

George Friedman. *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981. 312 pages.

On the inside jacket of his book George Friedman is identified as an assistant professor of political science at Dickinson College who received his Ph.D. from Cornell. That exhausts my knowledge of the author. From the contents of his book, however, I would infer that the courses he offers deviate from the usual political science fare of model building and conceptual games; that they speak to genuine issues of Marxism and modern society: the crises of social systems, the madness of reason, the import of religious and utopian visions, and so on. I would even hazard that he is a stimulating teacher, and probably a fine fellow. For these reasons alone, if Professor Friedman has published this book in order to secure a job and tenure, I believe he deserves them.

If this book can be extricated from an ugly web of academic politics and careers to be judged on its own, then a different judgment can be offered: the book is awful. If only Cornell University Press expended as much effort on the text as it did on the typography and binding, which are excellent, we would all be happier. The scholarship is inferior, the arguments are a swamp, and the writing induces pain. This is another academic book which no one will read to the end without a special grant. It is the kind of book that after 10 pages or so you begin to wonder what is the meaning of life or, at least, what is the Haagen Dazs situation in the freezer.

Friedman did not want to write an intellectual history but a "systematic treatment of the thought of the Frankfurt School," or, more precisely, an "exegesis" of its texts on political theory. For this purpose he confines the Frankfurt School to Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse and Benjamin. Within these boundaries he might have utilized their earlier works which have been published in recent years; they might illuminate the mature political texts. A vain hope. Friedman sticks to the basic and familiar books, *Negative Dialectics*, *Eclipse of Reason*, *One-Dimensional Man*, and so on. Moreover, not only is history extraneous to his enterprise, it does not exist. He handles the texts as if they were all written at the same time, which often renders his arguments absurd. For instance, it is impossible to discuss "the" Frankfurt School's relationship to the proletariat by citing with equal ease Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" and Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation*, as if several decades do not separate them.

The weakness of his scholarship is not restricted to his use of Frankfurt School texts. In all the areas he tackles — Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche — Friedman is over his head. To be sure, it is often not clear whether Friedman simply does not know what he is gabbing about, cannot write or cannot think; knowledge, style and logic form a seamless unity. It is clear that he does not stray far from the Standard Dictionary of Humanist Schlock. He employs often not only the basic terms, "crises of modernity," but leaps through finding crises of death, existence, redemption, history, and so on. Even his casual phrases betray the scantiest of knowledge; he regularly refers to the Marxism of "Stalin and Blum," as if it designated something. Why poor Léon Blum gets elevated to a co-determinant of Marxism is not explained.

Each chapter evidences Friedman's historical naivete, fractured language and synthetic emotionalism; because the book is conceptually dead Friedman tries to breathe life into it with contrived drama. The Frankfurt School is always agonizing over something. To illustrate: one chapter analyzes the Frankfurt School's relationship to Hegel and Hegelianism. The issue for the Frankfurt School was "whether there existed a way out of the historical cul-de-sac of the 20th century. To one such as Hegel, the existence of a cul-de-sac, particularly one with no exit, was

literally unthinkable. Men who could think such thoughts were not Hegelians." To Friedman, cul-de-sacs with exits are quite reasonable, which makes him a Hegelian. Throwing on the scale the Frankfurt School's radicalism and critique of Hegel, Friedman concludes that "contrary to popular opinion, the Frankfurt School is not Hegelian, except as we are all Hegelians."

Perhaps they were Young Hegelians? Friedman raises "an issue with which both the Young Hegelians and the Frankfurt School were obsessed, but which the Frankfurt School radicalized: the issue of the death of God." The drums roll: "The issue was one that each of the members of the Frankfurt School knew of and agonized over. Each faced the problem as if it were the critical moment of contemporary existence. Each sought somehow to come to grips with the social and psychological implications of the abolition of divinity." Friedman footnotes here "the entire *Dialectic of Enlightenment*" as well as some stray pages from Marcuse, Horkheimer and Benjamin.

However, the Young Hegelians and the Frankfurt School diverged. "First, their [the Frankfurt School's] experience of the death of God was mediated through Nietzsche, a richer and more immediate source." The Young Hegelians did not have the good fortune of reading Nietzsche. Why the death of God becomes richer and more immediate by reading Nietzsche is not explained. "Second, the Young Hegelians greeted atheism with a sense of liberation. History did not permit the Frankfurt School such shallowness." Very nice. The Young Hegelians were not atheists. A perusal of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* could disabuse Friedman of this idea, but he seems innocent of any textual familiarity of their writings. It is welcome news that "history" does not permit shallowness; perhaps Friedman can expand on this idea in another book. It is one of his favorite formulations; history is continually forcing the Frankfurt School to think.

The reader stumbles along with Friedman dazzled by the language and insight. "Adorno criticized Kierkegaard while Horkheimer wrote on Schopenhauer for similar reasons." Well said. Friedman imagines that the Young Hegelians formed two rival high school teams. After drawing up the teams, he concludes that the "Frankfurt School could never fit within the confines of such a neat schema." We then move onto "darker and more dangerous" origins of the Frankfurt School. The following chapters take up Nietzsche, Heidegger, Spengler and Freud.

The Frankfurt School came to Nietzsche because history allowed no escape. "They were impelled to move towards him for they were wise enough to realize that the crisis of modernity rested at least as much in the knowledge he had made available as it did with Marx. . . . Also, they had little choice in being influenced by Nietzsche, since they were Germans, whose teacher, for better or worse, had been Nietzsche's finest heir: Martin Heidegger." The only truth here, for which Friedman must henceforth be credited, is that the Frankfurt School was German.

Friedman cites some texts of Nietzsche and is content to state that the Frankfurt School learned from them. That he demonstrates the Frankfurt School's thought emerged out of or in contact with Nietzsche's is foreign to his method; he is pleased to register general parallels, and pumps up his analysis with half-truths. "The Frankfurt School learned an enormous amount from Nietzsche. In the first place, they took their understanding of the crisis of modernity. . . . From this they shared with Nietzsche a certain joy at the liberation afforded by the collapse of traditional metaphysics and morality." The "certain" here betrays the fraud: this statement means nothing or is false.

From here to Heidegger, already announced as Nietzsche's heir; he never returns to this claim. Why Heidegger? Guess. "One could not study philosophy in Germany at the time of the Frankfurt School and avoid the influence of Martin Heidegger." Of course both Adorno and Horkheimer studied philosophy at the time of the Frankfurt School and avoided Heidegger quite successfully. In fact, only Marcuse was influenced by him. Oh well. As proof, he footnotes *Weimar Culture*, where Peter Gay states that Heidegger's influence was "far-reaching," one letter by Benjamin, and so on.

Friedman is dimly aware of some problems, e.g., Adorno never ceased to criticize Heidegger. Against all evidence, even some he trips over, he decides that Adorno protested the "use" of Heidegger's concepts but not the concepts themselves. He cites a passage of Adorno attacking the fetish of genuineness, which closes, "Such abuse, however, is not extrinsic to the concept of genuineness." How does Friedman read this passage? "The use of the concept and not the concept itself is what repels Adorno." Such perspicuity is abundant in this book. Marcuse's more complicated relationship to Heidegger is captured in the following lovely sentence: "Marcuse, in a way, and by Benjamin's standards, continued to work with Heidegger and to even risk fascism, for he had few alternatives." To judge this statement false would be generous.

Next we come to Spengler where the same procedure of manufacturing something out of nothing is employed. Adorno wrote two essays on Spengler, the second a brief lecture from 1955. No other substantial references to Spengler exist in the Frankfurt School oeuvre. Out of this empty box Friedman concludes that Spengler bestowed on the Frankfurt School a concept of culture and "sense of the future." "Spengler, more than Marx, created and nurtured the School's historical vision." Of course, beyond some "parallels," Friedman cannot show any Spenglerian impact.

Friedman continues through a chapter on Judaism and Freud to arrive at this startling conclusion: "What distinguishes the Frankfurt School from other forms of Hegelianized Marxism is the way that their historical and social concerns were mediated through a melange of other, at times antithetical, sources." Unfortunately, this only ties up Part I. Part II is titled "Posing the Problem of Modernity," and finds a veritable nestegg of crises: crises of the enlightenment, art, culture and the psyche. All these are contained in the "overarching crisis: the crisis of history." The crisis of history, in turn, is enveloped by the "general crisis of human existence." The crisis of human existence is "in a deeper sense, a crisis of everyday life." In its deepest sense these crises register the crisis of the academic mind trumping itself up as the *Weltgeist*. Part III is called "The Search for the Solution," and contains the usual amount of absurdities.

Friedman concludes with mumbo-jumbo. "The concern of the Frankfurt School for the erotic is simply the radicalization of the privatization implied by the universalization of the household (into a thing coterminus with society as a whole), which Marxism traditionally argued for." He runs at the mouth about death and related subjects. The Frankfurt School "chose the illogic of negative dialectics precisely because their position was untenable. They were trying to have the world while being lost in it. The intention was, in a way, touching."

Professor Friedman's intention to write on the Frankfurt School is, in a way, touching, but he is lost beyond logic and knowledge. This book ill serves its subject and publisher, but most of all, its author.

Russell Jacoby