

## *Judaism, Antisemitism and Zionism in Fromm and the Frankfurt School*

### Abstract

This paper focuses primarily on the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists, i.e. those whose lives and livelihoods, whose friends and families, were harmed or killed by the Nazis; Erich Fromm, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse and Leo Löwenthal. Though Fromm (1900-1980) was the only clinician among them, he was instrumental in effecting the kind of Marx-Freud synthesis that inspired the Frankfurt School's efforts to address the relationship between authoritarianism and antisemitism, and to fashion a methodologically rigorous and sophisticated psychoanalytic social psychology. Though Fromm had little to say on this subject, when he left the Institute for Social Research in 1938, Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal devoted considerable time and energy to studying the history and psychology of antisemitism, and were generally more supportive of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel than their erstwhile colleague.

This talk explores the attitudes toward Judaism, antisemitism and Zionism found among the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists; men whose lives and livelihoods, whose families and friends, were directly threatened or harmed by the Nazis, notably Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), Erich Fromm (1900-1980) Leo Löwenthal (1900-1988) and Theodor Adorno (1903-1969). To elucidate their relationships to one another, we briefly review the history of the Frankfurt School for Social Research, Freud's own attitudes toward Judaism, antisemitism and Zionism, and clarify their similarities and differences with Freud (and one another) on these subjects. We then critique some of their views, assessing the contemporary relevance of their ideas, and the prospects for future research along the lines they pioneered.

### *Psychoanalysis and the Origins of Critical Theory*

The founder of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research was Felix Weil, a pupil of the Marxist philosopher Karl Korsch. Weil set things in motion with an endowment furnished by his wealthy father, an Argentinian-Jewish businessman. The Frankfurt Institute's first director, Carl Grünberg (1861-1940) was a protégé of Henryk Grossman (1881-1950), a committed Marxist with working class roots who did not identify as Jewish, much less a Zionist. Grünberg took charge in 1924, well before Hitler's ascendancy to power seemed assured to most (Jewish and non-Jewish) observers. The Institute's second Director, Max Horkheimer, took charge in 1930, when Hitler's triumph seemed increasingly likely to most thoughtful observers.

The year Horkheimer became Director, 1930 was also the year that Sigmund Freud published *Civilization and Its Discontents*. According to Freud, social cohesion is only achieved through the domestication and secondary transformation of our instinctual drives, creating a good deal of sexual privation and anguish, rendering everyone “an enemy of civilization” in the depths of their unconscious. At the same time, he noted, scientific and technological progress have given us “god like” powers undreamt of by our ancestors, but that these same powers can be harnessed in the service of our innate aggression. Indeed, his main criticism of the Marxist world view is that it consistently underestimates or simply ignores this facet of human nature. And beyond that, he warned that unless or until we learn to harness or deflect our instinctive aggression, we face the prospect of technologically mediated self-extinction in the not-too-distant future (Freud, 1930).

Nowadays, few would dispute that Freud’s warning was prophetic. But when the Frankfurt Institute, under Horkheimer’s leadership, heaped praise on Freud’s book, and helped to award him the city’s Goethe Prize in literature, many orthodox Marxists were appalled. Undeterred, Horkheimer differentiated his evolving approach from orthodox Marxism, and coined the term “Critical Theory” to describe the Institute’s orientation. In addition to integrating psychoanalytic perspectives on social psychology, Critical Theorists deviated from orthodox Marxism by rejecting economic determinism, promoting interdisciplinarity and integrating ideas and insights from Max Weber and other non-Marxist theorists in sociology, anthropology, philosophy and literature (Jeffries, 2017). In the process, as Perry Anderson observed, their emphasis shifted away from the pragmatics and exigencies of class struggle toward a critique of

social factors that Marx deemed to be “superstructural”, notably, literature, the arts, radio and cinema, popular music and propaganda (Anderson, 1983).

Where did Freud stand in relation to Judaism, antisemitism and Zionism? Despite his gloomy views on human nature and the hidden costs of progress, Freud was basically a rationalist and a materialist in the Enlightenment tradition. As a result, perhaps, his attitude toward Judaism was ambivalent, evidenced in his famous description of himself as a “godless Jew” and his claim that Moses was an Egyptian who was murdered by the Israelites in the wilderness. Nevertheless, having been exposed to anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution himself, he was also a determined critic of antisemitism who saw Zionism as a legitimate response to the plight of European Jewry. (His younger contemporary, Theodor Herzl, who convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, lived just a few blocks away from him). And despite Freud’s Enlightenment animus toward religion in general, he claimed that the Jewish religion is a more rational religion than Christianity, because of its prohibitions on idolatry and the practice of magic or witchcraft, etc.

### *The Critique of Idolatry*

Freud acknowledged that the prohibition of idolatry plays a significant role in the Jewish faith, but beyond that, he did not give it much thought, or explore its ramifications deeply. By contrast, the Biblical injunction against idolatry loomed large in the minds of several Institute members, although they interpreted it differently than Freud had. For Freud, the shift from a polytheistic to a monotheistic mentality denoted a shift from a more mother-centered

(matricentric) to a more father-centered (patricentric) outlook; one that is more conducive to the development of abstract thought, and therefore one step closer to the scientific (i.e. atheist and materialist) world view that Freud himself embraced. So, according to Freud, the transformation Moses sought to effect on the Israelites had an ethical dimension, perhaps, but was primarily an advance in *cognitive* development. The Frankfurt school reversed Freud's emphasis on this score, laying more emphasis on its ethical dimension. Indeed, strange as it may sound, Horkheimer and Fromm characterized nationalism – which they both abhorred – as a species of idolatry. In 1956, in a fragment on antisemitism, Horkheimer wrote that:

The Jews are the enemy because they witness the spiritual God and thus relativize what puffs itself up as the absolute; idol worship, the nation, the leader. The support non-Jews must look for from medicine men the Jews find elsewhere . . . For every Jew is experienced as a member of the Jewish people, the people that almost two thousand years ago lost their state and that, though scattered, were held together by their idea of God . . . In his own isolation which the other vainly tries to break out of by making an idol of his nation as the collective to which he belongs, he sees the Jew who need do nothing, not even go to temple, not even speak Hebrew, who, even as a renegade, remains part of his people (Horkheimer, 1978, p. 131).

Ten years later, in the same melancholy vein, Horkheimer added that the recent development of modern technology intensifies this problem. In a fragment entitled “Religion and Society”, he wrote:

In the Torah, the Eternal addresses the people and the individual alike by the same word. “Love your neighbor for he is like you” refers both to the collective and the individual. In ascribing an individual soul to every person and thus differentiating it from animals, Christianity made the individual the being that counted. Present Judaeo-Christian civilization would have had the task of bringing the two, people and individual, together, wherever and wherever they might be, to leaven the other nations and individuals, and to order the world according to the commandments. Instead, a society that is automatizing itself integrates the individuals as autonomous subjects and makes the collective, the nation first of all, into an idol. The Eternal and His commandments disintegrate (Horkheimer, 1978, p. 233).

In much the same spirit, in *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, published in 1950, Fromm wrote:

A person whose exclusive devotion is to the state or his political party, whose only criterion of value and truth is the interest of the state or the party, for whom the flag as a symbol of his group is a holy object, has a religion of clan and totem worship, even though in his own eyes it is a perfectly rational system (which, of course, all devotees to any kind of primitive religion believe). If we want to understand how systems like fascism or Stalinism can possess millions of people, ready to sacrifice their integrity and reason to the principle “my country, right or wrong”, we are forced to consider the totemistic, the religious quality of their orientation (Fromm, 1950, pp.31-32).

Somewhat later, in 1966, Fromm published *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition*, which devoted an entire chapter to the analysis of idolatry in both its ancient and modern forms, treating the concept of idolatry – or *avodah zara*, in Hebrew – as a precursor to Marx’s concept of alienation.

Though he was largely written out of the Frankfurt School’s history, the fact remains that Erich Fromm was the only trained psychoanalyst in their midst, and the only member of the (mostly Jewish) Frankfurt Institute raised in an orthodox Jewish household. Before training as an analyst, Fromm completed a Ph.D. in sociology under Alfred Weber on three denominations of Judaism; the Hasidim, Reform Judaism and the Karaites (Burston, 1991). Löwenthal, Fromm’s childhood friend, was the only other person in Horkheimer’s inner circle who had a religious education nearly comparable in scope, and then only very much against his (highly assimilated) father’s wishes. Like Fromm, Löwenthal’s early outlook was profoundly shaped by the ethics of the neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen and his follower, Rabbi Nehemia Nobel, with whom Fromm and Löwenthal both studied. Fromm, Löwenthal and their mutual friend Ernst Simon (1900-1988) joined the Zionist movement in Weimar in their early twenties, though

unlike Simon, a committed Zionist to the end of his days, Löwenthal became somewhat disillusioned with the direction Zionism was taking in the 1930s (Jacobs, 2015).

By contrast with Fromm and Löwenthal, Benjamin, Horkheimer and Marcuse all came from assimilated Jewish households and received no religious education to speak of, although Horkheimer invoked “the Eternal” from time to time, and mystical and messianic Jewish motifs show up frequently in Benjamin’s work. Benjamin’s friend, Theodor Adorno, came from an even more complicated family background. Theodor Weisengrund, his father, was an assimilated Jew who had converted to Protestantism, while his mother Maria Cavelli-Adorno della Piana, was raised Catholic. Nevertheless, together with Horkheimer and Adorno, Adorno devoted considerable time and energy to studying the roots of European antisemitism after Fromm left the Institute (Jacobs, 2015).

### ***Moses and Monotheism: The Problem of “Cultural Regression”***

One year after Fromm’s departure from the Institute, Freud published another book that had a strong impact on the Frankfurt School, namely, *Moses and Monotheism*. Following the lead of the noted archeologist Ernest Sellin, Freud speculated that the Israelites murdered Moses for interfering with their idolatrous rites and devotions, atoning for their deed by venerating him afterwards, thereby re-enacting the patricidal drama that supposedly occurred in the “primal horde” in remote prehistoric times. And following the celebrated historian Salomon Reinach, Freud contended that it was not Jesus, but Paul (Saul) of Tarsus who really founded the Christian religion, and who articulated the concept of Original Sin. According to Freud, Paul laid the

foundations of Christianity by borrowing motifs from the mystery cults of pagan antiquity, substituting a son-centered religion for the older, father-centered religion of the Jews, putting a new and decidedly Oedipal twist on the religion that gave rise to monotheism in the first place.

In his own words:

In certain respects, the new religion was a cultural regression as compared with the older Jewish religion; this happens regularly when a new mass of people of a lower cultural level effects an invasion or is admitted into an older culture. The Christian religion did not keep to the lofty heights of spirituality to which the Jewish religion had soared. The former was no longer strictly monotheistic; it took over from the surrounding peoples numerous symbolical rites, re-established the great mother goddess, and found room for many deities of polytheism in an easily recognizable disguise, though in subordinate positions (Freud, 1939, p. ).

From this, Freud inferred that Christian anti-Semitism arose from lingering pagan sympathies and inclinations in the Gentile world, and an unconscious hostility towards Jews for inventing monotheism in the first place; an interpretation shared by several of his contemporaries, including his erstwhile friend and follower, Carl Jung, who confined his musings on this score mostly to his private correspondence and several posthumously published pieces (Burston, 2021). How did the Frankfurt School respond to this book?

As Ronen Pinkas observes, Fromm did not believe that Moses was Egyptian, or that the Israelites murdered him in the wilderness, as Freud alleged (Pinkas, 2022). Granted, Fromm's first publication, on the Sabbath, which appeared in 1927, was a straightforward application of Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex to the ritual and symbolism of this weekly religious observance (Pinchas, 2022). But his orthodox Freudian phase did not last long. In an essay entitled "The Dogma of Christ" which appeared in 1930, Fromm rejected Freud's theory of our phylogenetic or "archaic inheritance", which construed the Oedipus complex as the "core complex" that shapes religious ideation and patterns of social and cultural development behind



the scenes (Burston, 1991). By contrast, Adorno and Marcuse eventually embraced Freud's theory of the phylogenetic inheritance (Adorno, 1951; Marcuse, 1955; Pittenger, 2022) – though neither of them speculated on the birth or death of Moses specifically, to my knowledge. Nor did Adorno or Marcuse attempt to explore or explain Freud's personal identification with Moses, which Fromm only touched on briefly, and which many authors have dwelt upon since.

Nevertheless, though it downplayed the specifically Oedipal themes that animated Freud's fertile imagination in relation to Moses, chapter five of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1944), entitled "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment", is profoundly indebted to *Moses and Monotheism* and more specifically, to the concept of "cultural regression" that Freud introduced there (Pittenger, 2022). And as a result, their philosophy of history became very unlike Marx's. Marx interpreted history through the lens of class struggle and anticipated a "happy ending" (or new beginning) for humankind after the revolution. In the wake of WWII, that optimistic outlook no longer seemed tenable. After all, Horkheimer and Adorno et al. had witnessed the galloping Nazification of Germany at close quarters before they fled Germany in 1934. As a result, they were quite wary of the concept of progress, arguing that while scientific and technological progress proceed apace in the modern world, it masks and facilitates a collective regression to barbarism, culminating in the Holocaust (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947). As a result of Freud's influence, Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and Horkheimer's enduring fondness for Schopenhauer's metaphysics (yes *despite* his admiration for Marx), Critical Theory's attitude toward the Enlightenment could only be described as profoundly ambivalent (Jeffries, 2017). They shared

the Enlightenment's aspirations for human emancipation and equality but lacked faith in the ability of relentless scientific and technological innovation to bring it all about.

For better or worse, Fromm did not share the gloomy outlook of his erstwhile colleagues. Schopenhauer and Benjamin had no discernable impact on Fromm, nor did he embrace Freud's pessimistic views of human nature. Indeed, his books between 1941 and 1968 exude a spirit of cautious optimism about the human prospect that is in keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, and strikingly at odds with Horkheimer and Adorno's gloomy philosophy of history. And again, unlike them, after 1934, Fromm became increasingly critical of the classical Freudian approach to the study of society.

Another curious point of difference between Fromm and the others was that Fromm never engaged in a deep and meaningful exploration of antisemitism, at least not in his published work. Though Fromm lost friends and family members in the Holocaust, for reasons that remain obscure, he was nearly silent on this subject his entire career. Lawrence Friedman, his biographer, notes that in Fromm's first best seller, *Escape From Freedom* (Fromm, 1941), Fromm deemed antisemitism to be merely one of several racist or ethnic prejudices that Hitler entertained, rather than his dominating passion or obsession (Friedman, 2013). And as Roger Frie points out, on the rare occasion that Fromm did address antisemitism, his analysis focused exclusively on the impact of objective economic conditions and class disparities of one sort and another (Frie, 2020). In short, despite his analytic training, Fromm completely ignored the "subjective" (unconscious) factors that animate antisemitism through the ages and along with it, the theological/religious roots of antisemitism that persist (in many quarters) to this very day.

To appreciate the intriguing oddity of this situation, contrast Fromm's meager Marxist reflections with the ideas of his contemporary Rudolph Löwenstein (1898-1976). Löwenstein's book *Christians and Jews: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Löwenstein, 1951) acknowledged the presence of economic factors in the formation of negative attitudes toward Jews, and was not deeply informed about the theological background to antisemitism, either. But Löwenstein placed far greater emphasis than Fromm did on specifically irrational and unconscious factors, such as the role of the Oedipus complex, sibling rivalry, castration anxiety and their accompanying defense mechanisms. While Löwenstein's contribution falls short in several respects – by Fromm's standards, anyway - it opened a field for deeper psychological reflection on this subject and is more in keeping with what one might expect from a Jewish psychoanalyst living in that period of history.

Though it is difficult to prove at this late date, it seems likely that Fromm's reluctance to reflect deeply on antisemitism was linked to his attitudes toward Zionism. Fromm resembled Freud in seeing Zionism as a response to antisemitism, but whereas Freud saw it as legitimate and necessary, Fromm regarded it with suspicion. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, but before the creation of Israel, Fromm aligned himself publicly with Brit Shalom, a group that embraced a kind of cultural Zionism, rather than aspiring to Jewish sovereignty over a portion of Palestine. Brit Shalom was led by Rabbi Judah Magnes, and included such luminaries as Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Henrietta Szold, Hannah Arendt, Ernst Simon and Moshe Sharett (among others); leading intellectuals who advocated for a binational state in Palestine. When those hopes were dashed Fromm, like Arendt, became an outspoken critic of Zionism, a stance

which estranged him from Scholem and Simon, who remained in the Zionist camp, but endeared him to Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Friedman, 2013), who believed that American foreign policy in the Middle East lacked balance (Friedman, 2014). But while this was his public stance, privately, it appears, Fromm had been deeply disenchanted with Zionism since his twenties. In a letter to Walter Kaufmann, dated April 24, 1972, Gershom Scholem recalled his last conversation with Fromm in 1927 in which Fromm . . . tried to convince me of the compatibility of Marx and Freud, from whose union he expected then higher things – after having left the Zionist “parochial” camp for broader human horizons, as he saw it. The gap that this opened up between us was the real topic of our talk (Scholem, 2002, p. 442).

Fromm’s childhood friend, Leo Löwenthal was also critical of the Zionist project, but never rejected it completely. In *An Unmastered Past: The Autobiographical Reflections of Leo Löwenthal*, Löwenthal acknowledged his own disappointment with the Zionist movement. He said:

You know that in my student years in Heidelberg I was a member of the Zionist student organization. But I had joined because I believed strongly in Judaism’s messianic mission, its utopian political task. I had hoped that Eretz Israel would be the model for a just society. However, my experience with Zionism followed a path very similar to my later experience with the Communist world movement and the Communist Party. I experienced great disappointment; I felt that the Zionist movement was suffering more and more from what . . . Ernst Simon . . . called the “intoxication with normality.” Ideologically, I was not so blinded as to refuse a critical analysis of the settlement policy of the Jewish organizations in Palestine. As I saw it, the Jewish land purchases were an alliance of big Arab landowners and Jewish money at the expense of the Arab peasants and farm workers. I instinctively foresaw that this could lead to bad conflicts, if not catastrophes. . . This does not mean, I would like to repeat, that I have given up my relation to Jewish motifs or my support of Israel (Löwenthal, 1987, p. 114).

Löwenthal’s reference to mainstream Zionism’s “intoxication with normality” refers to the fact that Jews lived as dhimmis in Muslim lands for thirteen centuries, and that the relatively recent political gains made by European Jewry had been completely wiped out by the resurgence of the genocidal antisemitism, which culminated in the Holocaust. Rather than continuing with a

precarious and marginal existence as second (or third) class citizens in the midst of Christian and Muslim populations, whose hostility frequently erupted in spasms of collective violence, Zionists wanted Jews to live like a “normal” people, and to enjoy “normal” relations with other nations. The early Zionists also believed that cultivation of the land – something forbidden to Jews in most countries for many centuries - is essential to the health and vitality of the Jewish people, fostering a “back to the land” movement, leading to the creation of numerous *kibbutzim* and farming villages. Indeed, this is precisely why Jewish philanthropists purchased large tracts of land from the Arab aristocracy before WWII (Burston, 2021).

Clearly, the dispossession and displacement of Arab peasant farmers clashed with Löwenthal’s utopian/Messianic hopes of making Israel into the model of a “just society”. Nevertheless, he admitted: “I support anything that destroys this anti-Semitic image of the Jew as a weakling, as castrated or effeminate”, hinting obliquely that on some level he admired Israel’s determination to defend itself against encroaching threats as a sign of newfound resilience in the face of many centuries of bloody persecution, and the threats of genocide and annihilation that still emanate daily from many of Israel’s Arab neighbors and various terrorist organizations.

In *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives and Anti-Semitism*, Jack Jacobs claims that Löwenthal’s attitude toward Israel was representative of the consensus view among most members of the Frankfurt Institute (Jacobs, 2015). If so, it appears that Herbert Marcuse was probably the most sympathetic to the Zionist project. In an article entitled “Israel is Strong Enough to Concede”, which appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* in 1972, Herbert Marcuse defended Israel’s right to exist, arguing that if the state had materialized before WWII it could have saved millions of lives. At the

same time, he acknowledged the injustices suffered by the Palestinians, and conceded that, like all nation states, much of Israel's territory was won by conquest. Nevertheless, he criticized the Occupation and the second-class status accorded to Israeli Arabs, urging Israel to return to the pre-1967 borders, to make peace with Egypt, to help create a viable Palestinian state, and finally to relinquish sovereignty over Jerusalem to the United Nations, making it an international city. In short, he believed that if suitable concessions were made on the Israeli side, a two-state solution was possible, indeed necessary, so that Jews and Arabs could flourish side by side.

Although it is seldom acknowledged nowadays, Marcuse's opinions in 1972 were indistinguishable from those of most Left leaning Israeli "peaceniks" of that era, the chief difference between them being that he neglected to specify the concessions that adjacent Arab states would have to give to make peace possible, i.e. recognizing Israel as a legitimate state, normalizing diplomatic relations, ceasing to harbor or provide support for terrorist groups, etc.

Later, on March 10, 1977, Marcuse disclosed more about his attitude toward Israel. (These remarks appeared in the Winter edition of "L'Chayim" a Jewish student newspaper at the University of California San Diego.) In this interview, Marcuse took issue with UN resolution 3379, which declared that Zionism is racism, saying that *some* Zionists are indeed racists, but many are not. At the same time, he deplored Israel's arms sales to apartheid South Africa, a policy that he deemed to be at odds with the original Zionist ethos.

Nevertheless, in 1977 Marcuse was, if anything, even more emphatic about Israel's right to exist, to defend itself and to prevent the occurrence of another Holocaust. Once again, he

stressed the need for Israelis to make significant concessions for peace, now adding that Arab states must also make significant concessions. Finally, Marcuse acknowledged that anti-Semitism appeared to be in abeyance now, but that anti-Semitism and societal tendencies to scapegoat Jews are deep and lingering problems, predicting that the next major crisis of capitalism would provoke another resurgence of anti-Semitism with potentially lethal consequences. Lars Rensmann summarizes their views as follows, saying

. . . they all had some misgivings about Israeli policies but all rejected “anti-Zionist” ideologies. Horkheimer claimed that purported anti-Zionism provided a thin screen for underlying antisemitism among neo-Nazis and communists. Marcuse stated in 1967 that “under all circumstances a new war of annihilation against Israel must be prevented.” Löwenthal expressed his hope that “Israel will not only survive but will grow and prosper” in the years ahead. He later criticized those who “are apparently ready to sacrifice the state of Israel out of love for the Palestinian Liberation Movement.” It goes without saying that for the Frankfurt School thinkers, too, criticism of Israeli government policy was not and should not be conflated with antisemitism. Yet, while criticism of Israel does not have to be antisemitic in nature, such criticism is not a priori free of antisemitism either . . . (Rensmann, 2017, p. 532).

Moreover, by contrast with Fromm, who remained strangely detached on the subject of antisemitism, Horkheimer, Adorno and Löwenthal launched a study of anti-Semitism from the Reformation onwards with support from the American Jewish Committee shortly after their arrival in America. Their research was published in 1941 (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1941), and followed by *Prophets of Deceit* (Löwenthal & Gutterman, 1949), *Studies in Prejudice* (Horkheimer & Flowerman, 1950) and Adorno et al.’s monumental study, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950), which featured the famous “A” (for antisemitism) scale, constructed by Sanford, Levenson and Else Frenkel-Brunswick.

To the best of my knowledge, the “A” scale was the first attempt to go beyond purely descriptive criteria to measure the depth or intensity of anti-Semitism psychometrically. While

doubtless important and groundbreaking, the A scale was not entirely successful, however. Why? According to Adorno et al., antisemitism is highly correlated with religiosity, conservative and proto fascist leanings among Americans in the Cold War era. So, by their account, anti-Semitism is essentially a right-wing phenomenon. Left wing anti-Semitism, which was raging in the Soviet Union at the time, was not even mentioned in this context, prompting critics to complain about Left wing bias in the Frankfurt's school's whole approach to the study of authoritarianism (Christie and Jahoda, 1954.).

Unfortunately, studies of authoritarianism conducted since *The Authoritarian Personality* was published seldom (if ever) address the issue of antisemitism as intently as Adorno, Horkheimer and their colleagues did. *The Authoritarian Specter*, a book by Bob Altemeyer, is reasonably representative of this literature (Altemeyer, 1996). Chapter 10 of this otherwise prescient book describes a series of nine intriguing experiments Altemeyer conducted on the impact of "hate literature" against Jews, homosexuals and feminists in the 1990s. But while his findings concerning authoritarianism and Holocaust denial, which cover fourteen pages, are intriguing, they are completely bereft of any kind of psychoanalytic insight or perspective.

Fortunately, Lars Rensmann, Professor of European Politics and Society at the University of Groningen revived interest in the psychoanalytic dimension of the Institute's original studies on authoritarianism and antisemitism recently in *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (Rensmann, 2017). Unlike many Critical Theorists, he acknowledged the extent of the Institute's indebtedness to Fromm's early work on psychoanalytic social psychology. Rensmann also acknowledged that the correlations



between ethnocentrism, authoritarianism and antisemitism documented in *The Authoritarian Personality* are just that, correlations; that there are some authoritarians who are not antisemitic, and some antisemites who are not authoritarian. Nevertheless, he argued that the correlations in question are strong enough to justify positing an “ideal type” of authoritarian antisemite whose psychodynamic structure Critical Theory can illumine. Significantly, however, Rensmann does not confine his critique to Right wing antisemites. He extends it to thinkers and movements on the Left that support Islamist organizations.

Now, in fairness to Rensmann’s predecessors, the first modern Islamist organization was probably the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. But because of the Cold War, Islamism, which germinated before WWII, played a relatively small role in global politics until the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet-Afghan war of 1979, and again in 1981, when a member of the Muslim Brotherhood assassinated Egypt’s peace-making President, Anwar Sadat. That being so, Islamism seldom (if ever) attracted the attention of the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists, leaving us to extrapolate what their attitude towards Islamism might have been had they lived long to theorize about it. One striking clue comes from the reflections of Max Horkheimer on the dangers of Left-wing radicalism, written in or around 1966. He said:

In our time, the attack against capitalism must incorporate reflection about the danger of totalitarianism in a two-fold sense. It must be just as conscious of a sudden turn of left-radical opposition into terrorist totalitarianism as of the tendency toward fascism in capitalist states. This was not a relevant consideration in Marx and Engels’ day. Serious resistance against social injustice nowadays necessarily includes the preservation of the liberal traits of the bourgeois order. They must not disappear but be extended to all. Otherwise, the transition to so-called communism is not better than fascism but its version in industrially backward nations, the rapid catching up with automated conditions (Horkheimer, 1978, p. 233).

Significantly, ever since the Left embraced Islamist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah as allies, many Leftists have become profoundly illiberal, and scoff at the idea that bourgeois freedoms and civil liberties could (or should) be extended to all in a truly free society. The influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism on Left wing thinkers is evident here too. For example, in *Thinking Past Modernity: Islamism and Critical Theory on the Left*, Susan Buck-Morss argues that Islamism is a welcome, authentic and legitimate critique of modernity and the Eurocentric ideals of the Enlightenment (Buck-Morss, 2003). And in *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, Amy Allen rejects the very ideas of progress, Enlightenment and human rights as no more than “Eurocentric”, “imperialist” and “neocolonialist” fallacies (Allen 2016).

By contrast with them, Rensmann argues that Islamist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS, al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad, the Taliban, etc. are theocratic and authoritarian to the core, and therefore profoundly hostile to democracy, to women, gays, dissenters and above all, perhaps, to Jews. From this it follows that Leftists who actively embrace Islamists as allies in the name of decolonization may be putting their own authoritarian - and antisemitic - leanings on display. An important question that Rensmann does not address, and which requires further study, is why most Leftists condemn Zionism so fervently, but actively embrace or passively accept the Islamists in their midst despite the vicious brutality of Islamist regimes and militias all through the Middle East, Africa and Asia. The Left’s lop-sidedness on this score is positively breathtaking, and evidence, some would say, of latent (or lingering) antisemitic biases (Burston, 2022).

### *Summary and Conclusion*

To summarize then, despite his Orthodox Jewish upbringing, Erich Fromm, the only psychoanalyst among the first generation of Critical Theorists, wrote barely a word about origins and dynamics of antisemitism, and drifted away from Freudian orthodoxy during the 1930s. By contrast, his former colleagues, all from assimilated backgrounds, fervently embraced Freud, but focused exclusively on Right wing antisemitism. However, despite their respective achievements, neither Fromm nor members of the Frankfurt School gave much thought or attention to antisemitism on the Left, a phenomenon which has come under more scholarly scrutiny recently as it gathers momentum again in the “real world” (e.g. Wistrich, 2010; Hirsch, 2018; Linfield, 2019; Randall, 2021). Addressing this problem from the standpoint of Critical Theory is a difficult and complicated task because the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists did not anticipate the global rise of Islamism and postmodern philosophy, with their rejection of liberal democratic ideals, and their deep and pervasive influence on Left wing movements today. Furthermore, many influential thinkers who call themselves Critical Theorists nowadays do not engage deeply with Freud nor do they heed Horkheimer’s warning about the dangers of Left-wing radicalism, rejecting liberal democratic values altogether, rather than seeking to deepen and extend them.

That being said, Right wing antisemitism has also undergone a huge resurgence in recent years, and researchers will eventually have to address the question of whether (or to what extent) the prevalence of Right- and Left-wing authoritarianism in a given population spring from shared psychodynamic processes or characteristics. As things stand, it is difficult to say.

Another closely related problem is that scales measuring the intensity of Right wing authoritarianism (or RWA) have been refined over many decades, while measures of Left wing authoritarianism (LWA) are still in their infancy, and will likely undergo several modifications and refinements in years to come. The most promising approach thus far comes from Thomas Costello and five colleagues at Emory University, in an article entitled “Clarifying the Nature and Structure of Left -Wing Authoritarianism” (Costello et al., 2021). Though he does not address the issue of antisemitism directly, Costello argues that Right- and Left- wing authoritarians do indeed share many traits, and that the differences between them are mostly “ideological” or “personological” in nature. Though time alone will tell, the most likely explanation for these differences is that Right wing authoritarians typically idealize and identify with the aggressor or the authoritarian “strongman”, while Left wing authoritarians typically idealize and identify with the victims of oppression. Presumably, these opposing pathways of idealization and identification give rise to different kinds of cognitive distortions and ideological biases, both of which resist change under most circumstances. Obviously, much more empirical work remains to be done here. Hopefully, Critical Theorists will not be deterred by the extremely complex and politically controversial nature of these issues, but will continue their efforts to elucidate these social dynamics in years to come.

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