FRANZ L. NEUMANN: NEGOTIATING POLITICAL EXILE

Thomas Wheatland

The émigrés of the 1930s and 1940s are, perhaps, overrepresented in the transatlantic histories of the twentieth century. For many, they are legitimate heroes in an era filled with so many frightening villains. Leaving everything behind, they left Europe not only to flee the Nazis but also to continue waging an open struggle against Fascism. Yet, in a world on the brink of the information age, the exile community included the first European knowledge professionals to begin building permanent bridges across the Atlantic in ways that a previous generation had only imagined. With a reputation for challenging the contradictions inherent in the postwar “Atlantic Community,” the Frankfurt School (or Institut für Sozialforschung, henceforth Institute) became an influential voice of dissent against the Cold War status quo during the 1950s and 1960s. Born out of the non-allied Weimar Left, the thinkers who comprised the Frankfurt School developed a mode of thought — Critical Theory — which established a path between the deterministic Marxism of the Second International and the revolutionary Marxism of Lenin. The primary focus of their Critical Theory of contemporary society was to re-examine the question of consciousness by challenging fundamental assumptions about the relationship between the social base and its cultural superstructure.

During their transatlantic sojourn, the members of the Frankfurt School grew to question the development of class consciousness by finding inspiration from Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as to pioneer the study of mass culture. As a result, they were not surprised by the triumph of fascism or the persistence of postwar, late capitalism. During the 1930s and 1940s, when the Frankfurt School pursued much of this groundbreaking work, few Americans took serious notice (the New York Intellectuals being a notable exception). The fortunes of Critical Theory changed after the war with the meteoric rise of Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse in the United States and with the simultaneous celebrity that Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno achieved in the Federal Republic of Germany.

Critical Theory made two Atlantic crossings. Until very recently, the majority of scholars have paid attention to the transition from Europe to the United States, but the trend may be changing. The story about the return of Critical Theory to Germany is just as interesting
as the exile narrative. Both crossings were fraught with confusions and problems, but Critical Theory returned to Europe with a split personality — while it may have been homeless and rootless in exile, it became bipolar in its return to Germany — trapped between a classically American epistemology grounded in empiricism, as well as the pursuit of practical ends, and a more strident denial of “traditional theory” on the grounds that it could not see beyond the status quo and contributed to a “totally-administered” society.

The aim of this article is to examine in detail how the Frankfurt School made this transition and developed this complex postwar identity. In numerous oral histories and reminiscences, members of the Frankfurt School emphasized the isolation and marginalization of their coterie and enterprise during the exile years. Horkheimer and Adorno, in particular, emphasized the Institute’s commitment to preserving Critical Theory as a product of Weimar thought and culture, enabling it to become a living link between the Weimar Republic and the postwar Federal Republic. By emphasizing this dimension of the Frankfurt School’s legacy, they greatly underplayed the integrative roles that some other members of the Institute played in relation to American thought and social science. This paper will focus on the efforts of one member who was particularly intent on coming to terms with the Institute’s new American hosts — the legal and political theorist, Franz L. Neumann. By focusing attention on Neumann, one is able to see crosscurrents within the Frankfurt School when it came to the topics of American “positivism” and “empiricism.”

While some, like Horkheimer, preferred to dismiss nearly all of it as “traditional theory” that had nothing in common with the Institute’s “critical theory” of society, others like Neumann endeavored to pay closer attention to the dynamics taking place within American social science that provided opportunities for the Frankfurt School. On the basis of Neumann’s initial efforts in this regard, the Frankfurt School was awarded its first American grant in 1943, which eventually led to its famous series of contributions to American sociology — a five-volume series of books entitled The Studies in Prejudice.

Franz Neumann: the Émigré Scholar as Cultural “Integrator”

For most people familiar with Critical Theory, Franz Neumann is typically seen as a bit player in a complex institutional and intellectual drama. Neumann was a lawyer and political theorist. After obtaining a doctorate in law from the University of Frankfurt, Neumann became
a protégé of Hugo Sinzheimer — one of the most influential labor lawyers of the Weimar Republic. Neumann had a successful legal practice in Berlin where he successfully advocated on behalf of the Socialist labor federation. After being briefly detained by the Nazis in 1933, Neumann fled to Britain, where he completed a second doctoral dissertation, this time in political theory, at the London School of Economics with Harold Laski. Although Neumann had lived most of his short life in Germany up to that point, his forced emigration in 1933 led to twenty years of education, adjustment, and experimentation that prompted him to focus in retrospect on a critical examination — sometimes excessively harsh — of the intellectual scene of which he had been an active part. Significantly, Neumann was a latecomer to the Institute and did not fit comfortably within its intellectual orbit around the Frankfurt School’s director, Max Horkheimer — and there is no question that Neumann’s experiences and commitments to working-class political movements were out of step with the Frankfurt School’s abandonment of the proletariat as the primary agent of revolutionary social change. This is not to say, however, as some have assumed, that Neumann’s intellectual contributions to Critical Theory were not substantial. Rather, it points to the fact that Neumann was underutilized and underappreciated by Horkheimer and his administrative right-hand man, Friedrich Pollock.

Neumann served the Frankfurt School as a lawyer and negotiator, while contributing his legal and political expertise to the structural dimensions of the Institute’s comprehensive theory of contemporary society. Yet even in this regard, Neumann is best remembered within the context of the Institute for his critique of the Frankfurt School’s structural analysis of late capitalist/fascist society. By sharply contesting Friedrich Pollock’s theory of state capitalism, Neumann challenged a paradigm that grew in significance throughout the late history of Critical Theory — eventually, in modified form, constituting the substructural basis for the conception of the totally-administered society, with its accompanying critique of instrumental reason. Ironically, at the same time that Neumann voiced some of the gravest concerns about Pollock’s lack of socioeconomic and political rigor, as well as the political dead-end to which state capitalism appeared to be leading Critical Theory, Neumann was also the member responsible for charting an alternative course for late Critical Theory.

1 His time during ten of the twelve years of the Weimar Republic was largely consumed by the routine of legal work, which led him to countless litigations before all the courts of the law system, including the highest, as well as to a role as advocate and publicist in the periodicals of the Socialist and labor movements. He was a practitioner.

2 Neumann came to Horkheimer’s attention through Harold Laski and the London School of Economics. As Neumann was completing his second doctoral degree with Laski, he became acquainted with Horkheimer in 1936. After promoting the Institute and its journal in London, Horkheimer offered Neumann a job in the United States. Unlike most of the other research associates of the Horkheimer Circle, Neumann was valued more for his legal expertise than for his scholarship as a political theorist. Neumann litigated and negotiated a legal dispute concerning Felix Weil’s business interests in Argentina, as well as one concerning the Institute’s ongoing struggle with the Gestapo over the seizure of its library back in Frankfurt. Matters such as these consumed large amounts of Neumann’s time, making his intellectual contributions to Critical Theory rather insignificant until 1939, when he became deeply involved in grant-writing. His only notable intellectual contribution between 1936 and 1939 was his article “Der Funktionswandel des Gesetzes im Recht der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft,” Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 6, no. 3 (1937): 542-96.


Although Neumann never had the chance to embark on this portion of the Frankfurt School’s second Atlantic crossing, he was the figure most responsible for plotting the course toward a successful merger between late Critical Theory and American sociology — a development uncomfortably at odds with the theoretical thrust of late Critical Theory. The reconstituted Frankfurt School of the 1950s taught a new generation of German students the American empirical techniques that Horkheimer, Adorno, and Pollock had encountered in America and had learned to utilize for their massive study of prejudice. Thus, the postwar Frankfurt School was part of the larger trend in West German sociology. As teachers and social researchers, its members functioned as allies and ambassadors of American postwar sociology. Yet at the same time, the reconstituted Frankfurt School’s scholars did not abandon their critiques of positivism or instrumental reason — two trends that they saw in abundance in both American and West German social science both serving to mask the flaws and contradictions in Cold War society.

Nowhere was this ambition to negotiate between German and American social science more evident than in Neumann’s contributions to the Frankfurt School’s methods statement, as well as in his revisions of the Institute’s grant proposal for a research project on anti-Semitism. His contributions both helped garner the support of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) and propelled the Institute in a direction and toward a future that Horkheimer, Pollock, and even Adorno could not have foreseen — and initially did not desire. This path represents the basis for late Critical Theory’s bipolar, epistemological tension between the social theoretical critiques of empiricism and pragmatism and the practice and teaching of sociological research that rely on both of these theories.

Like so many of the other émigrés celebrated in Neumann’s retrospective account of the Cultural Migration, Neumann stood apart from his colleagues in his heightened self-conscious ambition to function as a transatlantic intellectual. As he recounted,

... it is clear that emigration in the period of nationalism is infinitely more painful than ever before. If the intellectual has to give up his country, he does more than change his residence. He has to cut himself off from an historical tradition, a common experience; he has to learn a new language, he has to think and experience within and through it; has,
in short, to create a totally new life. It is not the loss of a profession, of property, of status — that alone and by itself is painful — but rather the weight of another national culture to which he has to adjust himself.\(^5\)

Partial or tentative integration into U.S. society and academic culture was not only impractical but also impossible in his eyes.\(^6\) Neumann realized that he could only continue to fight fascism by exposing its character through studies based on his negotiations between European political theory and American social science. It is also clear that such integration was fully compatible with his former thought and practice as a political intellectual. American social science, thus, like German jurisprudence, was simply another set of realities that needed to be navigated in his quest for progressive social change.

Bred to history and theory, Neumann said, the German émigrés initially disparaged the empiricism and pragmatism of American scholarship.\(^7\) Some exiles attempted to make a total change, to become intellectually like the Americans as they saw them; others simply maintained their previous positions and sought converts — or accepted the status of recluse. From Neumann’s point of view, however, the optimal strategy was to attempt “integration” between the two cultures.

Neumann contended that persons like himself, trained in the German tradition, were able to achieve two things. First, they brought skepticism about the ability of social science to engineer change. But more importantly, they attempted to “put social sciences research into a theoretical framework.”\(^8\) By overstressing the significance of empirical data collection and ignoring theory, Neumann argued, American social scientists made themselves vulnerable to the following criticisms:

... that the predominance of empirical research makes it difficult to see problems in their historical significance; that the insistence upon mastery of a tremendous amount of data tends to transform the scholar into a functionary; that the need for large sums to finance such enterprises tends to create a situation of dependence which may ultimately jeopardize the role of the intellectual as I see it.\(^9\)

Despite these reservations, Neumann did see some merits in the American approach — “the demand that scholarship must not be
purely theoretical and historical, that the role of the social scientist is the reconciliation of theory and practice, and that such reconciliation demands concern with and analysis of the brutal facts of life.”10 For Neumann, full understanding of the “brute facts” required their contextualization in a historical theory that comprehended both past developments and present potential for the future; the knowledge of the “brute facts” precluded an illusory projection of that future. Even theoretically unsatisfactory empirical inquiry could be adapted for purposes of the more critical view, as long as the “facts” it examined did indeed bear on the course of development. The exposition of such a theoretically informed and factually controlled reading of events had practical consequences in the critique (and reorientation) of actions. One might be tempted to see Neumann’s characterization of the successful integration of Continental social theory and American social science as something that arose only from hindsight. Neumann’s interventions on behalf of the Frankfurt School’s grant proposals of the early 1940s, however, suggest not only that he had formed these views much earlier but also that he was the one responsible for transmitting them to the other members of the Institute.

Engaging the American Social Sciences

In 1939, as the Institute commenced work on several simultaneous bids for outside grant support, Neumann began thinking in earnest about recent developments in American sociology. It would be an exaggeration to suggest that other members of the Institute were not similarly looking more closely at their colleagues in the social sciences. Horkheimer, for example, had corresponded with Louis Wirth and received a lengthy handwritten report on the state of sociology in America from Wirth’s senior assistant, Edward Shils. Adorno, meanwhile, was working closely with Paul Lazarsfeld on a massive study of radio listenership and listening habits in the United States but was a very skeptical eyewitness for this groundbreaking endeavor. As we will see momentarily, they remained generally convinced that no accommodation between Critical Theory and concurrent developments in the United States, insofar as they became aware of them, was possible. Neumann, by contrast, saw more potential for the Institute in the United States. There is little question that his differing attitudes resulted, in part, from his distance from both the Institute’s inner circle and its intellectual project. Yet, one can also see his efforts in 1939 as another case of

10 Ibid., 24-25.
him entering into a negotiation on behalf of the Institute’s theory as he understood it.

From the beginning of his employment with the Institute, Neumann contributed book reviews to the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung. Prior to 1939, he had published a total of twelve reviews, but the subjects of the books each of these examined were restricted to his acknowledged areas of expertise — law, labor issues, and political theory. His assignment to review some works in contemporary sociology, which coincided with the commencement of the two grant proposals, thus signaled a shift in Neumann’s niche within the Institute, cautiously ventured by Horkheimer, as it appears, and eagerly sought by Neumann.

Neumann’s first effort to come to terms publicly with contemporary trends in U.S. sociology was his review of Robert Lynd’s Knowledge for What?11 Strategically, the assignment of this book to Neumann for review in the closely held journal was able to serve two vital functions. First, it was good diplomacy. Prior to Erich Fromm’s departure from the Institute in 1938, Lynd had been one of the Horkheimer Circle’s key allies at Columbia University. Thus, an extensive review of Knowledge for What? by someone with Neumann’s profile could function as a kind of olive branch. Second, the review assignment was good preparation for Neumann as he was given the primary responsibility for directing the Institute’s proposed research project on the rise of Nazism in Germany. While it is hard to see the review of Lynd’s book in its entirety as a representation of Neumann’s independent views and opinions, it is possible to discern passages in which he largely appears to be writing for himself and others in which he is writing more as an official spokesperson for the Institute. Detailed negotiations between the editor, who was exceptionally close to Horkheimer, and contributors based in the Institute were not unusual. For example, the significance that Neumann attributed to the book — the topic that dominates nearly the first half of the review — would clearly appear to represent his own unmediated views, a speculation strengthened by the terms of his subsequent dealings with Lynd. Anticipating an assessment of American sociology that he would later repeat and defend against attacks by other Institute members in an in-house debate that was held in 1941, Neumann saw the book as an important example of U.S. disillusionment with both positivism and empiricism. It was significant for the Institute not only because it was formulated

by a “chief representative of the Research School of American sociology” but also because Lynd was endorsing the use of theory, which Neumann saw as potentially compatible with the Institute’s underlying methods. Neumann’s criticisms of Lynd, similarly, anticipated characterizations he would articulate more forcefully in the Institute’s 1941 debate. For example, he questioned Lynd’s call for his sociological colleagues to make bold hypotheses and to let values guide both their research and analyses. As Neumann indicated in the review, as well as later in the debate of 1941, Lynd failed to explain the methods by which such hypotheses can be made or how values can guide social research in directions that are not entirely relativistic. When Neumann concluded his review with his proposed solution to these problems, he presented a vague description of Critical Theory that was typical of characterizations made by other members of the group:

But if his [Lynd’s] criticism is correct, and we do not doubt it for a moment, what method then remains in the present stage of society for maintaining the isolated, progressive features or even for thoroughly transforming them into a rational whole? This central question cannot be answered by positivism, for it does not even recognize the problem. It cannot be answered by any value philosophy, which offers to mankind a whole array of values for selection. It cannot be answered by psychology, which can never pass judgment on the rightness and truth of man’s strivings. It can only be answered by a theory of society, which is essentially critical. . . . All the twelve problems regarded by the author as relevant, are problems which fundamentally cannot be explained in the realm of psychology, but only in terms of the inner contradiction of society.12

Thus, the culmination of Neumann’s review presented the Institute’s point of view and deployed the kind of Aesopian language typical of explanations of the Institute’s methodology to outsiders.

At the end of 1939, Neumann was able to foray strategically into the world of American sociology once again when he was invited to an event sponsored by the University of Chicago Social Science Department. It is likely he was invited as a representative of the Institute, though it may have been due to the strength of his earlier acquaintance with the noted sociologist, Louis Wirth. Nominally, the event
was intended to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the department’s building, but it actually was to register the department’s adjustment to the strong trend against its founding thesis of the unity of the social sciences, which nevertheless coincided with new moves towards qualitative research and theory in sociology. The meeting was accordingly called “The Social Sciences: One or Many?” and was chaired by Wesley C. Mitchell, a prominent senior economist oriented to Thorsten Veblen and John Dewey but best known as a specialist on business cycles. Neumann was not invited to give a lecture, but he took part in a round table on the meeting’s theme, in which he made an impromptu intervention on behalf of the Institute. In a memorandum he prepared for Horkheimer, he recounted these remarks, opening with notice that the issue of the unity of the social sciences was not the defining theme of the Institute’s work. In his recollection, he had begun his comments by presenting the standard picture of the Institute that had been used throughout its early years of exile by emphasizing its multidisciplinary structure and its commitment to integrating the social sciences. Neumann had then departed from the more cautious Institute narrative by insisting that organizational structure alone is not capable of achieving the kind of theoretical integration that is the hallmark of the Institute’s work. By noting this, however, Neumann obligated himself to a more substantive attempt to explain the research methodology of the Frankfurt School. Accordingly, the memo continued:

Integration must ultimately lead to a theory of society enabling us to understand the rise of modern society, its structure, its future, in short, the laws governing its development. If we accept this concept of integration, we are faced at once with two decisive problems. Every social science constantly operates with certain basic concepts like person, being, essence, motion, liberty, etc. These concepts cannot be won by mere generalization. Induction would not make them true concepts. They are, in our view, philosophical concepts which can only be developed through a general philosophical effort. The Institute is consequently engaged in an analysis of the traditional concepts and methods of the social sciences. We try to find out the meanings of the basic concepts of the social sciences and to redefine them according to the present historical needs of the social sciences. That, however, is by far not enough. Since our main problem is the rise,
structure and the prospective development of modern society, we insist that sociological work can only be fruitful if it is historical. . . . [W]e agree with Professor Lynd’s view [on this matter]. . . . Each member of the staff, in spite of the fact that we require from him a thorough training in his own specialized field, has to present his work historically. Philosophy and history, both, unite the research work of all our members.16

Whereas Neumann had made only the vaguest allusion in his 1939 Lynd review to a kind of social theory most familiarly exemplified by historical materialism, his statement at the Chicago meeting picked up on Lynd’s enthusiasm about the historical method in Knowledge for What? and experimented with a new description of Critical Theory. While it still camouflaged its debts to Marxism and relied heavily on a vague formulation of the integration of philosophy and history, it strongly suggests that the discussions that Neumann had heard on this occasion in Chicago appeared to show openings for more detailed negotiations with American colleagues.

The Lynd review and Chicago intervention are important primarily as public moments in Neumann’s personal development of a more open attitude towards links between Critical Theory and American social science, as well as a careful signal to representatives of the latter that the Institute might be open to such negotiations. The minutes of a discussion entitled “Debate about Methods in the Social Sciences, Especially the Conception of Social Science Method for Which the Institute Stands,” trans. David Kettler and Thomas Wheatland, Thesis Eleven 111, no. 1 (August 2012): 123–29; and Institut für Sozialforschung, “Debatte über Methoden der Sozialwissenschaften, besonders die Auffassung der Methode der Sozialwissenschaften, welche das Institut vertritt” (MHA, IX, 214) (hereafter cited as “Methods Discussion”).

16 Ibid.

the requirements of the social-scientific strategies sanctioned by American funding agencies.

Horkheimer set the terms of the discussion by characterizing the small and uncertain opening he thought was available for securing support from the American foundations. These were evidently no longer satisfied with “empiricism” alone, he noted, but increasingly recognized the importance of “theoretical viewpoints.” Yet American social science in general — and presumably the evaluators for the foundations — also insisted that theoretical claims were “hypotheses” that required verification by empirical research, a methodological conception antithetical to that of the Institute. The primary question of the consultation was whether the group could explain its method so as to overcome the obstacles and to seize the opportunity that Horkheimer perceived.

Two group projects were in the background, both designed in the course of the preceding year with a view to external funding and both exhibiting signs of trouble. The first, initiated by Horkheimer and Adorno, involved a structural analysis of the anti-Semitic belief system based on leading anti-Semitic texts. For obvious reasons, this project looked to Jewish organizations for its funding, notably to the American Jewish Committee (AJC); the original scheme was scheduled for a complete reworking after clear signals that it would not be supported, being remote from needed and useable information. The topic intended for the Rockefeller Foundation was an analysis of National Socialist Germany — with both genealogical and structural approaches under consideration. The succession of project proposals devoted to this subject occupied at least six of the members of the Institute in 1940 and early 1941. During this time, it was the principal focus of Neumann’s efforts, both as planner and as promoter. It would be only a slight exaggeration to say that the January meeting was called to discuss this project in which Neumann played the leading role, and that it was designed both to see how its funding could be facilitated and how improper compromises could be prevented.

Strikingly, Neumann twice interrupted Horkheimer’s opening statement at the 1941 discussion. As soon as Horkheimer said that they were expected to supply an explanation of their method, Neumann interjected that the explanation must not appear Marxist. Moments later, when Horkheimer referred to the empirical testing of hypotheses expected of them, Neumann moved the discussion towards

Making his own assessment of American social scientific trends, Neumann stated that “[T]he general consensus is that it is necessary to have a working hypothesis, but it is not known how this can be discovered.”19 Julian Gumperz, Felix Weil, Herbert Marcuse, and T. W. Adorno all disputed Neumann’s characterization.20 Each of Neumann’s challengers fell back on the empiricist, positivist, and pragmatist stereotypes that had been common in the Institute since Horkheimer’s “Traditional and Critical Theory,” which asserted that, in an effort to be unbiased, Americans avoided hypotheses altogether or they developed functional hypotheses aimed at achieving limited but instrumentalist goals. Citing the examples of Thorsten Veblen, Robert Lynd, and Max Lerner, Neumann made the case that things were changing and that the Institute’s old stereotypes of “traditional theory” had to be reconsidered — and thus a clearer statement of the Institute’s methodology was necessary.21 Following Neumann’s lead, Horkheimer declared that “[I]t would never occur to us to construct a hypothesis because we find a quite specific state of the question [Fragestellung] already given . . . We would rather revert to certain conceptions of society that we already possess.”22 In an effort to anticipate the likely American skepticism of Horkheimer’s impulse to simply defend Critical Theory, Neumann tried to imagine the objections of US social scientists: “what is correct about the theory on which you base yourselves? To come to such an understanding with the American who does not accept the theory is very difficult.”23

What European Social Theorists Offered

Based on his interactions and negotiations with potential sponsors of the Institute’s two research projects, Neumann imagined a statement of methodology less strident and less philosophical than what Horkheimer and the other members of the Institute were advocating. As Neumann suggested,

This is not about working out our own method but about the question, “How do I tell it to the children?” Until now we have been satisfied to say that we seek to integrate all the social sciences. That does not suffice. The question is whether we can present our method so as to attack the hypothesis-fact problem. We distinguish ourselves from sociology in that we view phenomena as historical phenomena, which Americans do not do. We must emphasize

---

19 “Methods Discussion,” MHA IX, 214.

20 This was not the first time that the Institute had reflected on the relationship between Critical Theory and other trends in the social sciences. Early during Neumann’s tenure with the Institute, Horkheimer published “Traditional and Critical Theory,” a programmatic statement regarding the methodology of the Frankfurt School in contrast to wider practices in America — see Max Horkheimer, “Traditionelle und kritische Theorie,” Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 6, no. 2 (1937): 245-94. The objections to Neumann raised throughout the “Methods Discussion” bear a remarkable resemblance to the characterizations of “Traditional Theory” developed in Horkheimer’s essay.

21 “Methods Discussion,” MHA IX, 214. It is important to note that Neumann had reviewed some of these new social scientific trendsetters that he directly referenced in the “Methods Discussion.” See Franz L. Neumann, “Review of Max Lerner It Is Later than You Think,” Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung 8, no. 1-2 (1939): 281-82; and Neumann, “Review of Robert S. Lynd Knowledge for What?”.

22 “Methods Discussion,” MHA IX, 214.

23 Ibid.
that we are not engaged in sociological but in social-scientific work, and we must explain this. The difference is enormous, and we must show this.24

History, as Neumann noted years later in his retrospective contribution to the Cultural Migration, was the key to allowing the European social theorist to gain traction in the United States.25 It avoided the thorny question of Marx, and and yet developed an epistemological vocabulary true to the Institute’s theory that could simultaneously be readily explained and defended to U.S. social researchers and social research foundations.

A methodological statement was prepared afterwards as a preface to the project on “Cultural Aspects of National Socialism” for its submission to the Rockefeller Foundation. It would not have taken the form it did without the January debate. After its rejection, this methodological statement was published in the Institute’s journal Studies in Philosophy and Social Science as a prelude to the anti-Semitism prospectus.26

The methodological statement comprised four theses, none of which, it was reassuringly said at the outset, would “be treated as dogmas once the actual research is carried through.” Two of the four recall suggestions that Neumann advanced during the January session.27 The first announced that “concepts are historically formed . . . concretized in a theoretical analysis, and related to the whole of the historical process.” In the second thesis, the argument expounding the claim that “concepts are critically formed” resembled the approach of Robert Lynd in Knowledge for What?, so highly prized by Neumann:

Social theory may be able to circumvent a skeptical spurning of value judgments without succumbing to normative dogmatism. This may be accomplished by relating social institutions and activities to the values they themselves set forth as their standards and ideals. . . . The ambivalent relation between prevailing values and the social context forces the categories of social theory to become critical and thus to reflect the actual rift between the social reality and the values it posits.28

Both of these methodological principles were much in evidence in Neumann’s successful revision of the Institute’s floundering grant proposal regarding anti-Semitism, as well as in his own book

24 Ibid.
27 The third and fourth theses better represented the views that had been expressed by Horkheimer and Adorno during the “Methods Discussion”—similarly, they also corresponded most closely to ideas that Horkheimer had published in his article “Traditionelle und kritische Theorie.” The third and fourth theses were that “societal concepts are inductively formed” and “integrated.” The theses went on to explain that the “totality of modern culture” was a system, and thus the entire system was implicated and laid bare in any social relationship or social concept.
Behemoth. Neumann not only discovered how to “tell it to the children,” but also developed ways of putting this historical methodology into practice and thereby attracting the attention and interest of American social scientists.

Until Neumann’s intervention, the grant proposal regarding anti-Semitism had been pushed in a direction significantly different from the methodological principles championed by Neumann. During the summer of 1940, Adorno commenced a new round of work on the project that culminated in the draft that appeared in Studies in Philosophy and Social Science.29 As Adorno wrestled with the topic of anti-Semitism, his historical prism widened to the point of slipping into anthropology. Ultimately, Adorno’s search ended with the pre-history of the Ancient Hebrews. In a letter on September 18, 1940, Adorno shared his new and daring thoughts with Horkheimer:

At a very early stage of the history of humanity, the Jews either scorned the transition from nomadism to settled habitation and remained nomadic, or went through the change inadequately and superficially, in a kind of pseudomorphosis. . . . The survival of nomadism among the Jews might provide not only an explanation of the nature of the Jew himself, but even more an explanation for anti-Semitism. The abandonment of nomadism was apparently one of the most difficult sacrifices demanded in human history. The Western concept of work, and all of the instinctual repression it involves, may coincide exactly with the development of settled habitation. The image of the Jews is one of a condition of humanity in which work is unknown, and all the later attacks on the parasitic, miserly character of the Jews are mere rationalizations. The Jews are the ones who have not allowed themselves to be ‘civilized’ and subjected to the priority of work. This has not been forgiven them, and that is why they are a bone of contention in class society. They have not allowed themselves, one might say, to be driven out of Paradise, or at least only reluctantly. . . . This holding firm to the most ancient image of happiness is the Jewish utopia. . . . But the more the world of settled habitation — a world of work — produced repression, the more the earlier condition must have seemed to be a form of happiness which could not be permitted, the very idea of which must be banned. This ban is the origin of anti-Semitism, the expulsion of the

Jews, and the attempt to complete or imitate the expulsion from Paradise.30

For Adorno, nomadism was synonymous with an existence free of reification, repression, and alienation — the nomadic Jew was representative of a utopian liberation from the exploitation and domination inherent in contemporary society. More importantly, civilization itself — not merely bourgeois civilization — was now interrogated by Adorno’s Critical Theory of society. Adorno had begun identifying flaws inherent in the constitution of Western Civilization and was linking them to the contemporary phenomena that the Institute traditionally studied. This conceptual shift was a crucial steppingstone toward his version of the grant proposal on anti-Semitism, as well as toward Dialectic of Enlightenment.

Writing for an audience of Jewish philanthropists and American social scientists, Adorno self-consciously restrained his more speculative anthropological theses. Instead of imaginatively looking back to the biblical narratives of the Ancient Hebrews, the project’s historical timeline began with the Crusades and then proceeded to the medieval pogroms of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the Reformation. Adorno also proposed the existence of anti-Semitic trends during the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and the German Wars of Liberation. Although the focus on the anti-Semitism of Voltaire and Goethe might have surprised some of his American readers, the selections of Herder, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel would have confirmed some of the earliest, anecdotal American beliefs in a German Sonderweg. Nonetheless, it remained a challenge to convince contemporary readers that the prehistory of Nazi anti-Semitism had much practical relevance in combating the contemporary manifestations of the phenomenon. Furthermore, Adorno’s analysis suggested that the anti-Semitic trend was not simply a German aberration but a danger inherent within Western Civilization. As Adorno explained,

It is generally overlooked that present day National Socialism contains potentialities which have been dormant not only in Germany but also in many other parts of the world. Many phenomena familiar in totalitarian countries (for instance, the role of the leader, mass meetings, fraternizing, drunken enthusiasm, the myth of sacrifice, the contempt of the individual, etc.) can be understood only

30 Letter from Theodor W. Adorno to Max Horkheimer, 18 September 1940, MHGS 16:762-64.
historically — that is, from the foundations of the whole of modern history.\textsuperscript{31}

In a profound misreading of his American audience, Adorno rationalized his historical and psychological approaches to the study of anti-Semitism in a highly provocative manner. Adorno’s research proposal implicated Western Civilization for some of Nazism’s most irrational policies. The Rockefeller Foundation had balked at the Institute’s grant proposal, “Cultural Aspects of National Socialism,” for a similar reason. American research foundations were perfectly ready to entertain the idea that Nazism and anti-Semitism were capable of threatening America, but they were not ready to accept the notion that they could arise in America due to indigenous forces that (by Adorno’s own formulation) would be nearly impossible to prevent or overcome because of their deep-rooted origins.\textsuperscript{32}

Also prominent in Adorno’s 1940 grant proposal was an emphasis on Friedrich Pollock’s theory of state capitalism. Whereas the Frankfurt School had formerly embraced a monopoly capitalist theory of fascism, Adorno now insisted on the state’s conquest of the economic sphere. As Adorno explained,

\begin{quote}
In the totalitarian state the free market is abolished, and the ability of money to “declare” ceases to exist. Now the government, together with rather small groups of the contemporary German bureaucracy, determines which undertakings are useful for its military and other purposes and which are not. The market, an anonymous and democratic tribunal, is replaced by the command and plan of those in power.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Thus, Adorno dropped the Institute’s traditionally Marxist emphasis on cartels and instead emphasized the totalitarian state as the economic engine, as well as the force behind, contemporary anti-Semitism. He drew a distinction between the liberal economic order and totalitarianism — whereas the Jews had a function in the liberal state, the shift to state capitalism put an end to the Jews and their former economic roles. As Adorno wrote,

\begin{quote}
The decline in importance of the spheres of economic activity in which the German Jews were chiefly engaged is the basis of their becoming superfluous. Their economic
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} Institute for Social Research, “Research Project on Anti-Semitism,” 126-27.


\textsuperscript{33} Institute for Social Research, “Research Project on Anti-Semitism,” 141.
existence was intimately connected with the liberal system of economy and with its judicial and political conditions. In liberalism, as already mentioned, the unfit are eliminated by the effectiveness of the mechanisms of competition, no matter what their names are or what personal qualities they have. In the totalitarian system, however, individuals or entire social groups can be sent to the gallows at any moment for political or other reasons. The replacement of the market by a planned economy of the state bureaucracy and the decline of the power of money capital makes possible the policy against the Jews in the Third Reich.34

Adorno linked Nazi race theory with the eclipse of the free market. He saw Germany’s Jews as representatives of entrepreneurial, finance capitalism — but the monopolies had not inherited the Earth (as Horkheimer had earlier claimed); rather, Adorno now argued that it was the totalitarian state that obliterated the bourgeois order and had initiated the race policies of the Third Reich.35

It is odd to see Franz L. Neumann taking the lead role in the revision of the anti-Semitism project. In addition to his awkward institutional and intellectual fit within the Frankfurt School, Neumann was also noted for an apparent naïveté and disinterest exhibited toward the topic of anti-Semitism in his classic book Behemoth. In a passage that has been quoted by numerous scholarly commentators, Neumann wrote:

> The administration kept a number of anti-Jewish measures up its sleeve and enacted them one by one, whenever it was necessary to stimulate the masses or divert their attention from other socio-economic and international policies. Spontaneous, popular Anti-Semitism is still weak in Germany. This assertion cannot be proved directly, but it is significant that despite the incessant propaganda to which the German people have been subjected for many years, there is no record of a single spontaneous anti-Jewish attack committed by persons not belonging to the Nazi Party. The writer’s personal conviction, paradoxical as it may seem, is that the German people are the least Anti-Semitic of all.36

Although parts of Behemoth’s monopoly capitalist analysis of the Third Reich have remained influential, this account of anti-Semitism is one of the glaring exceptions.

---

34 Ibid.
35 See Max Horkheimer, “Die Juden und Europa,” Zeit- schrift für Sozialforschung 8, no. 1-2 (1939): 115-37. In this essay, Horkheimer states that “[T]he number of corporations which dominates the entire industry grows steadily smaller. Under the surface of the Führer-state a furious battle takes place among interested parties for the spoils . . . Inside the totalitarian states, this tension is so great that Germany could dissolve overnight into a chaos of gangster battles.”
Despite the reasons that make Neumann seem a peculiar candidate for guiding the revision of the 1942 proposal for the anti-Semitism project, his involvement seems more plausible when one looks at his participation as another case in which he functioned as a negotiator on behalf of the Frankfurt School. As we observed earlier, Neumann’s first jobs for the Institute were as a legal counsel. As a legal agent, Neumann functioned as a mediator — a role to which he was accustomed from his law practice during the Weimar Republic. It is important to remember that mediators and negotiators do not simply represent the interests of their clients. This would make them little more than couriers. Mediators and negotiators are granted the power to bargain: to represent, modify, and transform the interests of their clients in order to accomplish their patrons’ broader aims. Mediators and negotiators help their clients navigate institutions and individuals. In the context of the proposal for the anti-Semitism project, this role enabled Neumann to reformulate the project to make it more congruent with the epistemologies of U.S. social science, as well as to make it more practical in its political ambitions to combat the problem of anti-Semitism.

Fusing German Bildung and American “Science”

As has been examined in more detail elsewhere, Neumann’s revision of the grant proposal regarding anti-Semitism was a successful integration of Continental social theory and American empiricism. Neumann’s revisions, however, also demonstrated the specific methodological bridge that he had proposed both before and after the AJC’s acceptance of the Institute’s proposal. It was not simply a case of rebranding, marketing, and grantsmanship. Neumann had struck upon a bargain — a manner of seeing and embracing the interrelationships between German Bildung and American “science.”

The revised grant proposal offered a more concrete historical analysis of anti-Semitism and its political functions. Neumann’s proposal held the promise of more effectively combating National Socialism by better understanding its wider aims and significance. Although the Institute had utilized the concept of totalitarianism before (using it as a synonym for fascism), Neumann’s proposal developed a more specific notion of totalitarianism to capture the essence of the dangers it posed to both Europe and the rest of the world. As the new proposal explained,
The new anti-Semitism is totalitarian. It aims not only at exterminating the Jews but also at annihilating liberty and democracy. It has become the spearhead of the totalitarian order, and the aims and function of this order can be vastly clarified by a study of anti-Semitism . . . the attacks on the Jews are not primarily aimed at the Jews but at large sections of modern society, especially the free middle classes, which appear as an obstacle to the establishment of totalitarianism. Anti-Semitism is a kind of rehearsal; when the results of the rehearsal are satisfactory, the real performance — the attack on the middle classes — takes place.\textsuperscript{38}

Notably, the concept of state capitalism had been removed from Neumann’s grant proposal, and the Institute’s more traditional emphasis on monopoly capitalism returned. The primary threat, however, no longer jeopardized merely the Jews and their economic roles within the liberal state — Jewish and non-Jewish small businesses and free professionals were in danger. Neumann’s proposal broadened but also specified this rhetoric to present the totalitarian menace in terms that an American audience would appreciate. It threatened liberty, democracy, and the middle class — the very foundations of American society.\textsuperscript{39} By better comprehending totalitarianism and its anti-Semitic policies, the Institute offered to assist the United States in combating and eliminating them. As the revised proposal explained,

\begin{quote}
The aim of our project is not merely to point out contradictions, to enlighten the prospective victims, or to argue with them rationally. We want to trace the origins, conscious as well as unconscious, of anti-Semitism, to analyze the pattern of anti-Semitic behavior no less than of anti-Semitic propaganda, and to integrate all our findings into one comprehensive, empirically substantiated theory of anti-Semitism which may serve as a basis for future attempts to counteract it.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Like the 1941 proposal, Neumann’s revision promised to include a study of the origins and history of anti-Semitism. The description, however, was far less impressionistic. While the earlier work proposed some intriguing but tenuous hypotheses about the early history of anti-Semitism, the new appeal to the AJC promised to rigorously uncover the recent history of prejudice and mass persecution. Instead of

\textsuperscript{38} Institute for Social Research, “A Research Project on Anti-Semitism,” MHA, IX, 92, 7a, 2-6.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 8.
identifying specific but distant events and intellectual movements that anticipated contemporary anti-Semitism and failing to appropriately explain the basis for each, the Institute outlined its procedure without indulging in the kinds of social philosophical speculations that Adorno had emphasized. The result was a coherent and concrete description of a historical research methodology that could be embraced by social scientists in the United States. This historical analysis promised to accomplish what the prior grant proposal had offered (a historical examination of anti-Semitic behavior and its rhetorical basis in the messages of demagogues), but it devoted itself to these topics without drawing attention to the more provocative critique of Western Civilization that had become the main focus for Adorno.41

In a similar fashion, like the 1941 proposal, the revised AJC project also sought to uncover anti-Semitic character types and their basis in common perceptions of Jews. These research goals, which represented the major psychological contribution of the enterprise, made up the other essential piece of the plan. These character types were modeled closely on those developed by Erich Fromm in Autorität und Familie; Neumann recognized that this section of the study had the potential to generate great interest in the United States. Psychoanalysis was rapidly growing in popularity, and innovative use of Freudianism had would likely appeal to a sizable scholarly audience. Unlike Adorno, however, Neumann recognized that psychoanalysis alone would not be able to convince sponsors. Instead of separating the various elements of the psychological portion of the study, as the 1941 article had planned, Neumann’s new appeal to the AJC consolidated the analysis of anti-Semitic character types by simultaneously considering their sociological basis in contemporary reality, as well as their political functions. 42 He aimed to unify psychology, sociology, and politics by focusing on anti-Semitic propaganda. From the outset of the grant proposal, Neumann’s hypothesis was that anti-Semitic propaganda could be more successfully negated its audiences and their receptions of it were better understood.

The revised AJC grant proposal concluded with a direct appeal to U.S. social researchers and foundations. The new research program needed to fit the orientation and interests of potential American sponsors. The old proposal had failed to accomplish this, much like the equally unsuccessful Nazism project. Both initiatives aggressively asserted the recent theoretical and philosophical breakthroughs that members of the Institute had pioneered, but this strategy could only attract a
limited set of U.S. researchers. Consistent with the “Methods Discussion” in early 1941, the Institute did not completely abandon the theoretical traditions it had brought from Continental Europe. Instead of advocating a total assimilation to American sociology, the revised proposal recognized the possible benefits of trying to combine the two approaches. Realizing that the Frankfurt School would need assistance, the proposal expressed a desire for collaboration with American specialists. Such a marriage of the two sociological traditions might be successful.43 As the members of the Institute explained,

Such a combination of the highly developed American empirical and quantitative methods with the more theoretical European methods will constitute a new approach which many scholars regard as highly promising. . . . What will be important in the proposed tests is not the explicit opinions of those subjects but the psychological configurations within which these opinions appear. The terms which occur most frequently in free associations may supply us with valuable cues. It will be particularly instructive to compare the frequency curves of various subjects and socio-psychological types. A more precise knowledge of the emotional backgrounds of anti-Semitic reactions may enable us to elaborate more differentiated psychological methods of defense against anti-Semitic aggression.44

Manifesting neither epistemological intransigence nor complete accommodation, Neumann’s revised proposal arrived at a vision of social research that would cause the enthusiastic receptions of the book series, The Studies in Prejudice.

More importantly, Neumann’s revised proposal offered a political plan of attack for combating totalitarian anti-Semitism. In a supplement to the grant proposal added in December 1942, Neumann offered an action plan that was expected to rise out of the Institute’s research study. The supplement proposed the following:

(1) The emergence of the new totalitarian form as distinct from the previous forms of anti-Semitism, requires the adoption of an offensive strategy and the abandonment of the traditional defensive and apologetic policies. In this connection, we shall show how to identify potential anti-Semitic movements behind their various disguises and

43 Ibid., 31.
44 Ibid., 31–32.
classify them according to the magnitude of the danger they present. We shall evolve new methods for distinguishing the less dangerous non-totalitarian forms of anti-Semitism from its deadly totalitarian form. The exact and early recognition of the danger may prevent the counter-action from being “too little and too late . . .”

(2) We shall attempt to determine which social groups and organizations can be won as allies, which can be neutralized and which are thoroughly uncompromising. Here, our analysis of the specific social and economic conditions underlying anti-Semitism will stress the role of certain social reforms in partly destroying the breeding ground of anti-Semitism. . .

(3) In formulating our suggestions we shall take into account various possibilities of post-war reconstruction in Europe and America. We shall assume first an American-British control over most of the world for a long transitory period with a gradual introduction of self-administration in Europe. We assume a painful transition and serious social unrest. Social and economic trends already apparent during this war, instead of arbitrarily drawn blue-prints, must serve as a guide, for this as well as for our inquiries.45

Thus, Neumann’s revision of the anti-Semitism grant proposal put a strong emphasis on the connection between the research program and political action. Rather than identifying the profound depths of the problem, as Adorno’s proposal had, Neumann’s took the threat just as seriously but envisioned it in a manner that empowered its readers to combat the new totalitarian anti-Semitism.

The revised proposal offered hypotheses, but they were hypotheses that had arisen directly from the Institute’s theoretical work. Neumann was careful, however, not to draw too much attention to the social theoretical views that lay in the background. The Institute’s unique brand of Marxism was a central source of inspiration, but prudence prevented an open admission of this reality. More significantly, the new proposal represented the kind of reconciliation of “theory and practice” that Neumann later presented as one of the most important notions that European exiled social scientists learned from their American counterparts. Horkheimer and the other

members of his inner circle had developed a series of philosophical critiques of pragmatism, but Neumann recognized the practical value of pragmatism in the pursuit and utilization of social research. As a committed member of the Weimar’s anti-Fascist community, Neumann was determined to combat Nazism. What was the point in studying anti-Semitism if not to strike a blow against the Third Reich? As Herbert Marcuse later recalled in a memorial address for Neumann delivered at Columbia University,

Theory was for him [Neumann] not abstract speculation, not a digest of various opinions on state, government, etc., but a necessary guide and precondition for political action. He believed that progress in freedom depended on the progress of democratic socialism, that the failure of German socialism was not final, that knowledge of past errors and a thorough analysis of the historical forces determining the present era would help rescue what had been lost. . . . The rapid consolidation and expansion of the Nazi regime did not demoralize him: he saw in the emigration a fresh opportunity for action.46

Although the integration of empiricism and theory was an important dimension of postwar Critical Theory, it was, perhaps, the concept of practical, political action that made this blending of opposites both possible and desirable. As Marcuse observed about Neumann, the postwar Critical Theorists did not import and deploy American social science methods for their own sake or for strictly mercenary motives. They utilized the newest American techniques to address significant problems in West German society. They had made their peace with pragmatism — not American pragmatism in its philosophical guise, but practical pragmatism as a guide to social change. Without Neumann’s intervention, it is intriguing to wonder whether late Critical Theory might have included this adaptation from its earlier exile form.

Neumann’s successful strategy for securing grant support from the AJC backfired against his professional hopes at the Institute.47 The terms upon which the agency supported the project offended the leaders of the Institute. While they could not refuse the money, they closed off Neumann’s chances of continuing his work. Just as Neumann had seen few practical contradictions between Marxism and law, he similarly did not see insurmountable contradictions between Critical Theory and trends within U.S. sociology. If he had

46 Herbert Marcuse, “Franz Neumann,” Minutes of the Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University, April 15, 1955.
47 Horkheimer and Pollock had threatened to terminate Neumann and other Institute members during the immediate fiscal crisis that hit the Institute during the recession of 1937-1938. See the letter from Neumann to Horkheimer, 24 September 1939 (NHA, VI, 30, 124-26). This threat, however, was rescinded when Horkheimer decided to maintain the full Institute staff in several bids to win outside grant support. In an ironic twist, Neumann eventually did succeed in procuring the grant support, but he was still terminated despite this significant contribution.
intended the anti-Semitism project to foster a mutually valuable complementarity between social scientific work of the newer American type and the theoretical orientations of the Institute, he failed to carry Horkheimer and the others. They concluded that he had harnessed them to a kind of work they despised. The curious consequences were, first, that he was excluded from the work he had made available and, second, that the empirical components of the project resembled more nearly what they feared than what he had planned. Paradoxically, at least in the eyes of many observers, the momentum of the celebrated “authoritarian personality” studies led to the curious juxtaposition of theoretical radicalism and conventional research during the years after the Institute returned to Germany.

In relation to the consequences of Neumann’s achievement, the fallout was profoundly ironic. American social scientists, as well as fellow émigrés outside of the Frankfurt School, appreciated Neumann’s efforts to supplement Continental social theory with American empirical methods. Nowhere were his efforts more enthusiastically embraced than at the Sociology Department at Columbia University. Ever since the Institute’s arrival on Morningside Heights, members of the department had hoped that the Institute would continue the kinds of interdisciplinary research that Erich Fromm had managed in Europe. Initially, Columbia’s sociologists thought that their wish had come true as Fromm initiated a series of comparable projects in collaboration with Columbia faculty and graduate students. Yet these hopes were dashed by Fromm’s departure in 1939.48 Neumann’s efforts on grant proposals to study the origins of Nazism in Germany and the broader phenomenon of anti-Semitism renewed the hopes of Columbia’s disappointed sociologists. Despite the Rockefeller Foundation’s rejection of the Germany Project and the Anti-Semitism Project’s initial failure to generate interest, Robert Lynd and other members of the sociology department appreciated what Neumann was attempting to accomplish in his work on both. While Lynd scolded the other members of the Institute for having “wasted a great opportunity” because they had “never achieved a true collaboration” in which they “might have confronted our European experiences with conditions in America,”49 he became a powerful champion for Neumann. As the Institute sought a closer and more formal relationship with the university that would include a member of the Institute becoming a lecturer on Columbia’s sociology faculty, the leadership of the Frankfurt School assumed that Horkheimer (or whoever he chose to designate) would

48 For a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding the Institute’s move to America and its relationship with Columbia University, see Wheatland, Frankfurt School in Exile, 35-94.

49 Letter from Marcuse to Horkheimer, 15 October 1941 (MHGS 17: 199-201).
be selected for this role. When news arrived in January 1942 that the department had selected Neumann for the lectureship, Horkheimer and Pollock immediately commenced with radical plans to downsize the Institute. Neumann was notified that his position would be terminated in September of 1942 unless outside funding was secured, thereby making his flight to Washington a necessity. Although Neumann did secure the outside funding that represented his only hope of remaining with the Institute, their confused judgment about the terms with the AJC led Horkheimer and Pollock to rescind this last bit of hope.

Ambassadors and Critics of American Social Sciences in Postwar Germany

As much as Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock, and Theodor W. Adorno sought to emphasize the origins of their thought between the traditions of Weimar Bildung and Wissenschaft, they returned to Germany as both ambassadors and critics of the empirical methods they had encountered in American sociology. On the one hand, the postwar Institut für Sozialforschung marketed itself and expressed its appreciation of the methods and goals of American social science by listing the numerous and significant benefits of social research:

Social Research, in all its aspects, and particularly in the areas of research on the structure of society, on human relationships and modes of behavior within the labor process, of opinion research and the practical application of sociological and psychological knowledge in the last few decades, has received a great boost. . . . The part these disciplines can play today both in Germany’s public life and in the rationalization of its economy can hardly be overestimated. . . . The demand for scientists trained in the new methods is no less than that for engineers, chemists or doctors, and they are valued no less than those professions are. Not only government administration, and all the opinion-forming media such as the press, film and radio, but also businesses maintain numerous sociological research bodies. Social research can create the optimal social conditions in their factories, ascertain and calculate in advance what the public needs in their branch of business, and monitor and improve the effectiveness of their advertising.

50 Wheatland, Frankfurt School in Exile, 87-91, 230.
51 Letter from Pollock to Horkheimer, 27 January 1942 (MHA VI, 32, 385-87).
Although this quotation appears in an early pamphlet promoting the Institute and its unique qualifications, the Frankfurt School did carry out a research agenda quite faithful to this mission statement during the first two decades in West Germany. Thus, it promised to deploy the most cutting-edge empirical techniques to meet a myriad of “functionalist” ends. In addition to the well-known *Gruppenexperiment* (Groups Experiment) on postwar political attitudes, the Institute also pursued a research program of educational and industrial sociology relying on the most contemporary techniques of American public opinion polling for a variety of practical results to bolster West German society and business.\(^5^4\)

On the other hand, the reconstituted Frankfurt School also presented itself as an enemy of these same trends viewed by many as synonymous with American social science. As Adorno explained in the famous *Positivismusstreit* (Positivism Dispute),

> Sociology’s abandonment of a critical theory of society is resignatory: one no longer dares to conceive of the whole since one must despair of changing it. But if sociology then desired to commit itself to the apprehension of facts and figures in the service of that which exists, then such progress under conditions of unfreedom would increasingly detract from the detailed insights through which sociology thinks it triumphs over theory and condemn them completely to irrelevance.\(^5^5\)

In other words, at the same time that members of the Institute offered its services to West German managerial and political elites, their social theory attacked the same research methods that they deployed in the name of critical sociology.

The cognitive dissonance between the two positions led many who were intimately familiar with the Frankfurt School’s theory and methods to throw up their hands in confusion. Paul Lazarsfeld, an Austrian émigré himself and a leading figure in “American” empirical social sciences after the war, expressed this sentiment like no other. In an essay written at the height of the Frankfurt School’s postwar reception by the New Left, Lazarsfeld noted the puzzling contradiction:

> When, after the war, the majority of the Frankfurt group returned to Germany, they at first tried to convey to their


German colleagues the merits of empirical social research which they observed in the United States. . . . Within a period of five years, however, the situation changed completely. Adorno embarked on an endless series of articles dealing with the theme of theory and empirical research. These became more and more shrill, and the invectives multiplied. Stupid, blind, insensitive, sterile became homeric attributes whenever the empiricist was mentioned. . . . Thereafter one paper followed another, each reiterating the new theme. All have two characteristics in common. First, the empiricist is a generalized other — no examples of concrete studies are given. Second, the futility of empirical research is not demonstrated by its products, but derived from the conviction that specific studies cannot make a contribution to the great aim of social theory to grasp society in its totality. Empirical research had become another fetish concealing the true nature of the contemporary social system.\footnote{Paul Lazarsfeld, “Critical Theory and Dialectics,” \textit{Paul Lazarsfeld Papers}, box 36, pages 112-14.}

Upon first glance, the archival material could easily lead one to conclude that this epistemological bipolarity was a result of material necessity. The reconstituted Frankfurt School required the financial, political, and intellectual capital to possess the academic freedom to critique postwar social science.\footnote{Wheatland, \textit{Frankfurt School in Exile}, 191-263.} And yet grantsmanship cannot fully account for the contradiction. Even at moments when the material circumstances of the Institute were most dire, its leadership did not support the kind of intellectual assimilation that took place after the war. While the Institute was struggling to survive during the most precarious period of its exile, Horkheimer expressed his sense of entrapment in light of the need to assimilate: :

In this society [the US] even science is controlled by trusted insiders. . . Whatever does not absolutely submit to the monopoly — body and soul — is deemed a ‘wild’ enterprise and is, one way or another, destroyed. . . We want to escape control, remain independent, and determine the content and extent of our production ourselves! We are immoral. . . Fitting in, however, would mean in this instance, as in others, primarily making concessions, many of them, giving material guarantees that submission is sincere, lasting, and irrevocable. Fitting in means surrendering, whether it turns out favorably or not. Therefore, our efforts are hopeless. . .\footnote{Max Horkheimer to Theodor W. Adorno, June 23, 1941, \textit{Max Horkheimer Gesammelte Schriften}, vol. 17, \textit{Briefwechsel 1941-1948} (Frankfurt-am-Main, 1996), 81-88.}
Had Horkheimer changed his mind after the war and in the new setting of West Germany? The answer would clearly seem to be “yes.” But what were the reasons for the change? I would like to suggest that Horkheimer had been trapped by his own success. During the early 1940s, neither he nor his inner circle had foreseen the acceptance of their grant proposal for a study of anti-Semitism or the fruitful integration of Continental social theory and American empiricism that it envisioned. Both the grant and subsequent projects that made up the books in the Studies in Prejudice series, brought Horkheimer and his colleagues more notoriety than could have plausibly been expected. Interestingly, none of the key members of the Institute’s inner circle had been responsible for the seminal breakthroughs that made the project possible. Rather, the task was accomplished by a relative outsider, Franz L. Neumann. The Institute returned to Germany quite different from how it had left. The successes Neumann’s interventions made possible created opportunities for the returning Frankfurt School, but it also created expectations that could not be ignored.

Thomas Wheatland is an assistant professor of history at Assumption College. His research focuses on intellectual history and the history of the social sciences in the twentieth century. He has published widely on members of the Institute of Social Research and their transatlantic careers, including his book The Frankfurt School in Exile (University of Minnesota Press, 2009).