that "human society has been up to now divided into classes affects more than the external relations of man. The marks of social repression are left within the individual soul" (Ibid., pp. 738, 742, 747). Thus the analysis of anti-Semitism is simultaneously an analysis of structures of class and power; investigations of prejudice necessarily involve a reconstruction of the history and impact of anti-Semitic thought and stereotyped perception in general, thereby opening up a perspective on the genesis of domination itself. In Adorno's words, the history of anti-Semitism "is not its own history, but the political and social history of the world in which it fulfills a pernicious function."<sup>22</sup> A social world, whose civilization "enkindles, through its own mercilessness, precisely those tendencies that prove hostile toward it"<sup>23</sup> and thus without a critique of its material

<sup>22</sup> Adorno, Theodor W.: "Remarks on the *Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, Sanford", MHA VI. 1. D 75.

<sup>23</sup> Horkheimer, Max: "Zur Psychologie des Antisemitismus", *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 12, p. 174.

foundation no clear picture of its ideological dispositions can be achieved.

Through a genetic reconstruction of the modernization of traditional structures of prejudice into anti-Semitic delusion, critical theory arrives at a comprehensive critique of general societal conditions. Of course, the primarily social-psychological orientation of the epochal *Studies in Prejudice*, – which, despite plans to the contrary, were not continued after Adorno and Horkheimer's return to Frankfurt – must today, a half century after their appearance, be augmented by a more precise economic critique of accelerating trends of reification. This is the course recently charted, with unique conceptual precision, by the sociologist Moishe Postone in his extensive study *Time, Labor and Social Domination* (1993). Postone places Marx's "critique of labor in capitalism" and the "reinterpreted concept of alienation" into the "center of his critique of society" (Ibid., p. 17). His insistence on a strong concept of social totality places him in close proximity to critical theory, which similarly wanted "to move beyond the limits of the present totality by limiting itself historically" and also chose to operate within the Marxian framework, because its "immanent critique of capitalism is such that the indication of the historical specificity of the object of thought reflexively implies the historical specificity of his theory, that is the thought itself grasps the object" (Ibid., p. 82).<sup>24</sup> Materialist theory must work itself out on the objects that it interrogates. Only if this is the case will its concepts remain flexible enough to accommodate historical transformations and its aims remain true to the words of Horkheimer, who, in another passage of the speech quoted at the outset of this essay, warned that the university must not "shut itself off from the profound particularities of modern life" (Horkheimer 1985, p. 384).

<sup>24</sup> Postone appropriately criticizes the traditional reading of Marx's theory, focusing in particular on Pollock's thesis of state capitalism and Horkheimer's subsequent reflections on the subject. Like Habermas, however, whom he subjects to equally pointed criticism, Postone claims critical theory's inevitable pessimism. Nevertheless his demand that the contradiction of theory "be such that it points beyond the existence of the totality" (Ibid., pp. 86-90) is reflected in the concept of the 'non-identical'. Cf. Ritsert (1997).

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**FLUCTUATIONS OF AUTHORITARIANISM  
IN SOCIETY: AN EMPIRICAL TIME SERIES  
ANALYSIS FOR THE DYNAMIC SOCIO-  
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INFLUENCE  
ON AUTHORITARIANISM IN AMERICAN  
SOCIETY, 1954-1977**

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Social Thought & Research, 1998, Vol. 21, No. 1-2

This analysis aimed first to construct and test an empirical time series model of authoritarianism in society. Using rival theoretical assumptions of authoritarianism a number of models were built from available time-series, and the models were subsequently tested by time series analysis. The main models were developed from the assumptions of the psycho-dynamic approach of Adorno et al. (1950), the cognitive-learning approach of Altemeyer (1988) and the economic approach of authoritarianism (Sales 1972, 1973).

Second, the analysis aimed to test some basic reactions to authoritarianism in society. The main assumption tested was that large scale social phenomena like authoritarianism will have an impact on individual authoritarianism, that in turn will also be related to more specific individual behaviors. This was examined by cross-correlations with time lags analysis and by path analysis.

Authoritarianism scale responses of 136 American student samples were used for the construction of a time series of authoritarianism (1954-1977) in the United States (Meloan 1983). The face validity seemed high: high levels in the 1950s, declining in the 1960s until the early 1970s and a rise thereafter.

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