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Messianic Thinking in the Jewish Intelligentia of the Twenties

This article contains the main sections of the address given by the author to the congress on *Humanism and Society* which took place to commemorate Erich Fromm's 90th birthday on March, 23/24th 1990, in Heidelberg/Germany.

I.

That theological themes, particularly those stemming from the Jewish tradition, have left their mark in the thought patterns of the Frankfurt School had become clear by the last interviews of Max Horkheimer at the latest or, failing that, by the time the more recent literature on Walter Benjamin saw the light of publishing day. Whether, however, these theological trace elements should be regarded as mere conceptual ballast, or whether they are rather to be seen as integral systemic components, remains controversial at this point of time. Perhaps understandably, though, are fears voiced by the odd social scientist who owes an inspirational debt or two to the Critical Theory - fears to the effect that attempts to seize on and play up whatever theological motivations may have been at work here are purchased at the price of reneging on social commitments, of indulging in woolly thinking and empty platitudes, of seeking refuge in meaningless affirmation. It is feared, in other words, that licensing a theological interpretation of the Critical Theory would be tantamount to robbing it of its best credentials: namely, the strict negation of existing social relationships.

On the other hand, the Critical Theory's own commitment to freedom, justice and openness is sometimes adduced against what is felt to be an all too one-sided „socialization" of its import. Thus M. Theunissen writes: „If, then, the methodical stance informing the Critical Theory is essentially anticipatory and experimental - scrutinizing the Christian notion of freedom for its social realizability, so to speak - then we may assume that this attempt to write a philosophy of history not only proceeded from a theological impulse as a matter of fact, but indeed could only have been written from the vantage point of such an impulse' (M.Theunissen, 1981, p.39).

Whether or not the Critical Theory is really informed by theological motivations or here is only being decked out in borrowed robes, cannot be dismissed as a mere question of taste or of perspective; rather it must be regarded as a problem which should be capable of resolution by recourse to the received methodology of hermeneutics in the Arts and social sciences - i.e. through attempting to reconstruct the context of origin of the theory, by assiduously running to earth whatever relevant utterances are recorded in the literature, by investigating what systematic use the said motivational themes are put to, etc.

A detailed investigation of the theological stance implicit in the Critical Theory would require a full-scale study in its own right. In the following remarks I will confine myself to delineating the intellectual-historical background of Messianic motivational themes in the thinking of Jewish intellectuals of the twenties. Here I will be drawing heavily on extant anecdotal material.

II.

In 1964 Theodore Adorno had this to say about his early relationship to Walter Benjamin: „I saw Benjamin fairly frequently - I would say at least once a week, though probably it was more - during the whole of the time he lived in Frankfurt. Later on too I saw quite a lot of him on a regular basis - not just during his visits here, but above all in Berlin. I believe we were also once in Italy together - in Naples it must have been - but I can't swear to it. I would be hard put to say what the >reason< was behind our meetings. We would seek each other out the way intellectuals forty years ago used to seek each other out - simply for the sake of conversation and getting a chance to snatch at the bone of whatever theory the other happened to gnawing away at right then. With Benjamin and me it wasn't any different. I was very young at the time - in any event, he was all of 11 years older - and I definitely regarded myself as being on the receiving end of the exchange. I recall that I would listen to him with an incredible fascination, every so often asking him to go into something in more detail. Very often he would pull out things he had written and show them to me before they were published. One was the essay on Goethe's Elective Affinities: I was permitted to read a typewritten page - as I recall, it was the carbon copy of a typewritten page..." (Th. W. Adorno, 1970b, p. 68).

Adorno was 21 years old at the time. It was before his move to Vienna and years before he was to write his study of Kierkegaard. Benjamin's essay on the *Elective Affinities*, which he had got to read part of, ended with the celebrated sentence which contains the whole of the theology of the Critical Theory in a nutshell: „Only for the sake of those without hope are we given to hope."

Benjamin composed the essay on *Goethe's Elective Affinities* in 1921-22, i.e. during the same period his close friend Gershom Scholem had alerted him to Franz Rosenzweig's seminal work on the history of religion, *The Star of Redemption*. Benjamin made a more or less thorough critical study of Rosenzweig's work before finally seeking out the author himself to discuss the book's significance as well as the dangers he felt were lurking in it. The far-flung threads drawn together at the end of Benjamin's essay on the *Elective Affinities* - where Benjamin makes light of the Goethean symbols of heaven, star and hope - should be seen as being linked (in what is a clearcut relation of correspondence) by way of the intermediary concepts of redemption and atonement to Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* and the passages in the latter on Goethe's childlike heathenism, hope, and the Church of Love inspired by the Gospel of St. John.

Whereas Rosenzweig deploys the image of the star to evoke the realm of God and his love, Benjamin responds for his part by alluding to Goethe's erotic interpretation of love. Rosenzweig evokes the power of prayer and its soteriological force: „The searchlight beam of prayer can only inspires the individual the same way it inspires everyone, i.e. by training its light only on what is most far off and remote, namely the realm of God. Everything lying before us on the way there remains shrouded over with darkness; yet the realm of God is, at the same time, the most immediate thing imaginable. By virtue of the fact that the star which normally blazes in the remoteness of eternity appears here as something nearby and immediate, the whole power of love is moved to gravitate towards it and transmit its light with magic force through the night of the future into the present of the prayerful community's prayers" (F.Rosenzweig, 1921, p. 369.).

Walter Benjamin, whose theological endeavors were always concerned to pierce through the crust of the profane to arrive at the saving, salvational core, countered this affirmation by pointing to the very self-denying hope which springs from the very hopelessness of those who are in love. This theologian of the profane replaced prayer with the love between man and woman as well as the inevitable failure it is doomed to. „The most paradoxical, most fleeting hope is, finally speaking, bathed in the light of atonement to the extent that the light of the sun

expires and is absorbed in the twilight of the Evening Star that will outlast the night. Venus, to be sure, gives off a glimmer of hope here." (W.Benjamin, 1980, p. 200.) The thought of Franz Rosenzweig, to which Benjamin refers in many other essays apart from the one on *Goethe's Elective Affinities*, embodies most suggestively what could be called Messianic thought patterns among the younger generation of German-Jewish intellectuals of the twenties - though admittedly still in a form that is explicitly linked to Judaism.

In a remarkable essay H.D. Hellige (1979) has analyzed the origins of Jewish anti-capitalist attitudes in Wilhelminian Germany and in the Danube Monarchy. His conclusion is that a contempt for engaging in commerce to earn a living, which had been brought about by an increasing gravitation to the religious ideal of learning, came to be manifested in violent Oedipal conflicts between fathers pursuing a regular professional career on the economy and sons extremely critical of anything to do with money and commerce. In line with the political fortunes of Wilhelminian Germany and the Danube Monarchy, this hostility towards commerce started off by being fairly conservative and more in the nature of a social critique (approximately up to the outbreak of the First World War); it then took the form of Jewish nationalism and a brush with Zionism (during the first half of the Weimar Republic); finally it turned outright anti-capitalist and socialist (up to the end of the Weimar Republic). Prototypical of the first phase were intellectuals like Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Ludwig Sternheim and Walter Rathenau; while the second phase saw the emergence of philosophers and scientists, i.e. the likes of Martin Buber, Max Brod, Franz Oppenheimer and Arthur Ruppin. Characteristic of the third phase was the circle of social scientists gathered at and around the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research - with such prominent names as Theodore W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, Felix Weil, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal, Siegfried Kracauer, Erich Fromm and Ernst Bloch.

Admittedly these phases cannot always be clearly demarcated on either the topical or the personal level. A certain amount of overlapping and dovetailing on the time plane does creep in frequently enough, though this is certainly not the rule. Thus, on the basis of his political and cultural orientations, Gershom Scholem would really fit into the second phase better, but the fact is that he was in close contact with Walter Benjamin. On the other hand, figures like Buber and Rosenzweig were of exceptional importance for Benjamin, Löwenthal and Fromm in their early years.

At least for the second and the third phases, it can be stated that both equally gave voice to Messianic preoccupations and modes of thought. Both phases can be seen as reactions to the catastrophe of the First World War and the gradually looming realization that the attempt at a Jewish-German integration was heading for failure. They should be seen - and are intended - as answers to the breakdowm of middle class culture and the increasing manifestations of illiberalism in German society.

A. Rabinbach (1985) has written a comparitative essay on Benjamin and Bloch in which he presents Messianism as resulting from a post- Assimilation renaissance of German Jewry; he sees this as being expressed in the form of a paradoxical weltanschauung whose inspiration can be traced back to both secular and religious sources. Referring to Gershom Scholem's essays on the subject of Messianism, Rabinbach sees this modern form of Messianic thought as being characterized by four elements:

First, Messianic thought is backward-looking and restorative by intention. It rejects the notion of progress and the rationale of reform in favor of a goal of a more meaningful life in the future that is modelled on a transfigured and idealized past.

Second, Messianic thought is essentially utopian, since it rejects the past and the present in favor of a future that radically differs from the present. While this future may represent the endpoint of all historical developments, it is never seen as being the product of such developments.

Third, Messianic thought is imbued with apocalyptic elements. This is so because the condition of the world just prior to the advent of the supra-historical redemptive process is seen as being completely catastrophic and bereft of any positive redemptive aspects. One could go even further and say that the absolute unredeemedness of the world is virtually the very condition required of redemption if this is ever to intervene at all.

Four, a fundamental ethical dilemma results from this view of history, which is at once apocalyptic and hostile to the notion that historical developments could ever lead to any real improvements: this takes the form of an unresolved, and indeed unresolvable, moral ambivalence that characterizes individuals who have committed themselves to Messianic schemes or programs. The more the unredeemed condition of the world cries out for action to change it for the better, the more each action undertaken to this end becomes discredited by the burning awareness that it will inevitably become bogged down in the world's very unredeemed condition. Utopian quietism is usually what results - at least to the the extent that one does not, as Erst Bloch did, take the way out of interpreting the historical process itself (and man too, understood as an integral part of it) as a Messianic happening.

All these elements of apocalyptic thought can be found in virtually ideal-typical purity of expression in Franz Rosenzweig's Star of Redemption, where, after by way of a consideration of Nietzsche, Schelling and Kierkegaard, the author develops a critique of Hegel's affirmative and progress-orientated philosophy of history. On the other hand, Rosenzweig was moved by the cyclical rhythms of the Jewish religious year - and hence what he saw as the timeless presence of the Jewish people - to detect an anticipatory intervention in the temporal order on the part of eternity, providing an inkling of the coming, final intervention. The idea of a qualitative break with historical time that was also to inform Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history is formulated for the first time by Franz Rosenzweig at this period in his *Star of Redemption* (1921, p. 420):

„And so the true eternity of the eternal people must necessarily appear an alien presence and an irritant to the state and world history at all ages and times. In opposition to the only hours of eternity which the state down the centuries has known how to cut into the bark of the ever-growing tree of time through the blows of its sharp sword, the eternal people, proceeding at its own unhurried and untroubled pace, has succeeded in adding a new ring year for year to the trunk of its eternal life. Against this gradual and quiet growth - which looks neither to the left or to the right - the power of world history has expended itself in vain."

Rosenzweig's thought and the yet-to-be-unravelled themes of a Messianic and mystical Zionism had indeed achieved an airing in more than one respect in the Frankfurt of the twenties.

Thus in 1910 Anton Nehemia Nobel - an ordained Orthodox rabbi, who had studied under Dilthey and had taken out his doctorate in 1895 at the University of Bonn with a dissertation on *Schopenhauer's Theory of the Beautiful* - was appointed to a professorship at the University of Frankfurt. In subsequent years there congregated around the person of Nobel - incidentally one of the first German rabbis to expressly come out in favor of Zionism - a group of young Frankfurt-based Jewish intellectuals featuring such notable names as e.g. Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Siegfried Kracauer, Erich Fromm and Ernst Simon. A man of some exceptional charismatic force, Nobel was instrumental in getting at least some of these young and more than partly assimilated Jews to show a renewed interest in Judaism. Leo Löwenthal has left us a description of the atmosphere around Nobel in which the Messianic traits alluded to above all crystallized, as it were, in a particular lebenswelt and around a particular lifestyle:

„In the circles I was associated with in Frankfurt and Heidelberg there grew up a sort of Jewish cult presence revolving around the charasmatic figure of Rabbi N. A. Nobel. He was not himself Orthodox in the strict, technical sense, but rather conservative by nature and highly educated in philosophical matters. He

exercized a particular hold over many a young and talented Jew, though his attraction was by no means restricted to the young. Under the influence of this Jewish atmosphere with its ineffable mixture of many ingredients - elements of philosophy, a little socialism, a touch of psychoanalysis and even a dash of mysticism - the desire was aroused in both myself and my then wife to start living according to Jewish practice... Rabbi Nobel was a Hungarian Jew by origin who had, however, also studied philosophy at depth. He had made the acquaintance of Hermann Cohen and indeed united in his person a most remarkable mixture of mystical religiosity, philosophical acumen and doubtless also a more or less successfully repressed homosexual attraction towards younger men. It was indeed a kind of cultic association. He was a fascinating person to listen to. He directly approached those he preached to. He kept an open house which could be and was frequented at any time one felt the urge“(L.Löwenthal, 1980, p.19).

This atmosphere described by Löwenthal palpably contains those very elements which in later years were to be so characteristic of the research approach of the Institute for Social Research: the inner tie between Marxism and psychoanalysis, for instance, which was to be initiated by no less than the formerly Torah-true Erich Fromm. Erich Fromm’s later wife, Frieda Reichmann, who was later to become a celebrated, psychoanalytically inclined psychiatrist, established a small psychoanalytically orientated sanitorium in the Heidelberg area which was supported by Leo Löwenthal and his wife.

„My wife, Golda, would help out in the household and in caring for the children, for example. The sanatorium was a kind of Jewish-psychoanalytic cross between a boarding house and a hotel. An almost cult-like atmosphere reigned there. Everyone underwent analysis at Frieda Reichmann’s hands, myself included. Then too, the sanitarium was run along >Jewish< lines: only kosher meals were eaten and all religious holidays were strictly observed. The atmosphere of Jewish religiosity was mixed with an interest in psychoanalysis. Sometimes in my recollections of this period, I see this syncretistic linkage between Jewish tradition and psychoanalysis as not stopping there, but as being further linked to our later attempt at the institute to >marry< Marxist theory and psychoanalysis which came to play such a great role in my life.“ (L. Löwenthal, ibid., pp. 17, 19-20.)

It was also A. N. Nobel who first implanted the idea in Franz Rosenzweig that the latter should take over the direction in Frankfurt of a Jewish evening college (which had been long planned anyway). In this evening college (or Lehrhaus) which was finally set up in 1920, the principal aims were to reach a critical evaluation of East European Jewish culture and to inculcate the practice of a new form of Jewish identity. It was intended to put the emphasis less on onesided teaching of a fixed body of ideas than on encouraging open exchanges (it was incidentally here that the philosophy of dialogue developed by Buber and Rosenzweig took it first, tentative steps forward). It must be admitted, though, that these groping attempts were only crowned by a modest amount of success. One of the problems was that the doctrinal forms inculcated remained too closely tied to traditional forms.

Concerning the topics and themes covered at the lehrhaus, foremost place went to classical Judaism, the Bibel, the Talmud, the period of emancipation, Zionism, anti-Semitism, medieval and modern Hebrew literature, cultic practice, mysticism and ethics. The three Frankfurt-based rabbis - Seligmann, Salzberger and Nobel - all belonged to its teaching staff in the years 1920-26, along with a series of other personalities that were either well known at the time or were later to become so, of which the following names should be mentioned: the economists Franz Oppenheimer and Fritz Stern; Siegfried Kracauer; Erich Fromm; Leo Löwenthal; the philosophers Nahum Glatzer and Leo Strauss; the Cabbala scholar Gershom Scholem; and Martin Buber, who even at that time, was a famous name; the poet Margarete Susman; and S.J. Agnon, who was later to win the Nobel Prize for Literature for his literary works written in Hebrew. After wind-

ing down its activities after 1926 and even closing down temporarily in 1929, it reopened its doors in 1933 when, in the face of the Nationalist Socialist menace, German Jewry experienced for a few brief years a forced (and therefore highly dubious) renaissance, which constituted an ambivalent „new beginning in the midst of destruction".

Theodore W. Adorno, the son of an Italian Catholic mother and a Jewish convert to Protestantism, was in his early adult years certainly exposed to the influence of Messianic thinking, the inspirational atmosphere of this Jewish „renaissance", and theologically motivated lines of argument. His friends Siegfried Kracauer and Leo Löwenthal also belonged to the circle clustering around Nobel and were on the teaching staff of the Jewish lehrhaus- though it should be pointed out that his father did not approve of these friendships. To be sure, Adorno was at this time not above making sarcastic remarks about Löwenthal's apocalyptic brand of Messianism.

In addition, Kracauer and Adorno undertook to read Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* together, although it turned out that Adorno was not able to make much sense of this work. His verdict was rather one of baffled incomprehension (cf. L. Löwenthal, 1984, p.77): „This is a pseudo-philosophical juggling with words which even if I understood it I still would not understand my understanding." Siegfried Kracauer was likewise sceptical about not only about the idealistic vein Rosenzweig's work was couched in, but also about the likelihood of such philosophy ever leading to anything meaningful. In a letter to Löwenthal he wrote, „[He] is and remains an idealist among thinkers...nor can his star redeem him from this. Whatever Scholem and his brother Benjamin may say, I don't believe the book has any bite to it." (Ibid., p. 78.) As one might expect after this negative judgement, Adorno was also led at that time to reject Benjamin's interpretation of *Goethe's Elective Affinities*.

Adorno's sceptical-to-downright-sarcastic attitude to all forms of Jewish religious philosophy, in particular, and religious questions in general, remained more or less unchanged until the early thirties. Admittedly, Adorno had seriously considered converting to Catholicism for a while back in the twenties, though he had finally abandoned the idea since it struck him as „incorrigibly romantic". No less than Martin Buber, who Adorno unfairly and quite superciliously attacked after the war as writing in „a wilful jargon all his own making", had felt the sting of his biting irony even before the war. Adorno called Buber „the religious equivalent of a country bumpkin from the Tirol", lost no opportunity to relate personally slighting anecdotes about Buber, and savaged Leo Löwenthal and Erich Fromm by referring to them, in Horkheimer's presence, as „Jews by profession".

However, it is important to see that this rejection of the principal Jewish religious philosophies of the hour by no means indicated a carte blanche dismissal of theological thought as such.

In their co-authored essay entitled *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (especially in the sections dealing with the „Factors behind Anti-Semitism") Horkheimer and Adorno attempted to develop a historical-philosophical interpretation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. Here the ascetic aspects in Judaism are defended against the repressive features of a God that is brought down to the human level: „Those who remain true to the paternal religion attract the hatred of those who worship the son and of course know better. This is hatred developed for spirit by counterspirit rigidly propagating its own salvational claim. What chiefly irritates the Christian enemies of the Jews is that the latter operate from the vantage point of a truth capable of maintaining itself in the face of manifest unredemption, without experiencing any need to rationalize it away; a truth that clings to the idea of undeserved blessings conferred in the teeth of worldly developments and false salvational schemes purporting to be able to realize these" (Horkheimer, Adorno, 1981, p.161).

The very ahistoricity of Judaism, which Franz Rosenzweig sought to interpret as the intervention of eternity in the here and now, exists for Horkheimer and A-

Adorno too in the form of the practice of atoning remembrance which, even when still in its ritual form, represents for them a protest against the cunning subversiveness of nature:

„The Jews would appear to have been able to achieve what the Christians strove for in vain: toppling magic from its throne through their own unaided efforts, so that Magic is directed against itself in the service of God. Reducing things down to the level of nature has not so much been expunged by the Jews as made the object of the purist of ritual injunctions. Thus they have kept atoning remembrance at the heart of their concern, without which symbols inevitably revert back into mythology.“ (Ibid., p. 167.)

The pledge for such atoning remembrance is the prohibition against graven images. Precisely because they are strictly forbidden to dwell on details of graphic form are Jews able to cling fast to the thought of atonement. Only in situations where, thanks to the very ascetic discipline of the prohibition against graven images, the thought of atonement is not sold out to the imperatives of the present (or to a future conceived of as merely an extension of the present) - only here does the possibility of a meaningful remembrance of the victims of history also have a chance to prevail. Only here does the thought of „saving those without hope“ make any sense. The authors of the *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* went on to interpret the prohibition against graven images as „the prohibition against worshipping error in the name of God, against taking the bounded to be unbounded, against taking a lie to be the truth. The pledge of salvation lies in expunging all creeds which arrogate to themselves a right to denounce the madness of the world on the grounds of possessing special insight. The image is saved so that it can come into its own true force - but precisely by ensuring that the prohibition on it is assiduously enforced“ (Ibid., pp. 24-25.)

In this fashion, a none-too-lenient critique of the ideological movements springing up in the wake of Freud and Marx becomes a precondition for atonement. The concomitant rejection of false and premature attempts to provide comfort for despairing humanity sets up a tension in any Messianic thought that is not prepared to jettison the whole idea of atonement, nor prepared to make the slightest concessions to affirming the fallen condition of the present. This tension can only be borne by cutting loose from the world as it exists and fleeing into a world of future possibility. In the celebrated final aphorism of the Minima moralia, we find a formulation of what might be called a conjunctivistically inclined Messianism which in suggestiveness leaves nothing to be desired:

„The only philosophy capable of standing up responsibly in the face of despair would be the attempt to see all things from the vantage point of atonement. Insight sees by no other light than by that which shines on the world from an atonement that is to come; everything else remains bogged down in the stage of post- construction and remains in essence simply a technique. It is necessary to develop perspectives that reveal the world as it will one day appear in a Messianic light, as being held in pawn and alienated from its true being till then - given over to tawdriness and cheapness and estranged from itself. The only task for a thought worthy of the name is in developing such perspectives - but without resorting to any kind of force or arbitrariness, by feeling one’s way into the situationality of the world and sensing what is possible. At the same time, this is the easiest of tasks, since the way things are undeniably cries out for such insights - precisely because, when negativity is only taken far enough and looked at in its entirety from all possible angles, it will be found to fold back upon itself. Like the handwriting in the mirror, it becomes the opposite of itself while still remaining the same. But it is also something that seems quite impossible to achieve, since it presupposes a vantage point set somewhere of the reach of the snares of Being (at some far or close remove). On the other hand, every act of insight must not only be wrung from the world as it exists, if it is ever to validate itself; but is also beset by precisely the same disfigurement and destitution that it purposes to be trying to shrug off or discard. The more passionately the intellect attempts, for the

sake of the unconditional, to shore itself up against its own conditional status in the world, the more it unintentionally (and thus, in practice, fatefully) becomes swallowed up by and in the world. Even an understanding of the impossibility of the undertaking must be striven for in order that existing possibilities may be grasped. In the face of these demands, the question of the reality or unreality of atonement itself pales away into insignificance“ (Th. W. Adorno, 1970, pp. 333-334.).

The author of these lines seems to be sure of only two things: First, that insight into the true nature of things is not possible, since this would require that things were already bathed in a Messianic light; but this is a light that does not yet shine. Second, that this Messianic light will one day shine despite everything! But at this point it might be objected: from what quarter does the author derive his ability to make this discrimination - or indeed his certainty that he is right in holding the present world to be in an unredeemed condition - if there is no possibility of even an anticipatory glimmer or some cognitive inklings of the coming redemption? Distinguishing between the conviction that the Messianic light will one day shine and the invariously erroneous attempts to know in what form it will shine, might be a way of solving this problem. But then there would still remain the question of where this light is to emanate from.

The source of this redemptive light would appear to be the human determination not to leave things in the wretched condition of unredeemed immanence they are in. Man’s physical ability to bear up in the face of suffering and his capacity to remember sustained injustice would probably be the points in human nature to fix on - topics otherwise reserved for theology. Despair of the power of human consciousness alone becomes the fons et origo of the hope that enables despair to counteracted:

„The conscious mind would not be able to despair of the very greyness of the world if it did not possess the concept of a different color whose scattered traces are not missing in the negativity of the whole. Invariably it comes from the past; hope is generated out of its opposite, i.e. from what was ripe for destruction or has had sentence passed against it; Such an interpretation would fit well enough to the last sentence of Benjamin’s text on Goethe’s Elective Affinities: >Only for the sake of those without hope is hope given to us<.“ (Th. W. Adorno, 1967, pp. 368-369).

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Zusammenfassung: Das messianische Denken in der jüdischen Intelligenz der 20er Jahre

Eine der wichtigsten Wurzeln der - erst später so genannten - Kritischen Theorie liegt im jüdischen Messianismus. In den 20er Jahren dieses Jahrhunderts, als M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, W. Benjamin, L. Löwenthal, E. Fromm, H. Marcuse und andere Vertreter der jüdischen Intelligenz ihre geistige Prägung erfuhren,

entwickelten sie auf der persönlichen Ebene eine Protesthaltung gegen die kommerzielle Gesinnung ihrer Vätergeneration, der auf sozialem und politischem Gebiet eine gegen den Kapitalismus gerichtete Gesellschaftsauffassung entsprach. Das messianische Denken fand in Franz Rosenzweigs *Stern der Erlösung* (1921) seinen literarischen Ausdruck und in der Gründung des Jüdischen Lehrhauses in Frankfurt (1920) eine organisatorische Plattform. Sein Einfluß spielt bei der Entwicklung der Kritischen Theorie insofern die Rolle eines Katalysators, als in ihm der gegenwärtige Weltzustand als erlösungsbedürftig dargestellt wird und die Zukunft - im Gegensatz zur idealistischen Geschichtsphilosophie - durch einen radikalen Bruch von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart getrennt erscheint. Der vorliegende Beitrag geht vor allem den verborgenen messianisch-theologischen Motiven bei Benjamin und Adorno nach; er befaßt sich aber auch mit entsprechenden Denkansätzen bei Löwenthal und Fromm, die von einer - vor allem durch Nehemia Nobel vermittelten - stärkeren Hinwendung zur jüdischen Tradition geprägt sind.

Riassunto: Il pensiero messianico nell'intellighenzia ebraica degli anni venti

Una delle radici più importanti della teoria critica - così chiamata solo più tardi - si trova nel messianismo ebraico. Negli anni venti di questo secolo, quando M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, W. Benjamin, L. Löwenthal, E. Fromm, H. Marcuse ed altri rappresentanti dell'intelligenzia ebraica ricevettero la loro decisiva formazione spirituale, essi svilupparono sul piano personale un atteggiamento di protesta contro la mentalità commerciale della generazione dei loro padri, che corrispondeva sul piano sociale e politico ad una concezione della società ostile al capitalismo. Il pensiero messianico trovò la sua espressione letteraria nello „Stern der Erlösung" („La stella della redenzione") di Franz Rosenzweig (1921), ed una piattaforma organizzativa nella fondazione della scuola ebraica di Francoforte (1920). Il suo influsso svolge nello sviluppo della teoria critica la funzione di un catalizzatore, in quanto la condizione attuale del mondo vi viene rappresentata come bisognosa di redenzione, e il futuro - in contrasto con la filosofia idealistica della storia - appare diviso dal passato e dal presente da una rottura radicale.

Questa relazione esamina anzitutto i motivi messianico-teologici nascosti in Benjamin e Adorno; essa però si occupa pure delle corrispondenti impostazioni di pensiero in Löwenthal e Fromm, i quali sono caratterizzati da un più spiccato orientamento verso la tradizione ebraica, mediato soprattutto da Nehemia Nobel.

Sumario: El pensamento mesiánico en la inteligencía judía de los años veinte

Una de las raíces más importantes del mesianismo judío la constituye lo que más tarde se llamaría Teoría Crítica. En los años veinte de este siglo, cuando M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, W. Benjamin, L. Löwenthal, E. Fromm, H. Marcuse y otros representantes de la inteligencia judía fueron marcados espiritualmente de manera más decisiva, éstos fueron desarrollando a nivel personal una actitud de protesta contra el carácter comercial de la generación de sus padres, correspondida por una comprensión de la sociedad contraria al capitalismo en los campos políticos y sociales. El pensamiento mesiánico encontró su expresión literaria en el libro de Franz Rosenzweig „Stern der Erlösung" (1921), y su plataforma organizativa en la fundación de la Casa de la Enseñanza Judía en Francfort (1920). Su influencia actúa como un catalizador en el desarrollo de la Teoría Crítica afirmando la necesidad de transformación del mundo actual y, al contrario de la filosofía histórica idealista el futuro aparece separado por una ruptura radi-

cal entre pasado y presente.

El presente ensayo analiza los ocultos motivos mesiánico-teológicos en Benjamin y Adorno, tratando también los pensamientos correspondientes en Löwenthal y Fromm que se caracterizan por una orientación más pronunciada hacia la tradición judía, impulsada principalmente por Nehemia Nobel.