

**Walter Benjamin's Critical Theory of Society and  
Religion:  
From Enslavement to Freedom, Happiness and  
Redemption**

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*"To our Posterity*

*..... You, who will emerge out of the flood  
In which we have drowned  
Remember us  
When you speak of our shortcomings  
And the dark times  
That you have escaped.*

*So we went, changing countries more often than our shoes  
Through the class wars, hopelessly  
When only injustice existed and not outrage against it.*

*But we know full well:  
Even hating poverty  
Deforms the features.  
Even rage against injustice  
Makes the voice hoarse. Alas, we  
Who wanted to prepare the ground for friendliness  
Could not be friendly.*

*You however, when the time comes  
Where brother helps brother  
Remember our legacy  
With mercy."*

(Brecht 1967, Bd. 9:722-724).

## ***Purpose***

The purpose of this essay is to address the issue of voluntary serfdom in globalizing late capitalist society on the basis of the critical theory of society as a middle range theory in the context of the Frankfurt School: more specifically and precisely, on the basis of Walter Benjamin's critical theory of society and religion. Benjamin, of course, developed his critical theory in close solidarity with the other first generation members of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and New York, particularly with Adorno and Horkheimer. As such, this essay seeks to develop the critical theory of and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as it focuses ultimately on the political praxis/struggle for an identity change in globalized civil society that moves not toward post-modern, alternative Future I - the

totally administered signal society, or post-modern, alternative Future II - the entirely militarized society, but rather toward post-modern, alternative Future III - a society, in which personal sovereignty and universal solidarity would be reconciled. The essay appeals to Benjamin's critical theory of society and religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as ideology critique and as explanation of the voluntary servitude in past and present civil society. In Benjamin's spirit we shall certainly not shy away from the new forms of self-willed servitude in the present 2016 political situation, be it in the countries led by members of the old or neo-conservative, or neo-liberal bourgeois parties, or be it in the countries led by the members of Social Democratic, Labor, or New Deal - liberal parties with or without Green party participation, who have invoked socialism or Roosevelt liberalism, pretending to give capitalism a human face, in order to realize nothing else than neo-liberal-programs: be it Gerhard Schröder, Angela Merkel, Tony Blair, Wm. Clinton, or Barack Obama. That Schröder, Clinton, Obama, or Bernhard Sanders came from the working class does not mean that they still belong to it: not to speak of sharing or promoting its emancipatory interest. In general, through the principle of subsidiarity, the Social Democratic Parties, as well as the socially modified Roosevelt Liberal Democratic Party in the USA, have long turned from working class into low middle class entities.

### ***Origin***

For the past century, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt and New York Institute for Social Research tried not only to explore the extremely antagonistic totality of modern bourgeois society, but also to overcome in theory and praxis the deep contradictions in it between the religious and the secular, the races, the nationalities, the genders, the individual and the collective, and the social classes, which produce immeasurable human suffering. The critical theorists have formed and constructed always new stages of the dialectical theory of civil and socialist society, responding from one stage to the another to always new historical situations from the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present. The critical theory originated primarily in the experience of the bourgeois societies in Europe - mainly that of Germany, England and France - before World War I, in the horror of World War I, of fascism, of the American exile, of the terror of World

War II, and of the Cold War period. With the help of great thinkers of the past, Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Leo Löwenthal, and other critical theorists of the first generation, most of them assimilated Jews, tried to make sense out of the senseless war experience, be it in Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Stuttgart, Paris, New York, or Los Angeles, or elsewhere in European or American civil societies.

### ***Enlightenment Movements***

Benjamin and the other critical theorists were rooted in and stood on the shoulders of the enlightenment movements and the older critical theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. They looked for support particularly in the critical writings of Immanuel Kant, Johann G. Fichte, Friedrich W.J. Schelling, G.W.F. Hegel, Sören Kierkegaard, Arthur Schopenhauer, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and others.<sup>1</sup> From Benjamin on, the critical theorists defined enlightenment as the attempt to free people from their fears and to make them masters of their fate; to place Ego where Id was, and consciousness where unconsciousness was. They learned from Hegel not only about the dialectic between the sacred and the profane, but also about the dialectic in the religious and in the enlightenment. Religion had turned against itself. The religion of truth turned into the ideology of slaveholders, feudal lords and capitalist owners. The religion of love produced Anti-Semitism, heresy trials, crusades, witch-hunts, etc. Also the modern enlightenment turned dialectically against itself: rationalization turned into irrationality; integration into disintegration. Enlightenment ended up in fascism. At least from World War II on, more precisely since Benjamin's death, and since Horkheimer's and Adorno's great *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that was written in his spirit, the critical theorists were haunted and driven by the fundamental question of why the enlightened Western civilization did not realize its potential and possibility to move toward the revolutionary, alternative Future III - the realm of freedom beyond the realm of necessity, but rather chose instead the way toward alternative Future I - dictatorial, authoritarian and totalitarian administration and bureaucracy, and the corresponding involuntary and even voluntary enslavement, and toward alternative Future II - hot and cold, total and global class warfare, which was only temporarily slowed down somewhat since the collapse of

the Soviet Empire through the neo-liberal counter-revolution of 1989.

### ***Dialectic of Enlightenment***

Benjamin was a philosopher of language in the tradition of Johann Gottfried Herder, who belonged with Goethe, and later with Schiller, Fichte and Schelling to that group of German enlighteners who early on were critical of the dialectic of enlightenment. From its very start in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the German enlightenment - which followed Rousseau and Voltaire, the fathers of the principles of deism, religious tolerance and morality in France - split into two forms: one, which emphasized analytical understanding and the finite, and was promoted by Christoph Friedrich Nicolai, Moses Mendelsohn, Wilhelm Abraham Teller, Johann Joachim Spalding, Johann Friedrich Zöllner, and the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek* in Berlin. The other expression of the German enlightenment stressed dialectical reason and the Infinite, and was carried out by Herder, Christoph Martin Wieland, Goethe and later Schiller, Fichte and Schelling in other parts of Germany. It was this later form that first discovered the dialectic of enlightenment and fought against it. Benjamin was supposed to become the *Herder* of the University of Jerusalem and of Jewish Palestine, but he decided to stay in Fascist Germany as long as possible in order to try to rescue the European culture from barbarism. Benjamin attempted to concretely supersede, at least fragmentarily, the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion of Rousseau and Voltaire, as well as of Kant and Hegel, into his own critical theory of society and religion. Benjamin moved between Gershom Scholem's kabbalist philosophy of religion and Bertolt Brecht's historical materialist philosophy of history, and tried to reconcile them. With Ernst Bloch (2000; 1972), Benjamin (2011:18-21, 144-160, 62-84, 168-170; 2002:305-306; 1969:253-264; 2003:389-400) rejected the possibility of *theocracy* in modernity. For Benjamin, the goal of the philosophy of history as well as of politics was freedom and happiness. The aim of the philosophy of religion was redemption and the kingdom of God. Only a religious theocracy was still possible in Modernity, but not a historical or political one. However, while the philosophy of history and the philosophy of religion were thus opposed to each other, they could, nevertheless, also support each other dialectically. The secular politics of freedom and happiness could prepare the silent coming of the kingdom of heaven.

Like the other critical theorists of society, particularly Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Benjamin wanted to discover the causes for the dialectic of enlightenment through an *archeology* of modern bourgeois society: why rationalization turned over into irrationality? Why integration changed into disintegration? Why the bourgeois enlightenment and revolutions turned into Fascism? Why the socialist enlightenment and revolutions turned into Stalinism, or *Red Fascism*? Why the psychoanalytical enlightenment and revolutions turned into the porno- and drug - society? Why religion joined Fascism against Marxism and Freudianism? Benjamin searched for the causes of the dialectic of religion and the dialectic of enlightenment in order to develop a new religion and a new enlightenment, pointing to post-modern alternative Future III - a society characterized by freedom and happiness as well as by redemption and salvation.

### ***Theory of the Middle Range***

In comparison to Kant's transcendental philosophy and Hegel's dialectical philosophy, which structural-functionalists call *high-range theories*, or which the deconstructionists name *great narratives* that attempt to embrace the whole dimension of nature as well as the spheres of subjective, objective and absolute spirit, the *critical theory of society* - developed in the Institute for Social Research at the Johann Wolfgang von Goethe Universität in Frankfurt a.M., Germany by its main prototypes, Walter Benjamin, Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Friedrich Pollock, Alfred Sohn-Rethel, Leo Löwenthal, and Jürgen Habermas - is what the structural-functionalists have called a *theory of the middle range*, situated between the smaller working hypotheses and all-embracing speculative theories.<sup>2</sup> The Critical Theory is concerned with the antagonistic totality of civil society, characterized by the dichotomies between the religious and the secular, or mythos and enlightenment; between the genders, or between mother- and father- right; between the individual and the collective, or between personal autonomy and universal solidarity; and between the social classes, or the blue and white color workers and the lower and higher bourgeoisie.

### ***Constellations***

Unlike Kant's transcendental philosophy, and Hegel's dialectical philosophy,

Benjamin's, Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory of society is not systematic, and thus cannot be treated and dealt with systematically. This can be done only contextually, and in terms of large social, economic, political, historical, and cultural configurations; the memory of which break into the contemporary socio-political crises in a flash producing the possibility of spontaneously and negative-dialectically creating new, critical, liberating constellations of theory and praxis.<sup>3</sup> Yet, paradoxically enough, particularly in terms of Benjamin's critical methodology, the critical theory investigates and thus must be grasped in terms of a *micrology* that is devoted to the smallest, seemingly most meaningless details.<sup>4</sup> All systems are under suspicion of ideology, understood critically as false consciousness, as masking of class and national interests, shortly, as untruth. As expressed throughout his entire oeuvre from 1910-1940, Benjamin, like Adorno and Horkheimer, was not only the heir of Judaism, the *Religion of Sublimity*,<sup>5</sup> particularly Jewish mysticism, but also of the modern enlighteners Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, whose scientific discoveries inflicted the deepest wounds on the narcissism of the human species, and thus produced the inversion of theoretical focus from self-love to object-love. The earth is not the center of the universe; humanity is not high above the animals; human beings are not equal but organized into antagonistic social classes that have fought each other throughout history; moral values are not higher than values of vitality; Ego is not the master in its own psychic house. Benjamin's critical theory is one most courageous attempt to reconcile Moses and Kant, revelation and autonomous reason, mysticism and enlightenment.

### ***Realm of Freedom***

The critical theory of society aims at alternative Future III - the realm of freedom beyond the realm of necessity; the classless society; the society in which personal sovereignty and anamnestic, present and proleptic solidarity will be reconciled for the first time in the known world-history. As a matter of fact, the critical theory is as much a middle-range theory as the harmonizing Parsonian and Luhmannian structural-functional action theory, which points however consciously or unconsciously toward alternative Future I - the totally administered society, in which all liberty is forgotten and

in which later born generations willingly and with no regret do what the earlier generations were forced and constrained to do by means of superior, immediate or mediated force.

### ***Antagonistic Civil Society***

As a theory of antagonistic traditional and modern civil society, the critical theory includes the dimensions of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, family, constitutional state, history and culture, particularly the spheres of art, and especially music and literature, and of religion, as well as of philosophy and the social sciences. In all these dimensions of contemporary, globalizing late capitalist society the critical theorists were pursuing an epistemologically and politically motivated, radically negative dialectic, which again and again has approached different latent and manifest forms of voluntary submission or self-willed servitude in bourgeois and socialist society. There are unfortunately not only *white* or *black* books<sup>6</sup> of fascism and communism, but also of liberalism as well, e.g., Obama's "assassination list."<sup>7</sup> The economic periods of capitalism do not merely replace each other externally and in time. That precisely is what the non-dialectical, positivistic economists want to make us believe. Rather, capitalism as one and the same and identical with itself, nevertheless, changes itself and goes beyond itself and is even in fascism still the same. As a matter of fact, it is only in fascism, or corporatism, that capitalism really comes to itself: e.g. in the fascist concentration camps with lowest minimum wages and maximal appropriation of surplus labor and value by private industries; an appropriation that even goes beyond the death of the victims, whose hair, teeth, skin, and clothing are still utilized in the process of the accumulation, concentration, and defense of capital.

### ***The Critical Theorists***

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the pens of the critical theorists, Benjamin's first of all, did not break or become soft. The critical theorists did not submit to the conventional lack of concern, or to tactical, strategic, or pragmatic collaboration with the *status quo* of civil, fascist or socialist society, when they were faced with the boundaries between power and powerlessness, between the production of genuine desire and its social and



scientific production, between the pleasure principle and the reality principle, between the progress of humanity and the nihilism of the social sphere. The critical theorists were concerned with a flawless radicality that penetrated the depth of a critical realism and which identified and tried to destroy the causes of the *structural guilt* of a late capitalist society in which everything is transformed but nothing seems ever to change: *bad infinity!* For the critical theorists, it was indeed the dimension of desire that gave dialectical substantiality to the term voluntary enslavement. Particularly, the articulation of desire with the foundations of every desire-production in late capitalist society led the critical theorists to their radical social critique: not only to the fight against a deeply religious or secular biological anti-Semitism, or better Anti-Judaism, but also to the *great refusal* of all domination, barbarism, authoritarianism and totalitarianism, and to the rejection of economic alienation, reification and commodity fetishism, and to the opposition against ideological, and repressive state apparatuses. The first generation of critical theorists never turned into NATO philosophers. Their fundamental concepts are coming up today - after having been misunderstood, distorted and reified already not at last and not at least by the New Left - against neo-conservative and neo-liberal, as well as deconstructionist and neo-fascist forms of a new intimacy between culture and politics. It is the intent of this essay to support theoretical practices that attempt to give new vigor to those concepts by connecting meta-theoretical efforts with the time diagnosis and time prognosis of concrete situations that arise from the emergence of calculated and calculating digital machines, as well as of systems of economic production and consumption of coded, over coded, but also decoded desires, and not at least, and not at last, by the rise of a neo-fascism. As its first modern manifestation in the decades following World War I, this contemporary rise of neo-fascism is characterized once more by anti-intellectualism; by the authoritarian personality that is romantic, nationalistic - right or wrong, my country. Once again, today's neo-fascism is pro-capitalistic, is sadistic toward the weak and masochistic toward the strong, and is racist as is evidenced daily in the USA and the EU. This neo-fascism champions the cult of tradition and the rejection of modernism. It advocates an irrationalism that is actualized through a cult of action for action's sake; by ambiguity; by the lack of clarity; by calling treason distinction, differentiation, and disagreement; by frustration; by social identity through being born in

the same country - blood and soil. Today's global neo-fascist movement is also characterized by the feeling of humiliation due to the ostentatious wealth and force of the enemies; by living for struggle; by a popular elitism and contempt for the weak; by heroism and cult of death; by the will to power transferred to sexual matters; by selective, qualitative populism; by "newspeak;" and by a conscious or unconscious Satanic dialectic. All these characteristics are alive today in 2016, in the framework of an extremely antagonistic, not very civilized civil society, determined and overwhelmed by *Trumpism*, not only in America, but in Europe as well. It was German, French, and Spanish fascism, the Falangists' *Viva La Muerte - Long Live Death*, that drove the critical theorist Walter Benjamin into suicide in Portbou, a small boarder town between France and Spain, in September 1940. In spite of the fact that the murderers had indeed triumphed over their innocent victim, as was the case of their friend Walter Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer (1985:385-404) later on defined religion not only as longing for the totally Other than the horror and terror of nature and history, for perfect justice and unconditional love, but also as longing that the murderer shall not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately. Up to the present day, the Christian community asserts this same longing in faith and hope daily, that his murderers did not triumph over its founder, Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth, and that he was resurrected, and will come gain.

### ***Whip and Carrots***

As mentioned above, from 1991 - 1995 those broadly defined as Social Democratic leaders and parties supported and promoted the counter-revolutionary, neo-liberalistic and neo-colonialist war against socialist Yugoslavia, which incinerated and murdered about 200,000 people - including many civilians, the so-called daily *collateral damage*. From its war against Yugoslavia to its interference in its Presidential elections of September/October 2000, the European Union was under the leadership of the United States guided not by *normativism*, but rather by *decisionism*:<sup>8</sup> it did not side with the UN Security Council, the code of the UN, the Geneva Convention, or with the particular national constitutions. Neither did it listen to the Yugoslav internationally observed Election Committee, which established that the opposition leader Vojislav Koštunica had not reached the 50% mark, or to the Supreme Court's decision to void the Presidential

election. Rather, the EU joined rank with the lawless, Germany-, Vatican- and USA (particularly CIA)- inspired counterrevolutionary, nationalist mob, rioting in the streets of Belgrade, and gutting and ransacking the Yugoslav Parliament building, in order to topple the legitimate socialist President Slobodan Milošević. Despite the fact that such imperialist, pre-emptive/preventive wars of “*regime change*” have been the “declared” so-called “unipolar” right for the national security and defense of the United States of America since 2002/2004,<sup>9</sup> the bourgeoisie as a whole cannot possibly wish that such barbarous acts should be the future way of any democratic transfer of power, as it was, of course, the case in the past with the toppling of the socialist Dr. Allende by his fascist General Pinochet in Chile, as well as the U.S. led invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 that deposed and ultimately led to the 2006 murder of the Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and the brutal overthrow, torture and murder of the socialist leader of Libya Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 - to which the then neoconservative Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton, who is now the 2016 Democratic Party candidate for the Presidency of the United States laughingly exclaimed: “*We came; we saw; he died.*”<sup>10</sup> First, the bombing of Yugoslavia, and then the promise to end the - in any case - unjust NATO-sanctions! First the whip, and then the carrots! The most recent attempts at such illegitimate, neo-liberal/neoconservative, whip-carrot regime changes in Libya, Syria, and the Ukraine, have failed miserably.

### ***Excessive Use of Force***

The United Nations top human rights official praised the socialist Yugoslav security forces for not cracking down on the illegal protesters in Belgrade in early October 2000: quite in contrast to the bourgeois Israeli security forces, who at the same time killed over 80 Palestinian protesters after an unbearable provocation by the former Israeli General Ariel Sharon, then leader of the hardline Likud opposition party, who on September 28, 2000 had visited a Jerusalem shrine, holy to the Muslims. On October 7, 2000 the UN Security Council did approve a resolution condemning Israel’s *excessive use of force* against the Palestinians, from which however the United States unfortunately abstained. Hitler, the fanatic Anti-Semite and anti-communist, would have rejoiced if he could have experienced all that has been going on not only in Israel in recent decades, but also what

has happened in Eastern Europe since 1989: the so called fall of communism. That is what he always wanted. What Hitler could not achieve with Stukas and tanks, now the West seems to have accomplished through the World Bank, the IMF, the credit system, the secret services, and finally through high level precision bombing in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and through drone strikes elsewhere. Has the West really succeeded in the restoration of civil society to Eastern Europe? The enlightened Hungarian-American currency-capitalist, Georg Soros, has justified doubts: according to him the reintroduction of civil society into Eastern Europe has failed because it happened without social thought, i.e., without the regulatory intervention of a social state into the as such amoral bourgeois society. To be sure, Western society is still held together by indirect force, which only too often turns into a direct one, not only in the form of the death penalty for individuals, but also in the form of attacks by security forces and air forces against collectives. Unfortunately, the fascist attitudes, which murdered the critical theorist Benjamin together with millions of other victims, did not die with Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Salazar, or Pavelic, and their God, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these attitudes and policies are newly strengthened by charismatic people like Donald Trump, who wants to reintroduce water boarding again, inherited from the Holy Inquisition and the SS, and exclude Mexicans and Muslims from the country, and build walls, and assassinate enemies through drone strikes, and even through carpet-bombing the Near East, etc. All this fashistoide behavior gives the revolutionary life, and work, and death of Walter Benjamin a new actuality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Normativism against Decisionism***

What does all this mean for the future? While the national and international bourgeoisie is rather pleasant when it deals with residuals of the old feudal order - popes, kings, princes and princesses, whom it has overcome, whenever it faces socialism or communism, by which it may be concretely superseded and succeeded, it turns rather ugly, and forgets its own values, principles, rules, laws and norms. Now, the purpose of defending or restoring capitalist civil society and its class system sanctifies all means to accomplish this, no matter how unjust, illegal, or criminal they may be. Precisely thereby, the bourgeoisie weakens itself in the midst of its triumph, and thus prepares its own

downfall. As Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth taught: A house turned against itself cannot prevail! (Mark 3:24-25; Matthew 12:25). Alternative Future III - real freedom as negation of all involuntary and voluntary enslavement - can be reached only through *normativism*, not through bourgeois, finally fascist decisionism. All fascist governments of the 1930's and 1940's engaged in *decisionism*, and thus precisely through their victories promoted their own disaster: particularly, those who had bombed Belgrade at that time. If the bourgeoisie would at least hold on to its own norms and constitutions and institutions, the world would already be a somewhat freer and more peaceful place. Walter Benjamin's life, work and death point to alternative Future III - a society, in which the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane, revelation and enlightenment, as well as personal autonomy and universal, i.e. anamnestic, present and proleptic solidarity would be newly reconciled.

### ***Nature and Spirit***

The bourgeois society no matter under what leadership - high bourgeois, low bourgeois, social democratic, or outright fascist - is as inhuman as it is unnatural. Today, as in Kant's, or in Hegel's, or in Marx's, or in Freud's, or in Benjamin's time, in all Western countries the dominant bourgeois classes still enslave, and thus still hold in utter contempt the human spirit as well as nature, in spite of all transfigurations of both. In the bottom of his heart, the low as well as the high bourgeois still sees in nature - e.g. the rainforest - nothing else but the senseless and indifferent material that enters the process of the accelerated acquisition of surplus value - e.g. McDonalds. The bourgeois classes still see nothing else in spirit and nature than the means for the maximization of profit. This will remain the case until the now globalizing civil society will change its identity toward alternative Future III - a society, in which nature and spirit will no longer be commodified, but will be liberated, and will be allowed to be what they are in the process of their mutual mediation, reconciliation and liberation: in Marxian terms of mystical origin - *nature will be humanized and human beings will be naturalized*.<sup>11</sup> That is the goal of the critical theory. Only with the disappearance of its object - the unnatural as well as inhuman bourgeois society - will the critical theory have fulfilled its purpose and

will thereby become history. In his life and work, Walter Benjamin tried to prepare and to promote the humanization of nature, and the naturalization of man.

### ***The Truth***

In 1942, under the specific title *For Voltaire*, Horkheimer and Adorno asked in their by now most famous common work on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* how far a civil society must have come, in which merely the rogues still speak the truth, and in which Adolf Hitler's propaganda minister Dr. Josef Goebbels kept awake the remembrance of the daily continued lynching's inside and outside of the concentration camps. This work was very much inspired by Benjamin's life and death, illuminations and notions, shortly by his *Angelus Novus*, or *Angel of History* (Benjamin 1968:257-258; 2003:392). In 1921, while visiting his friend Gershom Scholem (1976:209) in Munich, Benjamin bought one of Paul Klee's many angel paintings: the *Angelus Novus*. To Benjamin, the Angel appeared as if he was distancing himself from something at which he stared. His eyes were wide open. His wings were spread far apart. The Angel had turned his face toward the past. In the course of history the Angel saw one great catastrophe, which continually heaped ruins over ruins, and threw them before his feet. The Angel would have liked to stay and to awaken the dead, and to put together again what had been torn apart and destroyed. However, a storm blew from Paradise, which had caught itself in the angel's wings, and which was so strong that he could not close them anymore. This storm drove the Angel backward into the future, while the heap of ruins grew to heaven before him. What modern people called progress, was precisely this storm. The first time that Benjamin planned to commit suicide, he willed by testament Klee's *Angelus Novus* to his friend Gershom Scholem in Palestine. Today in 2016, the painting is housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. For Scholem (1994:184-185; 1977), Klee's *Angel of History* was ready to fly. He would very much like to return in history because if he would remain living time, he would have little happiness. Scholem was correct when he stated that Benjamin never returned to Hegel. The *Angelus Novus* as well as Benjamin's last essay *On the Notion of History* presented that which in Hegel's (1956:21; 1967:808) philosophy of history had been described as historical Means: the great men, the agents of change,

and the slaughterhouse and Golgotha in and on which they operated and produced their ruins, and the enormous lack of happiness for even moral individuals and collectives. What was missing with Klee, and with Benjamin's and Scholem's interpretation of his *Angelus Novus* was what Kant and Hegel had still called the principle of history, that Reason or Providence governed the world, and what for them as well as still for Marx had been the goal of history, the realm of the Freedom of All. As intellectual heirs of Benjamin, Horkheimer and Adorno emphasized that it was not the good but the bad that was the object of the critical theory of society. The critical theory presupposed already the reproduction of life in the particular, determined forms of bourgeois society. While the goal of the critical theory was and is alternative Future III - the freedom of All, its real theme was the historical trend in this society toward alternative Future I - the oppression and the involuntary and voluntary enslavement of the Many by the Few, and by the One in the name of the latter.

### ***Language***

Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer, were fully aware of the extreme importance of language for the expression of the truth, understood negatively as the negation of ideology. Particularly as ideology critique, Benjamin's, Adorno's and Horkheimer's, as well as still Habermas's and Honneth's critical theory of society and religion was rooted in the human potential of language and memory, and in the evolutionary universal of the struggle for recognition, which was discovered by Kant and Hegel. For Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer, wherever language became apologetical it was already corrupt. In terms of its very essence, language is not able to be neutral. In the movie about the Nürnberg trial, entitled *Nuremberg* (2000), only Hitler's Reichsmarschall, Hermann Göring, seemed to speak the truth. Today, in 2016, the Germans are afraid that the newly, scientifically edited *My Struggle* by Adolf Hitler may contain and reveal some truths. How far has civil society come in which such a movie or such a book are produced and are silently and happily received by millions of people only 71 years after the end of the most murderous World War II, which cost the lives of 70 million people, including 27 million Russians, and 6 million Jews, like Benjamin? From where does the fascination

for this horror come, a horror initiated mainly by the fascist leadership, who came from the low bourgeoisie - as did Hitler and Göring - and were paid by the high bourgeoisie, and in which they played the most important role as the heads of the fascist State and its Air Force, which most brutally destroyed the Basque town of Guernica, as well as later on Warsaw, and Rotterdam, and Coventry, and parts of London, and many other open cities? Today, in 2016, such horrors continue and are on the rise again, not only through the globalization of capitalism and its wars of regime change, but also through the killings and lynching by Right-wing extremists and by the police in the civil society's of Germany, the European Union, and the United States.

### ***Alternative Futures***

In comparison to Kant's and Hegel's extremely systematic work, the critical theory of society and religion of Benjamin, as well as that of his student and friend Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, and Honneth is an unsystematic and fragmentary, yet methodologically organized body of ideas, or structure of thoughts and categories, or connection of knowledge. Particularly for Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer, the paradigm of this non-linear, non-"progressive," anti-system, anti-positivism, anti-historicism, dialectical methodology was that of mosaic, montage, or constellation building as well as that of "riddle solving" in the pursuit of the manifold levels or shards of interpretation and meaning that make up a single topic.<sup>12</sup> Their work was directed toward alternative Future III - the truth of human society, the right society, instead of the further development of alternative Future I - the totally bureaucratized society, characterized more by voluntary than involuntary enslavement, or what Max Weber (1958:181) had called the "*stahlhartes Gehäuse*" - the *housing of bondage* or the *iron cage* of capitalism, or beyond that of alternative Future II - the extremely militarized society, engaged in always new conventional wars, civil wars, anti-terrorist drone and helicopter strikes, and finally the possibility of NBC (nuclear, biological, chemical) wars between religion-based civilizations, and the consequent ecological disasters. While for Horkheimer the totally administered society was still some time away and liberating enlightenment could still be done, and while Habermas asked if it might not forever be prevented by insurmountable anthropological obstacles, for Benjamin and Adorno Future



Alternative I had already arrived. Thus, Adorno agreed with Benjamin that this precisely was the catastrophe of modernity as “hell:” that things went on in late capitalist society as they did.<sup>13</sup> While Benjamin, Adorno and Horkheimer were still horrified by the project of the totally bureaucratized signal society, the late structural-functionalist, Nicolas Luhmann, the student of Talcot Parsons, and Robert Merton, and Hermann Lübbe, could talk about its infinite, dominating social networks as something entirely normal, and do so without weeping. The concentration camps, prepared theoretically by Thomas Hobbes and practically by General Kitchner in South Africa, and used by fascists for Jews and Christians, socialists and communists, non-conformist intellectuals and politicians, homosexuals and ethnic minorities, are early examples of this modern totalizing system of dominating, cold, instrumental rationality. This point is stated precisely by Eugen Kogon (1947, Neumann 1944), a German opponent of the Nazi Party, who was imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp from 1939 to its liberation in 1945, and who based on his experiences in Buchenwald authored the book, *Der SS Staat*, which was translated into English and retitled as *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them*. “The concentration camps were merely the extreme and most effective expression of this system which embraced in its toils every aspect of public and private life” (Kogon 1950:19). Even if these camps happened in so-called socialist countries under *red fascism*, in Nazi Germany, they started out as internment camps and camps for the appropriation of cheap labor by capitalist industry, which included prisoners’ self-administration and even prisoners’ orchestras, and finally ended up as death camps. Benjamin himself had been in a German concentration camp, and shortly before his death, was as a Jew and a stateless person, very much afraid of being sent back there again. As is known all too well today, such programs and camps still exist in the present period of globalizing late capitalist society: e.g., more than two-dozen countries complicit in global CIA secret “Black site” torture and interrogation centers where “enhanced” questioning technique - aka torture - of detainees occurs;<sup>14</sup> Guantanamo Bay Naval Base Prison, U.S. Prisons’ Sweatshop Labor Production for Corporate Profit,<sup>15</sup> et al. No matter whether we address private or state capitalism, the voluntary and particularly the self-willed enslavement is still very much the same in both, in spite of their differences. Also anti-terrorist/terrorist institutions, like

the *School of the Americas/the School of Assassins*,<sup>16</sup> which reinforce the low wages of the workers and the high surplus value of the owners in Argentina, Bolivia, Honduras, Panama, Chile, or El Salvador, do not only exist in Fort Benning, Georgia, USA.

### *Negative Dialectic*

While Benjamin's, Adorno's and Horkheimer's critical theory of society and religion is indeed derived from the study of a large number of facts and data, relating to the history of traditional and modern civil society and its fundamental trends, it is, nevertheless, not only the result of the study of phenomena but it is also to a large extent the consequence of a radical, but nevertheless still determinate negation of a negative dialectic discovered by Kant, and then most of all by his greatest student and critic, Hegel. The critical theory includes in itself the knowledge of several social sciences, particularly anthropology, psychology, economics, political science and sociology, as well as artistic, religious and philosophical forms derived from such study of facts and from such dialectical method and imagination. The critical theory is a general body of positive and particularly negative dialectical assumptions and principles worked out already to a large extent in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and *Science of Logic*, as well as in their historical-materialistic inversion by Karl Marx. Benjamin, Adorno, and Horkheimer, informed by Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, discovered, to speak with Hegel (1956:344), the pearl of religion hidden in the mussel enclosed by the shell of historical idealism and by the shell of historical materialism. In the history of philosophy all great idealistic philosophies had already a materialistic element in themselves, and all materialistic philosophy still retained an idealistic component. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the greatest idealist Hegel had historical-materialistically turned upside down Rabbi Jesus' teaching (Matthew 6:33-34)

*Set your hearts on his (the heavenly Father's) kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things (life, food, body, clothing) will be given you as well*

and translated it into

*Set your hearts on food and clothing first,  
then the kingdom of God will fall to you by itself.*

This materialistic inversion always stood before the eyes of the philosopher and historian Benjamin (1968:254-255), who had been educated by Marx's writings that the class struggle was a fight and battle for the raw and material things - life, body, food, clothing, housing, marriage, etc. - without which there could not be any fine and spiritual things. However, these fine and spiritual things were, nevertheless, present in the class struggle between slave and master, or serf and feudal lord, or wage laborer and capitalist in a different way than as the representation of a booty, loot, or prey, which fell to the winner, or victor. The spiritual things were present and alive in the class struggle as confidence, courage, humor, cunning, ruse, and determination. Also these spiritual things were effective back into the distance of time. These spiritual things would always put into question anew every victory that ever fell to the rulers. Just as flowers turn their head toward the sun, so too by the power of a secret heliotropism does the past turn toward the sun, which was in the process of rising at the heaven of history. According to Benjamin, the historical materialist had to know, understand and comprehend this most insignificant and unprepossessing of all changes. From his early *Theological-Political Fragment* on to his last essay *On the Notion of History*, written shortly before his death, Benjamin tried to combine and reconcile Scholem's Jewish mysticism and his friend Bertholt Brecht's version of historical materialism. Both friends, however, considered such a reconciliation to be problematic, if not impossible. In his critical theory of society and religion, Benjamin concretely superseded historical idealism and historical materialism, Hegel and Kant as well as Marx. Benjamin's critical theory of society and religion, which penetrated the particular social phenomena into the depth of the antagonistic, class-warfare totality of modern civil society, was - long before that of Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse and Fromm, Habermas and Honneth - as such dialectically related to a communicative and political praxis directed toward the modification at least of alternative Future I, the prevention of alternative Future II, and the promotion of alternative Future III.

### ***Class Struggle***

This class struggle cannot completely be hidden even inside the most advanced

industrial societies. During the Presidential campaign of 2015-2016 in the USA, the class struggle was almost completely ignored. Only Vermont Senator, Bernard “Bernie” Sanders, a Social Democrat who sought the Presidential nomination of the Democratic Party, appealed to the working/precarious class and to the young as he campaigned to alleviate their oppression by the neoliberal/neoconservative capitalist system. Throughout the campaign, which he lost, Sanders continually criticized Hillary Rodham Clinton, who won the Democratic Party’s nomination, as well as the Republican candidate, Donald J. Trump, for favoring the one percent of the capitalist class in American civil society. Both Clinton and Trump appealed to the middle and power-elite classes beyond the \$50,000 income mark, while the majority of Americans earn less. However, a vast majority of the 130 million American workers think that they belong to the middle class. They are most deeply and intensely and mostly unconsciously engaged in false consciousness and self-willed servitude. They hide their real class-status and support their false class-consciousness by overloading their credit cards and thus getting deeper into debt. The Keynesian Hitler’s first economic criticism in the Weimar Republic was directed against credit slavery. The same picture unfolds in the present - 2016 - Presidential campaign, in which candidates represent democratic socialism, Roosevelt liberalism, neo-liberalism, and fascism on the basis of a civil society, in which the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the working class is much deeper today than it was in the time of Marx or of Benjamin, and deepens continually as reflected only too clearly in the huge income discrepancies between owners and workers. The democratic socialist Senator Bernhard Sanders ran as a Democrat, since there does not exist a viable labor party in the USA, and the fascist Trump runs as a Republican, since there exists no viable fascist party. While traditionally in America the Democratic Party has the task of stopping socialism, while the Republican Party has the task of stopping fascism in order thus to balance and stabilize the bourgeois system of domination. In the 2016 Presidential campaign, the Democratic Party is more effective in curbing socialism than the Republican Party is in curbing fascism. The balance of the system is in danger!

### ***Religion***

As far as religion is concerned, while in his *Philosophy of Religion* Hegel had

comprehended the religion of the West, Christianity, as the Absolute Religion in which all the other positive religions, dead and alive, were concretely superseded, Benjamin and the other critical theorists considered Christianity to be a more advanced, but nevertheless still a relative, positive world-religion, situated among other still living relative, positive world-religions, like Taoism - the *Religion of Measure*, Hinduism - the *Religion of Imagination*, Buddhism - the *Religion of Inwardness*, Judaism - the *Religion of Sublimity*, and Islam, the *Religion of Law*.<sup>17</sup> To be sure, for Benjamin and most of the Jewish critical theorists of the first generation, the Jewish religion played an important role. While Hegel had found the goal of the history of religions in Christianity as the *Religion of Freedom*, the critical theorists foresaw and promoted the inversion, i.e. determinate negation, of Jewish, Christian, and Buddhist, and all other religious semantic and semiotic materials and potentials into the secular critical theory of society, and beyond that into the likewise profane discourse of expert cultures, and through them into emancipatory communicative and political action in globalizing late capitalist society, in opposition to all possible relapses of modern civil society into paganism, and the barbarism of involuntary and voluntary serfdom.

### ***Fascist Alliance***

Unfortunately, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during Benjamin's lifetime, even different paradigms of Christianity allied themselves with fascist domination and enslavement, as the example of Hitler's Pope, Pius XII, and of many other ecclesiastical officials shows only too clearly and sadly. The *Via della Conciliazione*, which leads to the Saint Peter's Square and Basilica in Rome, reminds all visitors of Benito Mussolini's *Lateran Treaty* with the Vatican, and of Adolf Hitler's *Empire Concordat* with the Vatican, which is still valid today - in 2016 - in the German Federal Republic, and in general of the reconciliation between Roman Catholicism and pagan fascism. The recent beatification of 18 Spanish and 1 Croatian clerico-fascists and of over 100 Chinese-Christian participants in the Boxer imperialism makes us wonder whether Christian endorsement of voluntary or involuntary enslavement has fully been repented. However, there have, of course, also been heroic and liberating exceptions from this fatal Right-wing tradition in Christianity, which reaches in more recent times at least from Donoso Cortez to Carl

Schmitt: e.g. the recently beatified Edith Stein, and Father Kolbe, and Archbishop Romero. It must not be forgotten that also Benjamin carried with him a letter addressed to monasteries in fascist Spain, which were willing to help and rescue the stateless Jewish refugee on his way to Lisbon and New York, and to the *Institute for Social Research* at Columbia University. His possession of this letter even led to the false identification of his being a Christian. While Benjamin was dying in a Portbou hotel owned by a fascist Falange party member and frequented by Gestapo officials, Benjamin was not only mistaken as a medical doctor, but also as a Roman Catholic believer, who thus received the Last Rites, the seventh Sacrament for the Sick and Dying of the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, the letter did not help. Thus, it must still be asked why Christianity did not become the overall target of Anti-Semitism, or Anti-Judaism, since it was also a *Semitic religion*. In its beginning, at least for the first 70 years, Christianity was a legitimate Jewish sect, like the Essenes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Zealots. The initiators of Christianity - John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth and Paul of Tarsus - were Jews, not Christians. Quite correctly, critical theorists have asked such questions before and particularly after Auschwitz and Treblinka. During Benjamin's life time, many Southern German and Austrian Catholic villages had a cross standing at their entrance with a sculpture of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth hanging on it. During the fascist period, the farmers often put a sign in front of the cross reading: *Jews are not wanted here*. The farmers were obviously not aware that the man who was hanging on the cross, and whom they worshipped in their churches, was a Jew. They had become monophysitists, who abstracted from many of the human qualities of the Nazarene. He redeemed them from their sins, so that they had nothing further to do. Thus, the sinful world remained the same: including Anti-Semitism. The Catholic Adolf Hitler, who admired the reactionary Roman Emperor Julian Apostata, nevertheless thought that Jesus of Nazareth was a great man, a theoretical genius, as he considered himself to be a practical, political genius. However, according to the fascist race-anthropology, a Semite could never be a great man, not even the Mufti of Jerusalem, not to speak of a Jew. Thus, Hitler with the help of the Talmud made Jesus out to be at least a half Aryan: Jesus was supposed to be the son of an Aryan, a Galilean-Roman occupation soldier in Galilee, and a Jewish mother, Mary. All that may answer some of the questions of the critical theorists of society.

### ***The New Critical Theory***

While Kant had initiated the critical theory of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Hegel and Marx constituted the critical theory of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Benjamin, Horkheimer, and Adorno and their colleagues started and developed the critical theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the framework of the *Institute of Social Research* or the Frankfurt School. The critical theory of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must necessarily supersede concretely in itself the critical theories of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in order to be successful in the attempt to promote further enlightenment and emancipation in globalizing advanced capitalist society and beyond, and to overcome its different forms of false consciousness and involuntary and mainly self-willed servitude: e.g., that of millions of American workers voting for the billionaire Trump as their choice of a Presidential candidate in 2016.<sup>18</sup> As in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, once again in the 21<sup>st</sup> century people will have to unite themselves with each other in one form or another in order to form the new critical theory of society and give it a home as independently and as irreconcilably as it is possible for human beings with their specific past and education: no matter how modestly but nevertheless without conformism and defection, without dilettantism and academic assiduity and zeal. What counts are not the means, e.g. academic research institutes, grants, titles, offices, awards, etc., but rather what is essential: i.e. a theory that incorporates non-identity-thinking. No threat against critical thinking or thinkers must be allowed to become the rationalization for not searching desperately for the word that can turn into force, in order thus to be liberated from it. No fatalistic consequences must be drawn from gloomy prospects concerning the possibility and probability of alternative Futures I and II. As little as the critical theorists of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are those of the 21<sup>st</sup> century allowed politically or privately to rid themselves of their responsibility and liability, and to live in the sense of *apres nous le deluge* (after us the deluge). The critical theorists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would remember Walter Benjamin best and honor him most if they would accept this as their responsibility and liability.

### ***Reduction of the Individual***

Such responsibility and liability cannot be carried out without continual - what

Benjamin himself had called - *anamnestic solidarity* with and motivation by great critical theorists of the past and their works. This solidarity creating remembrance is the revolutionary substance of Benjamin's incomplete and fragmentary *Arcades Project*, and particularly his early *Theological-Political Fragment* of 1920/1921/1938,<sup>19</sup> and his final essay *On the Notion of History* of 1940. These works not only deeply moved his friend, the Marxist playwright Brecht, but also influenced most profoundly Horkheimer's essay *Reason and Self-Preservation*, and his essay on the *Authoritarian State*, and most of all his and Adorno's common work *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which became the foundation for the further development of the critical theory of society of the by now globalized *Frankfurt School*, and which is still of greatest actuality today in 2016. For Benjamin, such historical remembrance of past revolutionary/emancipatory theory and praxis in history - that is concretely understood as the unending time of ruling-class domination and warfare - is the dialectical truth of the oppressed classes' solidarity in the historical struggle for their emancipation and happiness, if not redemption. For Benjamin (1968:253-264, par. 254), the past contains a "temporal index" that refers to and cries out for the redemption of those who were denied justice. Redemption is thus not something that will come possibly from the future, but rather is rooted in the remembrance by the living of the past oppression, sufferings, loss of life-chances and death of the innocent (ibid:264). Unlike Horkheimer, who argued against Benjamin's theologically grounded position in a letter of March 16, 1937, by saying, "Past injustice has occurred and is completed. The slain are really slain. ... unhappiness is sealed by death," Benjamin (1999:471) emphasized the openness of history;

"that history is not simply a science *but also and not least a form of remembrance (Eingedenken)*. What science has 'determined,' remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete suffering into something incomplete. That is theology; but in remembrance we have an experience that forbids us to conceive of history as fundamentally a theological, little as it may be granted us to try to write it with immediately theological concepts."

This response is expressive of Benjamin's Messianic, inverse, apocalyptic theology that



permeates every aspect of his critical theory. As Benjamin (2002:305-306) stated in his very short essay, "Theological-Political Fragment," it is only the Messiah who can redeem and thereby complete history through its end in the Messianic new creation. Of course, such revolutionary and solidarity-creating remembrance defies the historicist's and positivist's class ideology of history as nothing more than a progressive continuum of a homogenized, empty time in which the rulers further their own class interests and domination of nature, society and history. As positivism is the perversion of the enlightenment into the reifying myth of the existing status quo, historicism is the distortion of history into the mythology of progress that legitimates the continuing barbarism of the ruling class (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972:x; Benjamin 1969:253-264; 1999:456-488). Through such anamnestic solidarity with the innocent victims of the past class-war horror and with their fight for emancipation and happiness, the living are endowed thereby "with a weak Messianic power" to redeem their memory and their struggle in the midst of the continuing class war for Future Alternative III. This solidarity, which Benjamin held on to into the last months of his life in Marseilles, France, in 1940, in the form of his final essay *On the Notion of History*, stood in closest connection with the core of Horkheimer's essays and his and Adorno's common book, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: i.e., the suspension of the reduction of the individual in the monopolistic civil society, which occurs particularly through false consciousness and voluntary enslavement. Benjamin's critique of the Social-Democratic notion of *progress* in his *On the Notion of History*, and Horkheimer's critique of the *mass party* in his essay on the *Authoritarian State* hit the same core point. Benjamin's, Horkheimer's and Adorno's request and critique is concretely to be superseded into the critical theory of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### ***Culture of Amnesia***

In recent years, Peter Sloterdijk, one of the present leaders of the post-modern school of thought with its culture of amnesia and strategies of forgetfulness concerning the innocent victims of past and present involuntary and self-willed enslavement, was deeply mistaken, when he - motivated by Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger - assumed that the

tradition of critical thinking through the past three centuries was broken, and that the critical theory of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was dead after the breakdown of the Soviet Empire in 1989. The present actuality of Benjamin's, Horkheimer's, and Adorno's life and work is certainly a strong indication, that the critical theory is well and very much alive. The declaration that the critical theory is - as it was once said about Hegel and Schopenhauer - *a dead dog*, is at best apologetics in the interest of late capitalist society, and as untrue as Karl Popper's attack against the *enemies* of the *open*, i.e., traditional and modern civil society: Plato, Hegel, Marx, the critical theorists, and many others. What is Sloterdijk's traditional, postmodern, or better still anti-modern theory of forgetfulness in comparison with Benjamin's critical theory of society and religion, characterized by anamnestic solidarity with the innocent victims of past and present and future voluntary as well involuntary enslavement? Contrary to Benjamin's critical theory, Sloterdijk's traditional theory does not mean progression to alternative Future III - a society characterized by the freedom of All, a civilized rather than a civil society that vacillates between decadence and barbarism, but regression from the freedom of the Few in present bourgeois society to alternative Future I - a society determined by the freedom of the One, and the voluntary or involuntary servitude of the Many, and finally to utter barbarism, or even to alternative Future II - a militaristic society finally engaging in ABC culture wars. As of July 22, 2016, the U.S.A. and Russia possess over 90% of the 15,500 known nuclear weapons in the world.<sup>20</sup> In a class action trial in Florida, USA on June 11, 2000, attorney Stanley Rosenblatt delivered his closing argument against the American tobacco industry in the interest of 700,000 ill people by paraphrasing Winston Churchill's praise of the Royal Air Force during the "Battle of Britain":

*"Never have so few caused so much harm to so many for so long, and the day of reckoning has arrived"* (Wall Street Journal 2000).

The statement is indeed prophetic in the best Jewish, Christian and Islamic sense of the word: remembrance of the victims instead of *amnesia!*

### ***Reason as Self-Preservation***

For too long in the West, reason has been made identical with self-preservation and

domination. Auschwitz can be understood only as the no longer to be surpassed, most extreme consequence of the liberal ideology in the tradition of Hobbes, de Sade, Nietzsche, Bentham, Malthus, Fordism, Taylorism, scientific management, etc. Fascist Europe was the first fulfillment of the technical rationality and efficiency-philosophy, which affected even the opponents: the United States and the former Soviet Union. In spite of all the differences between events like Auschwitz and Treblinka, Coventry and London, Stalingrad, Kursk and Berlin, Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or Hanoi, they have, nevertheless, one thing in common: the coldly and brutally calculating and manipulating, most cruel and murderous reason as an organ of self-preservation and domination, which with utter contempt for individual human beings has cleared up and done away with the last rationalist illusion: the Ego organized for life, the synthetical unity of the person. Since World War II, the Ego has continued to shrink in antagonistic civil society. Ego-weakness has been spreading continually at least since the 1920's. The tendency toward the shriveling of the Ego has been identical with the process of the expropriation of the middle bourgeoisie.

### ***Disintegration of Culture***

The shrinking and weakening of the bourgeois Ego has contributed most intensely to the rising of voluntary servitude in antagonistic civil society. The logical end of this process may very well be the disintegration of culture, as predicted by de Sade and Nietzsche. Today, under the auspices of liberalism, neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism, deconstructionism, neo-fascism, etc., continues the internalization of the external, compulsive, functional system-connection of advanced capitalism and its rigorous work-discipline, which had been initially forced upon the masses in the 18<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries against massive resistance and under great sacrifices, and which still in the 21<sup>st</sup> century makes most people do voluntarily what they have to do anyway. Even in present-day Euro-American universities, this technocratic tendency - including the administrative mania for increasing curricular assessment and the epistemological prioritizing of knowledge to the academic disciplines of the "hard" sciences, technology, engineering, and mathematics, aka. S.T.E.M. - threatens to swallow up all human or cultural studies

and social sciences, or at least push them to the fringes of academic life.<sup>21</sup> The global imperialism of neoliberal and neoconservative capitalism also includes its colonization of the academic life-world by the interests and demands of trans-national corporations, which reduces all schools of the academe and culture into being little more than means of corporate production, as it creates human beings into one-dimensional automatons as another facet of modernity's "progress" toward alternative Future I and alternative Future II. Why else the continuation of the high level of armament production after the end of the cold war? The main concern of the *Institute for Social Research* at the University of Frankfurt and at Columbia University was not so much the classical anthropological definition of human beings as *animal rationale*, but rather the ambiguous history of human rationality from Antiquity through the Middle Ages to Modernity, as the source not only of the real possibilities of the alternative Futures I - total administration, or alternative Future II - chronic warfare including illegal and immoral drone assassination attacks with much collateral damage in other sovereign nations - but of the right possibility of alternative Future III - the realm of concrete freedom.

### ***Split Personality***

The voluntary enslavement in antagonistic bourgeois society is not only made possible by the shrinking of the Ego and its increasing weakness, but also by its being split. Fascism tried to promote the break down of the split personality. As a matter of fact, the split of the Ego, as it appeared under fascism, had already a long pre-history. What happened under fascism was only the consummation of a trend of split personality that permeated the whole modern era. The split personality had made itself felt not only within the old juxtaposition of theological and scientific truth, but much more drastically within the division of labor and leisure, of private morals and business principles, of private and public life, and in innumerable other aspects of the existing order, or disorder, of civil society. What fascism did with respect to the split personality was only to manipulate consciously and skillfully a break, which itself was based on the most fundamental mechanisms of antagonistic civil society itself. The unity of the personality, as soon as it went beyond the sphere of logical formalism, always had been an ideology,

i.e. an untruth: the gulf between logic and psychology expressed that most clearly. The fascists had destroyed this ideology in order to reproduce arbitrarily the split of the personality, which had been produced already by civil society itself. There was not any reason why this attempt of the fascists should have collapsed from within: not any intrinsic reason. It certainly could not be broken through inner inconsistencies, but only through the action of those who resisted it. To be sure, the development of the split personality has been inherent in the very condition of antagonistic modern society from its very start. This psychological antagonism by itself can never lead to the collapse of any fascist or any pre- or post- or neo-fascist capitalist system. Therefore, the fascist regime could only be overthrown by conscious political and military action. The fundamental modern personality split between theological and secular scientific truth had been most thoroughly described already by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Religion*. It also plays a core role in Horkheimer's and Adorno's - Benjamin inspired - *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The non-ideological and non-manipulative resolution of this personality split between the religious and the secular, through the migration of semantic and semiotic potentials from the depth of the mythos into the secular discourse among the expert cultures, and through them into communicative action of the life world, still characterized by mimetic rationality and mediated by personal morality, and even into the economic subsystem of modern action systems, characterized by instrumental rationality and mediated by money, and into the political subsystem, characterized by functional rationality and mediated by power, remains a fundamental task of the critical theory of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Such resolution of the personality split and the related problem of Ego-shrinking and -weakness is a necessary precondition for the successful resistance particularly against self-willed enslavement in late capitalist society.

### ***Mass Idols***

The mass idols of civil society - that appear in sports, music, television, movies, etc. - continue intensely to promote Ego-shrinkage and -weakness and the further splitting of the personality. The mass idols, or heroes, who's biographies have appeared in the popular American and European magazines throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well as the

categories in which they have been treated, belong decisively to the realm of consumption. This reflects indeed the receptive state of masses' mind in antagonistic civil society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the unconscious admission that the sphere of production and active transformation no longer offers any more opportunities. This can be proven by comparative content analyses concerning the biographical heroes that are portrayed in the periodicals of the 21<sup>st</sup> century with those in the same kind of periodicals in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when they were industrialists, great bankers, and representatives of real culture. While on one hand the collection of biographies of mass idols represented just one more section of modern mass culture, of which Benjamin and all other critical theorists had a clear picture, this phenomenon, however, also contained the dream of a future humankind, which might center its interests around happiness, not in the harshness of labor and production, but rather in the enjoyment of sensuous goods in the broadest sense of the term.

### ***Life of Innocence***

While during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, historical information for the masses in antagonistic civil society became a web of lies and of ridiculous accumulation of the most insignificant facts and figures, the same masses showed by their ways of consumption a longing for a life of innocence in consuming and a hate against the identity of production and death. From their own inner life and experience Benjamin and the other critical theorists could deduce more and more in and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century how hateful the whole idea of production in the sense of permanent changes, transformations, continual assessments, incessant treatment of man and nature by machines and organizations, became to the unconscious and even conscious life of the majority of people living in late capitalist society. In a certain sense, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the biographies of heroes of popular magazines in European and American civil societies were over all quite similar. However, they were different as well. The European material falsified history by an enchanting net of profound metaphysical and meta-psychological phantasmagorias. The American material was just the reverse and instead of taking history too seriously, it took it for being too funny. However, the European and the American biographical

material were similar, nevertheless, in that both represented distorted utopias of a concept of humanity, to which Benjamin and the other critical theorists stood in an affirmative way. They both implied the unconditional importance of the real, living and existing individual: his or her dignity and happiness.

### *Prophets, Saints and Martyrs*

Of course, the world religions, particularly Judaism, Christianity and Islam, have their own heroes - prophets, saints, martyrs - as counter-heroes to the mass idols of antagonistic modern civil society. They carry their own utopian message: the Messianic new heaven and new earth. During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II beatified and canonized over 1,500 heroic saints to be imitated by the believers on their way to the Messianic kingdom of heaven. One of them was an American nun Katharine Drexel, who gave 25 million dollars back to the poor classes in the form of schools, particularly for African-American and Native-American children, which her rich capitalist family had appropriated from their white, black and red parents and grandparents in the form of surplus value. She knew from the Gospels, of course, that no rich man, or woman can possibly enter the kingdom of heaven, for which communism is a precondition, because he or she necessarily lives from the surplus labor of others. Sister Drexel thus made it possible for African-American and Native-American children to move from the lower involuntary enslavement of their ancestors in antagonistic civil society to a higher self-willed serfdom, which still produced surplus value for their masters, and now even more so, because their skills and thus productivity were so much greater than those of their forefathers. There are, of course, not too many capitalists who give the surplus value, which they have appropriated from their workers through decades and generations, back to them: for example, like Oskar Schindler from Frankfurt am Main, who used the surplus value which he had robbed from his Jewish ghetto workers in Poland to buy 1,200 of them back from the SS commandos, and thus rescue them from exploitation and annihilation in Auschwitz. He regretted for the rest of his life that he had wasted so much of it, and had not given more, e.g., his gold watch. Of course, alternative Future III - the right society - would be one that would no longer be in need of any such secular heroes or

religious prophets, saints and martyrs, and their enormous sacrifices.

### ***The Disintegration of the Individual***

In spite of all secular or religious heroes, in antagonistic modern civil society, there nevertheless continues the transformation, or rather disintegration of the individual through the monopolistic and oligopolistic *apparatus*; the triumph of the exchange value over the use value; the elevation of the absolute and relative surplus value to the level of the highest closure-value of bourgeois culture beyond democracy, monotheism or monogamy; the absolutization of the most extreme commodity-fetishism and idolatry; and the continual massive utilization, accumulation and concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands in more or less hostile, or friendly national and international take-overs and mergers, and particularly through the immediate technical working process. This happens not only in the world of work, but in the leisure time as well. To be sure, all anti-technical movements have had a reactionary character. If new moral catastrophes are to be avoided, it is high time that instrumental and functional rationality and action - rooted in what Hegel (1983, 1971) had called the human potential of work and tool and driven by self-preservation and the will to power and domination - be balanced by a mimetic, communicative, anamnestic, erotic, and mutually recognizing rationality and praxis, rooted in the evolutionary universals of language and memory, sexuality and eroticism, the struggle for recognition, and community. Benjamin was before all other critical theorists a great advocate of mimetic and communicative rationality and praxis.

### ***Forgetfulness or Remembrance***

Those who in globalizing late capitalist society forget the horror of recent history and do not learn what not to do from it, namely, not to yield passively to false consciousness and voluntary enslavement, are condemned, continually to repeat it: terror, cruelty, boredom and eternal return. According to the Rabbi Israel Ben Elieser, the Baal Shem-Tov - the founder of Hasidism, forgetfulness leads to further *exile*, while remembrance alone is the secret of *redemption*. Alternative Future III - the freedom of All, is the home for which everyone longs, and has never been. In some parts of the world - in Northern



Michigan, along the Californian or Adriatic coast, or in Hawaii, or along the French Riviera, or in the Swiss Alps - almost every day nature is a symbol for the possibility that the earth could be a paradise rather than a concentration camp if the unleashed instrumental rationality and action of self-preservation and power could be tamed by real and genuine thinking and thoughtful praxis, no matter how difficult that may be, in the interest of alternative Future III - human freedom, happiness and solidarity. Benjamin's work can be of greater help even in promoting the turn-over of individual and collective self-preservation into alternative Future III - the liberation of the individual and the universal, i.e. anamnestic, present and proleptic solidarity - than even that of his colleagues and friends in the *Institute for Social Research* in Frankfurt, New York and Los Angeles, whom he influenced, inspired and motivated so deeply.

### ***The Notion of History***

In August 1941, Benjamin's friend, the Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht (1993:159), wrote in his *Work-Journal* concerning Benjamin's last essay *On the Notion of History*. Günther Stern, the former husband of Hannah Arendt, gave the article to Brecht and commented how dark and confused it was. Brecht did not see it that way, but wrote that the treatise presented the very difficult issues that it addressed quite clearly and simply. Benjamin wrote this last essay a few months before his suicide in Portbou, a little railroad town between France and Spain, on the night of September 26/27, 1940. In composing this essay, Benjamin followed the model of the romantic philosopher, Meister Eckhart scholar, and Hegel's friend, Franz von Baader's thesis-like *Elementary Notions on the Time as Introduction to the Philosophy of Society and History* (Friesen 2004). Baader, according to the critical theorist and *religious sociologist* Leo Löwenthal (1987:220), had developed a religious philosophy of redemptive mysticism and of solidarity with society's lowest classes. Baader had rehabilitated the mystical as the kernel of a conservative orientation. The vanguard position of this arch-conservative Catholic philosopher of religion, Baader, particularly his political morality and his affinity to those who suffer in this world, to the *Proletärs* as he called them, had not only very much attracted Benjamin, but also Löwenthal, and other critical theorists. From Baader, Benjamin had learned his deep insight that history had always been written by

the victors. Like Baader, so Benjamin was always interested in writing the history of the *losers*. Baader himself had been such a *loser*: a lone figure of German restoration philosophy. Benjamin would become all the more such a *loser* as fascism became victorious in establishing first voluntary and then involuntary enslavement in Germany and then all over Europe. Precisely because of this, Benjamin (1996a:356; 1987:233) found it necessary *to hope for the sake of the hopeless*. Even now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, neo-conservative bourgeois politicians, such as the former President George W. Bush, and the neo-fascist, 2016 Republican Party Presidential candidate Donald Trump, speak of low-energy and stupid *losers*, and are convinced of and express publicly the social-Darwinistic principle that under all circumstances there must be winners and losers. As a justification of the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act” (the Welfare Reform Act) of 1996, a neo-conservative American Congressional Representative, Rep. John Mica, R-Florida, stated that too much welfare for the poor classes was not good for them because, like the animals in the zoo, they would forget how to hunt.<sup>22</sup> In the perspective of neo-conservatism, late capitalist society must indeed be a jungle.

### ***Critical Elements***

There were, indeed, also truly critical elements in Baader’s otherwise conservative theory of society and history, that being his religious sociology. Baader saw through and criticized that which was bad in liberalism, including a naive and vain enlightenment psychology, which masked the voluntary enslavement in late bourgeois society. Liberalism promised the full realization of the human potential for All, but in reality paid for the emancipation of the Few with the voluntary or even involuntary servitude of the Many. The present Presidential candidate for 2016, Hilary Clinton, and her husband, the former President Bill Clinton, are good examples for such liberalism, as they pretend to help the working class, while they are highly paid and enriched by the bourgeois ruling class, which would have stopped paying them long ago if they had not delivered so well. It is the democratic socialist and Presidential candidate, Senator Bernhard Sanders, who continually uncovers and exposes what is bad in liberalism. Aristotle (1996) already knew that money kills democracy: plutocracy and material democracy are incompatible. Either the people or money rules! Benjamin collected and concretely superseded the

critical elements from Baader's religious sociology into his own critical theory of society and religion, particularly into his last essay *On the Notion of History*, in which it found its summary and conclusion. Long before Herbert Marcuse, Baader coined the concept of *one-dimensional thinking* as being characteristic of modern industrial society. Baader had become a spokesman for the proletariat in his critique of liberal society. Baader had not only the word *proletarian*, as did the likewise arch-conservative Catholic thinkers Bonald and De Maistre, but he had also a very strong sympathy for a proletarian society. Baader conceived of the proletarian society as an alliance between the Church and the nation's lower classes against the secularized bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, Baader's conservative philosophy had this way of not submitting to what seemed to be the going trend in modern civil society, and of having compassion for those who were enslaved voluntarily or involuntarily in its progress, for its very significant motif and motivation. In the further globalization of bourgeois society, proletarians, or precarians, have been all of those who find themselves in voluntary, not to speak of immediately forced servitude. According to Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in fascist Germany and Europe, the Jews had taken the place that once had been occupied by the proletariat in traditional and modern civil society. Today, in the 21st century, huge working classes continue to exist in all civil societies, but they cannot be called proletarian any longer, if this notion is constituted by the consciousness of the blue and white color workers of their self-willed or involuntary servitude and their exploitation inside and outside of bourgeois society. Proletarian is not only a matter of being, but also of consciousness, which is supposed to and normally would follow the former, but sometimes does not. In the later case, such a needed class consciousness is turned into a false consciousness, which makes liberation difficult, to say the least.

### ***Historical Research***

In Brecht's (1993:159) view, Benjamin's Baader-influenced last essay *On the Notion of History* dealt with historical research. Brecht (2016) thought that it came very close to his own novel-fragment *The Business Affairs of Mr. Julius Cesar*, which Benjamin knew very well. In Brecht's perspective, in his last essay Benjamin rightly turned against the representations of history as course of events, of progress, as a powerful enterprise of

well rested heads, of work as the source of social morality, of the working class as protégés of technology, etc. In Brecht's perspective, Benjamin ridiculed rightly the often heard sentence of how something like fascism could still happen in this 20<sup>th</sup> century, as if it was not the fruit of all the centuries of Western so-called civilization. Shortly, according to the extremely secular Brecht, Benjamin's last essay was clear, disentangling, unraveling and clarifying, in spite of all its theological, i.e. Messianic metaphors and Judaism's. Brecht thought with horror of how small the number had become of those people, who, like Stern, were ready at least to misunderstand something like Benjamin's essay *On the Notion of History*. Only very recently have people from the European Union and the United States asked once again, more equally naively, how something like the most cruel and bloody 1991-1999 Yugoslavian civil war, as well as the most deadly wars of regime change in Iraq (2003), in Libya (2011), in Syria (2011 - present), and in Ukraine (2014) could possibly still happen in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, as if they were not the result of these most murderous centuries, and of the many previous centuries of European history. Already in the *Introduction* to his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel (1956:21; 1967:808) had called this horror a *slaughter-bench* in his *Phenomenology a Golgotha*. In his book *The World as Will and Representation*, Arthur Schopenhauer (1969, 1958) - Hegel's archenemy who criticized him for his *curse of optimism* - also described this tragic development of modern civil society in terms that attributed all of the world's suffering, horror, and death to life's metaphysical "will to live." This was a book that Adolf Hitler carried as soldier in his rucksack throughout World War I, but was influenced Sigmund Freud in discovering the death drive in the human psyche. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* was certainly not less realistic in its description of the horror of European or even human history than the work of Schopenhauer, the father of occidental metaphysical pessimism, influenced by Buddhism, the *Religion of Inwardness*, as well as by Christianity. Such a denial of the negative in Hegel's philosophy is the result of amnesia!

### ***The Butcher***

Brecht (Wizisla 2009:184) dedicated the most beautiful obituary in the form of a

poem that summed up the final part of the life of his fallen friend Benjamin, who had escaped Spanish, French and German fascist voluntary and involuntary enslavement through his suicide by an overdose of morphine pills:

*On the Suicide of the Refugee W.B.*

*I'm told you raised your hand against yourself  
Anticipating the butcher.  
After eight years in exile, observing the rise of the enemy  
Then at last, brought up against an impassable frontier  
You passed, they say, a passable one.  
Empires collapse. Gang leaders  
Are strutting about like statesmen. The peoples  
Can no longer be seen under all those armaments.  
So the future lies in darkness and the forces of right  
Are weak. All this was plain to you  
When you destroyed a torturable body.*

Not quite five years later, in April 1945, the fascist enemies, butchers, and gang leaders - Adolf Hitler and his Propaganda Minister and designated successor Dr. Joseph Goebbels, who were both Schopenhaurians, and who had driven Benjamin to heroically take his own life in Portbou, themselves cowardly committed suicide in the bunker of the Chancellery in Berlin. In doing this, they evaded their co-responsibility for the death of 70 million people and avoided the most fallible court, prosecution, defense, judgment and punishment of the Nürnberg Trial, arranged and carried out by their liberal and socialist enemies.

***Will to Life***

At Heidelberg University in July, 1921, Benjamin attended a one-hour lecture by the nationally recognized, Jewish-German literary scholar from the Stefan George circle, Friedrich Gundolf, who counted Joseph Goebbels as one of his admiring students (Benjamin 1994:182; Eiland and Jennings 2014:147-148; Leslie 2007:47). While even in their last days, Hitler and Goebbels discussed over the phone Schopenhauer's philosophy, they contradicted, nevertheless, its advice against suicide in their own praxis. What of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* did the fascist leaders discuss in

their last days in Berlin under the hellish impact of thousands of Russian guns and British and American bombers: the three volumes about the will to life, the aggressive rather than the libidinous component of which they had served so most brutally, or the fourth volume about the redemption from the will to life through art, religion and philosophy? We don't know. Yet, we do know their victim Benjamin's thoughts during the last months, days and hours of his life, as he tried to escape from Fascist Germany, through fascist Vichy-France, through fascist Spain, and through fascist Portugal to the liberal USA, to New York, to freedom, to his friends, the critical theorists, in the *International Institute of Social Research* at Columbia University, which Scholem considered to be bolshevist. As recorded by those who fled with him to Portbou, Benjamin's concern was the survival of his *On the Notion of History*, being not only influenced by Baader, but also by Scholem's Jewish Messianic mysticism, as well as by the liberal Hegel's and socialist Marx's, and socialist Brecht's idealistic - or materialistic-dialectical philosophy of history, and aimed at alternative Future III - the realm of freedom, happiness and redemption.

### ***Ideology Critique***

While this essay has aimed at the development of the critical theory of and for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and has targeted ultimately through political praxis the needed identity change in globalized civil society not toward post-modern, alternative Future I - the totally administered signal society, or post-modern, alternative Future II - the entirely militarized society, but rather toward post-modern, alternative Future III - a society, in which personal sovereignty and universal solidarity would be reconciled, its immediate concern has been with Benjamin's critical theory of society and religion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as ideology critique and as explanation of the voluntary servitude in past and present civil society. Examples of such voluntary servitude are the voluntary enslavement to: credit - or lease - arrangements that are produced by intense, psychoanalytically mediated and supported marketing; to the addiction of drugs, of lottery, of smart telephones, of stocks from the domestic or even more so from foreign surplus value, of innumerable, most time-consuming, sadistic television shows, movies and games, of masochistic pornography without subjectivity, respect, or love, of unending, meaningless and

therefore boring committee meetings on all levels of social institutions and organizations, of assessment mania, of all kinds of healthy and unhealthy food; to the obsession with commercial sports as the new opiate of and for the people; and to the fascination by the now globalized American dream of sex, car and career. These mass culture items, produced by the culture industry, are so many ideological mechanisms through which the masses in modern capitalist society are seduced into and maintained in voluntary, likewise passive and thoughtless obedience to its antagonistic system from day to day, no matter, how just or unjust, or even criminal, its processes, procedures and actions may be. Such ideological mechanisms and the voluntary, systemic enslavement that they foster and promote, point, if they remain unchecked, not toward the arrival of the most desirable alternative Future III, but rather toward the arrival of the most undesirable alternative Futures I and II. While Benjamin's critical theory is one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that of the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be formed without remembering the former if it wants to produce qualitative change in multinational monopoly-capitalist society toward alternative Future III.

### ***Truth as Negation of Ideology***

While here ideology is understood critically simply as untruth, liberating truth is comprehended as the negation of enslaving ideology, or untruth, in antagonistic modern civil society. Already Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth taught that the truth will make us free, if we practice it (John 8:31-32). In spite of all its pluralism and multiculturalism, modern bourgeois society is extremely contradictory in terms of its dichotomies between the religious and the secular, between the genders, between the individual and the collective and between the often racially determined social classes. Globalized advanced industrial society is characterized by a culture of forgetfulness, which in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has lost all recognition of what Hegel had once called the subjective, objective, or absolute spirit in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With the so-called disintegration of the absolute spirit on the Left and the Right, its contents - particularly, art and religion - have been relegated to the subjective and objective spirit, to psychology and sociology. In spite of the fact that psychologism and sociologism are hard to avoid in this situation, the critical theorists

have tried to do so, nevertheless, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In any case, civil society and its so-called culture or civilization have become subject- memory- and love-less, just like the hard pornography they now produce globally. The plurality of critical theories in the civil society of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries witnesses to what Benjamin's student and friend, Theodor W. Adorno (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972:x) called in his spirit the *time-core of the truth*, and operates and militates against the ahistorical hypostatization of each and any of them. For Benjamin, as well as for Adorno and Horkheimer, the critical theory of society was synonymous with the truth itself, understood as the *negation* of ideology as the masking of not only involuntary enslavement, but of voluntary servitude as well, and even most of all, the lack of freedom, happiness, and redemption.

### ***Metaphysician, Critic and Scholar***

On the modern *continuum* between the sacred and the profane, revelation and enlightenment, Benjamin, informed by Scholem, stood obviously much closer to the religious pole than Horkheimer or Adorno or any of the other critical theorists up to Habermas and his disciples. This is true in spite of the fact that Benjamin was unlike Scholem as little a Zionist as any of the first generation of critical theorists, and in spite of the fact that he was a friend of Brecht, who stood closest of all to the profane pole, even to the extreme of a vulgar atheism, i.e., beyond any methodological atheism, which according to Adorno could be rescued only in terms of an *inverse theology* (Adorno and Benjamin 1999:53). According to Benjamin's and Adorno's *inverse theology* - conceived of on the Island of Ibiza in April-July 1932 and in April-September 1933, valid semantic materials and potentials could be rescued only through their being allowed to migrate from the depth of religion into the secular discourse among expert cultures and through it into the liberating political praxis. For Adorno and Benjamin (ibid:108), "a restitution of theology as inverse theology, or better still a radicalization of dialectic into the core of the theological glowing fire, would have to mean at the same time an extreme sharpening of the social-dialectical, even the economical motives." The religious closeness between Scholem and Benjamin explains best the affective bond that connected the Cabbalist with his friend, and which on Scholem's part reached far beyond Benjamin's death for several



decades. Scholem (1941) expressed this religiously grounded, affective bond to Benjamin most beautifully in the dedication to his book *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, which appeared in 1941, one year after Benjamin's death:

*To the Memory of  
Walter Benjamin (1892 - 1940).*

*The friend of a lifetime whose genius united the insight of  
the Metaphysician, the interpretative power of the Critic  
and the erudition of the Scholar.*

*Died At Portbou (Spain)  
On His Way into Freedom.*

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## **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> For the philosophical explanation of this development, see: Siebert 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See: Merton 1957 for his description of these theory labels.

<sup>3</sup> See Benjamin's statements of this dialectical historical methodology: Benjamin 1999:456-488; Benjamin 1968:253-264; Adorno & Benjamin 1999: 52-59, 60-65, 66-73, 82-87, 92-98, 104-116, 116-119; Benjamin 1997:27-56.

<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of Benjamin's dialectical methodology of "constellation" building, see Ott 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Hegel 1974:170-219; Hegel 1987:423-454.

<sup>6</sup> Books comprising a compilation of names of individuals that were/are "specially most wanted" (*Sonderfahndungsliste*) and are to be arrested (Black book) or assassinated (White book.)

<sup>7</sup> See: [http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/5/kill\\_list\\_exposed\\_leaked\\_obama\\_memo](http://www.democracynow.org/2013/2/5/kill_list_exposed_leaked_obama_memo)

<sup>8</sup> See the explanation of this notion of "decisionism" as presented in the works of Carl Schmidt, e.g., (1985, 2008, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> See the National Security Strategy of the United States of America documents at: <http://nssarchive.us/>. For a more expanded and detailed and forthright description of the NSS policies, see the various *Defense Planning Guidance* documents as well as *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America* documents. Also, see the transcript of the 2004 video entitled *Preventive Warriors* in which the imperialist policy of *preventive war vis-vis pre-emptive war* is made: [https://www.journeyman.tv/film\\_documents/2364/transcript/](https://www.journeyman.tv/film_documents/2364/transcript/).

<sup>10</sup> See the televised portion of the October 20, 2011 interview with Clinton where she makes this "joke;" <http://www.globalresearch.ca/hillary-clintons-failed-libya-doctrine/5460175>.

<sup>11</sup> See for example: Marx 1964:132-146.

<sup>12</sup> See: Benjamin 1977:27-56; Benjamin 1968, par. 261-264; 2003:401-411, par. 403; Benjamin 1999:456-488; Horkheimer 1993: 1-14; Horkheimer 1972:188-252; Adorno 1931/1977:120-133; Adorno 1974:par. 244-247; Adorno 1967:227-241; Ott 2016:28-60.

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin 1999:842-843; 544, S1,5; Adorno and Benjamin 1999:104-116.

<sup>14</sup> Ross 2010.

<sup>15</sup> See the following: Burrows 2016; Davidson 2015; Pelaez 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Nelson-Pallmeyer 1997; Gill 2004.

<sup>17</sup> See Hegel's description of these religions in his *Philosophy of Religion* (1987).

<sup>18</sup> See: Siebert 2010.

<sup>20</sup> See the explanation for the different dates listed for Benjamin's writing of this "Fragment" in: Benjamin 2002:306.

<sup>20</sup> See: <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Nuclearweaponswhohaswhat>

<sup>21</sup> On this topic of the corporate colonization of education, see, for example: Adorno 1959:93-121, 1966/1998:191-204; Arum, et al. 2011, Brown 2006:690-714; Chesterton 1991; Chomsky 1967, 2012, 2014; Ginsberg 2011; Giroux 1980:329-366, 2008, 2011, 2014a, 2014b; Hedges 2012; Horkheimer 1972:3-9, 1993:177-215; Horkheimer and Adorno 2011; Kershner 2013.

<sup>22</sup> Rodrigue 1996. *The Free Lance-Star*, Sept. 18, 1996, A 11.

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1298&dat=19960918&id=dOkyAAAIBAJ&sjid=ygcGAAAAIBAJ&pg=6961,2981910&hl=en>

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