

THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND CRITICAL SOCIOLOGY
AND CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY¹

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Dr. Manheim delivered a lecture on the Frankfurt School and Critical Sociology and Critical Philosophy at the Department of Sociology of the University of Kansas on November 14, 1991. This is a transcription of that lecture. It has been transcribed and partially edited, with Dr. Manheim's assistance, by Laura J. Bahmaie and Hossein Bahmaie.

The Institute [of Social Research] was started in 1923 by a Viennese professor, Carl Grünberg, a Marxist, who established an archive of the labor movement. He was succeeded by Horkheimer and others. The staff came from various backgrounds, but surprisingly they shared upper-middle and upper-class background. They shared with their class a certain generalized pessimism. I mention a few names, perhaps you have a nodding acquaintance with them. Schopenhauer, a keen traveler of similar background, who influenced Horkheimer, was one. He found life dismal, not encouraging. Only contemplation and retreat offered some gratification. Nietzsche's outlook was also in the minor key. The most articulate of the pessimists was Oswald Spengler whose book, *The Decline of the World*, was translated into many languages, presented history as a cyclical process. Youth, middle-age, decline and ultimate disintegration are the phases. The Fellahs of the desert are the heirs of Arab civilization. The Roman Empire eventually declined and in its last years was a dictatorship, and eventually it was subject to conquest because it didn't want to survive. The critical approach predisposed the Frankfurt group to a pessimistic outlook.

Several other streaks of German learning have affected the Frankfurt School. One is the traditional distinction between culture and civilization. Now in English speaking literature culture is what is inherited from generation to generation within a given society. Civilization covers many societies, sharing similar values. In other words, the difference is one of extension. In German parlance, culture is the sum total of things intrinsic -- thought, sentiments, values aesthetics, morality, in other words, what the Germans call spiritual things. Civilization, on the other hand, is the sum total of technology, conveniences, plumbing, streets, safety, good police protection. The pessimists see a cultural decline in the growth of our all encompassing civilization.

Another shared trait of German philosophy is its historical orientation. It is the effort to gain an understanding of social and intellectual phenomena by relating them to the historical sequence in which they occur. Ranke, the German historian, maintained that values are historical variables. Each period of history was "equally near to God." In short, the explanation of social phenomena requires that they be placed in their proper historical context. Another German tradition is the systemic view of things as opposed to their location in a causal chain. Not explaining things as links in their causal chain, but rather in a context, in a historical configuration. When, for example, we scrutinize an institution, it is not the personnel, nor is it the immediate causes, but the systemic context that provides us with the explanation. I was told that before a German doctor looks at the overt symptoms of a patient, he will look for a systemic root before he makes a therapeutic decision; then he may treat the local symptoms.

Another strong philosophical current in Germany is idealism. Other countries harbor aspects of idealism, but German idealism is unique as a habit of thought which assumes that ideas originate and lapse in an inherent continuum. What is continuous in history is the flow of ideas, one from the other. And second, ideas also determine reality. In other words cultures emanate from ideas and social change follows from new ideas. The effect of changing ideas are changing conditions, social, political and economic. Ideas are believed to have inherent continuity. Kant, the father of German epistemology construed cognition with no thought of its social motives. Cognition follows from sense perception which is guided by categories such as causality, necessity, possibility and by "reason" which directs it toward ends. Cognition forms on these three levels.

Hegel's philosophy is of an entirely different type. It is unique in that it seeks to reveal the logic in the historic succession of ideas, as it is spelled out in his *Phenomenology*, his *Logic* and his *Philosophy of History*. Hegel's logic helps one to understand his phenomenology. What Hegel was about was tracing the transformation of concepts from one another. This is also the creative source of history. The process begins with the self which posits its opposite, the non-self; the succeeding synthesis restores the self on a higher level. Speculative as Hegel's philosophy is, it is not devoid of an historical vision of a conservative nature. He saw the ultimate realization of reason in 1830, in the Prussian Constitutional Monarchy, as the ultimate and final stage of history. At the peak of its dialectical evolution, the "spirit" or mind returns from its alienated self to itself on the highest. I dwell on Hegel because most of the Frankfurt schools considered themselves Hegelians. Marx was an avowed Hegelian. The dialectical vision of history moves through opposites; their synthetic resolutions lead to new levels of attainment. It was basically Marx's vision of history.

History, as he expressed it in the Communist Manifesto and in other publications, is a history of class struggles. Each resolution of the class struggle, opens up new levels of conflicts and new class systems. The final state, in which class conflicts must end, will come with the self-destruction of capitalism. The declining rate of profits will force the capitalists progressively to curtail wages. This intensifies the resistance of the workers to the ultimate revolutionary stage at which they will take over the means of production. The take over of the means of production by the workers marks the end of all classes.

Something else happens. All class systems distort man's perspective. Men see the world in a distorted perspective which is implicit in their class. While all historical ideologies have distorted reality, the proletariat is said to be the one class that is forced to gain a true vision of society by understanding itself. In another words, the revolutionary working class moves for the first time from false consciousness to a state of true consciousness. So much for Marx.

I should mention one more source of influence, the romantic movement. The romantic movement affected the literature of other countries but it took a unique form in German philosophy and intellectualism. It was, essentially, a reaction to the rapid industrial development of Germany. In thirty years Germany was transformed from a country of farmers and small towns with local principalities ruling over the lives of subjects, into a country with metropolitan cities, large scale production and social mobility. The bureaucratization of Germany in the 19th century added to the unease manifest in the literature of the time. The literature of the German romantics reveals an urge to escape from the objects of daily experience to the imagined worlds of the past and of distant islands. The cult of nature, originality and spontaneity expresses a common distaste for things mechanical and calculable. Rousseau's portrait of life in an original state of innocence was designed as a model for a system of natural laws to take the place of the bureaucratic order of the time.

Freudian psychology takes a prominent place in the intellectual endowment of the Frankfurt School. The Freudian approach to self-analysis is seen as a step toward the subject-object identity which on the macroscopic level is the crowning event in the Marxian prognosis. Fromm was the most influential analyst among the members of the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno, its principle representatives, shared the psychoanalytical view. According to them, the existing civilization has subordinated love, both altruistic and erotic, to work and the achievement principle. They expected that a reconstituted society will restore both forms of eros as socially relevant assets. Work and performance were to be subordinated to eros. Marcuse went so far as saying that the consumer society will have to disappear. Technology, of course, may lead the way to it, but the quotient of labor in the economy may have to be further curtailed even at the expense of producing less, providing fewer consumer

goods, and reducing the standard of living if it is to restore the sensual relevance of the body. Thus, reason, love, and sensuality are to be the governing forces in the reconstituted society.

On their return from the United States to Frankfurt, after their exile in New York and California, Horkheimer and his associates reviewed the Marxian orientation. They did not subscribe to the Marxian prognosis of a working class governed society. The experience of fascism, for example, demonstrated to them that the financial rewards and the bureaucratic machinery assimilated the workers to the point of dismantling their revolutionary potential. Hence, they couldn't prevent fascism. In England and in the United States, the Frankfurt School initiated a study of the authoritarian family as a school of obedience, that prepared people to accepting authority. Some psychoanalysis was involved. The published volume was to elucidate the need of authoritarian regimes for authoritarian and patriarchal families as the training ground for compliant citizens. At the initiative of Horkheimer, a study of the authoritarian person was conducted, and the so called F-scale was constructed for measuring traits of authoritarianism. Questionnaires and interviews were to provide the needed data on the distribution of authoritarianism. The authoritarian person was found to transfer his super ego to those in power and in authority. He learns to love and idealize authority. He is oriented towards submission--domination and the hierarchy of order and influence. Authoritarian persons love the strong and dislike the weak. They cultivate tough mindedness and oppose tender mindedness, subjectivity, imaginativeness. They are inclined to see the world in terms of black and white; they idealize the powerful and identify with them. Freud furnished some concepts for this study such as: sublimation, displacement, the super ego, identification. The study was not without its critics, it was defended by some and criticized by many. But, the study of the authoritarian person represents a turning away from Marx.

Upon return to Frankfurt the institute was reestablished at the University and was received with honors. Horkheimer became the director of the Institute and the rector of the University. Horkheimer and his staff revised the Marxian dictum and the earlier acceptance of Georg Lukacs' analysis of class and class consciousness, the concept of reification and the prognosis of a collective order succeeding the existing one. They expected not groups and parties to carry the initiative in the expected reform but rather individuals. It was to be the individuals to hold up a mirror to the existing society and to outline alternatives.

Let me say that the Soviet experience, the Moscow trials and Stalinism had some role to play in the partial alienation from the Soviet example of a Marxian ruled society. Critical Philosophy and Critical Sociology have not died with the return of the remnants of the staff of the Frankfurt School back to Germany, but it has changed its views and became much more fluid. It became a community

for discussing views about present man, views about his psychology and views about possible reforms. They continue to repudiate the instrumental rationality of the compartmentalized sciences as being tools of management and production. The unity of action of reason and action as the motor of reform continue to guide the Frankfurt School. They repudiated the study of the sociology of knowledge proposed by Karl Mannheim, as a value free analysis of ideologies. That knowledge and reason must always be associated with proposal for change remains the tenor of the Frankfurt School.