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Notes on Anti-Semitism¹

Werner Bonefeld

Preface

These Notes arose from teaching a course on Political Identity in (the former West-) Germany. The Jewish Question in the German question of political/national identity is, of course, an important one; better: it is the fundamental question. Some commentators, for example Dinar (1987) and Rabinbach (1986), speak about a 'negative symbiosis' between the Jewish Question and the German Question post-1945. This is a neat way of focusing and posing the issue. It is a 'negative' symbiosis for basically two reasons. First, after 1945, hardly any Jews remained in Germany and beyond - the Nazis' war aim of exterminating European Jewry has been frightfully 'successful'. Thus, and this is the second aspect of 'negative symbiosis', the 'dead Jews' confront the living Germans in their quest for 'normality'. The so-called 'coping with the past'² was a coping with a past in which Jews were exterminated for the sake of extermination. A measure of this 'coping' can be gleaned from Henryk Broder's remark about the Germans: 'They will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz!'³ Did the desecration of Jewish cemeteries after German unification happen *because* or *despite* of Auschwitz? What do we make of the student-left of 1968 that responded to the Six-Day War of 1967 by suggesting that Israel behaved like Germany had in occupied Poland. What, indeed, do we make of the left's response to the Lebanon War of 1982 when Begin, Israel's then Prime Minister, was said to be a Nazi?⁴ Paraphrasing Broder, 'coping with the past' has more often than not taken the form of exorcising the burden of the dead by persecuting the living Jews in the present.

Auschwitz has, time and time again, been identified, by Conservative historians as well as concerned left-liberals like Habermas, as an obstacle to the reconstruction of national identity in Germany.⁵ However, 'Auschwitz', the word of horror, has become sidelined and replaced by the term 'Holocaust'. This replacement creates a much more abstract, intangible relationship with the deed. Indeed, the word Holocaust not only removed Auschwitz from the vocabulary, its use has also proliferated and has become a generalism: ecological holocaust, global holocaust, etc. The word Auschwitz signals horror. The word Holocaust, however, 'normalises' the horror through its popular usage (Clausen, 1995). The killing of millions is normalised as all trace of annihilation is erased through relativism.

It is, however, not just Auschwitz that is being normalised but, also and importantly, the very conditions through which anti-Semitism existed and persists to this day. Of course, there is a difference between the anti-Semitism that culminated in Auschwitz and the anti-Semitism of the post-1945 world. However, and within the context of these Notes, whether anti-Semitism persists because or despite of Auschwitz is, ultimately, an idle question. This is for two reasons: Firstly, the notions 'despite' and 'because' presuppose that the power of anti-semitic thought was somewhat put to rest at Auschwitz. It thus gives credence to Auschwitz as a factory of death that is assumed to have destroyed anti-Semitism. Furthermore, and connected, anti-Semitism is viewed as a phenomenon of the past, that merely casts its shadow on the present. In this way, overt expressions of anti-Semitism are deemed 'ugly' merely as pathological aberrations of an otherwise civilised world. The assumption thus is that anti-Semitism belongs to capitalism's past history.⁶ However, and anticipating much of the following argument, it is not anti-semitic thought that is anti-semitic in itself. Rather, anti-Semitism belongs to a form of thought that not only rejects reason's historical role to demand human conditions but, also, confuses reason with instrumental rationality. In short, 'reason' is confused with a form of thought that treats the social practice of human labour as a resource for the accumulation of abstract wealth. Anti-Semitism does not 'need' Jews. For anti-Semitism to rage, the existence of 'Jews' is neither incidental nor required. 'Anti-Semitism tends to occur only as part of an interchangeable program', the basis of which is the 'universal reduction of all specific energy to the one, same abstract form of labor, from the battlefield to the studio' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 207). Thus, anti-Semitism belongs to a social world in which sense and significance are sacrificed in favour of compliance with the norms and rules of a political and economic reality that poses sameness, ritualised repetition, and object-less subjectivity as the citizen's only permitted mode of existence. Difference, and therewith the elevation of human dignity to a purpose of social existence, beyond and above the ritualised mentality of empty and idle thought thus stands rejected. The mere existence of difference, a difference that signals happiness beyond a life of rationalised production, fosters the blind resentment and anger that anti-Semitism focuses and exploits but does not itself produce.⁷

Introduction

The following notes are not concerned with recent attempts at normalising Auschwitz. Neither are they concerned with the desecration of Jewish cemeteries after the fall of the Berlin wall and neo-nazi attacks on passers-by because of their 'Jewish' looks. The focus is on that anti-Semitism which found its *raison d'être* in Auschwitz. Is anti-Semitism only a form of racism, a mere prejudice which can be overcome by education and good-will?; or is it a 'hatred of capitalism', a 'hatred of men against money and exploitation', as the late left wing terrorist Ulrike Meinhof suggested?⁸ These notes suggest that anti-Semitism is

different from racism and that it has a direct relationship with 'modernity's' attempt at reconciling its constituting contradiction, that is the class antagonism between capital and labour. These notes go thus beyond a mere commentary on anti-Semitism: the issue is not just 'anti-Semitism' but, rather, the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment. In this way, the notes provide a critique of the 'Enlightenment' through the lenses of 'anti-Semitism'. The argument, in short, is that anti-Semitism has to be seen as subsisting in and through the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment. Without a critique of the Enlightenment, a study of anti-Semitism would merely allow a historical-sociological argument that already presupposes what it wants to show. It presupposes the 'eternity' of anti-Semitism regardless of historical circumstances and thus the changing mode of existence of anti-Semitism. In this way, anti-Semitism becomes to be seen as a fate to which one has to resign oneself, a fate that cannot be put into the museum of history.

In what follows, I have freely borrowed from Horkheimer and Adorno (1989) and Postone (1986). In their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno emphasise that Enlightenment's 'reason' obtains fundamentally and substantially as 'instrumental reason'. There is not a denunciation of 'reason' as such, that is of 'reason' as the illuminating power of human practice and as the categorial imperative that we all live a good, a dignified life. On the contrary, their concern was to criticise instrumental reason in and through which 'reason' subsists in a mode of being denied. Thus, they negate that 'reason' and 'instrumental reason' relate to each other in an external way. They belong together without being identical with each other. The determination of 'reason' as reason being denied in the form of 'instrumental reason' entails that instrumental reason is reason's false friend and that, as such a friend, negates reason's promise to destroy all relations where humanity exists as a resource⁹. The first four theses supply an introductory interpretation of Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of anti-Semitism. Postone's work on anti-Semitism elaborates Horkheimer and Adorno's insights by analysing anti-Semitism through the lenses of Marx's critique of fetishism. These insights will be drawn upon towards the end of these Notes when the argument deals with Nazism's 'anti-capitalist capitalism'.

I

In anti-Semitism, the 'Jewish Question' is posed as one between 'society' and 'community'. 'Society' is identified as 'Jewish'; whereas community is posed as a counterworld to society. Community is seen to be constituted by nature and 'nature' is seen to be undermined by evil social forces. The attributes given by the anti-Semite to Jews include mobility, intangibility, rootlessness and conspiracy against the values and integrity of a traditional community. The presumed 'health' of this community is seen to be at the mercy of evil powers: sexual perversion, intellectual thought, abstract rules, and laws and the disintegrating forces of communism and finance capital. Both, communism and

finance capital are seen as uprooting powers and as entities of reason, both of these are seen as the property and project of the rootless intelligence of 'Jews'. The 'Jew', in view of the anti-Semite, is rootless and seeks to impose rootlessness upon the 'community'. Thus the 'Jew' is projected as some-body who is not part of the family. It is essential not to confuse racism with anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is based on the ideas that 'the Jews are not a nation. They do not speak a language of their own. They have no roots in a *nature*, like the European nations. They claim to have their roots in a book' (Lyotard: 159).¹⁰

II

The desecration of Jewish cemeteries is not a mere excess of anti-Semitism - it is anti-Semitism in its essence (Horkheimer and Adorno: 183).

The 'uprooting' of the final resting place denies not only peace in death it also, and importantly, empties the place of rest, the final place of peace. This refusal of peace appears like a preventive action on the part of the anti-Semite: the Jews who are said to be without roots, are prevented to find roots in death. The depiction 'Jews' as rootless - the 'wandering Jew' - concerns thus not only the living but also the dead. The 'Jew' is refused 'humanity's' mercy to rest in peace. The refusal of a 'homeland' found in death finds its emblematic articulation in the refusal of a peaceful grave.¹¹

III

Anti-Semitism as a national movement was always based on an urge which its instigators held against the Social Democrats: the urge for equality (Horkheimer and Adorno: 170).

Social Democracy saw equality as emanating from the project of the Enlightenment. It urged equality to achieve a just and fair society. This demand focused on citizenship rights for all and on the sphere of distribution where equality of opportunity is seen as a civil good compensating for the absence of humanity at the point of production. Anti-Semitism urges a different sort of equality. Anti-Semite equality appears, at first sight, to be the complete opposite to the form of equality proposed by the project of the Enlightenment. Equality is derived from membership in a *völkisch* community. This equality is one of 'property', the property of land and soil defined by the bond of blood. Blood and soil are configured as the bond of community, of *Volk*. The notion of the original possession of land and the purity of blood amount to a mythical conception of community insofar as possession is construed as a blood-tied property.

Community, then, is the community of equals: *Volksgenossen*. Their perceived original bond with nature is seen to be threatened by the

dark forces emanating from 'society'. Society stands rejected not only because it 'is' rootless but, also, because it declares 'rootlessness' as its purpose: abstract equality before the law is presented as the organisational form of appropriating and accumulating monetary wealth.

The notion of equality based, as it is, on the conception of the soil and blood, defines the Other as a parasite whose objective is to oppress, undermine and pervert the 'natural community' into a society based on the accumulation of abstract and intangible values. 'If the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him' (Sartre: 13).¹² It is the invention of the 'Jew' as the Other, the one that deviates from, and is not allowed to participate in, the community of blood and soil, who serves to provide equality where class conflict and struggle rages: the *Volksgenosse* is an entity defined in terms of natural equality by virtue of its construed antagonistic relationship to the construct 'Jew'. The concept 'Jew' knows no individuality, can not be a man or a woman, and can not be seen as a worker or beggar; the word 'Jew' relates to a non-person. 'The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew' (Sartre: 69). Their 'equality' as Jews obtains as a construct to which all those belong who deviate from the conception of the *Volksgenosse*. In this way, then, 'the portrait of the Jews that the nationalists offer to the world is in fact their own self-portrait' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 168). The naturalisation of the *Volksgenosse* as a *Genosse* of and through blood and soil subsists through the denaturalisation of the Jew as a rootless entity. The *Volksgenosse* portrays himself as rooted in blood and tradition so as to defend his own faith in the immorality of madness. 'The true benefit of the *Volksgenosse* lies in collective approval of anger' (ibid.: 170). This anger is directed towards civilisation's supposed victory over nature, a victory that is seen as condemning the *Volksgenosse* to sweat, toil and physical effort, whereas the Other is seen to live a life as banker and sexual pervert. This the *Volksgenosse* aspires for himself with murder becoming the climax of his aspiration.

For the *Volksgenossen*, the Jews 'are the scapegoats not only for individual manoeuvres and machinations but in a broader sense, inasmuch as the economic injustice of the whole class is attributed to them' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 174). The liberation, then, of community from society is not only conceived as a liberating action but, also, as a moral obligation: anti-Semitism calls for a just revenge on the part of the 'victimised' community against the powers of rootless society. Extermination is thus conceived as the 'victim's' just cause. 'Community' is seen to be both victimised and 'strong'. Strength is derived from the biological conception of community: blood constituted possession and tradition. The *Volksgenosse* sees himself as a son of nature and thus as a natural being. This biologisation of community finds legitimation for murder in the biologisation of the 'action': biology is conceived as a destiny. From this follows the demand to overturn and break society's hold on community in order for the latter to reassert its 'purity'. The purpose legitimates the means. In this view, then, those victimised have the moral high ground on their side, reinforcing the claim to liberation as a moral obligation, whatever the means. 'As a

perfect madman or absolutely rational individual, he destroys his opponent by individual acts of terror or by the carefully conceived strategy of extermination' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 191). Thus the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment where the 'victory of society over nature changes everything into pure nature' (ibid.: 186).

The organised anti-Semite mob does not pretend not to be driven by the thirst of blood: indeed, it is the liberation of 'blood' from Vampire like society which reinforces the mythical conception of the original possession of land, a conception that anticipates the common deed as a bond of shared identity. The urge for destruction and its cold, dispassionate execution - the cruelty of silence in the house of the hangman - realises the project of 'equality' where Social Democracy failed: the rationally executed extermination of millions created an invisible horror far stronger than the invisible hand of the market that social democracy set out to direct in a just way. Why is this horror invisible? True, the horror was visible, even for those who claimed not to have smelled, seen and known. However, invisible still: the common deed remains invisible through its incomprehensibility. Auschwitz is beyond comprehension. 'The soul, as the possibility of self-comprehending guilt, is destroyed' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 198).

In a world where the 'true social individual' (cf. Marx) subsists against itself and thus in the state of individuality denied, the passion for deadly deed is far stronger than the attempt to tame, through a policy of social justice, the invisible hand of the market through the application of reason. The power of reason finds its claim to reason limited by the very forces upon which it depends. The dark side of reason is the invisible which Adam Smith praised for its just and impartial power of distribution. And it is this same power of the invisible which anti-Semitism claims for itself. 'Pogroms demonstrate the impotence of sense, significance, and thus reason and ultimately truth'. The negative dialectic of instrumental reason finds its synthesis at the place where one should expect its presupposition to stand: the cruelty of its beginning, that is the primitive accumulation of capital. Reason that escorted the primitive accumulation of capital with the promise of human dignity, appears transformed into the idle occupation of killing for the sake of killing. Kant's claim that only science is able to lead the common individual to dignity¹³ formulated reason's claim to think beyond itself in order to find salvation in significance and meaning, in humanity. This is reason's moral and indeed revolutionary imperative. However, reason is not one-sided; it has a darker side as de Sade showed. The darker side of reason subsists as instrumental rationality, a joyless rationality interested only in calculability be it in terms of a market rationality or fordist production processes.¹⁴ Indeed, in instrumental rationality, humanity is denied its existence as it is merely conceived as a resource to be integrated into the well-oiled systems of economic production and political machines. Thus, in instrumental reason, significance and meaning are bereft of their revolutionary imperatives and its theoretical project.

The Cartesian dualism between subject and matter emphasises pure reason as an abstract reason devoid of social content and thus in

sharp contrast to reason's claim to lead humanity's exodus from its self-imposed immaturity. The forward march of instrumental reason during the last century does not amount to a destruction of reason as Lukács (1980) claims. Within the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment, instrumental rationality is reason's other - its constituting - self (Horkheimer, 1985). The moral obligation to lead the exodus to a better world and the immorality of instrumental reason are historically and theoretically two halves of the same walnut: Revolution and its containment in the name of revolution itself. 'The thought of happiness without power is unbearable because it would then be true happiness' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 172). Instrumental reason is the mode of existence of the expanded reproduction of the *status quo*. It allows merely technological revolutions and serves the continuous project of bourgeois revolution by fashioning human existence as a resourceful tool for profitable calculation.

Thus, the idle occupation of killing does not deny 'reason'. In fact, it is reason's constitutive other and affirmed itself as such. The industrialised slaughter of millions reinforces reason's instrumental rationality whose concern with efficiency denies both sense and truth. All it knows is how best to achieve the optimum result, how best to increase efficiency be it in terms of produced cars or gassed corpses. The immorality of slaughter only confirms instrumental reason's claim for impartiality, the value-neutral rationality of calculation where no-body is at the same time no-one. Its dispassionate application is mirrored by its disregard for individuality: corpses all look the same when counting the results and they are equal to each other; and nothing distinguishes a number from a number except, of course, the difference in quantity. In anti-Semitism, the urge for equality confirms thus instrumental reason's conception of equality where the mere existence of happiness is a provocation to the rational application of physical effort. Judgement is suspended. 'The morbid aspect of anti-Semitism is not projective behaviour as such, but the absence from it of reflection' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 189). The *Volksgenossen* are thus equal in blindness. 'Blindness is all-embracing because it comprehends nothing' (ibid.: 172).

IV¹⁵

'Anti-Semitism is a passion' [which is] 'not caused by experience but by hatred and fear'. 'There is a passionate pride among the mediocre, and anti-Semitism is an attempt to give value to mediocrity, as such, to create an elite of the ordinary' (Sartre, 1976: 10; 11; 23).

The biologically defined possession of land and tradition is, as was agreed, counterposed to the possession of universal, abstract values. The terms *abstract, rationalist, intellectual* ... take a pejorative sense; it could not be otherwise, since the anti-Semite lays claim to a concrete and irrational possession of the values of the nation' (ibid.: 109). The abstract values themselves are biologised, the abstract is identified as

'Jew'. Both, thus, the 'concrete' and the 'abstract' are biologised: one through the possession of land (the concrete as rooted in nature, blood and tradition) and the other through the possession of 'poison' (the abstract as the rootless power of intelligence and money). The myth (and biology) of national unity is counterposed to the myth (and biology) of the Jew. Tradition is counterposed to reasoning, intelligence, and self-reflection; and the possession of soil is counterposed to the abstract value of international finance and communism. All these abstract values are deemed to be Jewish values: Jewry is seen to stand behind the urban world of crime, prostitution, and vulgar, materialist culture. 'The illusory conspiracy of corrupt Jewish bankers financing Bolshevism is a sign of innate impotence' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 172). Hence, the above reported notion:

'pogroms demonstrate the impotence of sense, significance and ultimately truth. The idle occupation of killing confirms the stubbornness of the life to which one has to conform, and to resign oneself' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 171).

The elevation of soil and tradition to the good, and the stigmatisation of reason and money as evil, confirms the view that those with a 'home', 'tradition', 'roots' and 'soil' are expropriated by vulgar powers. In the struggle between 'good' and 'evil' reconciliation appears neither possible nor desirable. Evil needs to be eradicated in order for the 'good' to be set free. The paradox of this claim seems clear, or so it seems. The attack on 'reason' rests on the employment of reason's other self: instrumental rationality, confirming, rather than denying, the circumstance that Nazism was less an aberration in the forward march of instrumental reason than the transformation of the forward march itself into delusion. 'The unleashed colossi of the manufacturing industries did not overcome the individual by granting him full satisfaction but by eliminating his character as a subject. This is the source of their complete rationality, which coincides with their madness' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 205). Civilisation's supposed victory over nature is assumed to have overcome its own law of impoverishment. This notion which justified the whole system, that of man as a person, a bearer of reason, is 'destroyed' (ibid.: 204). Auschwitz, then, confirms the 'stubbornness' of the principle of 'abstraction' not only through mass killing but also, and because of it, through 'abstractification'. The biologisation of the abstract as 'Jew' denied not only humanity, as the 'Jew' stands expelled from the biologised community of the concrete. The abstract is also *made* abstract: all that can be used is used like teeth, hear, skin; labour-power; and, finally, the abstract is made abstract and thus invisible itself through gas. The invisible hand of the market, identified as the abstract-biological power of the 'Jew', is transformed into the invisible itself. Within the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment, Auschwitz stands for the 'victory' of instrumental reason over reason's moral imperative that we all live a good life in dignity. Reason's claim to lead humanity out of self-imposed immaturity showed

itself as smoked-filled air.

V

No analysis of National Socialism that cannot account for the extermination of European Jewry, extermination for the sake of extermination is fully adequate (Postone: 303).

National Socialism projected itself as an anti-capitalist movement. This projection should not be dismissed out of hand. Yet, National Socialism also embraced industrial capital and new technology. Indeed, according to Aly and Heym (1991), the preparation of the Final Solution in occupied Poland was based less on anti-Semitism as an ideology, but, in fact, followed the instrumental reasoning of resource management. It was 'based', they argue, on meticulous research concerned with the rational planning of resources. Their argument is that, for the Nazis, the economic viability of occupied Poland depended on the reduction of the population per capital in order to secure that capital exported to Poland could be applied efficiently.

How do we approach the apparent contradiction between Nazism's anti-capitalist ideological projection and the rational calculation that proposes mass murder as a 'solution' to capitalist profitability? Nazi anti-Semitism is, as the above has tried to make clear, different from the anti-Semitism of the old Christian world. This does not mean that it did not exploit the anti-Semitism of the old Christian world.

In Christian anti-Semitism, the 'Jew' was also construed as an abstract social power: The 'Jew' stands accused as the assassin of Jesus and is thus persecuted as the son of a murderer. In national anti-Semitism, the Jew was chosen because of the 'religious horror the latter has always inspired' (Sartre: 68).

The 'Jew', in the Christian world, was also a social-economic construct by virtue of being forced to fill the vital economic function of trafficking in money (cf. Horkheimer and Adorno). Thus, the economic curse that this social role entailed, reinforced the religious curse (cf. Sartre).

National anti-Semitism not only uses and exploits these historical constructions but, also, transforms them: The Jew stands accused and is persecuted for following unproductive activities. His image is that of an intellectual. Bankers and intellectuals, money and mind, the exponents of circulation, form the impossible ideal of those who have been maimed by domination, an image used by domination to perpetuate itself (Horkheimer and Adorno: 172).

Thus, in national anti-Semitism, the Jew is portrayed as an entity which stands behind international capitalism and Bolshevism, both at the same time. The Jew as international banker and Bolshevik revolutionary? As was already discussed, Jewry has powers attributed to them which can not be defined concretely. The 'Jew' is seen as one who is not rooted and as such accused to stand behind phenomena: They

represent an immensely powerful, intangible, international conspiracy deemed to uproot the concrete (cf. Postone, 1986).

Why did national anti-Semitism - a secular anti-Semitism - coincide with the political emancipation of Western European Jewry during the 19th Century?¹⁶ The opening of social and political space meant that 'Jews' became visible in society. They entered professions from which they had previously been barred. It was these that expanded during the turn of the century. There appeared to be a sudden increase of Jewish lawyers, scientists, University teachers, hospital doctors, etc. Although, in Germany, only a small percentage of Jews occupied these professions, they became, nevertheless visible. They became visible in areas which were associated with modernity, universality, intellectuality and reason (Postone, 1986).

The political emancipation of European Jewry coincided with a rapid industrialisation with all its 'effects': risk of unemployment, inflationary wage erosion, urbanisation and overcrowding, destruction of crafts and the risk of bankruptcy. The old liberal idea of the self-determining individual mastering his affairs came to an end. What happened to reason's espousal of the self-determining individual? The entrepreneur of laissez-faire capitalism was increasingly replaced by a much more globally organised capitalism which seemed to operate independently from the individual entrepreneurial decision making. This change was captured by Hilferding and others who analysed this development in terms of finance capitalism. The result was the transformation of judgement into compliance with instrumental rationality. 'In spite of, and because of, the evident evil nature of domination, the latter has become so supremely powerful that each individual in his impotence can exercise his fate only by blind obedience' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 199) to the delusion of the invisible hand and its insane political reality.

As was reported above, anti-Semitism identifies 'society' as a perverting force and sees this perversion to be personified by the 'Jews'. Instead of the entrepreneur making independent decisions, it is the murky world of international finance that sets the conditions of market success. The invisible hand of the market and the hard hitting 'power' of money are rejected as 'Jewish'. At the same time, communism is denounced as a threat to the ruled because it would deliver them from sweat and toil. 'The rulers are only safe as long as the people they rule turn their longed-for goals into hated forms of evil' (ibid.). The Jews seem ready made for the projection of horror. 'No matter what the Jews as such may be like, their image, as that of the defeated people, has the features to which totalitarian domination must be completely hostile: happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth. These characteristics are hated by the rulers because the ruled secretly long to possess them' (ibid.). Anti-Semitism invited the ruled to stabilise domination by urging them to destroy, suppressing the very possibility and idea of happiness through participation in the Aryan enterprise of robbing the Others of all possession, including their life.

VI

'Fascism is also totalitarian in that it seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination. This machinery needs the Jews' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 185).

This insight poses the issue of Nazism's espousal of capitalist enterprise and its tirades against 'Jewish capitalism'. To answer this, the earlier insights into the biologisation of the concrete and the personification of the abstract need to be looked at again.

There has been a long 'radical' tradition which sought to cure capitalism from its social and economic ills. This tradition, which includes, for example, Proudhon, straddles the political divide between 'left' and 'right'. Their common concern is to save capitalism from what they see as the perverting power of money. Their critique of capitalism is based on a dualist conception between, on the one hand, social relations as relations between creative, industrious individuals and, on the other, their subordination to relations between things, to money. Marx's critique of Fetishism supplied an uncompromising critique of this dualist conception by making clear that the two do not exist independent from each other but are in fact each other's mode of existence. However, the radical 'right' and 'left' have all too often separated what, fundamentally, belongs together: the fetish-like endorsement of the concrete, of creative labour, of enterprise and of industry supplying material products that satisfy wants. Counterposed to this is the abstract sphere occupied by money and finance, specifically speculation and global finance capital. The celebration of the concrete goes hand-in-hand with the rejection of the mobility, universality and intangibility of finance capital that is charged with knowing neither national identity nor social 'responsibility'. The Vampire-like figure of capital sucking labour in the quest for surplus value, portrayed by Marx in *Capital*, is thus displaced: the Vampire becomes money. Industrial enterprise, rather than being conceived in terms of an enterprise of exploitation, is projected as concrete, creative labour. The viability of this labour is thus seen to be put at risk by money. Money is conceived as the root of all evil and the cause of all perversion. Enterprise and industry are fetishised as the concrete community, as concrete nature. Industrial endeavour is thus portrayed as a 'victim' of the evil force of money.

In anti-Semitism, then, the world appears to be divided between finance capital and concrete nature. The concrete is conceived as immediate, direct, matter for use, and rooted in industry and productive activity. Money, on the other hand, is not only conceived as the root of all evil, it is also judged as rootless and of being merely interested in itself: all enterprise is perverted in the name of money's continued quest for self-expansion. In this way, money, that is financial capital, is identified with capitalism while industry is perceived as constituting community's concrete and creative existence. Between capitalism as monetary

accumulation and social community as industrial enterprise, it is money which calls the shots. In this view, industry and enterprise are 'made' capitalist by money: money penetrates all expressions of industry and thus perverts and disintegrates community in the name of finance capital's abstract values. This destructive force puts claim on and so perverts: the individual as entrepreneur; the creative in terms of a paternalist direction of use-value production; the rooted in terms of *Volk*, the community in terms of a natural community. Instead of community's natural order of hierarchy and position, money's allegedly artificial and rootless force is judged to make the world go round by uprooting the natural order of the *Volksgenossen*. In this way, then, it is possible for the *Volksgenossen* not only to embrace capitalism but, also, to declare that the exploitation of labour creates freedom: *Arbeit macht frei*. They declared that work was not degrading, so as to control the others more rationally. They claimed to be creative workers, but in reality they were still the grasping overlords of former times' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 173). By separating what fundamentally belongs together, that is 'industrial' exploitation and money, the differentiation between money on the one hand, and industry and enterprise, on the other, allows the attack on reason and universality in the name of instrumental rationality set to work to improve capital efficiency.

With the biologisation of creative activity, the unfettered operation of the exploitation of labour in the name of blood and soil is rendered attainable by the elimination of the cajoling and perverting forces of the abstract: European Jewry. In this way, the ideology of blood and soil, on the one hand, and machinery and unfettered industrial expansion, on the other, rather than relating to each other as opposites, became instead the image of a healthy nation that stands ready to purge itself from the perceived perversion of industry by the abstract, universal, rootless, mobile, intangible, international 'vampire' of 'Jewish capitalism'. The projection of the 'Jew' as the personification of capitalism rests on the celebration of the Aryan-*Volksgenosse* as the personification of the concrete, of blood, soil, tradition, and industry. The *Volksgenosse* manifests a stubbornness of the most industrial kind: killing as an idle and efficiently discharged occupation. Their stubbornness only serves to strengthen their sense of destiny. As *Volksgenossen* they have all committed the same deed and have thus become truly equal to each other: their occupation only confirmed what they already knew, namely that they had lost their individuality as subjects.

VII

'Anti-Semitic behaviour is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 171).

They were set loose as subjects of instrumental reason and are thus

robbed of their subjectivity as a social individual to whom reason has meaning and significance. While reason subsists in and through the critique of social relations, the *Volksgenosse* has only faith in the terror of instrumental rationality. The collection of gold-teeth from those murdered, the collection of hair from those to be killed, and the overseeing of the slave-labour of those allowed to walk on their knees for no more than another day, only requires good organisation. Besides, there might be fun. 'One can beat and torture Jews without fear' (Sartre: 47).

Everything is thus changed into pure nature. The abstract was not only naturalised in the form of the 'Jew', it was also 'abstractified'. Auschwitz was a factory 'to destroy the personification of the abstract. Its organization was that of a fiendish industrial process, the aim of which was to "liberate" the concrete from the abstract. The first step was to dehumanize, that is; to strip away the "mask" of humanity, of qualitative specificity, and reveal the Jews for what "they really are" - shadows, ciphers, numbered abstraction'. Then followed the process to 'eradicate that abstractness, to transform it into smoke, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material "use-values": clothes, gold, hair, soap' (Postone: 313-14).

The concrete (industry) and the abstract (money) belong not only together as each other's presuppositions (cf. Marx). Also, the concrete is abstract as the category of abstract labour indicates, and conversely, the abstract is concrete as social relations exist as relations of exploitation (cf. *ibid.*). To separate the two, that is the concrete and the abstract, amounts to a politics of terror. Nazism's attempt to liberate the concrete from the abstract emphasised the internal relationship between the constitution and synthesis of the negative dialectics of the Enlightenment. The treatment of humanity as a resource and the demand that humanity is a purpose, both of these ideas, belong to the tradition of the Enlightenment. The treatment of humanity as a resource has, at times, been overshadowed by the social democratic dream of equality. This project could not succeed: the attempt to humanise the inhuman finds itself confronted by the paradox that the effort of 'humanising' presupposes inhuman conditions. Humanising of inhuman conditions amounts merely to tinkering. Thus, the limits of reason within the tradition of the Enlightenment whose project of 'civilisation' presupposes the continuous guarantee of private property.

Nazism signalled not so much the end of reason but the application of reason to its own presuppositions, that is the primitive accumulation of capital. Nazism's 'anti-capitalist capitalism' showed that the Enlightenment's project of the self-determining individual that foreshadowed better things in the name of reason, had transformed into madness. This transformation does not represent a 'pathological' aberration of the Enlightenment's forward march. Rather, this 'madness' constitutes the violence of its beginning. Just as the primitive accumulation of capital, Auschwitz has been written into the annals of human history. The difference between primitive accumulation and Auschwitz should not be overlooked. Primitive accumulation has been written into the annals of human history with blood and tears.

Auschwitz has been written into the annals of history with industrialised slaughter. While primitive accumulation launched the negative dialectic of reason and with it humanity's hope to leave behind self-imposed immaturity, Auschwitz destroyed the hope in the Enlightenment's civilising project. 'The dialectic of Enlightenment is transformed objectively into delusion' (Horkheimer and Adorno: 204).

Postscript

Attempts at 'normalising' Auschwitz have also to normalise the delusion that the Enlightenment presents. Is that possible? The dream of a human capitalism persists and has become even stronger since the fall of the Berlin wall. The end of history has been announced and with it the notion that everything is possible within the limits of what is called distributive justice. The dream of a human capitalism has already shown itself to be a nightmare. And what should one call the idea of a distributive justice without history? There is only one name: Deceitful publicity.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Olga Taxidou and Adrian Wilding for their very helpful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.
2. On this see Adorno (1986).
3. Quoted in Wistrich (1992: 96).
4. On this and also on the reaction of the student left in 1968 to the Six Day War see: Dinar (1987); Markovits (1984); Initiative Sozialistisches Forum (1990, ch. 3); see also Wistrich (1979).
5. See the so-called Historians' Dispute of the 1980s where conservative historian's attempted to restore German national identity by interpreting the Nazi-regime as an understandable reaction to Communism. Habermas, who triggered the debate by rejecting the conservative interpretation, argued instead in favour of a 'constitutional patriotism'. Both camps, despite their obvious differences, seemed, nevertheless, to agree that a nation state requires a patriotic public: one emphasising history as a resource for identity, the other constitutional value-orientations. The documents of this dispute are available in English in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?* (1993).
6. The notion of anti-semitism as merely an historical phenomenon of capitalism's past is conceived in analogy to Nolte's attempt to put good distance between post-war capitalism and pre-war capitalism. In his view, fascism was no more than an era in the development of capitalism. Once it has gone through this era, the epoch of fascism is of merely historical interest (Nolte, 1965). Nolte's emphasis on 'discontinuity' served an important role: it legitimised post-war capitalism in general, and the Federal Republic of Germany in particular.
7. The above paraphrases an insight borrowed from Horkheimer and Adorno (1989: 207-8).
8. Quoted in Rose (1990: 304). Rose's book supplies a common conservative

critique of revolutionary thinking. For a thorough assessment of the relationship between the revolutionary Left and anti-Semitism, see Clausen (1987). For a critique of left-wing anti-Semitism in (West-) Germany and beyond post-1945: Initiative Sozialistisches Forum (1990); Poliakov (1992); and Clausen's (1992) preface to Poliakov's book.

9. This is the basis of their claim that 'enlightenment which is in possession of itself and coming to power can break the bounds of enlightenment' (page 208). Their critique of the contradictory constitution of the enlightenment has often been misunderstood, see, for example, Offe (1996, ch. 2), to mean that their critique of instrumental reason is identical with the denunciation of reason as such. Offe's 'misunderstanding' is 'systematic' in that his theoretical project is not concerned with the 'rescue' of reason's historical role but, rather, the endorsement of instrumental reason as a civilising force.

10. Of course racism can go as far as murder, arson and destruction of communities. However, compared with racism, the hatred of Jews is different in that the Jews are seen to have come from no-where.

11. The desecration of cemeteries should not be seen as isolated events committed by a minority. Their 'action' subsists in a context which invented Jews as the Other. Lyotard makes this point well when he argues that 'Jews represent something that Europe does not want to or cannot know anything about. Even when they are dead, it abolishes their memory and refuses them burial in its land. ... When the deed is done in full daylight, Europe is seized for an instant by the horror and the terror of confronting its own desire' (Lyotard: 159). An assessment of Lyotard's post-modernist conception of 'difference', important though that might be, can not be attempted here.

12. On this see, amongst others, Rabinbach and Zipes (1986), Fetscher (1990), Enderwitz (1991).

13. Quoted in Agnoli (1992).

14. On the connection between 'Fordism' and concentration camps see Gambino's insightful analysis of the origins of so-called Fordism. He shows that Fordism's totalitarian production system amounted to a factory of fear whose summit is nothing less than a slave-labour camp: 'the assembly line is, together with totalitarian state systems and racist nationalism, one of the originating structures which broadly explain the concentration-camp crimes perpetrated on an industrial scale'. Of course, the history of so-called Fordism is often seen as a phase where capitalism took on reforming itself in a social-democratic manner. However, as Gambino emphasises, 'Fascism and Nazism were not in their origins the losing versions of Fordism, but were forced to become such thanks to the social and working-class struggles of the 1930s in the United States' (Gambino, 1996, p. 48). These struggles led to the constitution of a more 'social-democratic' version of 'Fordism' which, today, is seen as something that merely followed the functional needs of, and objective logic inherent in, 'capital' (on this see, amongst others, Hirsch/Roth, 1986).

15. The purpose of this section is to condense the previous argument. Though it repeats what has already been said, the aim is to take stock before moving on to an assessment of Nazism's 'anti-capitalist capitalism'.

16. On this see Fetscher (1990) and Enderwitz (1991).

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Revolutionary Theory in 1579*

Richard Gunn

Stephanus Junius Brutus, the Celt
*VINDICIAE, CONTRA TYRANNOS: or, concerning the legitimate
power of a prince over the people, and of the people over a prince*
Edited and translated by George Garnett
Cambridge University Press 1994
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Junius Brutus
*A DEFENCE OF LIBERTY AGAINST TYRANTS or, Of the lawful
power of the Prince over the People and of the People over the Prince:*
VINDICIAE CONTRA TYRANNOS
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Some explanation is necessary before more substantive questions can be addressed. The two books here under review are two differing translations of one and the same Latin text. The text was first published in 1579 and both its author ('Junius Brutus') and its place of publication ('Edinburgh') are fictitious. Its title might best be translated as 'A Claim against Tyrants' but its nuances are difficult to pin down and so the Latin title – which should, indeed, have a comma – is most frequently retained. As the work's subtitles imply, *Vindiciae, Contra Tyrannos* is a treatise on the nature and origins and limits of political authority.

The two editions before us, each offering its respective English translation, could hardly differ from one another more. Garnett's is the recently published, and perhaps definitive, scholarly edition: it comes complete with an analytical introduction, a glossary which unpacks terms in Roman and feudal law and an apparatus of Biblical and other footnotes. These notes are indispensable for anyone intending to approach the *Vindiciae* in a serious way. By contrast, the Still Waters Revival Books edition has the interest of being a (modernised) republication of the seventeenth-century translation of 1648 and 1689.