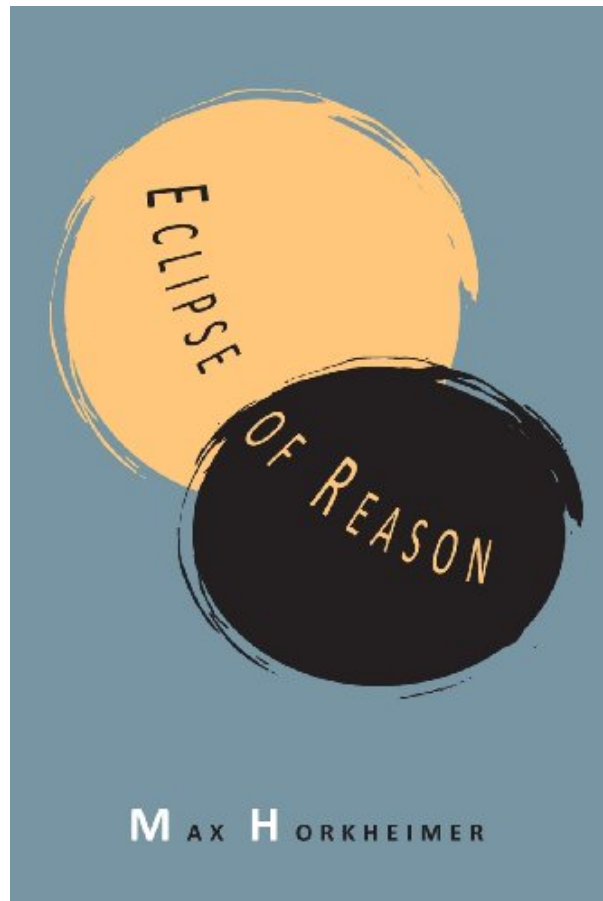
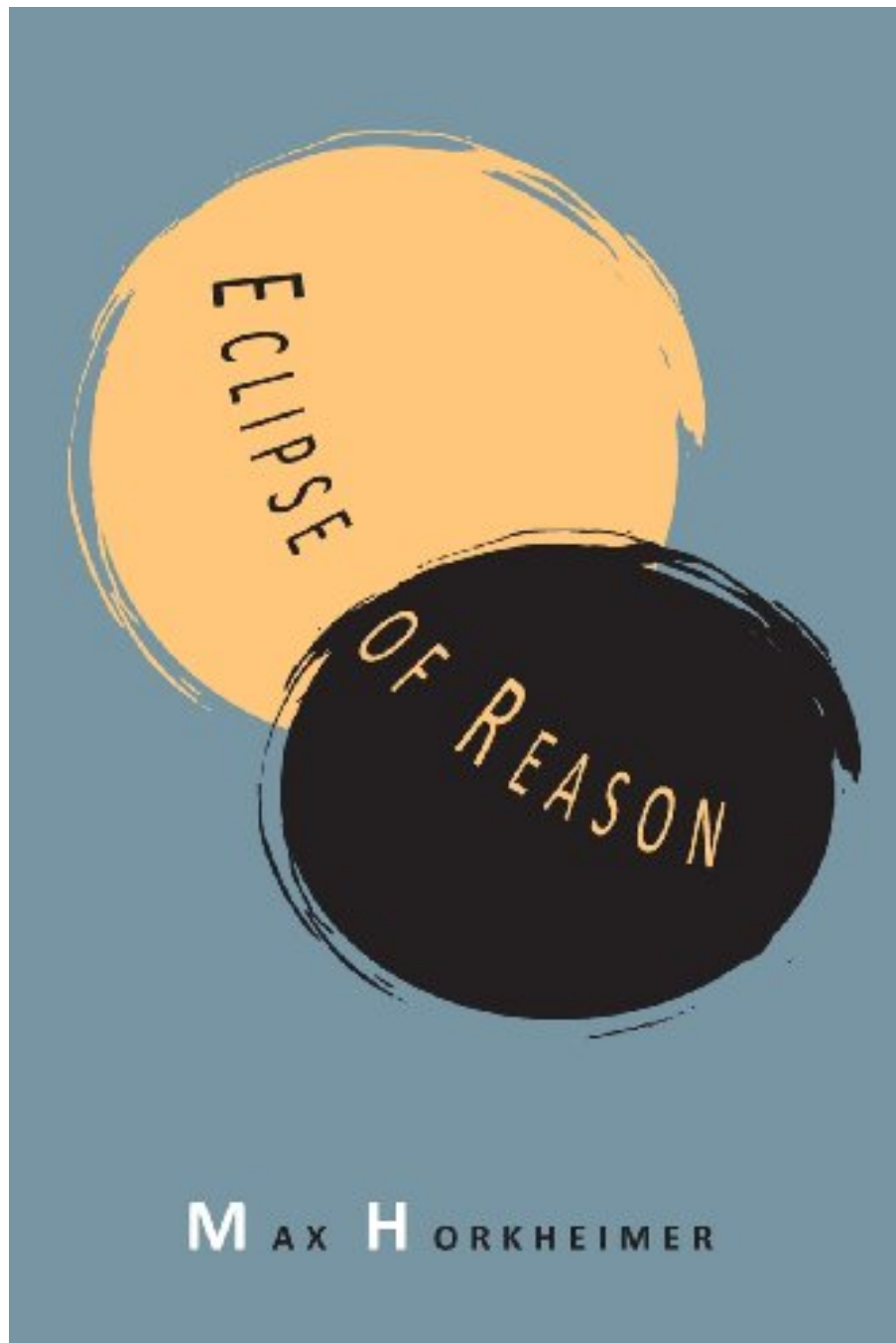


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About the Author

Max Horkheimer, founder and long-time director of the famous Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, was professor emeritus of philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt until his death in 1973. He is one of the founders of the Frankfurt School.

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2013 Reprint of 1947 Edition. Exact facsimile of the original edition, not reproduced with Optical Recognition Software. "Eclipse of Reason" discusses how the Nazis were able to project their agenda as "reasonable". It is broken into five sections: 1] Means and Ends, 2] Conflicting Panaceas, 3] The Revolt of Nature, 4] The Rise and Decline of the Individual and 5] On the Concept of Philosophy. It also treats the concept of reason within the history of western philosophy.

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Seeking Reason Beyond Reason

By benjamin

Despite its compact size, Max Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason* is a potent manifesto against the instrumentalization of Reason in the Enlightenment, which led to a culture in which the most barbaric of acts - the Holocaust, with all of its mediatized manipulation under the Nazis - could take place. At points a whirlwind tour through some of the major trends in intellectual history since Plato, *The Eclipse of Reason* can be as dense as it is potent. It will reward only a close and careful reading.

"Progress threatens to nullify the very goal it is supposed to realize - the idea of man" (v). This sentence, contained in the Preface, concisely states the main concern that animates the entire book. The Enlightenment comes in for heavy critique throughout these pages, for in separating reason from religion it "retained God, but not grace" (11) and effectively killed metaphysics. Having cut itself off from any notion of a grounding worldview, it finds its ultimate expression in the development of the American worldview, as best expressed in the only philosophical movement to have ever grown up out of America's own soil: Pragmatism, which Horkheimer writes "reflects a society that has no time to remember and meditate" (30).

The lack of time and transcendence - the lack of any fundamental notion of Truth, which is fundamental to American liberalism - helps undermine any and all notions of beauty as a revealing of Truth. The reduction of everything to mere practicality robs humanity of something fundamental to it, which is contained in the work of art: seeing something beyond ourselves, outside of ourselves. Practicality reduces everything to a mere tool: and this is the essence of totalitarian violence.

Digging deeper, Horkheimer reaches back to the very origin of modern thought on the individual: Socrates. This individualism grows with the Reformation, and then the Enlightenment; against this rise in individualism is itself the huge shifts in Christianity that began in earnest with the Reformation: a Christianity that, like Hamlet, has lost its Christian faith but not its Christian soul (93). The collapse of the medieval worldview and the loss of the Church as the central authority meant that the Christian conception of self - and individual made in the image of God, thus invested with infinite worth and given the opportunity of moral choice - would continue without the Christian concept of authority. This individual would, however, even lose its cosmic worth as technology progressed; the individual would eventually become nothing more than an economic unit.

In the end, all of this leads to the death of philosophy, meaning that "irrationality still molds the fate of men" (106). Thus, Horkheimer's conclusion is worth quoting in full: "If by enlightenment and intellectual progress we mean the freeing of man from superstitious belief in evil forces, in demons and fairies, in blind fate - in short, emancipation of fear - then denunciation of what is currently called reason is the greatest service reason can render" (126).

33 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

Reason as Failure

By fmeursault@yahoo.com

Horkheimer's book, *Eclipse of Reason* deals with the concept of "reason" within the history of Western philosophy. Horkheimer defines true reason as rationality. He details the difference between objective and subjective reason and states that we have moved from objective to subjective. Objective reason deals with universal truths that dictate that an action is either right or wrong. Subjective reason takes into account the situation and social norms. Actions that produce the best situation for the individual are "reasonable" according to subjective reason. The movement from one type of reason to the other occurred when thought could no longer accommodate these objective truths or when it judged them to be delusions. Under subjective reason, concepts lose their meaning. All concepts must be strictly functional to be reasonable. Because subjective reason rules, the ideals of a society, for example democratic ideals, become dependent on the "interests" of the people instead of being dependent on objective truths.

Horkheimer is writing in 1946 and is influenced by Nazi power in Germany. He is outlining how the Nazis were able to make their agenda appear "reasonable". He is also issuing a warning against this happening again. Horkheimer believes that the ills of modern society are caused by the misuse and misunderstanding of reason. If people use true reason to critique their societies, they will be able to identify and solve their problems.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Straight up Frankfurt-school-critique goodness. Some of the specific and ...

By The GoodStudent

Straight up Frankfurt-school-critique goodness. Some of the specific and sustained interpretive moments feel quite dated and uninspiring, but Horkheimer must be credited for putting into focus the nature of a technocratic positivist pursuit of means w/out any deeper end or purpose, without reference to some principle outside of our mere subjective wants (i.e., his concept of "objective reason")--it is, I think, a decisive description of the dominant mode of activity and organization in our moment of neoliberal or multi-national capitalism. What is the purpose of endless growth?

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