

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF MAX HORKHEIMER

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OF

MAX HORKHEIMER

By

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## Abstract

Due in large part to the writings of Jurgen Habermas, the philosophy of Max Horkheimer has recently undergone a re-examination. Although numerous thinkers have partaken in this re-examination, much of the discussion has occurred within a framework of debate established by Habermas' narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy. This thesis seeks to broaden that framework through a thorough, critical examination of Habermas' accounts. In chapter one, I survey Habermas' narrative centering on his treatment of the pivotal years in the 1940s. In chapter two, I expand on these years and argue that in contrast to Habermas' assertion that Horkheimer commits a performative contradiction, he instead engages in a logically consistent form of critique. In chapter three I discuss the later writings of Horkheimer and argue that the conception of philosophy contained therein is a continuation of his philosophy of the 1940s. Finally, in the conclusion I point to the implications which the above should have for Horkheimerian studies in general.

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Table of Contents

Introduction..... 1

Chapter 1: Habermas On Horkheimer..... 11

Chapter 2: Dialectic of Enlightenment  
as Immanent Critique..... 42

Chapter 3: Horkheimer in the Shadow of  
Dialectic of Enlightenment..... 66

Conclusion..... 87

Bibliography..... 95

## Introduction

Throughout the past ten years, there has been something of a renaissance in Horkheimerian scholarship. In addition to a new English translation of his early writings,<sup>1</sup> there has recently been published a collection of critical essays by prominent contemporary philosophers.<sup>2</sup> Although Horkheimer has not yet garnered the sort of attention and respect which a few of his other contemporaries such as Heidegger have, he has slowly been moved from the position of a marginal scholar within a marginal school, to that of one of the leading architects of an interdisciplinary program whose significance is only now beginning to be recognized.<sup>3</sup>

Much of the responsibility for this renewed interest in Horkheimer must be given to another prominent social theorist, Jurgen Habermas. His central work, The Theory of

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<sup>1</sup> Horkheimer, Max. Between Philosophy and Social Science (hereafter BPSS). Tr. G. Frederick Hunter et al. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives. Eds., Seyla Benhabib et al. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> See the "Introduction" to On Max Horkheimer, pp. 1-19.

Communicative Action, served to highlight Horkheimer's contribution to social philosophy in at least two ways. First, by devoting a major section to Horkheimer's writings,<sup>4</sup> Habermas implied that Horkheimer's critical theory represented as important a stage in his social theory as that of Max Weber, George Herbert Mead or Emile Durkheim. Simply the inclusion of Horkheimer among such prestigious thinkers serves to bring attention to Horkheimer.

The second and more significant way in which Habermas highlighted the importance of Horkheimer's thought was to explicitly attempt to connect the theory of communicative action with Horkheimer's model for interdisciplinary research. In discussing the tasks of a critical theory of society, Habermas writes that his new theory, grounded in intersubjective, communicative rationality, can "take up some of the intentions for which the interdisciplinary research program of earlier critical theory remains instructive."<sup>5</sup> In these two ways, Habermas has in large part initiated the attention which is still

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<sup>4</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "From Lukacs to Adorno: Rationalization as Reification" in The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One. Tr. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, pp. 339-399.

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two. Tr. Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987, p. 383.



thriving to this day. However, the benefits which come from being linked to Habermas are not without their drawbacks.

In the first place, the power of a voice which can initiate such a renaissance, can also prove to be somewhat intimidating for anyone who wishes to mount a challenge. This is especially the case for less well-known figures whose work has thus far attracted little attention. Thus while Habermas has been taken to task repeatedly for his readings of Foucault, Derrida and Heidegger,<sup>6</sup> little has been written in response to his readings of Georges Bataille, Cornelius Castoriadis and Max Horkheimer. In the second place, because Habermas is a significant philosopher in his own right, attention has generally focused upon his discussions and their relationship to his own theory, rather than their relationship to the various thinkers whom he treats. While again, in the case of major philosophers, Habermas has been subjected to criticism in his basic interpretations as well, in the case of figures like Horkheimer who are not as well known, such primary criticism has been lacking.

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<sup>6</sup> For Habermas' account of these figures, see The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Tr. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987. For critical responses to Habermas, see especially Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity. Eds., Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves and Seyla Benhabib. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.

As a whole then, there is a need in the case of Max Horkheimer to engage in that particular criticism which has been present for other philosophers. In particular, this thesis will seek to develop a general framework for discussion on Horkheimer by subjecting Habermas' treatment of his thought to intensive examination and critique. While much has of late been written concerning Habermas' discussion of Horkheimer's early attempt to develop an interdisciplinary model of social research, little has centred on his reading of Horkheimer's central works Dialectic of Enlightenment and Eclipse of Reason. As well, it should be added that virtually nothing has been written concerning Horkheimer's later writings.<sup>7</sup> This thesis will at least begin the process of remedying this neglect.

In the first chapter, I will undertake a close examination of Habermas' reading of Horkheimer in general. Specifically, I will first show that his reading is composed of two sides. On the one hand, Habermas is seeking to construct an overall narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy.<sup>8</sup> That is, Habermas is seeking a plausible story, as opposed

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<sup>7</sup> In English translation, the later writings of Horkheimer are Critique of Instrumental Reason, the second half of the aphorisms contained in Dawn & Decline and a few isolated essays.

<sup>8</sup> Although this narrative appears to a lesser extent in other works by Habermas, it is primarily developed in his essay "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work" in On Max Horkheimer, pp. 49-65.

to a psychological account, which can explain the different phases exhibited by Horkheimer's writings. In other words, he is engaged a kind of general effort to make sense of Horkheimer's philosophical corpus. On the other hand, Habermas provides extensive readings of Horkheimer's texts themselves.<sup>9</sup> Rather than simply elucidating the aforementioned narrative, it is these readings of Horkheimer's texts which Habermas uses as the foundation or justification for the narrative and it is here that I detail some of the difficulties of this two-sided account.

Briefly, I argue that Habermas' account of Horkheimer's philosophy is less than compelling insofar as it is circular. That is, through a detailed examination of both his reading of the texts and the texts themselves, I show that the reading which Habermas provides is plausible only on the condition that one already presuppose his particular narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy. However, since the textual reading is intended to be the justification for the narrative, Habermas' account in general lacks foundation.

Although chapter one serves to problematize Habermas' account of Horkheimer in a general way, it

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<sup>9</sup> These textual readings of Horkheimer's writings are found in the following works by Habermas: Justification and Application, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity and The Theory of Communicative Action.

specifically points to problems in his reading of Horkheimer's writings of the 1940s. In the second chapter I focus on these writings and I attempt to argue for two closely-related theses concerning them. First, with respect to the work Dialectic of Enlightenment, I argue that the type of critique which Horkheimer and Adorno use is not contradictory. Specifically, I argue that they are not employing radical ideology critique in the sense defined by Habermas,<sup>10</sup> and as such, they do not fall prey to his charge of performative contradiction. Rather the form of critique they use is immanent critique which, while it may in fact be problematic, is clearly not contradictory in the sense argued by Habermas.

The second thesis which I argue for in chapter two concerns Horkheimer's vision of philosophy in the 1940s. Although he does maintain that philosophy cannot be defined,<sup>11</sup> and that no timeless methodology of philosophy can be specified,<sup>12</sup> he does give an indication of the manner in which philosophy should proceed in the present. Namely, Horkheimer argues that immanent critique is the appropriate

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<sup>10</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Horkheimer and Adorno" in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Tr. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987, p. 116.

<sup>11</sup> Horkheimer, Max. Eclipse of Reason (hereafter EOR). New York: Continuum, 1992, p.165.

<sup>12</sup> EOR., p. 166.

method today. As such, the implication is that the form of critique used in Dialectic of Enlightenment is not only limited to that work, nor can we say it is due simply to the contribution of Theodor W. Adorno in the composition of that work. Rather it is clear that Horkheimer himself affirmed the use of that form of critique and attempted himself to utilize it.

In the third chapter, I turn to Horkheimer's writings from 1950 to his death in 1973, and to Habermas' discussion of them. Here I will chiefly be concerned with arguing three important issues about this period. First, I will argue that it is misleading for Habermas to characterize the writings of this period as contradictory. Although there are some inconsistencies in the aphoristic writings,<sup>13</sup> one must take into account that fact that they were not published until the year following Horkheimer's death. When the writings which he actually published are considered, this characterization can be seen to be an unwarranted generalization at best.

Second, I argue that Habermas is incorrect in his perception of Horkheimer's supposed attempt to distance himself from the writings of the 1940s. Although Horkheimer does recognize that times have changed and that the

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<sup>13</sup> These aphorisms are contained in the "Decline" section of Dawn & Decline.

political struggles in the 1960s should not uncritically appropriate the writings of earlier periods,<sup>14</sup> he does still endorse roughly the same form of critique utilized in Dialectic of Enlightenment and Eclipse of Reason. As such, it is misleading for Habermas to claim that in Horkheimer's later writings, there is "certainly no identification with what he had produced so far."<sup>15</sup>

Finally, in the third chapter I briefly address the extent to which Horkheimer turned to religion in his later writings. I argue that while there is some modification to his account, his claim that theory must incorporate a theological moment in no way endorses either theism or organized religion of any kind. As such, Habermas is correct when he states of Horkheimer's later writings, that they contained "no new approaches".<sup>16</sup>

In the conclusion to this thesis, I depart from specific textual concerns to outline two issues which this thesis raises for future scholarship. First, it clearly calls for further exploration of Horkheimer's thought. From what I have argued throughout the thesis, it should be clear that his writings at least from Dialectic of Enlightenment to his death are not contradictory in the manner charged by

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<sup>14</sup> See the 1969 Preface to Dialectic of Enlightenment, pp. ix-x.

<sup>15</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Habermas. As such, further examination is needed on the extent to which both the manner of critique and the conclusions drawn from it have relevance for our understanding today. Given that Dialectic of Enlightenment does not engage in a performative contradiction, it is not at all certain that the philosophical position presented therein is untenable today.

The second issue raised by this thesis concerns the relationship of Habermas both to Horkheimer and to the first generation of the Frankfurt school as a whole. Habermas claims that he is in that tradition insofar as he can recuperate the intentions of the 1930s without engendering the negative consequences of the 1940s.<sup>17</sup> If, however, critical theory in the 1940s does not have the negative consequences which Habermas claims it does, then it is not at all clear that his own theory represents a further development in the same tradition. Rather it becomes simply another theory alongside a still viable model. As such, this thesis will have served to problematize Habermas' relationship with the Frankfurt school as a whole. This problematization calls for a re-examination of that relationship not only for a general understanding of the

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<sup>17</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 2, pp. 378-403.

history of ideas, but also for the specific understanding of Habermas' philosophy.

In general then, this thesis serves as a preliminary to further scholarly debate. Rather than evaluating Horkheimer's philosophy, it seeks to argue that such an evaluation is still necessary. Rather than claiming that Habermas is not within the tradition of critical theory, it seeks to argue that the nature of his relationship to that tradition is still in question. In this manner, I hope that it will serve as the impetus to further debate on this tradition.



## Chapter 1: Habermas on Horkheimer

As was noted in the introduction to this work, Jurgen Habermas is first among contemporary scholars of Horkheimer in two senses. On the one hand, the current interest in Horkheimer in large part owes its existence to the various treatments provided by Habermas.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he is the *first* scholar in a chronological (and likely causal) sense. On the other hand, Habermas is also the first in the sense of being the most important or influential. Thus although his accounts have attracted some specific criticism, there has also been something of a tendency to accept much of what he says without significant debate or at least for that debate to occur within the parameters of what he has said.<sup>2</sup> Given this, I will in what follows explore only Habermas' account of the philosophy of Horkheimer.

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<sup>1</sup> Hunter, G. Frederick. "Introduction". Between Philosophy and Social Science. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, p. ix.

<sup>2</sup> See for example Seyla Benhabib's article "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory", Telos, 1981, no. 49, pp. 39-59. Although Benhabib does point to difficulties in Habermas' own version of critical theory, she rather uncritically adopts his analysis of the earlier Frankfurt theorists.

Although there are some differences in the positions of others,<sup>3</sup> these have tended to be minor in comparison with the points of agreement. As such, a treatment of the difficulties into which his account leads should be sufficient for generating a reading of the essential texts which is distinct from the prevailing, Habermasian reading, and thus one which contributes to a new and somewhat broader framework for debate on the study of Max Horkheimer's thought.

The form that Habermas' discussions take is essentially the search for a narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy.<sup>4</sup> It is important in approaching Habermas' writings to remember that this narrative is itself the goal; he is not doing commentary simply for the sake of commentary. This narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy is what allows Habermas to then proceed to link his own thought

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<sup>3</sup> See for example, Richard Wolin's article "Critical Theory and the Dialectic of Rationalism", New German Critique, No. 41, Sp-Su. 1987, pp. 52. Here Wolin argues that in contrast to Habermas' assertion that critical theory has its origin in the Cartesian philosophy of the subject, rather it arises out of a Hegelian-Marxist framework which is primarily concerned with unmasking such an illusory subject.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas' discussions of Horkheimer's thought can be found in the following: The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. 1, pp. 366-386, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, pp. 106-130, Justification and Application, pp. 133-186, and finally, the essay, "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", from On Max Horkheimer, pp. 49-65.

with the early Horkheimer and at least the spirit of the later (and thus with the tradition of critical theory), while at the same time maintaining a certain distance from the writings of the 1940s (in particular Dialectic of Enlightenment). In this chapter, I will outline in some detail this narrative which Habermas seeks to construct. I will then explore the textual evidence for his account of Horkheimer and I will argue that an interpretation of the type that he provides in support of the narrative is only possible on the condition that one presupposes that particular narrative in the first place. Thus, I will argue that at least the evidence for Habermas' reading of Horkheimer is unsatisfactory insofar as it appears to be circular.

For Habermas, Horkheimer is, first and last, a man of reason. He is a man who, while being critical of their lack of reflectiveness, was still essentially sympathetic to the sciences. In fact, according to Habermas, Horkheimer in the 1930s was so pro-science that he was something of an "antiphilosopher". Given the failure of the great idealist systems, he sought to "transfer philosophy to another medium in order [for it] not to degenerate into ideology."<sup>5</sup> Thus, "Horkheimer sought the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of philosophy

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<sup>5</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work" in On Max Horkheimer. Eds. Seyla Benhabib et al., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, p. 51.

in social theory; transformation into the social sciences offered the only chance of survival for philosophical thought."<sup>6</sup> As early as his inaugural address as director of the Institute for Social Research, we have the beginnings of Horkheimer's move toward a truly interdisciplinary institute and the origins of Horkheimer's first phase, which would later be ruptured, as Habermas points out, by the composition of Dialectic of Enlightenment.

Without delving too deeply into Habermas' discussion of this early period, it is worthwhile to make at least two observations. First, Habermas wants to make the claim that Horkheimer had a prominent role during these days at least partly out of the necessity of uniting diverse perspectives into this interdisciplinary model. A key example here is that of Theodore W. Adorno, who Habermas argues never really accepted the value of the sciences to the extent that Horkheimer did. Thus Habermas cites Adorno as marking a clear distinction between philosophy and science,<sup>7</sup> and then disparaging sociology by comparing it to a cat burglar who steals valuable things but eventually loses them because she does not recognize their value.<sup>8</sup> While these

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>7</sup> "the idea of science (*wissenschaft*) is research; that of philosophy is interpretation." T. W. Adorno, "The Actuality of Philosophy" Telos. Sp. 1977, pp. 126.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas, Jürgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 56.

characterizations are to be found in Adorno's inaugural address (delivered in the same year as Horkheimer's), there are also within the same address other statements which would seem to moderate his stance on the sciences. Thus he writes that "philosophical problems will lie always, and in a certain sense irredeemably, locked within the most specific questions of the separate sciences". And further, he does not

mean to suggest that philosophy should give up or even slacken that contact with separate sciences which it has finally regained, and the attainment of which counts among the fortunate results of the most recent intellectual history. Quite the contrary.<sup>9</sup>

While I do not mean to suggest that Adorno was completely enamored by the sciences, he did see both a necessity and a value to their close relation to philosophy.

A second observation should be made concerning Habermas' claim that Horkheimer was an "antiphilosopher."<sup>10</sup> This, coupled with assertions about transferring philosophy to another medium, gives a somewhat one-sided impression about Horkheimer's views on the nature of this interdisciplinary program. In his inaugural address, he

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<sup>9</sup> Adorno, T. W. "The Actuality of Philosophy". P. 126.

<sup>10</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks of the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 50.

argues that the divisions between philosophy and the social sciences on the one hand, and amongst those sciences themselves on the other, will not be overcome by the negation of philosophy as empiricists have done.

Rather, this situation can be overcome to the extent that philosophy - as a theoretical undertaking oriented to the general, the "essential" - is capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time remains open enough to let itself be influenced and changed by these concrete studies.<sup>11</sup>

Thus the union between philosophy and the social sciences is to be a dialectical one whereby both are to be preserved in their individuality, yet gain their full meaning by their unity.

Given these two considerations, it seems to be the case that Habermas is over-emphasizing the disagreement between Horkheimer and Adorno at this stage by making the former too strongly pro-science and the latter too strongly anti-science. To be sure, their positions did not seamlessly coincide. However, there is at least some basis here for their later collaboration.

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<sup>11</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research" in BPSS., p. 9.

Apart from the above, however, Habermas' characterization of this period is generally plausible. By all accounts Horkheimer did at least attempt both to articulate a philosophical justification for interdisciplinary work and to implement that interdisciplinary version of critical theory within the Institute. This period saw the publication of the *Studien uber Autoritat und Familie* and the continuing work in the *Zeitschrift fur Sozialforschung* where Horkheimer published the vast majority of his essays. In all, it was the most intellectually productive period for both Horkheimer and the other members of the Institute.<sup>12</sup>

In April of 1941, Horkheimer (who had already lived in the United States since 1934) moved from New York to California and began to abandon the interdisciplinary model in favour of what was to become a collaboration exclusively with Adorno.<sup>13</sup> It is in this period that Horkheimer produced the two seminal essays "The Authoritarian State" and "The End of Reason", the collection of lectures Eclipse of Reason and with Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment. The changes which occur in Horkheimer's position at this time, in particular those expressed by Dialectic of Enlightenment,

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<sup>12</sup> Wiggershaus, Rolf. The Frankfurt School. Tr. Michael Robertson. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994. Pp.149-260.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 291-326.

are interpreted by Habermas, according to Robert Hullot-Kentor, as "an aberration in the life of a once reasonable man."<sup>14</sup> To say that this work is an aberration, however, is not to say that it was uncaused or that it is without theoretical consequences.

With respect to the social and political factors which contributed to Horkheimer's new position, Habermas, in agreement with Helmut Dubiel's work,<sup>15</sup> argues that this period can be seen as a response to three historical experiences. First, "the Soviet development confirmed by and large Weber's prognosis of an accelerated bureaucratization." Second, "fascism demonstrated the ability of advanced capitalist societies to respond in critical situations to the danger of revolutionary change". Finally, experience in the United States had shown that "mass culture bound the consciousness of the broad masses to the imperatives of the status quo" and thus capitalism had another option for integration than that of open repression.<sup>16</sup> It was these three experiences which according to Habermas moved Horkheimer away from faith in

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<sup>14</sup> Hullot-Kentor, Robert. "Back to Adorno". Telos. No. 81, fall 1989. P. 12.

<sup>15</sup> Dubiel, Helmut. Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory. Tr. Benjamin Gregg. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985.

<sup>16</sup> TCA. Vol. 1, pp. 366-7.



both the sciences and the proletariat and led him closer to the philosophical position of Adorno.

With respect to the issue of the proletariat, Horkheimer and Adorno adopt a two-fold argument. On the one hand, they empirically refute Lukacs' thesis that rationalization as reification has its internal limit in proletarian revolutionary consciousness.<sup>17</sup> This is done by means of the theory of the culture industry and its unmatched ability to integrate, and thus frustrate, revolutionary ambitions. On the other hand, they argue that the emancipatory potential of the proletariat is further vitiated by the necessary process of the bureaucratization of the labour movement. These unions must maintain their own existence and "integration is the price which individuals and groups have to pay in order to flourish under capitalism."<sup>18</sup> As such, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the dreams of the proletariat as "subject-object" of history,<sup>19</sup> as agent of revolutionary change, have become bad utopianism.

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<sup>17</sup> TCA. Vol.1, p. 368.

<sup>18</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "The Authoritarian State". Reprinted in The Essential Frankfurt School Reader. Eds. Andrew Arato and Elke Gebhardt. New York: Urzen Books, 1978, p. 99.

<sup>19</sup> See "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in Georg Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness. Tr. Rodney Livingstone. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1968, pp. 83-209.

With regard to science, Habermas maintains that Horkheimer and Adorno regard the two main philosophical attempts for its justification as, at best, limited truths. Neo-Thomism uncritically hearkens back to an objective reason which is irretrievably lost under triumphant subjective reason. As such, Gilson's and Maritain's obstinate resurrection of myth is simply a regression to myth. Positivism with its lack of a principle whereby the scientific method might be justified, must elevate success within the world as it is for its criterion of truth. In its own way therefore it too regresses to myth only this time it is the myth of world as it is. Thus Horkheimer and Adorno have at this point lost confidence in a science which might yield knowledge that transcends the given order. They write,

Even though we had known for many years that the great discoveries of applied science are paid for with an increasing diminution of theoretical awareness, we still thought that in regard to scientific activity our contribution could be restricted to the criticism or extension of specialist axioms....However the fragments united in this volume [Dialectic of Enlightenment] show that we were forced to abandon that conviction.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> DOE., p. xi.

In this situation, science no longer has a positive content to offer and Habermas argues that Horkheimer and Adorno must therefore alter the role of critical thought to wholesale criticism.

With the loss of both science, which no longer is seen to have any intrinsic connection with truth, and the proletariat, which is just as integrated as the bourgeoisie, Horkheimer and Adorno according to Habermas engage in an ideology critique which is totalized twice over. They take the concept of the entwinement of reason and domination, that is, reification, which for Lukacs had been specific to capitalism, and

generalize it temporally (over the entire history of the species) and substantively (the same logic of domination is imputed to both cognition in the service of self-preservation and the repression of instinctual nature). This double generalization of the concept of reification leads to a concept of instrumental reason that shifts the primordial history of subjectivity and the self-formative process of ego identity into an encompassing historico-philosophical perspective.<sup>21</sup>

Thus according to Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno have moved into the position whereby instrumental rationality and its deleterious effects, that is, domination of inner and outer nature, become the meaning of history.

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<sup>21</sup> TCA, Vol. 1, pp. 379-80.

Central to Habermas' account is that for him, Horkheimer and Adorno are engaged in radical ideology critique. It is no longer simply a question of accusing various knowledge claims of being corrupted by illicit power relationships. Rather at this stage,

doubt reaches out to include reason, whose standards ideology critique had found already given in bourgeois ideals and had simply taken at their word. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* takes this step - it renders critique independent even in relation to its own foundation.<sup>22</sup>

As such, the difficulty arises as to both the epistemological and the normative foundations of critique. If all reason (and perhaps all knowing) is irredeemably bound with domination, how is it that Horkheimer and Adorno can see society for what it is? If all values merely express subjugation, then what values form the basis for critique? How can one even say that domination itself is wrong?

The theoretical consequences of this radical ideology critique frame the final section in Habermas' narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy. In the face of the aporia of the self-referential critique of reason, Adorno had no real

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<sup>22</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Tr. Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987, p. 116.

difficulty according to Habermas, because on the one hand, he was never as attached to reason as Horkheimer, and on the other hand, he could turn to music and aesthetic experience as a source of illumination.<sup>23</sup> Horkheimer, however, gives no indication that he was sympathetic to this option.<sup>24</sup> While some have indicated that he instead turned to religion as providing an analogous transcendent principle,<sup>25</sup> Habermas sees no evidence for this. Instead, we do find a certain resignation in the fact that "religion now appears as the only agency that - if only it could command assent - would permit distinguishing between truth and falsity, morality and immorality."<sup>26</sup> Thus according to Habermas any significance of religion for Horkheimer in his later period

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<sup>23</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 58.

<sup>24</sup> An exception is the essay "Art and Mass Culture", in Critical Theory, New York: Continuum, 1972. Here Horkheimer writes that "The work of art is the only adequate objectification of the individual's deserted state and despair (p. 179)." Although he does seem to acknowledge the importance of the aesthetic sphere to critical thought, the essay does not invalidate the above given on the one hand that it was written before Dialectic of Enlightenment and on the other hand, these thoughts are not explored in any of his other writings throughout his life.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, Joan Alway Critical Theory and Political Possibilities. London: Greenwood Press, 1995, pp. 49-60.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 60.

was less a question of what might be invoked in the future than a question of what has been lost from the past.

Although Habermas sees this discussion of religion as at best fragmented, he does think that it reveals something very definite about Horkheimer's philosophical position after the Dialectic of Enlightenment. He writes,

That Horkheimer should invoke theology, even if only hypothetically, is only logical once the philosophy of history has not only lost its historical basis but, extended into a totalizing critique of reason, threatens to destroy its own foundations. The older Horkheimer does not wish to accept this, though he sees no way out.<sup>27</sup>

Whereas Adorno could countenance contradictory thinking, and in fact according to Habermas, "Negative Dialectics reads like a continuing explanation of why we have to circle about within this *performative contradiction* and indeed even remain there,"<sup>28</sup> Horkheimer as the "man of reason" could not. In contrast to Adorno who published numerous works after Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer published only a few essays and a collection of disparate (and sometimes even contradictory) aphorisms. Habermas writes that expressed in these aphorisms and late writings is the "author's inability to bring his splintering insights

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. p. 119.

together once again into a convincing picture of a fractured social reality."<sup>29</sup>

This as a whole then, is the narrative which Habermas seeks to construct of Horkheimer's philosophy. Horkheimer is a man of reason who becomes disillusioned through the experience of Nazism. He then engages in a radical critique with Adorno (who in Habermas' version is relatively close to irrationalism anyway) and in the end, is basically reduced to little theoretical output, contradiction and theological musings. Habermas writes that the late philosophy is governed by a dilemma, "Dialectic of Enlightenment cannot be the last word, but it bars the way back to the materialism of the 1930s."<sup>30</sup> Thus Horkheimer, the man of reason, is cornered, with no rational way out.

From the above, it is clear that Habermas regards the work Dialectic of Enlightenment as one of the more essential works in organizing this narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy. On the one hand, it is this work which marks the transition away from the interdisciplinary studies of the early period. On the other hand, Horkheimer's later writings (or relative lack thereof) are also to be explained with reference to it. As such, if we are to come to any reasonable evaluation of this narrative, it is worthwhile to

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<sup>29</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

consider Habermas' treatment of this work in particular to determine whether or not it provides the required evidence. In addition, it is worthwhile investigating his reading of this work before turning to his reading of the later works. As we shall see, given the fact that Habermas sees these later works solely as a reaction to his view of Dialectic of Enlightenment, any problems which we discover in his reading of this central work, will serve to place some doubt on his reading of the later ones.

As far as textual evidence is concerned, Habermas needs to show that Dialectic of Enlightenment is a paradoxical book. It is a book which engages in an ideology critique so radical that it compromises any possible foundation upon which it can exist as meaningful critique. In order to provide the necessary evidence for his reading of Horkheimer's philosophy as a whole, he must show that Dialectic of Enlightenment is a general indictment of reason, which charges that from its very inception, reason has been inextricably bound with domination and in the present, forms a system so totalitarian that no cracks appear upon which critique might be built. Finally, he must show that these are the inescapable theoretical consequences of the Dialectic of Enlightenment and that these, taken together with Horkheimer's general commitment to reason,



crippled his later writings insofar as they precluded a rational, theoretical alternative.

The first and not altogether insignificant difficulty which Habermas faces is the fact that in a number of places, Horkheimer and Adorno seem to be maintaining the opposite of what Habermas claims they are. They seem to be stating that the situation is not quite as bad as to render all critical thought impossible. They write, "The point is rather that the Enlightenment *must consider itself*, if men are not to be wholly betrayed."<sup>31</sup> The implications here are first, that men are not yet wholly betrayed and thus that there are some (however feeble) grounds for optimism, and second, that there is some benefit to self-examination on the part of the Enlightenment. In other words, the Enlightenment is not yet at the stage at which any constructive self-knowledge is out of reach. It is in this sense that Horkheimer and Adorno describe the function of the book as a whole as contributing to the "health" of the modern theoretical faculty,<sup>32</sup> and as being "intended to prepare the way for a positive notion of enlightenment which will release it from entanglement in blind domination."<sup>33</sup>

These comments which indicate a more balanced appraisal of reason than Habermas would credit them with,

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<sup>31</sup> DOE., p. xv.

<sup>32</sup> DOE., p. xiii.

<sup>33</sup> DOE., p. xvi.

are not simply found in the introductory sections of the book, but are found to some degree in virtually every section of the work. Looking only at the first three essays of the book, we find that even amongst all of their comments concerning the overall negative character of the enlightenment, each of these essays ends in a similar fashion with at least some degree of optimism. In the first essay, they write that, today, since Francis Bacon's vision of commanding nature by action has revealed itself as domination on a "tellurian scale", knowledge "can now become the dissolution of domination."<sup>34</sup> The essay on Odysseus also ends in a similar fashion with a commentary on the poetic device of the caesura in the midst of the account of the hanging of the maids.<sup>35</sup> They write,

Where the account comes to a halt, however, is the caesura, the transformation of the reported into something that happened long ago, and by virtue of this caesura the semblance of freedom lights up, which ever since civilization has not succeeded in extinguishing.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> DOE., p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> Homer. Odyssey. Tr. S. H. Butcher and A. Lang. London: Macmillon and Co., Ltd., 1917. Book 22, line 474, p. 374.

<sup>36</sup> Given the difficulties with John Cumming's translation, throughout this thesis I will make use of the only available alternative: Robert Hulot-Kentor's translation of Excursus 1 of Dialectic of Enlightenment, "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment", New German Critique. Number 56, Spring-Summer 1992, (Hereafter referred to as Odysseus). Although any direct quotations from this

Finally, in the essay "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality", Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that the fact that Sade and Nietzsche insisted more decisively on the *ratio* than positivism, even to the point where no arguments against murder could be provided, and this

implicitly liberates from its hiding-place the utopia contained in the Kantian notion of reason as in every great philosophy: the utopia of a humanity which, itself no longer distorted, has no further need to distort.<sup>37</sup>

While it clearly appears from these passages that Horkheimer and Adorno were pessimistic with regard to a number of issues such as the likelihood of revolutionary change, that pessimism, however, is a far cry from either nihilism or hopelessness.

The interpretative strategy which Habermas adopts in the face of these passages is one which tackles the question of the authorship of the book as a whole. On this issue, Habermas writes,

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excursus will be based on this newer translation, for consistency's sake I will provide references to both. For example, *Odysseus*, p. 140; *DOE.*, p. 79. Quotations from all other sections of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* will be exclusively from the Cumming's translation.

<sup>37</sup> *DOE.*, p. 119.

The text, however, is by no means undivided. Gretel Adorno [Adorno's wife, by whom the manuscript as a whole was typed] once confirmed my suspicion, which is at any rate obvious to careful readers; the title essay and the chapter on de Sade are predominantly attributable to Horkheimer, while the chapters on Odysseus and the culture industry belong to Adorno.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, he attempts to maintain on the basis of this distinction of authorship that "only in those chapters in which Horkheimer's hand is visible", are there assertions to the effect that there is a liberating effect to enlightened knowledge.

As we have seen above, even if we assume that Habermas is correct about a division of authorship along essay lines, we can still find passages throughout the supposed Adorno sections which affirm the liberating effect of enlightened knowledge. As well, this division of itself has little to say with respect to the other sections of the book. Thus for example in the "Elements of Anti-Semitism", which even on Habermas' reading was jointly written, they write of fascism that:

Its horror lies in the fact that the lie is obvious but persists. Though this deception allows of no truth against which it could be measured, the truth appears negatively in the very extent of the contradiction; and the undiscerning can be kept from that truth only if they are wholly deprived of the faculty of thought [a

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<sup>38</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's work", p. 57.

faculty the health of which, as was cited above, this book claims as its goal]. Enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the bounds of enlightenment.<sup>39</sup>

As a whole then, even if we accept Habermas' distinction, there still remain significant difficulties in his interpretation.

It is not at all obvious, however, that we must accept this distinction in authorship. The two types of evidence he cites in support of his claim are first, that it is obvious to careful readers and second, that Gretel Adorno confirmed his suspicion. As to the first, it is simply not obvious that this division of authorship is correct. In the essay "The Concept of Enlightenment" which Habermas claims was written only by Horkheimer, for example, we find a discussion of science and logic as a struggle for unity which invariably does violence to the dissimilar.<sup>40</sup> While this critique of identity has no parallel in Horkheimerian writings, it is a common theme in the later Adorno, specifically in Negative Dialectics.<sup>41</sup> As well, in the

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<sup>39</sup> DOE., p. 208.

<sup>40</sup> DOE., pp. 7-10.

<sup>41</sup> Adorno writes that his work "attempts by means of logical consistency to substitute for the unity principle, and for the paramountcy of the supraordinated concept, the idea of what would be outside the sway of such unity." Negative Dialectics. Tr. E. B. Ashton. New York: Continuum, 1995, p. xx.

essay on Odysseus, as Hullo-Kentor has noted, one can discern

what Horkheimer called his [own] simplifying style. It relaxes Adorno's grip and lets one catch one's breath before being swallowed up by the next line. There is also an occasional glibness that otherwise never occurs in Adorno's own writings.<sup>42</sup>

In general, we find throughout the entire book, themes which are typically Adornean, such as the dialectic of sacrifice, mixed with Horkheimerian techniques of philosophical anthropology. As such, the obviousness of the division which Habermas asserts is without doubt in question.

This leads us to the other piece of evidence: the word of Gretel Adorno. Putting aside the fact that the direct verification of this evidence is virtually impossible, there is still a more telling difficulty. Habermas is for some reason placing more weight on the testimony of Gretel Adorno than he is willing to grant to that of Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno. Not only in Dialectic of Enlightenment do they affirm that it is a joint work, but as well in other works of the same period such as Eclipse of Reason and Minima Moralia. All of these express sentiments

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<sup>42</sup> Hullo-Kentor, Robert. "Back to Adorno", p. 9.

similar to that offered by Adorno later, in his study of modern music. He writes that

a common philosophy has evolved out of the author's work with Max Horkheimer, which extends over a period of twenty years. The author is, to be sure, solely responsible for matters pertaining concretely to music. However, it would be impossible to distinguish whose property this or that theoretical insight is.<sup>43</sup>

Given these statements it is difficult to understand why Habermas would give so much more weight to Adorno's wife than to Adorno himself. One possible reason is that Habermas is at least in part influenced in his interpretation by the very narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy, discussed earlier. According to it, Horkheimer is supposed to be the man of reason while Adorno is the irrationalist. The passages in Dialectic of Enlightenment can only be attributed exclusively to Horkheimer if one has already assumed that this split in their philosophical positions exists. Given, however, that the exposition of the text is supposed to be the justification for this narrative, Habermas' account of the authorship of the text lacks a suitable foundation. At least in this case, the relationship between narrative and exposition is circular.

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<sup>43</sup> Adorno, T. W. Philosophy of Modern Music. Tr. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster. New York: Continuum, 1973, p. xiii.

Putting this difficulty aside for the time being, at the heart of Habermas' account is the assertion that Dialectic of Enlightenment contains an ideology critique turned radical.<sup>44</sup> In this vein, Habermas defines ideology critique in general as that which

attempts to show that the validity of a theory has not been adequately dissociated from the context in which it emerged; that behind the back of the theory there lies hidden an inadmissible *mixture of power and validity* and that it still owes its reputation to this.<sup>45</sup>

This critique then becomes radical when it reaches out to include reason itself, thus rendering "critique independent even in relation to its own foundations."<sup>46</sup>

On any reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment, one cannot help but see that Horkheimer and Adorno are at the very least engaged in ideology critique. A constant theme of the work as a whole is that reason and domination (that

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<sup>44</sup> Throughout this thesis, three types of critique (the definitions of which are all taken from Habermas's The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, pp. 114-119) will be of particular importance: immanent, ideology and radical ideology critique. Although there is some common ground between these three and on the one hand, what might be called "classical Marxist ideology critique", and on the other hand, Karl Mannheim's ideology critique, the latter two are not relevant here. Given the issue concerns only the three types outlined in Habermas' discussion, for clarity's sake, I will only deal with those.

<sup>45</sup> Habermas, Jurgен. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 116.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 116.



is, validity and power) are inextricably bound. For example, with respect to growth in technical knowledge, they see as a pre-requisite, the division of labour which at the same time brings about a fixation of the instincts and a loss of imagination through a combination of repression and deprivation of experience. Thus,

adaptation to the power of progress involves the progress of power, and each time anew brings about those degenerations which show not unsuccessful but successful progress to be [the imagination's] contrary. The curse of irresistible progress is irresistible regression.<sup>47</sup>

Similar sentiments abound throughout the book to the point where it can declare its two theses simply as "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology."<sup>48</sup>

Without a doubt then, Horkheimer and Adorno are engaged in ideology critique. What might be questioned is whether or not this critique is *radical* in Habermas' sense. Related to this, we might ask as well whether or not ideology critique is the only type of critique in which they are engaged. That is, whether that critique is meant to stand on its own, and thus requires its own foundation, or whether it is merely one aspect of a larger strategy of

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<sup>47</sup> DOE., pp. 35-36.

<sup>48</sup> DOE., p. xvi.

critique, and thus gains its foundation from that larger project. In the event that there was such an overall strategy of critique, of which the ideology critique was merely a part, it is at least conceivable that Horkheimer's and Adorno's position might not contain the difficulties which Habermas claims it does. That is, Horkheimer and Adorno may be engaged in a project which is not unfounded in the manner charged by Habermas.

With respect to these very questions it is worth considering yet another interpretive decision on the part of Habermas. Specifically, he takes up "Philosophy and the Division of Labor" which is "unsystematically tacked on"<sup>49</sup> in the "Notes and Drafts" section at the end of Dialectic of Enlightenment. It is here that yet again, Horkheimer's and Adorno's position seems to be at odds with Habermas' reading of it. In contrast to the suggestion that they are only doing ideology critique (let alone, radical ideology critique), they write,

Philosophy knows of no workable abstract rules or goals to replace those at present in force. It is immune to the suggestion of the status quo for the very reason that it accepts bourgeois ideals without further consideration. These ideals may be those still proclaimed, though in distorted form, by the representatives of the status quo; or those which, however much they have been tinkered about with, are still recognizable as the

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<sup>49</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 117.

objective meaning of existing institutions,  
whether technical or cultural.<sup>50</sup>

This would appear to be a clear statement of Horkheimer and Adorno defining their project as immanent critique rather than ideology critique. The central difference being, that whereas ideology critique essentially adopts the strategy of showing power and validity to be illicitly intertwined, immanent critique adopts that strategy only insofar as the specific form of knowledge *claims* to be free of interest and power. Immanent critique not only attacks specific knowledge claims on the grounds that they mask power relations but, as well, it goes beyond to critique forms of knowledge in all of the different ways in which they fail to meet their own criteria. As such, immanent critique has at its disposal exactly as many strategies for criticism as the form of knowledge that it is attacking has claims. For example, while ideology critique could attack Thomism for concealing domination within its notions of objective meaning, immanent critique can expose in addition all of the different ways in which Thomists fail to satisfy their own criteria, that is, objective meaning. On this reading, both ideology and immanent critiques would attack specific forms of knowledge for inadequate separation of power and validity, but only immanent critique can in addition attack

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<sup>50</sup> DOE., p. 243.

all of the other various ways in which forms of knowledge fail to meet their own standards. Furthermore, because immanent critique does not bring standards to bear which are extraneous to the society in question, the question of the standpoint of the critique does not arise. Immanent critique is merely an internal cataloging of the different ways in which a society's hopes and values have been frustrated.

If we turn to bourgeois society and in particular its intellectual embodiment, the enlightenment, and if Horkheimer and Adorno are engaged in ideology critique, all that we should expect to find in their work are various attempts to show that the enlightenment conceals power relationships which compromise its claims to knowledge. If on the other hand, they are engaged in immanent critique, then in addition to these types of criticisms, we should also expect to find the other ways in which the enlightenment does not live up to its ideals.

Habermas assumes that only the former is the case and as such encounters the difficulty of accounting for the aforementioned passage from "Philosophy and the Division of Labor". Specifically, he seems to interpret the fact that it is "unsystematically tacked on" combined with the fact that it contradicts his general reading of the text to mean that they simply do not intend us to take this passage

literally. Rather, Habermas maintains that it "reads like an interloper from the classical period of Critical Theory [i.e. the 1930s]."<sup>51</sup> In this case, the point of the passage would be to illustrate a position which they have discarded under the weight of different social and political events. In this way, Habermas seeks to portray this apparent statement of purpose as ironical.

The plausibility of this interpretation however, is somewhat lacking. In the first place, there is nothing within the section as a whole which would indicate that they are anything but serious. In fact the passage ends by stating that philosophy

is simultaneously alien and sympathetic to the status quo. Its voice belongs to the object, though without its will. It is the voice of contradiction, which would otherwise not be heard but triumph mutely.<sup>52</sup>

Similar statements to these can be found not in the early Horkheimer, with which Habermas would like to identify this section, but in the later Adorno.<sup>53</sup> Hence, an interpretation of this passage which is based upon

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<sup>51</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 117.

<sup>52</sup> DOE., p. 244.

<sup>53</sup> "Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity" and "Contradiction is nonidentity under the aspect of identity", therefore dialectics could be said to be the consistent sense of contradiction. Negative Dialectics, p. 5.

attributing its composition solely to one of the authors, is questionable.

In addition, it is difficult to know what to make of the fact that it is "unsystematically tacked on". Given that prior to this work, Horkheimer had only produced one full monograph,<sup>54</sup> it seems as though he preferred the shorter forms of the essay and the aphorism. As well, after the publication of Dialectic of Enlightenment and Eclipse of Reason, he exclusively returned to those forms, never to complete a full monograph again. Adorno, on the other hand, never seemed all that partial to the systematic presentation of a text. Not only are Aesthetic Theory and Negative Dialectics closer in organizational principle to the "Notes and Drafts" section than to anything else, but Adorno actually characterizes Negative Dialectics as an "anti-system."<sup>55</sup> As such, simply the fact that the mode of presentation is unsystematic is not sufficient to disregard the content.

In fact, here again we have a case where Habermas' interpretation seems to lack rational foundation. The decision to regard the passage<sup>56</sup> as ironical is only rational if Habermas has already assumed that Dialectic of

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<sup>54</sup> Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History. Reprinted in BPSS, pp. 313-388.

<sup>55</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. Negative Dialectics, p. xx.

<sup>56</sup> The passage in question here is the section "Philosophy and the Division of Labour" quoted at length on page 22.

Enlightenment contains the performative contradiction which neither the early nor the later Horkheimer could countenance. If this were the case, the passage would be the road back from the totalized critique of instrumental reason, which is blocked by the dialectic of enlightenment. It would be the inability to negotiate this road back which accounts for the diminished output of the later Horkheimer.

The difficulty, however, is that once again, this narrative is the only justification we have for interpreting the text in this fashion. Habermas' account seems once again to be circular and thus problematic.

Before proceeding on to the issue of Horkheimer in his later life, it is worthwhile given what we have seen to re-explore these texts from the 1940s. In the chapter which follows, I will attempt a general, introductory reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment which strives to incorporate both Habermas' insights and what we have gained through the critique of his account in general, while at the same time keeping faith with what Horkheimer and Adorno say they are doing. In this way, we will gain a foundation for approaching both Habermas' readings of this later phase, and those texts themselves.

## Chapter 2: Dialectic of Enlightenment as Immanent Critique

As was argued in the previous chapter, Habermas' reading of Horkheimer encounters difficulties precisely when trying to account for the central years of Horkheimer's life, the 1940s. In dealing with Dialectic of Enlightenment, Habermas intends to show that the book engages in a radical ideology critique which becomes independent even in relation to its own foundations. As such the book, according to Habermas, is a denunciation of reason, which at the same time deprives itself of the right to make such a denunciation. What we have seen, however, is that there are specific textual counter-examples to such a reading. Although Habermas attempts to account for these, on the one hand by postulating a division in the authorship, and on the other hand, by attempting to dismiss the relevant passages as ironic, we have seen that these attempts are not compelling unless one already presupposes the narrative which Habermas seeks to support. In this chapter, I will explore the issue of ideology and immanent critiques even further by attempting to generate the framework for a new reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment which can avoid at least some of the difficulties discussed in the previous chapter. Hopefully, this framework will provide



us with a moderately more defensible foundation upon which to treat Habermas' discussion of Horkheimer's later writings.

As Habermas has quite rightly noted, the structure alone of Dialectic of Enlightenment is sufficient to render it "an odd book."<sup>1</sup> It contains an essay of about forty pages, two excurses and three appendices (which comprise over half of the text). The original German subtitle, "*Philosophische Fragmente*" adequately describes the text since all but two of the sections are further subdivided. Compounding these structural factors is the apparent lack of a single argumentative approach. While the first essay is more or less straight philosophical argumentation, the two excurses are much closer to interpretive exegesis of texts. The essay on the culture industry is cultural criticism while "Elements of Anti-Semitism" is socio-psychology. Finally, the "Notes and Drafts" section is almost impossible to classify given its range of both topics and approaches. As a whole, then, the work presents immense difficulties for concise exegesis.

Fortunately, in the case of this work, we have access to a significantly clearer commentary written by the author himself. During the same years in which Horkheimer and Adorno were drafting Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer also prepared the lectures which would form the basis of Eclipse of Reason. He writes that

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 106.

These lectures were designed to present in epitome some aspects of a comprehensive philosophical theory developed by the writer during the last few years in association with Theodor W. Adorno. It would be difficult to say which of the ideas originated in his mind and which in my own.<sup>2</sup>

The common ground between this work and Dialectic of Enlightenment is further corroborated by another member of the Institute, Leo Lowenthal, who asserts that Eclipse of Reason's composition was also a collaborative effort of Adorno and himself.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is not without justification that we might turn to Eclipse of Reason as a source of explanation for Dialectic of Enlightenment.

This turn to Eclipse of Reason for the understanding of Dialectic of Enlightenment however, places again in the forefront, the issue of authorship as discussed in the previous chapter. We must be careful here to avoid making a similar mistake to that of Habermas. In the face of his assertion that Gretel Adorno claimed a division of authorship in Dialectic of Enlightenment, we must be cautious not to merely assert the opposite, that they wrote every word

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<sup>2</sup> Horkheimer, Max. Eclipse of Reason. (Hereafter EOR). New York: Continuum, 1992, p. vii.

<sup>3</sup> Lowenthal, Leo. An Unmastered Past. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987, p. 211. It should be noted that Lowenthal participating in the writing of Eclipse of Reason is not a change from the authorship of Dialectic of Enlightenment since although he is not an author of Dialectic of Enlightenment as a whole, it is well-documented that he participated in the writing of the first three "Theses on Anti-Semitism" in that work.

together. Instead, a solution should be sought which if possible does not outright deny either side's testimony.

In this case, such a solution does seem possible if we initiate a distinction between *authorship* and *endorsement*. The term authorship would be reserved for the person who, strictly speaking, composed the bulk of the actual words which appear in the text. The term endorsement, however, would extend beyond the question of authorship insofar as one who was not the primary author could still have contributed to the writing process such that the ideas contained therein would still be endorsed and taken responsibility for. On the basis of such a distinction, it could be that Gretel Adorno is correct with respect to which author was primarily responsible for each section;<sup>4</sup> however, that distinction in authorship would not affect the overall claim of the authors' to jointly endorse the text in the above sense. As such, a study of Adorno's philosophy could treat the entire text as one of his works,<sup>5</sup> and this study shall treat it as one of Horkheimer's. Moreover, given the proximity in the time of composition of Eclipse of Reason to Dialectic of Enlightenment, it seems

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<sup>4</sup> This said, I still find it difficult to accept her contention that Horkheimer was primarily responsible for the first essay, "The Concept of Enlightenment". Stylistically, the essay does not resemble anything that Horkheimer ever produced on his own.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, Robert Hullot-Kentor's article "Notes on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: Translating the Odysseus Essay". New German Critique, Number 56, Spring-Summer 1992, fn. 2, p. 105. Here he writes, "In general I refer to Adorno as *the* author of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*."

appropriate to turn to the former work for aid in elucidating the latter.

As Wiggerhaus has noted, "what was Horkheimerian about his sketch of the dialectic of enlightenment [in Eclipse of Reason] was the easy-to-follow presentation of his ideas."<sup>6</sup> Although, to be sure, this is a general trait of his philosophical style, it is especially evident in Eclipse of Reason. This is most likely due to the general aim of the work, of which Horkheimer wrote: "I intend to make it a more or less popular version of the philosophy of enlightenment as far as it has taken shape" in Dialectic of Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup> As a whole, the two works deal with similar themes and have similar arguments, however Eclipse of Reason has the advantage of at least a certain degree of clarity. Before turning to Dialectic of Enlightenment then, I will first survey some general features of the argument of Eclipse of Reason. Central here will be an attempt to isolate methodology in order to determine whether the strategy is ideology critique or immanent critique.

If there is any section in Eclipse of Reason in which we might find an explanation of the methodology used in Dialectic of Enlightenment, the most obvious candidate is the last lecture, "On The Concept of Philosophy". Here,

<sup>6</sup> Wiggershaus, R. The Frankfurt School, p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> Letter sent in November 1943 from Max Horkheimer to Friedrich Pollock cited in R. Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, p. 345

Horkheimer details the role of the thinker, his or her relationship to reason, and the forms of critique which are still possible.

Interestingly enough, Horkheimer begins his discussion with a brief treatment of faith and fear. He notes, that "an underlying assumption of the present discussion has been that philosophical awareness of these processes may help to reverse them."<sup>8</sup> This assumption he further characterizes as a kind of "faith in philosophy" which "means the refusal to permit fear to stunt in any way one's capacity to think."<sup>9</sup> Given what we have seen concerning Habermas' account of Horkheimer's philosophy during these years, it seems somewhat peculiar that his first statements concerning the concept of philosophy and its possibilities for existence should mention faith and fear. Turning briefly to Dialectic of Enlightenment, we find a similar passage which reads,

we show that the prime cause of the retreat from enlightenment into mythology is not to be sought so much in the nationalist, pagan and other modern mythologies manufactured precisely in order to contrive such a reversal, but in the Enlightenment itself when paralyzed by fear of the truth (my emphasis).<sup>10</sup>

It is significant that rather than stating that faith in philosophy means a refusal to let reason stand in the way, or that the cause of the reversal today is Enlightenment pure and

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<sup>8</sup> EOR., p. 162.

<sup>9</sup> EOR., p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> DOE., p. xvi.

simple, they instead qualify these with the concept of fear. That is, rather than attacking reason itself, or Enlightenment itself, as Habermas argues, Dialectic of Enlightenment seems to be attacking only reason and Enlightenment in a distorted form. It is attacking a reason which has been corrupted by fear. Before continuing with Horkheimer's conception of a philosophy not blocked by fear, I will first briefly survey his account of reason to locate what precisely might cause said fear.

Drawing from Max Weber, Horkheimer begins his work by making a distinction between subjective, formal reason and objective reason. The former, he writes,

is essentially concerned with means and ends, with the adequacy of procedures for purposes more or less taken for granted and supposedly self-explanatory....If it concerns itself at all with ends, it takes for granted that they too are reasonable in the subjective sense, i.e. that they serve the subject's interest in relation to self-preservation - be it that of the single individual or of the community on whose maintenance that individual depends.<sup>11</sup>

Important here is the fact that subjective reason, strictly speaking, has no role in determining ends or goals. Unless one regards a goal as a means to some further end, that goal is not determined by rational thought. Given this limitation of reason, the decision between goals is left to "matters of choice and predilection, and it has become meaningless to

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<sup>11</sup> EOR., p. 3-4.

speak of truth in making practical, moral, or esthetic decisions."<sup>12</sup>

The fact that it has "become meaningless" to speak in this way indicates to Horkheimer another previously existing form of reason which he terms objective reason. He explains objective reason as

on the one hand [denoting] as its essence a structure inherent in reality that by itself calls for a specific mode of behavior in each specific case, be it a practical or a theoretical attitude. This structure is accessible to him who takes upon himself the effort of dialectical thinking, or, identically, who is capable of eros. On the other hand, the term objective reason may also designate this very effort and ability to reflect such an objective order.<sup>13</sup>

The form of reason to which he is referring is best evinced in the great metaphysical systems of the past. For example, although Horkheimer sees the tacit justification of power relations in the system of Platonic ideas,<sup>14</sup> at the same time, these ideas are independent of individual self-interest. The Socratic daimonion becomes the soul which perceives these ideas, rather than creates them.<sup>15</sup>

Once Horkheimer has proceeded to outline these two forms of reason, he then moves on to argue that the transition from objective to subjective reason is on the one hand, virtually total, and on the other hand, irreversible. This

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<sup>12</sup> EOR., p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> EOR., P. 11.

<sup>14</sup> EOR., pp. 132-5.

<sup>15</sup> EOR., p. 11.

argument is a relatively straightforward re-telling of Weber's. In it, the first stage is the demythologization of the world by religions. Here, the population of deities and forces which rule primitive humanity are replaced by organized religions and early forms of metaphysics. These in turn are supplanted by systems of objective reason which posit meaning as immanent in the world, and the role of science as the penetration into and recovery of that meaning. As such, "objective reason aspires to replace traditional religion with methodical philosophical thought and insight and thus to become a source of tradition all by itself."<sup>16</sup> However, this objective reason itself is soon challenged by subjective reason which claims that the former still displays mythological characteristics. Eventually, any claim to objective meaning concerning the goals of action is seen as mythological, and reason is confined merely to the choice of means.

At this stage, two points should be made clear. First, Horkheimer under no circumstances means to deny the existence of subjective reason at the earlier phases of demythologization. The fact that people oriented their actions toward transcendent goals does not deny the existence of more mundane ones. Nor does it deny the everyday tasks which require the types of instrumental action associated with

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<sup>16</sup> EOR., p. 12.



subjective reason. The central distinction between the earlier and later periods of demythologization is that whereas previously objective reason still had a certain credibility, today its subject matter is expelled from the sphere of rationality. Thus while religions still exist (and thus remnants of objective reason still exist), their truth is seen as unknowable, they are subject to non-rational faith, or in the extreme case of positivism, they are simply meaningless.

The second point that should be made concerns the qualitative difference between the demythologization which is carried out by objective reason and that which is done by subjective reason. Horkheimer maintains that the conflict between objective reason and religion is in one sense more severe insofar as there are mutually exclusive claims to truth which are in conflict. Objective reason cannot simply maintain its existence in the presence of that which would contradict it; in this sense, it aims at the totality. Subjective reason on the other hand denies such claims to the totality; however, in the very process of such a denial, it becomes even more totalitarian. By parceling out validity spheres, subjective reason occupies the realm of science, and banishes religion and metaphysics to their own sphere. In doing so, it pays lip-service to their value while at the same time neutralizing their content. The extreme form of this is

positivism which does not attack their claim to truth, but rather their claim to meaning.

Parallel to this process of the demythologization is what Horkheimer terms the rise and decline of the individual. The task of subjective reason is to liberate the individual and to invest that individual with a power to command nature. Rather than the situation where the individual is controlled by the gods or in general at the mercy of fate, subjective reason strips nature of its meaning under the claim that that meaning is simply anthropomorphic projection. In a similar vein, Horkheimer and Adorno write in Dialectic of Enlightenment,

Consequently the many mythic figures can all be brought to a common denominator and reduced to the human subject. Oedipus' answer to the Sphinx's riddle: "It is man!" is the Enlightenment stereotype repeatedly offered as information.<sup>17</sup>

Thus from Oedipus's answer to Kant's transcendental structures, the meaning of nature is viewed by subjective reason to be the product of the human mind.

This emancipation of the individual dialectically turns on itself in two related ways. First, the individual to preserve his or her identity (by subjugating external nature) must at the same time subjugate the nature within himself or herself. Horkheimer writes,

The human being, in the process of his emancipation shares the fate of the rest of his world.

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<sup>17</sup> DOE., p. 7.

Domination of nature involves domination of man. Each subject not only has to take part in the subjugation of external nature, human and non-human, but in order to do so must subjugate nature in himself. Domination becomes "internalized" for domination's sake.<sup>18</sup>

Again, this sentiment is echoed in Dialectic of Enlightenment, where

The domination of the self, on which the self is based, is inevitably the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken because the substance that is dominated, repressed, and dissolved by self-preservation is nothing other than that very life by which efforts of self preservation are exclusively defined; that very life that is to be preserved.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, the emancipation of the individual is ineffective because it emancipates the individual only by dominating and destroying it.

In addition to this dialectic of domination, Horkheimer argues that there is another more general sense in which the individual suffers. The disenchantment of nature is intended to provide the subject with control over that nature. However, with a lack of inherent meaning to nature which might transcend the individual and thus provide action-orientations which are trans-individual, the individual is forced to orient such action solely in accordance with self-preservation. When self-preservation becomes the only goal, the individual merely responds to an overwhelming objective reality which he or she can neither understand nor change. "Thus the individual

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<sup>18</sup> EOR., p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Odysseus, p. 119; DOE., pp. 54-55.

subject of reason tends to become a shrunken ego, captive of an evanescent present."<sup>20</sup>

As we have characterized briefly Horkheimer's conception of subjective and objective reason, as well as the effects which the exclusion of one by the other have had on the individual, it is now possible to address the issue of fear of which Horkheimer wrote in connection with reason and philosophy. The process of demythologization is initiated out of the awareness that mythology is a response to fear of the unknown. He and Adorno write, "in the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty."<sup>21</sup> It is this fear of the unknown which leads primitives to populate nature with deities and forces. Enlightenment, initially through objective reason, dispelled these myths and replaced them at least in part with knowledge. What Horkheimer argues has happened, is that with the enthronement of subjective reason, once again we are suffering under a fear similar in kind to that of primitives.

Before turning to the precise character of this fear, as developed primarily in Dialectic of Enlightenment, it is worthwhile to consider the significance of this charge in terms of the type of critique utilized by Horkheimer. The claim that a type of knowledge is corrupted by fear is not

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<sup>20</sup> EOR., p. 140.

<sup>21</sup> DOE., p. 3.

ideology critique in the sense defined by Habermas in the previous chapter. As he defined this form of critique, it specifically targets claims which illicitly harbor power relations. Nor does it seem for that matter as though Horkheimer is partaking in radical ideology critique. Rather than attacking reason, he attacks "what is currently called reason",<sup>22</sup> an instrumental, subjective reason. And as was cited above, it is not enlightenment which is the cause of barbarism, but the enlightenment "when paralyzed by fear of the truth". Given this emphasis on fear rather than power, it is clear that ideology critique is not the central thrust of Horkheimer's strategy. As well, given his attack is on a deformed reason rather than reason as such, it is also clear that he cannot be engaged in an ideology critique which is radical insofar as it questions reason itself. The question which remains is whether or not he is engaged in immanent critique.

On this issue, it appears clear that Horkheimer is in fact engaging in such a type of critique. He writes,

Reason can realize its reasonableness only through reflecting on the disease of the world as produced and reproduced by man; in such self-critique, reason will at the same time remain faithful to itself by

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<sup>22</sup> "If by enlightenment and intellectual progress we mean the superstitious belief in evil forces...- in short, the emancipation from fear - then denunciation of what is currently called reason is the greatest service reason can render." EOR., p. 187.

preserving and applying for no ulterior motive the principle of truth that we owe to reason alone.<sup>23</sup>

Here we have the notion of a self-critique. Reason, presumably as some form of philosophy, is to reflect and critique both itself and the dire state of the world. It is in engaging in this critique that reason becomes "reasonable", in contrast to the unreasonable form which, as we saw above, was corrupted by fear. While this kind of self-critique does appear to be similar to immanent critique, the question still remains as to what the standards are by which reason is to denounce this state of the world and hence become "reasonable". If they are the implicit or explicit standards of the society in question, then the critique is immanent. If they are not, then we are dealing with some other form of critique.

To this question, Horkheimer has a rather long passage which is worth quoting at length. He writes,

Distorted though the great ideals of civilization - justice, equality, freedom - may be, they are nature's protestations against her plight, the only formulated testimonies we possess. Toward them philosophy should take a dual attitude. (1) It should deny their claims to being regarded as ultimate and infinite truth....Philosophy rejects the veneration of the finite, not only of crude political or economic idols,...but also of ethical or esthetic values, such as personality, happiness, beauty, or even liberty, so far as they pretend to be independent ultimates. (2) It should be admitted that the basic cultural ideas have truth values and philosophy should measure them against the social background from which they emanate. It opposes the

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<sup>23</sup> EOR., p. 177.

breach between ideas and reality. Philosophy confronts the existent, in its historical context with the claim of its conceptual principles, in order to criticize the relation between the two and thus transcend them.<sup>24</sup>

Here then, we have a clear statement by Horkheimer of a dual attitude which, when taken together, answer clearly the question: from where are the standards for critique to be taken. Clearly Horkheimer maintains that the cultural values of a particular society have some truth value, and the society from which they emanated should be held to them. In other words, the practices of a society should be judged according to the values which it proclaims. In this way, critique is not robbed of its standards in the manner charged by Habermas, since it finds those standards already in the world. They are the values proclaimed by the thinkers of an epoch, the principles embodied in that society's institutions, and the goals which that society has in general set for itself. These are to be used as the criteria whereby a society undergoes critique. However, Horkheimer's form of critique is not simply a dogmatic acceptance of the words and ideas of a society over its practices. Rather, he writes that those values are to be denied their timeless and ultimate character. It is in this claim to unchangeability that the values of a time take on an ideological role. What is to be opposed, he writes, is "the breach between ideas and reality." Further, it must be stressed that the point of this exercise is not to

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<sup>24</sup> EOR., p. 182.

preserve either the values or the practices of a society unchanged, but rather "to criticize the relation between the two and thus transcend them".

Given the prominence which immanent critique has been accorded in Eclipse of Reason, it is now possible to return to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Specifically, we will be concerned with the extent to which this critique is present, and the particular forms of which it makes use.

Akin to Eclipse of Reason's assumption that awareness of dangers helps to reverse them, Dialectic of Enlightenment also places a certain premium on the value of knowledge. Horkheimer and Adorno write, "if enlightenment does not accommodate reflection of this recidivist element [that is, the tendency towards barbarism], then it seals its own fate."<sup>25</sup> Amidst all of the seemingly anti-Enlightenment sentiments contained in the Preface, we find this clear expression of enlightenment optimism concerning the power of reason. Here at the beginning of their text which is regarded by Habermas as a critique of the enlightenment so total that it lacks all hope,<sup>26</sup> we find a clearly hopeful statement about the power of enlightenment and of critique. It is the lack of knowledge concerning the course of enlightenment which threatens the world. If the enlightenment is enlightened about itself then

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<sup>25</sup> DOE., p. xiii.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, Jurgens. The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, p. 118.



it is possible to change its "fate". Here we have at least an initial indication that what is required is a self-critique, possibly of the type described in Eclipse of Reason, discussed above.

Given the importance of the concept of enlightenment in the above, it is worth considering briefly what they take enlightenment to be. We have already seen that central for them to the enlightenment is that it seeks to liberate humanity from fear. In its process of demythologization, enlightened thought exacted judgment on the mythical world and found it to be a response of fear to the unknown. Shaped as it was by this fear, the mythical world displayed certain characteristics which served to placate that fear, although not to eradicate it. Thus in the mythical world we find anthropomorphic deities which while obeying iron-clad laws, at the same time can still be influenced through ritual sacrifice. We find cycles of repetition which exact justice in the next life on those who have escaped it in this one. In general, we find a lack of understanding of nature which manifests itself in subjugation to nature and self-deception concerning sacrificial influence over that nature.

Enlightenment destroys this mythical world but according to Horkheimer and Adorno does not completely succeed in disentangling itself from mythology. In fact, with every practice of enlightenment, it "becomes more deeply engulfed in

mythology". As the judge of mythology, "it wishes to extricate itself from the process of fate and retribution, while exercising retribution on that process." In denouncing the cyclical character of fate which imprisons humanity, enlightenment upholds "the principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition." Finally, enlightenment "dissolves the injustice of the old inequality - unmediated lordship and master - but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation." For example, "the blessing that the market does not enquire after one's birth is paid for by the barterer in that he models his potentialities...on the production of commodities."<sup>27</sup> Whether or not enlightenment is aware of it, for precisely the same reasons which it denounced mythology, it now too must denounce itself.

This precisely is the function of Dialectic of Enlightenment. The critique of reason which Habermas found so radical, is nothing more than enlightenment turned on itself. In contrast to ideology critique, which has only the one strategy, namely showing power and validity to be inter-mixed, the immanent critique here is as multidimensional as enlightenment itself is, for its chief goal is to judge the practices of society by applying all of its values for the purpose of transcending both practices and values. The

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<sup>27</sup> DOE., pp. 12-13.

discussion of the Odyssey for example, links the barbarism of the 1940s to the earliest document of western civilization. Here we find not only mythic violence and domination, but also the birth of demythologization and with it, the rise of the self. In Odysseus' encounters with various threats, we find the solidification of his identity. Horkheimer and Adorno write,

the knowledge in which his identity consists and which enables him to survive draws its substance from the experience of the multifarious, the diverting, and disintegrating; and the knower who survives is at the same time he who entrusts himself most recklessly to mortal danger, on which he hardens and strengthens himself.<sup>28</sup>

On his journey, as Odysseus forms his identity, he does so at the expense of the mythical deities he encounters. His use of cunning, "defiance that has become rational",<sup>29</sup> allows him to observe the letter of mythical law while at the same time evading punishment. Thus in the Sirens' episode, he fulfills his requirement of listening to their song, yet he does not succumb since he has found a loophole, having himself tied to the mast. Although technically the Sirens have received what is due them, their power has been neutralized in the process. Horkheimer and Adorno write:

The epic is silent on the fate of the Sirens once the ship has disappeared. In tragedy, however, it would have been their final hour, as it was for the Sphinx when Oedipus solved the puzzle fulfilling its dictate and thus destroying it. For the right of

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<sup>28</sup> *Odysseus*, p. 112; *DOE.*, p. 47.

<sup>29</sup> *Odysseus*, p. 123; *DOE.*, p. 59.

the mythic figures, as the right of the stronger, depends solely on the impossibility of fulfilling its statutes.<sup>30</sup>

In finding this loophole, Odysseus has not only contravened this principle of their existence, but he has at the same time forced them to submit to his own rationality. As such, this Odysseus is not only a mythological character, but also the first enlightened character.

While there is more to their treatment of the *Odyssey*, what is central for us is the question of why Horkheimer and Adorno are undertaking this treatment in the first place. In a general sense, it serves as evidence for their first thesis that mythology already is enlightenment, while the Juliette essay supports the corollary thesis that enlightenment reverts to mythology. To the extent that we consider this as their purpose, their reading of the *Odyssey* is compelling. However, it does seem at the same time that there is another purpose to tracing the difficulties of the present as far back historically as possible. It almost seems as though Horkheimer and Adorno by generalizing the enlightenment to all of history, are seeking by exaggeration to forcibly alter a conception of history which would distance itself from the past.

On this issue it is worth considering a passage from Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", whose influence on Dialectic of Enlightenment has been well-

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<sup>30</sup> *Odysseus*, p. 123-4; DOE., p. 59.

documented.<sup>31</sup> In it, Benjamin notes that when we attain a conception of history that is in keeping with the insight that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule, then we will see that

it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism. One reason why Fascism has a chance is that in the name of progress its opponents treat it as a historical norm. The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge - unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.<sup>32</sup>

In Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno appear to be taking this strategy to heart by making history less a story of progress than a story of the "retrogressive anthropogenesis".<sup>33</sup> In preventing the present from being viewed as an aberration, or as an isolated regression, but rather as the truth of civilization, Horkheimer and Adorno force the enlightenment to understand its own nature and in doing so, attempt to free enlightenment from the fear which, as a result of ignorance, leads to Fascism.

As a whole then, the Dialectic of Enlightenment literally attempts to enlighten the enlightenment by means of

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, Kellner, Douglas. Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity. Great Britain: Polity press, 1989, p. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, Walter. "Theses on the Philosophy of History". Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken Books, 1968, p. 257.

<sup>33</sup> Honneth, Axel. The Critique of Power. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991, p. 37.

immanent critique. The threat of mythology is the threat of fear of the unknown which the enlightenment had denounced in mythology. The difficulties in this repeated, self-reflective effort at enlightenment are detailed in the chapter on the culture industry, but it is always clear that at least in principle, Horkheimer and Adorno maintain that their message might be heard...even if only by an "imaginary witness"<sup>34</sup>.

With respect to the issues we have dealt with thus far, it appears clear that on the basis of the relevant texts themselves, Horkheimer and Adorno have not abandoned the enlightenment. They have not moved into the camp of Nietzsche as Habermas would suggest,<sup>35</sup> but have rather argued against an enlightenment which is ignorant of its own nature, an unfinished enlightenment.<sup>36</sup> Although to be sure, there are numerous significant differences, this position is in some ways closer to Habermas' own position which considers modernity and enlightenment to be "unfinished projects".<sup>37</sup>

In any case, as we have seen, since Horkheimer and Adorno are not engaged in a radical ideology critique, they do

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<sup>34</sup> DOE., p. 256.

<sup>35</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 54.

<sup>36</sup> In distinguishing his own position from conventional cultural criticism (kulturkritik), Adorno writes "The cultural critic is barred from the insight that the reification of life results not from too much enlightenment but from too little." Adorno, T. W. "Cultural Criticism and Society", Prisms. Trs. Samuel and Shierry Weber. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997.

<sup>37</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Modernity: An Unfinished Project". Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996.

not encounter the performative contradiction on the level which Habermas claims. As such, his narrative which holds that Horkheimer's diminished theoretical output in his later works was due to this contradiction appears dubious. In the remaining chapter, I will explore these later works and attempt to produce an interpretation which is faithful to their content while at the same time cognizant of what we have seen thus far.

### Chapter 3: Horkheimer in the Shadow of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

As we have seen thus far, Habermas' narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy has been less than compelling with respect to the works produced in the 1940s. Specifically, while Habermas seems to be roughly correct concerning the early Critical Theory, his reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* lacks textual foundation. While that work may in fact be problematic, it is clear that it avoids the performative contradiction charged by Habermas. Rather than proceeding by way of a radical ideology critique, Horkheimer and Adorno instead utilize immanent critique. While the former type of critique lacks standards for criticism and hence falters, the latter simply uses the standards of the given society. As such, Habermas' reading of the period surrounding *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not as convincing as he might intend it to be.

Furthermore, the consequences of this difficulty in Habermas' reading are not limited simply to how the work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to be approached. Rather, since Habermas is at least in part attempting to account for



the "disparateness"<sup>1</sup> of Horkheimer's later philosophy, his reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment serves as an important element in his larger narrative. By way of analogy, if we compare the narrative in question to a Greek tragedy, Dialectic of Enlightenment would constitute the plot device (actually the hero's own doing) which serves to bring about the hero's downfall. As we have seen that Dialectic of Enlightenment cannot have served in this manner, we must now turn to the period of Horkheimer's supposed downfall.

According to Habermas, Horkheimer's writings from 1950 until his death in 1973 display a "remarkably indecisive productivity."<sup>2</sup> They contain "obvious contradictions, which are by no means dialectical and which Horkheimer did not even try to eradicate."<sup>3</sup> As well, they contain "no new approaches - and certainly no identification with what he had produced so far."<sup>4</sup> It is these specific characteristics which, as was discussed above, led Habermas to explore Dialectic of Enlightenment as the chief theoretical cause of the apparent decline. On Habermas' reading, Horkheimer's early and philosophically profitable model of critical theory was ruptured by the radical ideology critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment. The later Horkheimer, however, could not abide by this total

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<sup>1</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work" in On Max Horkheimer. Eds. Seyla Benhabib et al., Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

denunciation of reason, and, according to Habermas, given that the critical theory of the 1930s was lost to him, he was forced into the contradictions which riddle his later, unproductive work. As was cited before, "*Dialectic of Enlightenment* cannot be the last word, but it bars the way back to the materialism [that is, Horkheimer's particular version of Marxism] of the 1930s."<sup>5</sup>

Given that we have seen that there are difficulties in Habermas' interpretation of Horkheimer's texts from the 1940s, it is worthwhile briefly to explore the later ones to at least broadly outline their relationship with what we have seen thus far. Central here will be the two related issues. First, whether or not they exemplify the characteristics cited above. Are they contradictory? Second is the issue of their relationship to the works of the 1940s. Specifically, do they represent an effort of the part of Horkheimer to distance himself from the Dialectic of Enlightenment?

The writings from 1950 to 1973 can be roughly distinguished into two types. The first are the short aphorisms and sketches which form the "Decline" section of Dawn & Decline. Although these remained unpublished until the year following Horkheimer's death, Habermas devotes the majority of his discussion of this period to these writings. The second type of post-1950s writings are the essays and lectures which were published during his lifetime. The most

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

significant of these are collected and translated in the work Critique of Instrumental Reason. Although they are not accorded the same level of importance by Habermas, as we shall see, they are integral to any appreciation of this later period in Horkheimer's thought.

With respect to the aphorisms, Habermas' assessment is somewhat blunt. Although he agrees with Alfred Schmidt's reading concerning the presence of a "systematic intention" toward the appropriation of Schopenhauerian themes in these writings<sup>6</sup>, Habermas writes

The sense of life expressed in his late, aphoristic philosophy perhaps best explains its author's inability to bring his splintering insights together once again into a convincing picture of a fractured social reality.<sup>7</sup>

According to Habermas the specific "inability", referred to above, can be clearly seen in the contradictions which run throughout the second half of Dawn & Decline.

With respect to these contradictions, Habermas cites a few examples which are worth briefly exploring. He writes that

the fate of the Western world - of its vision of the rational association of autonomous undamaged individuals - seems sealed by the triumph of a totalitarian form of life. But at the same time

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<sup>6</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "To Seek to Salvage an Unconditional Meaning Without God is a Futile Undertaking: Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer" (Hereafter referred to as "To Seek to Salvage") in Justification and Application. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 62.

[Horkheimer] holds fast with a defiance born of despair, and sometimes even an abrupt naivete, to the liberal heritage of the era of the Enlightenment.<sup>8</sup>

On the one hand, Horkheimer seems to subscribe to the total denunciation of reason which Habermas argued was the thrust of Dialectic of Enlightenment. It is in this vein that Horkheimer states "Regression seems to be the only goal of progress."<sup>9</sup> But at the same time, Horkheimer frequently uses language which would suggest that all is not lost and that there is some purpose to critical thought. To this end he writes "As long as there is suffering that progress can alleviate, however, that very thought [that regression is the only goal of progress] is infamous."<sup>10</sup> Taken together, these two positions represent at least one of several contradictions which Habermas believes plagued the later Horkheimer.

Another example which Habermas cites concerns the issue of the loss of a pragmatic element in critical thought. Specifically, Horkheimer raises the issue of the value of a theory once its historical basis has been lost. He writes,

Isn't a vain utopianism the price one pays for the loss of the pragmatic element in criticism, the prospect of the concrete possibility of implementing it? There certainly can be no true criticism without an intellectually grounded hope

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer, Max. Dawn & Decline. Tr. Michael Shaw. New York: Continuum, 1974, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

which derives its legitimacy from realistic possibilities.<sup>11</sup>

While this passage is fairly decisive with respect to utopianism, Horkheimer later finds a positive content in a utopian thinking. He writes that

Since Being, that interest which transcends its own perpetuation, can no longer fulfill itself in the history of society in which he [the individual] lives...it becomes at once more concrete.<sup>12</sup>

Further in line with these seemingly contradictory sentiments, one could also include much of Horkheimer's discussion of the "longing for the other" which serves as a theological moment within a critical theory which is decidedly secular.<sup>13</sup>

From these examples, Habermas believes he has shown that the later Horkheimer, at least as expressed in aphorisms, produced contradictory work. Furthermore, according to Habermas, these contradictions are indicative of a theoretical impasse which can only be explained with reference to the dire analysis of Dialectic of Enlightenment.

Rather than entering a discussion of "Decline" as a whole which would be beyond the scope of this study, a few observations should be made concerning these examples cited

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137-8.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Jurgen Habermas, "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 52.

<sup>13</sup> See the interview with Horkheimer "What we call "meaning" will disappear", Der Spiegel, Numbers 1-2, January 5, 1970.

by Habermas. With respect to the first example, while it may be the case that Horkheimer does not have an adequate theoretical foundation for placing some hope in a world where regression seems to be the only goal of progress, it is important to remember that he does use the word "seems"<sup>14</sup>. In other words, the ineluctability of regression only *seems* to be the case. Although Horkheimer does not give a complete philosophical argument for this position within this particular aphorism (the aphoristic form tends to preclude such complete argumentation), the position is clearly similar to that expounded in Dialectic of Enlightenment as discussed above. Throughout that work, amidst discussion of the seemingly necessary regression of enlightenment to myth, Horkheimer and Adorno repeatedly assert that such a process can at least be mitigated by the self-reflection of the enlightenment. Hence, this aphorism by Horkheimer would simply seem to be a repetition of those earlier views, albeit in an abbreviated form.

Concerning the second example cited by Habermas, it may in fact be the case that there is a contradiction in his assessments of utopianism. However, one must keep in mind the following considerations. First, Horkheimer generally has maintained that dialectical thinking concerning aspects of theories involves considering both their positive and their negative sides. Thus for example, he can maintain that subjective reason has a positive content insofar as it

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<sup>14</sup> Horkheimer, Max. Dawn & Decline, p. 189.

was the "critical agent that dissolved superstition."<sup>15</sup> However, in becoming the whole of reason, it has become "a fetish, a magic entity that is accepted rather than intellectually experienced."<sup>16</sup> Although in this discussion of utopianism such arguments are lacking, it is conceivable that he could have intended them.

The second consideration with respect to this example and for that matter all of the late aphorisms, is that one must keep in mind that these writings were not actually published during Horkheimer's lifetime. As such, the character they manifest is one of incompleteness. While this does not entitle any commentator to simply ignore them, it does indicate at least two methodological points. On the one hand, rather than the disparateness of these aphorisms finding its cause in the contradictory nature of Dialectic of Enlightenment (a thesis which we have seen to be problematic), these aphorisms may be incomplete simply because they were incomplete. That is, at least some of the problems which Habermas quite rightly discerns in their composition might be due to the fact that the work was not completed to the same extent as the other works which were published during Horkheimer's lifetime. On the other hand, this points to the importance of exploring these other works. If we are to appraise Horkheimer's later thought, it is only appropriate that we consider in detail the writings

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<sup>15</sup> EOR., p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> EOR., p. 23.

which he himself put before the public. It is to these writings that we now turn.

Of the published essays, the generally most significant is "Theism and Atheism".<sup>17</sup> Although Horkheimer's later essays concern a wide variety of topics, the methodology employed is roughly the same throughout.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, since this essay is the only one of the later essays which Habermas explicitly discusses, it seems appropriate to focus on it rather than some of his other essays. In any case, a thorough discussion of this essay will yield some conclusions which can at least be provisionally applied to the others.

In this essay, Horkheimer traces the historical development of both theistic and atheistic movements. Specifically, he is concerned with the extent to which the Christian Church has been sympathetic to earthly conditions, and the effect such a sympathy has on the truth of the two movements. He writes that in early, relatively tolerant times, the Christians were singled out for persecution because they "did not yet at that time place the state above all else and still recognized something higher than the empire."<sup>19</sup> In that time, God appeared to the persecuted as "a guarantor of justice. There was to be no more

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<sup>17</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "Theism and Atheism" in Critique of Instrumental Reason. Tr. Matthew J. O'Connell. New York: Continuum, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> See for example the essays "The Concept of Man" and "The Future of Marriage" both in Critique of Instrumental Reason.

<sup>19</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "Theism and Atheism", p. 34.



suppression in the world beyond and the last would be first."<sup>20</sup> The earthly conditions of suffering were not given the eternal justification of the divine, but rather the existence of the divine served to denounce earthly injustice.

This time of opposition, however, was not to last. Horkheimer writes

Like the founder, who paid the price for refusing to show any concern for his own life and was murdered for it, and like all who really followed him and shared his fate or at least were left to perish helplessly, his later followers would have perished like fools if they had not concluded a pact....<sup>21</sup>

As such, Christianity "sealed its pact with the worldly wisdom which it had originally professed to renounce,"<sup>22</sup> and began to reconcile its gospel to an ever-increasing extent with the world as it was. Thus as Christianity began to assume greater power in this world, it had to conform to "the requirements of self-preservation,"<sup>23</sup> and hence to a reason which was exclusively subjective.

In this history of the adaptation of Christianity to the world, Horkheimer sees theology as a major culprit. He writes that "Theology has always tried to reconcile the demands of the Gospels and of power."<sup>24</sup> Although Horkheimer is somewhat brief on this point, the thrust of his argument

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

is that in uniting divine laws and natural laws, theology grants a certain sanction to the right of the stronger. As such, the comprehensive theological systems amount to an "ideological support [for] a relatively static society."<sup>25</sup> However, as strong as these systems were, in the end, the "opposition [between Christianity and worldliness] was all too apparent."<sup>26</sup> This breach between the ideas of the society and the practices created the possibility for a critique which took two divergent paths.

On the one hand, the critique of Christianity came internally in the form of the Protestant Reformation. Quite simply, "The Protestant way of reconciling the commandments of Christ with those human activities that appealed to them was to declare any reconciliation to be impossible."<sup>27</sup> Not only are science and faith divided here, but also a certain suspension of judgment is initiated on the question of good works. Horkheimer writes,

The view that men could justify their private or collective lives in theological terms and determine whether they were in harmony with the divine seemed to [Luther] sheer pride and superstition.<sup>28</sup>

As such, religion absconds from the political realm and, according to Horkheimer, indirectly sanctions that realm insofar as the Church abdicates its critical function.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38-9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

On the other hand, a different, and far more profitable form of the critique of Christianity is found by Horkheimer in the writings and actions of the militant atheists. In these thinkers, Horkheimer sees not only a "plausible critique of theism,"<sup>29</sup> but also a "sign of inner independence and incredible courage."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, rather than the naive view of the atheist as simply one who believes the opposite of theism, Horkheimer writes that

Those who professed themselves to be atheists at a time when religion was still in power tended to identify themselves more deeply with the theistic commandment to love one's neighbor and indeed all created things.<sup>31</sup>

Although to be sure, the Absolute or Nature which they eventually erected in the place of God served the same function, "identifying what is most permanent and powerful with what is most exalted and worthy of love,"<sup>32</sup> still as a critical moment, atheism contained its moment of truth in the opposition to the reconciliation of the Church and power.

After outlining these two critical moments and their modern incarnations, Horkheimer then turns to the role of theism today. Although atheism still contains its critical spirit in authoritarian countries "where it is regarded as a symptom of the hated liberal spirit,"<sup>33</sup> its place is taken

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

by theism in countries under totalitarian rule. He writes, "Atheism includes infinitely many different things. The term "theism" on the other hand is definite enough to allow one to brand as a hypocrite whoever hates in its name."<sup>34</sup> As such, the term "theist" today refers to "those who resist the prevailing wind" and try to "hold on to what was once the spiritual basis of the civilization to which they belong."<sup>35</sup> Theism is now the "thought of something other than the world, something over which the fixed rules of nature, the perennial source of doom, have no dominion."<sup>36</sup> As such it has once again recaptured at least a part of the critical function which it manifested in its earliest days.

This then is the general thrust of Horkheimer's argument concerning theism and atheism from the life of Christ to the present. Although we might find several areas in which to disagree with Horkheimer, his summary dismissal of theology for example, there are clearly no contradictions within this essay. The implication that the positive content of religion is always manifested in its opposition to the state regardless of the type of state, might certainly be questionable or problematic, however that is far short from being contradictory. As such, in this work at least, we see that a more balanced appraisal of Horkheimer's late work cannot simply dismiss it as being contradictory.

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Although the above deals with one issue, we must still consider the relationship between this essay and the philosophical position contained in Dialectic of Enlightenment. To recall briefly, we saw in the previous chapter that this latter work involved a conception of the role of philosophy as an integral aspect in the self-reflection of the enlightenment. Philosophy fulfilled its function by engaging in an immanent critique of modern society. It was to judge that society by the ideals which were proclaimed within it. At the same time, these ideals themselves were to be placed within a historical context such that both ideals and the society itself could be transcended. In maintaining this critical function, the enlightenment would be enlightened about itself and hopefully it would no longer be "paralyzed by fear of the truth."<sup>37</sup>

Returning to "Theism and Atheism", close inspection reveals that Horkheimer still appears to be engaged in a similar project. If we look at the structure of his essay, the "ideals" of the society in question are represented as being those of Christianity at its origin. He writes

All were the likeness of the divinity, even the lowest, and especially the lowest. The man at the stake, on the gallows, on the cross was the symbol of Christianity....If the barbarian masters, the men of quick decision, the generals and their

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<sup>37</sup> DOE., p. xiv.

confidants were included in the divine love, it was because of their poor souls.<sup>38</sup>

It is these ideals which then serve as a critical force against the injustice of the particular societies from which they emanated.

However, in keeping with the methodology prescribed in the 1940s, Horkheimer does not naively accept theism having a sovereign claim to eternal truth. As he has attempted to argue throughout his essay, Christianity has been complicitous with injustice for much of its existence. Hence, Horkheimer does not argue that Christianity should simply be proclaimed as the unequivocal truth. Rather, as he argued earlier, from criticizing the breach between the ideas and the reality from which they issue, philosophy can transcend both.<sup>39</sup>

From the above, we can see that Habermas' assertions concerning Horkheimer's later philosophy are less than compelling. Although the aphorisms in Dawn & Decline are certainly problematic, it is misleading to focus solely on those aphorisms. As well, given what we have seen concerning his methodology in the essay "Theism and Atheism", it clearly appears that Horkheimer still subscribed to much of Dialectic of Enlightenment. Of course, as Habermas rightly notes<sup>40</sup>, in the Preface to the re-issue of the latter work, Horkheimer does state some

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<sup>38</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "Theism and Atheism", p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> EOR., p. 182.

<sup>40</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 59.

clear reservations concerning the truth of that book. However, he does also write that "not a few of the ideas it contains are still apposite to the times," and in general, that their "assessment of the transition to the world of the administered life was not too simplistic."<sup>41</sup> While he does state that today the goal should be preserving and extending the "residues of freedom,"<sup>42</sup> at the same time he states that the central theses of the book have been "overwhelmingly confirmed."<sup>43</sup> As such it appears that while Horkheimer did recognize that the times had changed, he does appear to be far from the sort of distancing of which Habermas writes.<sup>44</sup>

Concerning these later writings of Horkheimer, there is one final issue which should be addressed. It concerns Habermas' compelling claim that Horkheimer did not turn to religion. This issue has some relevance for two reasons. First, other commentators strongly disagree with Habermas on this very point. For example, Joan Alway writes of Horkheimer's "religious turn"<sup>45</sup> which consists in his belief that

Under conditions where preservation rather than transformation is the order of the day, longing for something other reverts once again into a religious form, and faith in a transcendent being becomes the means for keeping alive a necessary

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<sup>41</sup> DOE., p. ix.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. ix.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>44</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 59.

<sup>45</sup> Alway, Joan. Critical Theory and Political Possibilities, p. 57.

but more or less impotent impulse for social change.<sup>46</sup>

The second reason for this issue having relevance is that it speaks to Habermas' claim that the writings of the later Horkheimer contained "no new approaches."<sup>47</sup> If Alway is correct and Horkheimer did turn to religion, the very fact of such a turn would contradict Habermas' claim.

On the issue of religion and its role in critical thought, Horkheimer's writings seem to divide into two main theses. First, he argues that the belief in God is necessary for truth generally, but particularly within the moral realm. He writes that "Without God, one will try in vain to preserve absolute meaning."<sup>48</sup> If one explores this point a little more closely, however, Horkheimer's claim here does not differ significantly from the argument of Dialectic of Enlightenment.

In the essay "Juliette or Enlightenment and Morality", Horkheimer and Adorno praised writers like Sade and Nietzsche for recognizing that a formalistic, instrumentalized reason is not "more closely allied to morality than to immorality."<sup>49</sup> Specifically, their central virtue was "not to have glossed over or suppressed but to have trumpeted far and wide the impossibility of deriving from reason any fundamental argument against murder."<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Habermas, Jurgen. "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 59.

<sup>48</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "Theism and Atheism", p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> DOE., p. 118.

<sup>50</sup> DOE., p. 118.



central thesis of Horkheimer and Adorno in this work, is that with the loss of objective reason, subjective reason cannot provide any justification for morality if that morality is not in the interests of the individual's self-preservation. In other words, if one can commit murder without risk of punishment, then subjective reason can provide no adequate argument against such an action.

Returning to Horkheimer's later comments, it clearly appears that he is simply repeating in an abbreviated form, the same position from Dialectic of Enlightenment. The claim that unconditional meaning requires the belief in God is not a claim that God exists. Rather it is simply a statement of one of the negative consequences of the process of enlightenment. To this end, Horkheimer writes

"If there is no God I need take nothing seriously," the theologian argues. The horror I commit, the suffering I do nothing to stop will, once they have occurred survive only in the remembering human consciousness and die with it....Unless they be preserved - in God. Can one admit this and still lead a godless life? That is the question philosophy raises.<sup>51</sup>

Again, there is no suggestion here that God actually exists. Rather, Horkheimer is arguing for a philosophy without illusions which, as was certainly the goal in the 1940s, can aid in the process of the enlightenment becoming enlightened about itself.

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<sup>51</sup> Dawn & Decline, p. 120.

With reference to the above thesis, it is thus clear that Habermas is correct concerning Horkheimer's supposed turn to religion. There is no textual evidence which supports such a turn. There is, however, another thesis of Horkheimer's which has also been taken to support claims about his later religiousness.

In an interview with Der Spiegel shortly before his death, Horkheimer argued that politics and philosophy both require a theological moment. He states,

I have written that a politics that does not preserve theology or metaphysics - and with these, of course, morality - within itself, remains, in the final analysis, business.<sup>52</sup>

As to the precise nature of this preservation of theology, Horkheimer only states that it is the "thought of transcendence,"<sup>53</sup> the "longing that the state of injustice which characterizes the world will not remain"<sup>54</sup> or simply, "the longing for the other."<sup>55</sup>

At least concerning this thesis, it does appear that there is something of a new approach in Horkheimer's later thought. However, without denying that novelty, it should be noted that this position is not a complete rupture with his previous writings. To this end, we must keep in mind two considerations. First, although Horkheimer does speak of a theological moment, he is careful to distinguish this

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<sup>52</sup> Horkheimer, Max. "What we call "meaning" will disappear", p. 80.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

from theism. He states, that the awareness of forsakenness is only possible "through the thought of the Absolute. However the certainty of God is impossible."<sup>56</sup> Further, he is quite clear in stating that both for himself and Adorno, the talk of the *other* was a conscious decision to avoid speaking of God.<sup>57</sup> As such, even on this thesis, it is clear that characterizing Horkheimer's later writings as a turn to religion is misleading.

The other consideration which must be kept in mind, is that Horkheimer spoke of faith as a central element of philosophy as early as Eclipse of Reason. In that work he wrote that faith in philosophy "means the refusal to permit fear to stunt in any way one's capacity to think."<sup>58</sup> The fear which he speaks of is a fear of the unknown. Hence, faith in philosophy is the faith that some good can come of knowledge, that all is not lost, that the world could be different than it is. Although his account of the longing for the other in his later writings seems to go farther in this vein, it clearly does not represent a rupture with the views he held in the 1940s. Hence, Habermas is correct when he states both that Horkheimer did not turn to religion in his later writings and when he states that these writings did not display any new approaches.

In general, Horkheimer's writings from 1950 to his death may not be particularly compelling. However as we

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> EOR., p. 162.

have seen, it is misleading to characterize them as contradictory only on the basis of Dawn & Decline. To gain an accurate appraisal of his later thought one must consider the works published while he was alive as well. Once these are considered, his thought loses that contradictory character which Habermas argues is due to his desire to distance himself from the view of philosophy contained in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Not only are his later writings internally consistent, but as well, it appears clear that if anything, these writings exhibit no desire to gain distance from the view of philosophy contained in Dialectic of Enlightenment.

## Conclusion

As we have seen in the previous discussion, Habermas' account of the philosophy of Max Horkheimer has been problematic in several respects. As a combination of a narrative and a reading of the texts, it has been shown to lack foundation. In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that these difficulties raise certain issues for our understanding of both Horkheimer and Habermas. In the following, I will first briefly summarize what we have seen thus far. Then I will, at least in a tentative fashion, outline some of the issues which stand in need of scholarly debate.

Initially, we saw that Habermas sought to construct a narrative of Horkheimer's philosophy. In it, he paints the picture of a promising young thinker who eventually suffered a sort of downfall. According to the narrative, originally Horkheimer started in the promising direction of encouraging an interdisciplinary model of research whereby philosophy would both guide and be guided by the social sciences. This co-operation would be a part of the self-reflection of the sciences which would alleviate several of their inherent

problems. At this stage, there was no indictment of reason and no denunciation of science. All that was recognized was particular problems which could in principle be resolved.

While, according to Habermas, Horkheimer held this position throughout the 1930s, specific historical and personal reasons contributed to his at least temporary endorsement of a significantly different position in the 1940s. In the work Dialectic of Enlightenment, Horkheimer in Habermas' view undertook a form of radical ideology critique which in the process of criticizing the enlightenment, also deprived itself of the right to make such a criticism. Collaboration with the sciences ended for the simple reason that as sciences, they were inextricably bound with the forms of domination which permeate modern society. While Horkheimer maintained this view for at least a decade, Habermas argues that in the final twenty years of his life, he could not reconcile it with his underlying commitment to reason and enlightenment values. Thus Habermas' narrative ends with the supposedly contradictory and unproductive later writings of Horkheimer. According to Habermas, the generally poor nature of these writings is evidence that Horkheimer could not abide by the self-contradictory stance of the 1940s, and wanted to return to the more promising critical theory of the 1930s; however, Dialectic of Enlightenment stood in the way.

The evidence which Habermas employs in justifying this narrative is a reading of the texts themselves. It is here that his overall account begins to encounter its difficulties. It is not necessary to catalogue all of these problems; however, underlying them is the central problem that his textual reading is only plausible on the condition that one has already presupposed the narrative that he seeks to justify. Hence his account is circular and can be said to lack foundation. Once this central difficulty had been isolated, we engaged in a much closer re-reading of Dialectic of Enlightenment. This reading illustrated that it is not at all obvious that Horkheimer and Adorno engage in self-contradictory, radical ideology critique as Habermas argues. Rather, we saw that the text to a greater extent supports the reading that they are engaged in an immanent critique. While this form of critique may be subject to criticism, it does not appear to commit the performative contradiction as charged by Habermas. Hence the pivotal moment of Habermas' narrative, namely that Horkheimer held to a contradictory denunciation of reason in the 1940s, is not supported by the text in question.

From what we had seen at that point, Habermas' views on the later writings seemed increasingly implausible. Given that we had seen that the writings of the 1940s were not contradictory, as was claimed by Habermas, it seemed

unlikely that these writings could best be explained as the expression of someone distancing himself from contradictions. As such, we turned to and explored those later writings themselves. Upon doing so, it was clear that while there were inconsistencies among some of the aphorisms, Habermas' emphasis on their contradictory nature gives a one-sided impression. When Horkheimer's essays were considered, it was clear that the later writings as a whole are not particularly characterized by contradictions. As well, although Horkheimer did caution against the radicalism of the 1960s, he did not in any tangible way distance himself from the writings of the 1940s. In fact, his later writings still roughly conformed to the method of immanent critique employed in Eclipse of Reason and Dialectic of Enlightenment.

Without denying subtle variations on minor points, it is clear from what we have seen thus far that the period from the writing of Dialectic of Enlightenment to his death in 1973, was relatively speaking, a theoretically static period for Horkheimer. Although in Eclipse of Reason, he criticizes the view that philosophy has a timeless method,<sup>1</sup> he does appear to have supported a method of immanent critique for roughly thirty years. In what follows, I will

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<sup>1</sup> EOR., pp. 165-166.



briefly outline some of the issues which are raised by this constancy.

With respect to Horkheimerian scholarship, the relatively static character of the later Horkheimer's philosophy raises at least three related issues. First, there is the ongoing question of his relationship with Adorno. On the one hand it has been claimed, with some plausibility, that the position outlined within Dialectic of Enlightenment is roughly the same as positions which Adorno held from his first work to his last.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, however, there has never been any in depth discussion on the possibility that Horkheimer's later essays might bear some relationship to Adorno's Negative Dialectics. Given the constancy we have seen in the later Horkheimer, his writings should bear some resemblance to that of his former collaborators, or at least, the claim that such a resemblance does not exist should itself be explained.

Another issue raised by what we have seen concerns the value of the specific positions for which he has argued. If these positions are not vitiated by the performative contradiction charged by Habermas, then their value has still to be determined. Horkheimer has written on a wide variety of topics from love and marriage to Zionism and

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<sup>2</sup> Habermas among others has noted this continuity of Adorno's thought. See, "Remarks on the Development of Horkheimer's Work", p. 56.

world politics. These writings have not had the kind of discussion which they would seem to merit given that they cannot simply be dismissed as containing internal contradictions.

Finally, a third issue concerning Horkheimer which is raised by this thesis concerns the viability of his later form of critical theory itself. As we have seen, at least in terms of methodology, this form amounted to an immanent critique of society. The practices of society were to be judged by the proclaimed ideals of that society for the purpose of transcending both. Is such a method a plausible alternative to other contemporary social philosophy such as the pragmatism of Richard Rorty or the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida? Given that Horkheimer's later philosophy is not plagued by a performative contradiction, it would seem at the very least to be worthy of consideration as an alternative to these.

In addition to raising these issues concerning Horkheimer, this thesis has also in the process raised a crucial issue concerning Habermas. Specifically, the relationship between Habermas and the first generation of the Frankfurt school has been shown to be problematic. On Habermas' reading, the tradition which at least in part informs his writings, is embodied in the critical theory of the 1930s. This period saw the possibility of some

productive collaboration with the social sciences, and it did not wholly condemn enlightenment as being a reversion to mythology. In order to preserve the relationship between his theory and this early phase, Habermas attempted to show that the later phase was self-contradictory and hence he could discount at least some of their criticisms of collaboration with the sciences. After doing this, he could claim that the phase of critical theory beginning with Dialectic of Enlightenment was a wrong turn which forced undesirable consequences upon Horkheimer. However he could contend that his own theory, could in a sense undo the damage. It could profitably build upon the early critical theory without developing into a self-contradictory denunciation of reason.

While it may be the case that Habermas' theory is more profitable than the model contained in Horkheimer's later writings, as we have seen, Habermas has yet to directly demonstrate this. The work Dialectic of Enlightenment is not the radical ideology critique which Habermas claims it is and Horkheimer's later writings do not exhibit the characteristics which he claims they do. As such, there exists in general a vagueness in Habermas' account concerning his relationship to Horkheimer. If he intends to show that he has rehabilitated the early critical theory, he needs to show in a more compelling manner that it stood in

need of such a rehabilitation. Otherwise his own theory, whatever its merits, will simply be a theory alongside that of the Frankfurt school rather than a continuation of that school.

As a whole then, this thesis has served less as a definitive account of Horkheimer than as a prelude to such an account. Without denying the invaluable contribution which Habermas has made to Horkheimerian scholarship, we have seen that that scholarship needs to progress beyond the Habermasian contribution. This thesis has contributed to that progress in part, by showing the limitations of Habermas' reading of Horkheimer. It is by appreciating these limitations that a deeper understanding of Horkheimer and his contribution to social philosophy can be reached.

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