

Liberal society, emancipation and antisemitism, why current debates on antisemitism need more Dialectic of Enlightenment

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▪ Adorno and Horkheimer's text 'Elements of Antisemitism. Limits of Enlightenment' (in 'Dialectic of Enlightenment') links antisemitism to contradictions intrinsic to liberal society in a way still unparalleled in the literature and can be put to work for important and powerful interventions into current debates. The liberal critique of antisemitism, from its nineteenth-century through to its twenty-first-century variants, has never been able satisfyingly to explain what makes antisemitism so attractive and dangerous. The perspective opened in 'Elements of Antisemitism' is singularly able to point to some of the reasons why (explicit or implicit) reverberations of the antisemitic debate on the 'Jewish question' are able to capture the imaginations of individuals across all ideological backgrounds still today, and perhaps increasingly so,² in spite of a growing temporal distance and in more and more parts of the world.

The decisive difference between the theory of antisemitism proposed in *Elements* and any alternative theory currently on the market is the bluntness with which it frames its argument within the judgment that the current form of society, i.e. liberal, bourgeois society as based on the capitalist mode of production, is 'the false social order' or 'the false state of things'. Not a false social order, or one that has more or less irremediable flaws, but *the* false social order, which almost amounts to saying that what can be referred to as 'the social order' in the present world is what is false about that world; except of course that hope for its remedy comes from that falsely ordered world itself.³

The radicality of Horkheimer's and Adorno's text is in many passages breathtaking, and their polite attempts to hide this radicality from the public sphere of post-War restoration by way of small revisions were as naïve as ineffective. The first paragraph, whose paradoxical character cannot fail to confuse and provoke on first reading, rings the themes of these seven fragments: when fascists think of the Jews as the anti-race that must be destroyed, they say something that is not just false, while when

liberals think that Jews (with the possible exception of *Ostjuden*, who are different) are but equal citizens with a slightly differing culture or religion, they say something that is quite false. Furthermore, when Horkheimer and Adorno state that 'both doctrines are true and false at the same time' they clearly indicate that the concept of truth will be central to their argument. And this is indeed what makes their contribution unique: the entanglement of liberal civilization and its central category of *Geist* (spirit/mind/intellect) in utter barbarism is argued simultaneously on a number of categorical levels, from the surface levels (historical details such as that German liberals, including those of Jewish background, detested Jewish immigrants from 'the East' as uncivilized) to the deepest, strictly philosophical ones. An approach that puts arguments that are properly at home in various disciplines of the social and human sciences to work in a larger argument framed in terms of social philosophy and theory was the signature of critical theory as a whole, but Dialectic of Enlightenment is an extreme example of this programme.⁴

In this short paper I will look at in detail the seventh section of *Elements*, then briefly outline the overall argument of *Elements* and then, in the remainder of the chapter, point to some of the ways I believe the text could transform the current debate on antisemitism if it were, at last, after some sixty years, given a hearing.⁵

Elements consists of seven sections. Considering that all sections have clearly demarcated themes and develop different aspects of the argument, and that section seven, which was added to the edition of 1947 only, mostly restates aspects of the other six sections, the composition in the form of increasingly longer sections points to an accumulative logic that builds a layered, antithetical but also increasingly detailed argument culminating in the sixth thesis. Throughout the text each paragraph contains one virtually self-contained train of thought – characteristically, on several occasions a paragraph is linked to the previous one by an adversative conjunction such as 'but' – which renders the whole text, in spite of the confusing complexity of its dialectical movements, actually a very orderly and rationalistic composition. (I have chosen for the following discussion to number the paragraphs and refer to the numbered paragraphs rather than to page numbers.)⁶

The seventh section recapitulates in condensed form the whole argument of *Elements*. Perhaps contrary to what one might have expected (keeping in mind the discussion on the revisions of the text), no signifi-

cant change in the general tone and tendency of the argument is noticeable; section seven sounds more Marxist than any other section, apart from the third. Some aspects are pronounced rather more strongly than in previous sections: the responsibility of German liberalism for fascism; the implication of progressive-democratic leftism in the general tendency of a 'rage against difference' and thus, at least indirectly, in antisemitism; the anachronism of the liberal-bourgeois order in the face of the ability of humanity's productive forces to rebuild human society on the basis of abundance rather than artificial scarcity.

The first paragraph of section seven⁷ consists of a particularly dense chain of dialectical inversions and negations that combine the political theme of the paradoxical relationship between antisemitism, liberalism and populism with the more philosophical theme of the destruction of independent thought and the modern democratic process. It begins rather provocatively with '*But!*': 'But there are no antisemites anymore. In their most recent form they were liberals who wanted to assert their antiliberal opinion'.⁸ While at the end of the nineteenth century old-fashioned conservative dislike of the Jews was 'merely reactionary', populist antisemitic demagogues, although numerically still marginal, were 'in keeping with the times'. 'The voicing of antisemitism was felt to be bourgeois and rebellious at one and the same time.'⁹ *Völkisch* ranting was still a distorted reflection of civil liberty. The falseness of German liberalism revealed itself in the beer-cellar politics of the antisemites which thrived on and finally destroyed the former.⁷ Liberalism and antisemitic populism, regularly voiced by former democrats, socialists or indeed liberals, were antithetical as well as interdependent. For these, the most modern antisemites (whose politically articulated antisemitism needs to be distinguished from the general, default 'antisemitism as a cultural code'¹⁰ that reflected the residual conservatism of liberal society), antisemitism was still one amongst several competing motives one had to choose from subjectively. 'Today', i.e. under the totalitarian/late capitalist conditions of the twentieth century, 'there are no antisemites anymore': or rather, antisemites are such by reflex rather than by choice. While *völkisch* nationalist thought has always been stereotyped thought that implied the whole program of chauvinist rhetoric, stereotyped thought is now the only form of thought remaining. A choice is only made between totalities. Even antisemitism itself 'has virtually ceased being an independent impulse and is now a plank in the platform', one of the items on the fascist ticket, the catalogue of the slogans of large-scale industry: like on the ballot paper, one

ticks one 'ticket' or another. The psychology of the individual antisemite is now irrelevant and replaced by the democratic mechanism: the 'yes' to one or other of the mammoth parties for which one has to vote, 'or else one's own convictions will appear to oneself as futile as the number of votes which the splinter groups receive'. Different from the genuine antisemites who 'in their most recent form' were 'liberals who wanted to assert their antiliberal opinion' twentieth century totalitarian society produces the antisemite who is not one. The disingenuous antisemites of today support the annihilation of the Jews for no better reason than that it is part of the ticket that includes the destruction of the trade unions and the crusade against Bolshevism. The formation of political viewpoints has been mechanized to such an extent that subjective experience, such as actual contact with Jews, has become irrelevant. Clichés replace experience; their eager consumption replaces the synthetic imagination, the faculty that is active in the process of experience. This mechanism makes antisemitism on a mass basis possible: few people would explicitly vote for antisemites were antisemitism not part of a ticket which they accept for whichever reason.¹¹ More specifically, it is what makes antisemitism without Jews possible. Members of all social strata must make sure they are as well orientated about which of the eligible instances of power to join as about the latest technological developments.

If stultification is a precondition of antisemitism, a theory of antisemitism must contain a theory of stupidity. It is in this sense that the second paragraph¹² continues the theme of the destruction of thought: it is suggested that in the present world-historical situation, more than in any previous one, thought would finally be able to actually contribute to the realization of an emancipated society, and that this is why the existing social order needs to destroy thought.

'In a world that consists of mass serial production', which is where the concept of the stereotype comes from, 'thinking in stereotypes replaces the work of thinking in categories.' 'Blind subsumption' replaces 'the real act of synthesis'. At an early, or pre-historical stage of human development, judgment meant being able to make quick distinctions in order to shoot the poisoned arrow quickly at the attacking animal. The historical development of exchange and the institutions of law, central to the process of civilization, have transformed judgment that now went through the process of deliberation. In late industrial society judgment regresses onto its prehistoric form that does without deliberation. Language boils down to the *termini technici*, providing standardized models, *Denk-*

modelle, through which things are seen unconditionally rather than on their own terms. The subject abandons the 'active passivity' typical of cognition, in which sense data and categories transform each other, 'whereby justice is being done to the perceived object'. With this dialectic abandoned, there are only blind perception and empty concepts next to each other.¹³ With judgment, also the distinction between false and true vanishes. Thinking becomes either 'an old-fashioned luxury' or a specialist piece of equipment for certain professions. Also when thinking, 'one is expected to be productive'.¹⁴ Deliberation is too uneconomic. The processes of thinking are increasingly subjected to the same criteria that are valid for material production: 'The more the development of technology makes physical work superfluous, the more eagerly the latter is elevated into the paradigm for intellectual work'. Thinking modeled on the paradigm of the productivity of physical work, though, means stultification which 'benefits antisemitism'. The question is: why does this stultification happen although it is objectively unnecessary? Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that the 'secret' behind this process is that thought 'must be prevented from drawing the appropriate conclusions' from the possibilities granted by technological progress. These conclusions are not spelt out on this occasion, but they can be inferred: the globally decreasing necessity to exert productive work in order to provide for all humanity's needs makes a societal order more and more absurd that links the reproduction of the individuals to the amount of abstract labor they exert individually. In the face of the immense increase of humanity's productive power the bourgeois principle that forces individuals to work by punishment of cutting off their access to their means of living is hopelessly anachronistic. Horkheimer and Adorno seem to imply that unimpeded, healthy processes of thought would inevitably arrive at just that conclusion, and that therefore the existing absurd and anachronistic social order must destroy the very faculty of thought, and this is done by modeling thought on the exertion of physical labour. In the logic characteristic of destroyed, stultified thought, 'the concept confronts the particular as an external force', and what is true of logic is even truer of society: 'everything that in society represents difference has ever so more to fear. Everyone is labeled as either a friend or an enemy. The lack of concern for the subject makes things easy for the administration. One moves ethnic groups into other regions, one sends individuals stamped Jews into the gas chamber.' It is in this sense that a historical epoch that could have meant the beginning of human, but humane, history, real progress and human emancipation, instead brought total and utter destruction.

The third paragraph¹⁵ summarizes the discussion of the concept of the individual which is discussed here in its dependency on economic forms but also as an economic unit in itself: bourgeois economy has created and in its further development also destroyed the bourgeois individual. 'The indifference towards the individual that also expresses itself in logic is a conclusion drawn from the economic process. The individual has become an obstacle to production. ... Economic rationality, the highly-praised principle of the smallest mean, is incessantly converting the last units of the economy: firms and human beings alike.' Department stores have replaced old-style specialized shops that had been free enterprises that engaged in initiative, disposition, organization, taking risks, making complicated calculations, being finally not most cost efficient (one might perhaps think of the wine shop run by Adorno's father). The individual is like these old-fashioned specialized shops: 'It had emerged as the power cell of economic activity'. When it created the modern individual, modern liberal society did a good thing. After having been emancipated from pre-modern tutelage, the individual took to taking care of itself, proletarians by adapting to the labor market, entrepreneurs to the ideal type of *homo oeconomicus*. Notably writing in the past tense, Horkheimer and Adorno state that psychoanalysis used to analyze the checks and balances of this type of bourgeois individual: in conversation with the social control instance of the super-ego the ego keeps the drives of the id in the limits of the necessities of self-preservation. Although at the cost of inevitable neuroses, 'this apparatus used to facilitate the relatively free interplay of the subjects which marketplace society consisted of'. This model has now become anachronistic: 'In the era of large scale concerns and world wars, though, mediation of the societal process by countless monads proves backward. The subjects of the libidinal economy are psychologically expropriated and libidinal economy is run more efficiently by society directly. The individual no longer needs to work out in the painful inner dialectic of conscience, self-preservation and drives what he or she ought to do.' Associations, corporations, administration and mass culture make decisions in lieu of the individual. Ego and super-ego are replaced by institutions, pop-stars, experts and leaders. 'Whereas in liberalism the individuation of a section of the population was part of the adaptation of society as a whole to the state of technology, today the functioning of the economic apparatus necessitates masses be directed without the impediment of individuation.' 'The irrationality of adaptation to reality is now for the individual more reasonable than reason.' While beforehand, the bourgeois had to make the effort to discipline themselves as well as their

workers, now 'the whole human being is the subject-object of repression'. 'The progress of industrial society' not only produced 'the law of impoverishment' that it claims to have conjured away but also destroys the concept of 'the human being as person, as carrier of reason' which had helped to legitimize the whole affair: 'the dialectic of enlightenment objectively tips over into madness'. The third paragraph of section seven takes up and complements in this way the suggestion made in the previous paragraph that the false order needed to destroy thought because under conditions of potentially universal prosperity, thought was becoming dangerous. The suggestion that 'the order' needed to do something does of course not yet explain why and how it was actually able to do it. In the third paragraph of section seven, by contrast, the destruction of thought, reason and individuality are described as objective processes effected by changes in the economic organization of society. The weak point here is the analysis of the changes in the economic structure, on which the argument of this paragraph is based: the notion that state-capitalism has irrevocably replaced liberal, competitive market capitalism, basically taken over by Horkheimer and Adorno from Friedrich Pollock, is one-sided and overdrawn.¹⁶ Even a very strong tendency to a corporatist, monopolistic economy, be it of a fascist or democratic variant, cannot completely do away with competition and the possessive individualism of isolated commodity owners.¹⁷ However, the dialectical structure of the overall argument of *Elements*, and thus the optimism that is intrinsic even to the negative dialectic, has survived the superimposition of the rather mechanical 'state capitalism' thesis and its tendency to hermetic pessimism (or liberal-democratic apologetics which are but the flip-side of the latter). Reading this paragraph in isolation would be misreading the overall argument. Horkheimer and Adorno's discourse on the loss of individualism incorporates and sublates a kind of radical liberalism: the most valid aspects of philosophical liberalism as in Kant, Humboldt and Mill are salvaged by way of their transferal into the territory of Marxism, as practical, political liberalism has deserted and betrayed, or never taken seriously, the ideals its philosophers have propagated.¹⁸

The fourth paragraph¹⁹ extends the argument on 'the madness' of contemporary world from the concept of the individual to that of national and world politics: 'This madness', the destruction of thought and subjectivity, 'is the madness of political reality, too'. 'Although the abundance of goods that could be produced everywhere and simultaneously makes the struggle for raw materials and markets seem ever more anachronistic, human-

ity is nevertheless divided into a small number of armed power blocs.' Furthermore, although the world has become culturally so standardized that national particularity can most of all be detected amongst those excluded from the development of wealth, the competition between the blocs is fiercer than that between businesses used to be in competitive liberal capitalism. 'Only the total identification of the population with these monstrosities of power, so deeply imprinted as to have become second nature and stopping up all the pores of consciousness, maintains the masses in the state of absolute apathy which makes them capable of their miraculous achievements. ... Ticket thinking, a product of industrialization and its advertising, is being extended to international relations.' The reification of the power structure, 'made possible solely by the passivity of the masses', has been consolidated to the point where 'even the ability to conceive of the true state of affairs' has become 'an irrelevant sectarianism'. 'Mere hesitation has therefore come to be ostracized as desertion.' 'For modern people since Hamlet, hesitation had come to stand for thinking and humane-ness. The time wasted through hesitation at once represented and mediated the gap between the individual and the universal, comparable to the way circulation mediates between consumption and production in the economy.' 'Accordance with reality, adaptation to power, are no longer the result of a dialectical process between subject and reality but are produced directly by the cogwheel mechanism of industry'. Although the individualism of the epoch of liberalism appears in the current context almost as a utopia, Horkheimer and Adorno also emphasize the necessity it be overcome. Generalized wealth would be the material condition of the *Aufhebung* of the individual: in an optimistic account, unleashed productivity was, or perhaps still will be able, one day, to sublimate (*aufheben*) the individual by 'granting it complete satisfaction' of all its wants and needs; in reality, though, the opposite is the case: 'the unleashed colossi of production' have extinguished the subject. This is the dialectic of civilization. In philosophical terms, the subject has suffered formal rather than determined negation. Likewise, the tension between collective and individual asks for reconciliation, which might still come one day, but the most recent development points to the opposite direction as 'the extreme disproportion' between omnipotent collectives and impotent individuals has now created 'faultless harmony' of 'unmediated contradiction, the absolute opposite of reconciliation.'

The fifth paragraph of section seven²⁰ brings the argument back to anti-semitism: the destruction of the bourgeois individual, perception and expe-

rience have created a new, not quite genuine type of antisemite. The 'internal agencies of wrong society' which have always determined the psychology of the individual have not disappeared with the individual itself. The 'character types' have merely been subsumed to the matrix of power more completely. The current proponents of antisemitism, dubbed by Horkheimer and Adorno 'neo-antisemites', 'react not so much genuinely against Jews as that they have developed a new alignment of their drives that receives only from the ticket its adequate object of persecution.' The authoritarian characters have not even enough ego left in them for being genuine antisemites. 'The loss of experience that manifests itself in ticket thinking has rendered inoperative those "elements of antisemitism" that once derived from experience, but the same ticket thinking now mobilizes them anew.' This mechanism can explain 'the empty, impenetrable character' of the most modern form of antisemitism: it is the antisemitism of individuals whose psychology 'lets itself and its contents be constructed exclusively by synthetic schemes' as provided wholesale and *prêt-à-porter* by society, under exclusion of genuine experience. 'The Jewish middleman totally becomes the image of the devil only since economically he has practically ceased to exist.' This relieves the neo-antisemite from responsibility: he is a mere observer of an inevitable historical tendency, easily triumphant, riding the waves of history, 'giving a helping hand only when his role as employee of party or *Zyklon* gas factory call on him to do so. As they designate obsolete sections of the population for extermination, the administrations of totalitarian states merely add the finishing touches to verdicts already passed by the economy.' This sense that nothing more than the economically and historically inevitable is being executed allows the perfectly neutral indifference of the bystanders. The peculiarity in whose name the victims are killed is anything but self-evident or immediately offensive to anyone: 'Now that the antagonistic religions which once set people apart have successfully been assimilated and processed into mere cultural artifacts by the leveling pressure of late-industrial society, those individuals who are to be outlawed as Jews first need to be found out by means of complicated questionnaires. ... Fascist antisemitism needs to invent its object in the first place, as it were.' The members of the national collective suffer from a general paranoid disposition, but they suffer from it on the societal level: object and goal of the paranoid aggression can not be delineated from their individual case histories, the paranoia needs to posit its target in the context of the *Verblendungs-zusammenhang* of wars and economic cycles, it must deliberately name the victim onto which the sick members of the national community will then prey.

The final, sixth paragraph²¹, takes up the notion of an end of antisemitism that was already formulated at the beginning of the first paragraph of section seven, and contrasts it with the paradoxical claim that the 'ticket mentality' and the loss of experience that it is based on themselves *are* antisemitism. As these are in this concluding passage directly related to one of the most basic categories of the capitalist mode of production, abstract labor, it can be inferred that antisemitism, thus re-defined, will not go away unless the capitalist mode of production itself is overcome.

'The fact that antisemitism now tends to exist only as one item on an interchangeable ticket gives irrefutable reason to hope for its end.' Those who follow fascist leaders who happen to be antisemitic would just as well follow fascist leaders who are not. The antisemitic 'plank' in the fascist 'ticket' is equivocal and the leaders could swap it for anything else 'as easily as the followers can be shifted from one location of wholly rationalized production to another'. This prophecy of an end of antisemitism is, of course, rather bitter: the notion of fascist regimes that can deliberately refashion and exchange their goals and slogans is indeed most pessimistic, as is that of a 'wholly rationalized' capitalist production that can 'shift' totally objectified workers from here to there. Although both visions can be criticized as overdrawn, they are, as dominant tendencies, still all too true. It seems that Horkheimer and Adorno are keen in this concluding paragraph to remind their readers that antisemitism is not the root of the problem: 'Anyway, the basis of the development which leads to ticket thinking, is the universal reduction of all specific energy to the one, identical, abstract form of labor from the battlefield to the [film] studio.' This is probably the sentence that most clearly flags up the genuine Marxism of its authors.²² It is immediately followed by another sentence that resists any temptation of joining existing leftist or socialist organizations or traditions: 'The transition from such conditions to the more humane state of things, though, cannot happen because the good and the bad are equally affected by the same general tendency'. Horkheimer and Adorno admit that 'the progressive ticket' attracts 'the psychologically more humane types' but 'the power-political structures which inevitably will result from progressive political decisions have as little to do with the freedom that the progressive platform invokes as antisemitism is essential to the chemical cartel.' The same larger historical tendency makes antisemitism a merely accidental element of the fascist ticket and the pursuit of freedom a merely accidental element of the democratic ticket. Although Horkheimer and Adorno hardly more than hint at this, the key to

this claim is the concept of abstract labor, namely labor as abstracted from the specificity of concrete labor, both in its contents and forms. Society as dominated by abstract labour is a society that devalues and despises difference, and this is true of all members of that society. The 'growing loss of experience ultimately turns also the supporters of the progressive ticket into foes of difference. It is not just the antisemitic ticket which is antisemitic, but the ticket-mentality as such.' The 'rage against difference' is 'teleologically inherent' to it. The only escape from the sickness is the refusal to join any rackets. By implication, if ticket-mentality is a reflection of labor abstraction, if the 'rage against difference' is inherent to it, and if antisemitism is an instant of the latter, this adds up to saying that the capitalist mode of production itself is antisemitic (*contra* antisemites, such as Sombart, who claim it was Jewish). This point is followed immediately by another argument that transcends the specific historical context of capitalism, twisting the argument back to a point made earlier: the persecution of a minority like the Jews is ultimately a projection, or anticipation of a larger paranoid hatred: if antisemitism is 'the resentment of the dominated subjects of nature's domination', it is poised against 'the minority that is nature,'²³ even where they still merely threaten the social minority'.

The last sentences of *Elements* turn back more specifically to the essential content of antisemitism, referred to earlier as 'the concealment of domination'. 'The elites who are responsible for the societal state of things', hiding in the fog of social relations of property and ownership, control and management, 'are in any case far harder to pin down than other minorities.' To distinguish a group of people who are a ruling class from a group of people who are an ethnic, cultural, religious minority requires the effort of conceptual thought. Under the conditions of the loss of experience and the destruction of thought, 'the ideology of race and the reality of class equally appear as nothing other than abstract difference from the majority': there are people there who are not like us. The actual ruling class can thus appear as a race ('Jews') and that race can in turn appear as a class (moneybags). It does not matter that they differ from 'us' in significantly different ways: what matters is that they differ. It is crucial to note that this verdict applies to democratic society as much as to its fascist counterpart. From here Horkheimer and Adorno move in their final words in this key text to a conclusion that is rather enigmatic: in a comparison between democratic and fascist rule they seem to imply that fascism provides a better chance for enlightenment

to usher in emancipation than does democracy. They argue that the progressive ticket 'actually drives towards something that is worse than what it proclaims as its content', whereas the content of the fascist ticket is so vacuous that 'it can continue to occupy the place of the better state of things only through a desperate effort on the part of the deceived' themselves. The fascist horror is that of the 'obvious but persistent lie'. Although it does not allow any truth, 'in the monstrosity of its absurdity, it brings truth negatively within reach', and in order to keep those under its domination from grasping it, it needs to guarantee 'their total abstention from thought'. Although Horkheimer and Adorno stop short of explicitly saying thus, there is an underlying sense that 'total abstention from thought' is not easily guaranteed: perhaps those under domination will at some point start thinking against and in spite of the total destruction of thought, and will discover how fragile the totalitarian regime is. Probably against the intended meaning – after all this was written by two refugees who were granted asylum in the country that was the epitome of democracy – the text almost says that democracy with its good pretensions is actually rather less favorable for emancipation than are the blunt lies of fascism. Either way, the text ends on a moderately optimistic tone: 'Enlightenment itself, having come into its own and thereby turning into a force, could break through the limits of Enlightenment.'²⁴

The seventh section restates arguments developed in more detail in the other sections of *Elements*. Although trying to sum up the overall argument of *Elements* in a few lines seems rather futile, one can at least determine some recurring themes that run through the whole text: Modern, totalitarian, or 'neo-antisemitism' emerges in the context and as a symptom of the anachronism that lies in the fact that domination and objectification become total in the very moment when their abolition would be feasible. Liberalism as well as democratic politics are fundamentally engaged and interested in maintaining this anachronism and are therefore unable to effectively resist antisemitism. Human rights are a promise of emancipation but remain a lie. The false claim that liberal bourgeois society is based on social harmony and is classless obviously cannot convince and discredits also the truth of liberal thought, the promise of the emancipation of the individual. Those who are in charge of running an antagonistic society have difficulties dealing with social, cultural and religious difference as they have to warrant society's precarious cohesion. Liberal, capitalist society is a particular instance of the devel-

opment of civilization, and more specifically, one of the moments within this development where civilization destroys itself. Antisemitic pogroms are rituals of civilization in which civilization demonstrates its own impotence. Antisemites call the bluff of liberalism but don't quite manage to see through it as they are themselves damaged by the destruction of thought that is intrinsic to the development of civilization. Being the carriers of the marks of a civilization gone wrong, they manage to destroy civilization but only in its own terms. Their critique and simple negation of civilization prevents the potential of determinate negation and *Aufhebung* of civilization by the better state of things. The question, why are the Jews the victims, is being answered on two levels. For one, because they ended up symbolizing the progress of civilization without ever actually having been firmly established in it, i.e. without enjoying any of the power and security that come with being part of the class that is in charge and beneficiary of civilization. Secondly, because Jews developed the concept of God that has been central to the progress of civilization, and whose displacement by the Christian revision of that concept has been equally central to the corruption of the concept of civilization. The Hebrew God signifies emancipation of *Geist*, spirit, from nature but also its distance from it, while the Christian God corrupts the *Geist's* emancipation by giving it a human mediator. The conflict between the two antagonistic concepts of the divine remains central to the process of civilization. The Christians find it hard to live with the knowledge that the Jews know of their trickery, and accuse the Jews as tricksters. The Christians handed over the secular sphere to Caesar, and accuse the Jews of making profane what is holy. Antisemites are disgusted by archaic mimetic behavior that fails to fit into the functional structures of modern civilization, especially the objectifying behavior called work, and in order to defend civilization from what seems to them to be the mimetic behavior of those who are less civilized, they mimic their mimicry and destroy them like animals. The totalitarian order is able to take into its service a mechanism that is 'as old as civilization', mechanical projection. Whereas all perception is projection, in the process of civilization mechanical projection became refined and controlled, a product of which process is also the ego; but refined projection degenerates into false projection, paranoia and the destruction of the ego. Self-reflexivity of the mind that can fight paranoia is destroyed when thought is turned into knowledge which is what happened in the context of the failure of emancipation to be delivered. Judgment does away with deliberation and regresses into its prehistoric form, the unmediated reflex of the animal.

'Elements of Antisemitism' works in a multiplicity of dialectical tensions, including objective vs. subjective factors, society vs. individual, general human civilization vs. the specific constellation of capitalist society, the latter's fascist vs. its democratic forms of appearance. Modern, liberal society is seen as a particular instance of civilization, namely the spirit's struggle to liberate itself from nature, which has historically so far always meant the domination of nature. Civilization opposed itself to nature and has failed to reconcile itself with it, while nature celebrated so many ironic victories over its powerful master. This is the general context within which Horkheimer and Adorno theorize antisemitism.

The fact that 'Elements of Antisemitism' is organized as an analysis of the specific ways in which fascist totalitarianism and antisemitism are rooted in the process and progress of civilization must be seen as a determinate rejection of the general tendency of most liberals and democrats after WW2: the impulse to bracket National Socialism out of the general course of otherwise gradually progressing human history and civilization in order to be able to go back and rebuild the civilization that had so much suffered from the barbarians' onslaught. The 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' is written against the idea that after two world wars and Auschwitz, civilization might simply go back to business as usual. 'Elements of Antisemitism' is thus the key to understanding the more famous remarks Adorno made on the impossibility of culture after Auschwitz, such as in his key essay '*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*', 'The Critique of Civilization and Society',²⁵ or rather, the fact that whatever remained of culture is garbage, in 'Negative Dialectic'.²⁶ This critique also ties in with Walter Benjamin's remarks on progress in his 'On the Concept of History'.²⁷ Whereas less sensitive observers by default continued to see liberal culture and the forward march of the progress of civilization as the point of departure for the development of an emancipated society, the proponents of critical theory disagreed. The critique of civilization contained in 'Elements of Antisemitism' belongs together with Adorno's distinction, developed in his '*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*', of the critique of civilization that must accompany the longing for a redeemed future from reactionary and conservative *Kulturkritik*. Both texts have the virtue of taking seriously and responding to the reactionary critique of liberal, bourgeois society and economy as proposed by antisemites, fascists and Nazis. Contemporary liberal critiques of reactionary movements from the British National Front to Al Quaida are so much weaker for their failure to do the hard work of conceptually understanding what they attempt to fight.

If present day antisemitism is not 'genuine' in the sense that its nineteenth century predecessor may have been, and if furthermore the leaders of fascist, populist as well as democratic rackets are relatively free to choose or abandon the antisemitic 'plank' in their 'tickets', the question remains why the antisemitic plank is included if and when it is. Horkheimer and Adorno's argument suggests that antisemitism is able to filter into differential contexts as a reactionary form of critique of capitalist modernity, i.e. of the structure and dynamics of modern society and economy and the political and cultural formations that tend to accompany it. In particular, populist and state-centred critiques of socio-economic modernization, especially in periods of capitalist crisis, have the potential to take on antisemitic forms. Fully developed antisemitic ideologies such as Hitlerite 'National Socialism' or the most reactionary forms of 'Islamism' are examples.²⁸ Furthermore, unacknowledged anti-liberal longings for pre-capitalist 'community' might be amongst the psycho-social motives that make perfectly secular, critical and liberal-minded Westerners acquiesce to or even to embrace antisemitic imagery and rhetoric as used by various movements, parties and governments – 'rackets', in Horkheimer and Adorno's term – all over the world that are dedicated to the quixotic attempt to resolve crisis phenomena that are intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production by strengthening the nation state. Both those who attempt to create social harmony and the liberal utopia of the classless society of free and equal commodity owners by means of the nation state, and the metropolitan sympathizers of those who try to use this stale medicine in what used to be called the Third World, are inheritors of the same nineteenth century liberals whom Horkheimer and Adorno identified as responsible for twentieth century antisemitism as unreflecting members of a long chain of self-destructive civilization. The means to come closer to the redeemed future, on the path to which also antisemitism, the false negation of the wrong state of things, must be destroyed, can only be expected from somewhere else. As long as the contemporary critique of antisemitism falls back behind that proposed by Horkheimer and Adorno more than half a century ago,²⁹ it will remain powerless.

1 The 'Jewish question' as posed by Enlightenment and liberal thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries concerned the integration of the impoverished Jewish population of Europe into an emerging bourgeois society and was formulated in parallel, often consciously, to the 'workers' question', the 'Irish question', the 'women's question' and other such 'questions'. The answer to all these 'questions' was uniformly the assimilation to bourgeois values, crucially including subsumption

- under the emerging new mode of production. The reformulation of the 'Jewish question' by nineteenth century antisemites, who came from liberal as well as various anti-liberal backgrounds, continued as well as displaced the earlier debate.
- 2 I do not want here to engage in the question whether antisemitism is actually on the rise, moving in waves or staying constant; the mere fact that it is still around even as a potential would sufficiently justify the kind of discussion I am attempting. Whereas the current debate vacillates between those who warn from potential new massacres and others who argue that Jews never enjoyed as much security and prosperity as at the present time, the authors of 'Elements of Antisemitism' argue that things get worse to the same extent that they get better.
 - 3 In the twentieth century, the Marxist tradition apart from Critical Theory is remarkably disappointing on the issue of antisemitism. Chiefly Trotsky and some in the Trotskyist tradition (most famously, Abram Leon) have contributed to the literature, but remained within the conceptual limits of a rather mechanistic, positivistic form of so-called 'historical materialism' (cp. Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference, Political Philosophy after the Holocaust*, London: Verso, 1998). As for scholars who operate on liberal premises themselves, such as Weberian or Durkheimian sociology, it can hardly surprise that they will at best go halfway towards suggesting these liberal premises were themselves implicated in antisemitism let alone the holocaust (Zygmunt Bauman might belong into this category, but also some of those in France who were influenced by the *Collège de Sociologie*, a line of thought that constitutes more or less a radicalized Durkheimianism). Jean Paul Sartre's and Hannah Arendt's contributions have become particularly influential because of their synthetic and indeed un-paradigmatic character.
 - 4 Hannah Arendt is perhaps the only other intellectual who worked on a similar scale, and also developed an argument that likewise located the reason for the demise of bourgeois society in the structures of that society itself. A careful comparison would probably show that the difference is that Arendt ultimately despairs over the demise of the bourgeois universe of values and hates the bourgeoisie for being complicit in its own destruction, arriving thus at a form of bourgeois self-hatred (cp. Marcel Stoetzler, 'Antisemitism and the Self-Destruction of the Nation-State', in: Dan Stone, Richard King (eds.), *Imperialism, Slavery, Race, and Genocide: The Legacy of Hannah Arendt*, Oxford: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2007), while Horkheimer and Adorno maintain and actually radicalize a revolutionary perspective out of, from within but going beyond liberal society, the longing for a 'better state of things', that can perhaps be described as a 'nostalgia for a redeemed future'; the latter is somewhat muted and muffled by taking into account more consistently than other strands of Marxism the experience of massive defeat that the revolution suffered in Russia, Germany, Hungary and elsewhere. The bourgeois self-hatred that Arendt seems to suffer from in the face of National Socialism is diagnosed by Horkheimer and Adorno as a characteristic of the bourgeois antisemites themselves.
 - 5 'Elements of Antisemitism' is surprisingly little discussed in the literature. To my knowledge no contributor to the secondary literature has so far presented a close analysis of the text and its argument; the most useful comments on 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' in relation to antisemitism are by Anson Rabinbach ('The Cunning of Unreason, in his *In the shadow of catastrophe: German intellectuals between apocalypse and enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 166-198; "'Why Were the Jews Sacrificed?': The place of antisemitism in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', in: Gibson, Nigel; Andrew Rubin (eds.), *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 132-49); cp. also Claussen, Detlev, *Grenzen der Aufklärung, Die gesellschaftliche Genese des modernen Antisemitismus*, Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1994 (forthcoming in English in 2008 with The University of California Press), Brett R. Wheeler, 'Antisemitism as Distorted Politics: Adorno on the Public Sphere', in *Jewish Social Studies* 7,2, 2001, pp. 114-48, and Lars Rensmann, *Kritische Theorie über den Antisemitismus, Studien zu Struktur, Erklärungspotential und Aktualität* (Berlin: Argument, 1998).
 - 6 I have worked from the German text (Horkheimer, Max; Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1969) and made use of both English translations: Horkheimer, Max; Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 137-72, and Adorno, Theodor W.; Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, translated by John Cumming* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 168-208. Cumming, the translator of the older English

language edition has added indentations of his own on several occasions (not, however, in the seventh section), while Jephcott, the translator of the more recent English language edition, remained true to the original indentations.

- 7 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:209-11; 2002:165-6; 1997:200-1
- 8 'Aber es gibt keine Antisemiten mehr. Sie waren zuletzt Liberale, die ihre anti liberale Meinung sagen wollten.'
- 9 'Würde antisemitische Gesinnung laut, so fühlte sie sich als bürgerlich und aufsässige zugleich.'
- 10 Shulamit Volkov, 'Antisemitism as a cultural code – reflections on the history and historiography of antisemitism in Imperial Germany', in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 23*, 1978, pp. 25-46
- 11 This point has been confirmed by recent historical research. Oded Heilbronner, 'From antisemitic peripheries to antisemitic centres: the place of antisemitism in Modern German History', in *Journal of contemporary History 35:4*, 2000, pp. 559-76, e.g. argues that not even members of the NSDAP were necessarily militant antisemites.
- 12 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:211-12; 2002:166-7; 1997:201-2
- 13 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (2; B75): 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions (Anschauungen) without concepts are blind'. This is in *Transzendentele Elementarlehre, Zweiter Teil, Die transzendentele Logik, Einleitung*.
- 14 'Man soll etwas vor sich bringen'; this seems to be a play on the literal meaning of *pro-ducere*.
- 15 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:212-14; 2002:167-9; 1997:202-4
- 16 cp. Postone, Moishe; Barbara Brick, 'Critical Theory and Political Economy', in: Benhabib, Seyla; Wolfgang Bonss; John McCole (eds.), *On Max Horkheimer, New Perspectives* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1993), on this.
- 17 Certainly Adorno's work as a whole testifies to and acknowledges the existence of the residual autonomy and agency of the individual in many ways.
- 18 This mirrors a crucial aspect of Marx's position: communism according to Marx is liberalism by better means: radical individualism and the hope for emancipation are reformulated within an analysis of the real world, rather than independently from, or as a normative counter-weight to liberal political practice that actually destroys the liberty that it claims to support. Marx developed therefore communism out of the dynamics of liberal society, and in strict opposition to the conservative reaction to it, including all the numerous (and often antisemitic) reactionary variants of socialism.
- 19 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:214-15; 2002:169-70; 1997:204-6
- 20 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:215-16; 2002:170-1; 1997:206-7
- 21 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:216-17; 2002:171-2; 1997:207-8
- 22 On the concept of abstract labour, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination, A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and, more handy, Moishe Postone, 'Rethinking Marx (in a Post-Marxist World)', in: Camic, Charles (ed.): *Reclaiming the sociological classics, The state of the scholarship* (Malden (Mass.): Blackwell, 1997), pp. 45-80.
- 23 This is how I understand the strange formulation 'die natürliche Minderheit' – the notion of a 'natural minority' does not seem to make any sense. The meaning seems to be that nature is, within society, a 'minority' in the sense that nature is the suppressed, the non-identical other.
- 24 It seems important here to acknowledge the ambivalence of the German word '*Gewalt*' (power; force; violence) in this sentence: 'Die ihrer selbst mächtige, zur Gewalt werdende Aufklärung selbst...', an ambivalence that some in the students' movement chose to resolve towards 'violence' rather than 'force' or 'power'. Whether Enlightenment could become violence without betraying itself, or must remain a non-violent 'force' is a notoriously difficult question that might have been in the backs of the authors' minds here.
- 25 Theodor W. Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft", in: *Prismen, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M: dtv, 1963 [1955], pp. 7-26; Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", in: *Prisms, Translated from the German by Samuel and Shiery Weber* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 17-34.
- 26 Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialectic, translated by E. B. Ashton* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 367
- 27 In Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminationen, Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 251-61.

- 28 The latter, whether they are to be seen as properly fascist or rather clerical-conservative, are in spite of the professed universalism of the *umma* in reality as nationalist as the Stalinist or Baathist regimes they are struggling to replace. On the ways in which the Iranian version of Islamist liberation theology managed to defeat (and slaughter) the state-socialist competition by learning from it, cp. 'Retort' (i.e. Iain Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), *Afflicted Powers, Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London/New York: Verso 2005).
- 29 The ability of Adorno and Horkheimer to address the dialectic between societal structures and social thought, as well as their adoption of a historically grounded critical concept of the triangle constituted by modern society, the individual and the state (as opposed to a sociology of 'group relations', 'networks', 'communicative structures', etc.), are crucial for a substantive understanding of what anti-semitism actually and essentially (im wesentlichen) is.