

FROM ENLIGHTENMENT TO MODERNITY:
CRITICAL THEORY AND THE RETREAT FROM PRAXIS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an interpretive analysis of the tradition of social thought which has come to be known as 'critical theory'. It is argued that the development of this school of thought may be understood as a continuing struggle with the contradictions of the Enlightenment and, in particular, with the internal tensions of Enlightenment reason. In the 1930s critical theory emerged as an attempt to integrate a critique of ideology directed toward social emancipation, with a normative theory of rationality drawn from the philosophy of German idealism. The collapse of this project in the mid 1940s is examined through an analysis of Dialectic of Enlightenment. This development is read here as an indication of a convergence between critical theory and Max Weber's pessimistic vision of a rationalized world. Since the early 1960s Jürgen Habermas has directed his efforts toward a renewal of critical theory. During his 'Frankfurt period' of the 1960s Habermas attempted to reassemble the 'project of the Enlightenment' through a reworking of the classical motifs of nineteenth century philosophy. In the resulting text Knowledge and Human Interests he defended the notion of an emancipatory interest inherent in acting reason. The criticism generated by this text has led Habermas to completely reconstruct the foundations of critical theory. Thus during his 'Starnberg period' Habermas turned to analytic philosophy in order to work out the 'formal pragmatics' of a theory of discursive

rationality. This research programme he has since integrated into a reconstructed theory of societal rationalization. In this reconceptualization of critical theory, which Habermas now refers to as a defense of the 'project of modernity', the influence of Weber is once again drawn into the light. The thesis concludes by indicating how Habermas' theoretical certainty has been gained at the cost of access to praxis. It is not at all clear how the highly idealized notion of discursive rationality presented in The Theory of Communication Action may serve as a guide for political emancipation. In short, critical theory's theoretical shift from the 'project of the Enlightenment' to the 'project of modernity' is accompanied by a retreat from the political problem of emancipatory praxis.

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Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Introduction	1
Notes to the Introduction	10
Chapter One: The Dialectic of Enlightenment	12
I. The Institutional Setting	12
II. Critical Theory and the Relationship to Marx	17
III. The Concept of Rationality: Critical Theory and Weber	21
IV. Conclusion	39
Notes to Chapter One	42
Chapter Two: Enlightenment and the Interest in Emancipation	47
I. The Renewal of Practical Reason	48
II. Reason's Interest in Emancipation	61
III. The Public Realm	72
IV. Conclusion	87
Notes to Chapter Two	92
Chapter Three: The Dynamics of Rationalization	97
I. Weber's Dialectic of Rationalization	98
II. A Theory of Discursive Rationality	116
III. Rationalization and the Problem of Emancipation	130
Notes to Chapter Three	139
Conclusion	144
Notes to the Conclusion	153
Bibliography	154

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Introduction

The tradition of social thought which falls under the rubric of 'critical theory' was first developed in the 1930s in the writings of the Frankfurt School -- a loosely-knit group of academics formally associated with the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt.¹ The chief architects of the 'critical theory of society' were Max Horkheimer, who became Director of the Institute in 1930, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor W. Adorno. Generally speaking, the critical theory project was an attempt to integrate political economy, cultural criticism, and psychoanalysis into a radical social theory which directed empirical research toward a critique of ideology.

The emphasis on ideology-critique is indicative of the Marxian predisposition of the Frankfurt theorists. However critical theory was also shaped by the prevailing themes of Weimar scholarship. Perhaps most important in this respect was the continuing influence of Max Weber's writings and the re-examination of the idealist tradition which had become popular within the German academy. Georg Lukács, who had been a member of Weber's neo-Kantian circle in Heidelberg, attempted to integrate these themes into a Marxian perspective in the early 1920s. Lukács looked to Kant and

Hegel in an effort to retrieve the philosophical dimensions of materialism. His reworking of historical materialism and the challenge this presented to Marxist orthodoxies had a profound effect on the would-be critical theorists. In their own appropriation of Enlightenment philosophy the Frankfurt School went beyond Lukács's path-breaking work. They rejected his appeal to the standpoint of the proletariat, insisting instead that it was the concept of reason, as developed in the tradition of German idealism, which alone could secure a normative standard for critique. This commitment to the project of the Enlightenment persisted throughout the 1930s even after the Frankfurt School was forced into exile by the rise of German fascism.

By the mid 1940s, however, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno had lost their faith in the emancipatory potential of Enlightenment reason. As George Friedman has noted:

If modernity reached its most extreme and self-confident point when Hegel declared that the real had become rational and the rational real, Auschwitz revealed the emptiness of that claim.²

The liberating content of Enlightenment thought, the critical theorists observed, had succumbed to an instrumental rationality which only served to extend

mankind's capacity to objectify and dominate. "With the extension of the bourgeois commodity economy," Horkheimer and Adorno wrote in their 1944 text Dialectic of Enlightenment, "the dark horizon of myth is illumined by the sun of calculating reason, beneath whose cold rays the seed of the new barbarism grows to fruition."³ With the revelation of this entwinement of reason and domination, enlightenment and mythology, critical theory descended into a conceptual labyrinth.

In the 1960s the project of a critical theory of society was resurrected in the writings of Jürgen Habermas. Over the past twenty-five years through his numerous books and articles he has established himself as perhaps the foremost social philosopher in present day Germany. One reviewer, impressed by the voluminous literature by and about Habermas suggests that "he is in all probability the most influential German social theorist since Max Weber."⁴ In fact the encyclopedic scope of his oeuvre prompted George Lichtheim as early as 1971 to draw comparisons between Habermas' work and that of Hegel.⁵

By his own admission it was not until the mid 1950s that Habermas' intellectual development took its radical turn.⁶ In 1955 he came across Dialectic of Enlightenment;

the interest in critical social theory which this generated led Habermas to Frankfurt where in 1956 he became an assistant to Adorno at the Institute. In 1964 he assumed a chair in philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt, and it was there that Habermas finished his first comprehensive attempt to renew critical theory: the 1968 text Knowledge and Human Interests. In 1971 Habermas left the University of Frankfurt to become Director of Research at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg.

While at Starnberg Habermas has guided an extensive research project examining the political and economic challenges facing the state in advanced capitalist society. During this time his own research interests have expanded from social philosophy and psychoanalysis to include aesthetics, anthropology, cognitive psychology, linguistics, and analytic philosophy in the Anglo-American tradition. In 1978 Paul Connerton suggested that for the development of critical theory Habermas' move to Starnberg may "mark as substantial a re-orientation as that which followed upon the assumption of the Directorship of the Institute at Frankfurt by Horkheimer in 1930."⁷ Connerton's insight has proven to be quite accurate. Habermas' work at the Max Planck Institute, culminating in the two volumes of The Theory of

Communicative Action (1981), fundamentally redefines the boundaries of critical theory.

This thesis examines the project of 'critical theory' as formulated under the guidance of Max Horkheimer in the 1930s and in the contemporary writings of Jürgen Habermas. It argues that the historical development of critical theory may be understood as a continuing struggle with the legacy of Enlightenment philosophy; more specifically, with the self-destructive tendencies of Enlightenment reason. In the nineteenth century this undercurrent of enlightened thinking manifested itself at the margins of philosophical discourse: in the Marquis de Sade, Schopenhauer, and, above all, Nietzsche. In the twentieth century this dark side of the Enlightenment has entered into the mainstream of social theory through the work of, among others, Weber, the Frankfurt School, and the French poststructuralists. Habermas stands in determined opposition to this development. It is in this context, this thesis argues, that one must understand Habermas' attempt to salvage the 'project of enlightenment' from the dialectic which had ensnared his Frankfurt predecessors, and his reconstruction of this enterprise into the 'project of modernity' by way of a critical appropriation of Weber's rationalization thesis. However this shift from enlightenment to modernity has not been without cost.

An internal aspect of the 'theory of enlightenment' is the goal of emancipation. The radical political objectives of early critical theory, therefore, demanded a resolution of the conceptual nexus of enlightenment and emancipation; that is, the mediation of theory and praxis. The project of modernity, however, constructed on the basis of a theory of rationalization, is marked by a retreat from the political dimension of emancipation. In the following Habermas' shift is traced through an analysis of the three distinctive periods of critical theory and in the three corresponding 'paradigmatic' texts. Chapter One focuses on the crucial years of the Frankfurt School when the motif of enlightenment and emancipation emerged as the central problematic of critical theory. The loss of the emancipatory moment of critique is shown against the backdrop of a shift from a Marxist to a Weberian sociology. The key text of this period is Dialectic of Enlightenment. In the final analysis the Frankfurt critique proves to be deficient at the level of both theory and praxis. It is not so much that a rift develops here but that, in the face of a one-dimensional process of cultural rationalization, emancipatory praxis dissolves. The text then turns to study Habermas and his efforts to reconcile the contradictions embedded in the Frankfurt theory of enlightenment.

Since the time of his first major text, Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit [structural transformation of the public sphere] (1962), Habermas has pursued two general problem-complexes: (i) an analysis of the origin, transformation, and potential direction of the political public realm and, (ii) an exploration of "that peculiar relationship between social analysis and social criticism that defines critical theory."⁸ The imperatives of these two projects have, however, created a tension in Habermas' own work. Chapter Two, then, examines Habermas' Frankfurt period and his first attempt to systematically reclaim the emancipatory element of critical theory. The work on the public realm and the epistemological study Knowledge and Human Interests are read here as a critical response to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Chapter Three examines Habermas' shift to a theory of rationalization in his most recent book The Theory of Communicative Action. Weber's rationalization thesis serves as the point of departure for this text and sets the foundation for Habermas' theory of modernity.

The occasion for an analysis such as that set out above has arisen in the context of a wide-ranging debate currently dominating the pages of several leading journals of the intellectual left. In the winter of 1981 the American

journal New German Critique published an article by Jürgen Habermas entitled "Modernity versus Postmodernity".⁹ The argument Habermas presented in this essay was that post-modern art and architecture had sacrificed modern form in favour of a nostalgic return to traditional motifs; post-modernity, he concluded, presents itself as antimodernity. Habermas' comments might have slipped by relatively unnoticed had it not been for his concluding remarks. At the very end of his lecture, moving from the level of culture-critique to critical theory, Habermas drew a series of parallels between various currents of 'antimodern' social theory and the emergence of new forms of political conservatism. The particular point of controversy here was his linking of French poststructuralism (Foucault and Derrida were singled out) to a 'tough young conservatism' which seeks to escape from the responsibilities of modern existence by embracing a spontaneous will to power. Naturally these allegations drew an immediate rebuttal from poststructuralist quarters in which Habermas' criticism was turned back and he too was labelled a conservative.

Of course there is more at stake here than the question of who truly represents the left. What is really under consideration in this modernity/postmodernity debate is the transition from the liberalized culture of the 1960s to the

neoconservatism of the present. In short, what is at stake in this dispute is the preparation of a theoretical foundation for the critical assessment of the experiences of the last twenty-five years; in other words, who will write the history of the present? While this modernity/postmodernity debate forms the point of reference for the following discussion, this thesis is not an attempt to resolve this debate nor even survey the positions of its various participants: this paper seeks only to clarify the position taken up by critical theory.

Notes to the Introduction

¹There are now several introductory texts on critical theory. For a general historical overview of the Frankfurt School see, Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923 - 1950, Boston: Little Brown, 1973. Jay has recently produced an analytical work on Western Marxism which deals with the major figures of the Frankfurt School, Habermas and others, Martin Jay, Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. The most in-depth analysis of critical theory is still David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

²George Friedman, The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School (London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 15.

³Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming, (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 32.

⁴James Schmidt, "Jürgen Habermas and the Difficulties of Enlightenment," Social Research, No. 49 (Spring, 1982), p. 185.

⁵George Lichtheim, From Marx to Hegel (New York: Orbach and Chambers, 1971), p. 175.

⁶For biographical information on Habermas see; Detlev Horster and Willem van Reijen, "Interview with Jürgen Habermas, Starnberg, March 23, 1979," New German Critique, No. 18 (Fall 1979), especially pp. 29-35; and Axel Honneth et al, "The Dialectics of Rationalization: An Interview with Jürgen Habermas," Telos, No. 49 (Fall, 1981), especially pp. 5-7.

⁷Paul Connerton, The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. x.

⁸Schmidt, "Difficulties of Enlightenment," Social Research, p. 185.

⁹What appeared to be an isolated dispute in the pages of New German Critique has now spread to Telos and the British journal Praxis International. Of particular importance are the following issues of NGC; "Special Issue on Modernism," No. 22 (Winter, 1981); "Critical Theory and Modernity," No. 26 (Spring-Summer, 1982); and most recently, "Modernity and Postmodernity," No. 33 (Fall, 1984).

Chapter One: The Dialectic of Enlightenment

In the 1930s the Frankfurt School turned away from the category of capitalization to the category of rationalization in an attempt to identify the developmental logic of modernity, and thereby sealed an encounter between critical theory and Max Weber. At the same time the critical theorists abandoned the notion of emancipation through proletarian praxis in favour of emancipation through critical reason; a movement from Marx back to German idealism. In this chapter it is argued that these two developments are fundamentally at odds. Ultimately the idealist dualism of subjective and objective reason would collapse under the weight of the critique of instrumental rationality. Thus by the mid-forties critical theory assumed a profound similarity to Weber's pessimistic theory of modernity. However, the ensuing practical-political crisis of critical theory could find no relief in Weber's politics and the hope of ever bridging the gap between theory and praxis was lost to the Frankfurt School.

I. The Institutional Setting

The Institute for Social Research, a financially independent adjunct of the University of Frankfurt,

officially opened in June of 1924. The driving force behind the creation of the new school was Felix Weil, who, with the support of his father, donated the necessary funds to establish and maintain the Institute. Also instrumental in the founding were two young academics, Friedrich Pollock and Max Horkheimer. "At the time of the Institute's foundation," Phil Slater explains, "neither Weil, Horkheimer, nor Pollock qualified for a professorship, and since the statutes demanded that the Director of the Institute be a professor of the University of Frankfurt, the three young intellectuals had no chance of actually taking control of the new institution."¹ After much negotiation a suitable candidate was found in Carl Grünberg, an "Austro-Marxist historian of international repute."² In the autumn of 1923 Grünberg became the first Director of the Institute, assuming at the same time a Chair in Economics and Social Science at the University of Frankfurt.

Upon his appointment, Grünberg became the first "avowed Marxist to hold a chair at a German University."³ When interviewed by Slater, Felix Weil intimated that "he would gladly have called the Institute what it was really intended

to be, that is, Institut für Marxismus (Institute for Marxism), but that this title was sacrificed in the interest of formal academic recognition."⁴ The memorandum sent by Weil to the Curator of Frankfurt University in September 1922 which first raised the subject of a new research centre made it clear that the primary concern of the school would be historical materialism. However, somewhat paradoxically, Weil also stressed that "the Institute's work would proceed 'independently of party-political considerations.'"⁵ From the very outset the school had cut itself away from any practical-political activity. This academic isolationism, which was probably unavoidable for legal-institutional reasons, would haunt the Institute throughout all of its productive years. This was ironic and perhaps even tragic given critical theory's ambition to realize Marx's dictum concerning the unity of theory and practice.

It is important to avoid the indiscriminate application of the term 'critical theory' to the research conducted by all the members of the Institute in Frankfurt: some clarification is in order.⁶ There appears to be a consensus that the term critical theory is most applicable to the work of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse: these three men will be referred to as the 'critical theorists'. If the purpose of

this paper were a detailed analysis of the Institute it would be necessary to distinguish, with appropriate justification, a 'Frankfurt School' from the Institute's general membership. Such a project is surrounded by controversy in the secondary literature.⁷ This thesis, however, is concerned only with the work of the critical theorists; within this context the terms 'Frankfurt School' and 'critical theorists' will be used interchangeably. A point of general agreement is that it was only with the appointment of Max Horkheimer to the Directorship of the Institute that the basis was laid for what was to become known as critical theory.⁸

Upon becoming director in 1930, Horkheimer immediately began to reorganize research at the Institute. Grünberg had stressed the 'scientific' nature of Marx's historical materialism and directed the Institute's research "on a multitude of topics in the history of capitalist and socialist economics and workers movements."⁹ While theoretical analysis during the Grünberg period remained unreflective, the emphasis on historically oriented empirical research had a lasting impact on Institute studies. The dramatic shift that occurred under Horkheimer's direction was the importance placed on the historical nature of theory itself. In the articles published under

Horkheimer's direction in the Institute's new journal Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, philosophy became an object of study rather than just a method of study. Critical reflection on historical philosophical doctrines could reveal both theory's distortion of reality and part of the 'truth' of reality. "But at this stage," Slater points out, "Horkheimer's conception of the theory-praxis nexus remains inarticulate."¹⁰ Nevertheless, this new direction effectively granted greater freedom to the researcher, allowing the members of the Institute to draw inspiration from a wider philosophical spectrum. It was out of this broadened analytical orientation that the more specific notion of a critical theory of society grew.

Predictably, the review literature is at odds when affixing dates to the development and decline of 'critical theory'. Tom Bottomore, for example, locates the "high tide" of critical theory during the 1950s and 1960s;¹¹ that is when Horkheimer, Pollock, and Adorno returned as heroes to the German academy and Marcuse's works were celebrated by a growing student protest movement. Certainly this was their period of notoriety. But celebrity and notoriety have little to do with the adequacy of a theory's relation to contemporary practice. Alternatively, Andrew Arato argues that the leading members of the Institute formed a genuine

school only during their American period (1935-1950). Focusing on this period allows Arato, "to depict the political origin and formative context of what is called critical theory today (as against the 1930s when it was a code-name for Marxism in general), ..."12 However, to abstract critical theory from its European context may distort its meaning and alter its significance for contemporary political theory. It is argued here following Habermas, Slater, and Zoltán Tar that 'critical theory' was developed in the 1930s in response to the prevailing currents of German social philosophy, and that by the mid 1940s the project had for the most part been abandoned.13

II. Critical Theory and the Relationship to Marx

It is in Max Horkheimer's writings of the 1930s that one finds 'the true birthplace and secret' of critical theory. Critics generally agree that the 1937 essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" represents Horkheimer's manifesto for critical theory. Tom Bottomore suggests that this essay "should be regarded as the founding document, or charter, of the Frankfurt School."14 But as Slater points out "'Traditional and Critical Theory' was not so much a new departure as a distillation of the various components worked out in the Zeitschrift from its inception."15 It is from

this seminal piece that the fundamental components of critical theory emerge. As Paul Piccone points out; 'The concept of "critical theory" derives from the traditions of Kantian critical philosophy and of Marxian critique of ideology.'¹⁶ Borrowing from Marx's political economy, critical theory proceeds by way of an immanent critique of bourgeois society. In David Held's words it "aims to expose and thematize contradictions between society's performance and legitimating ideologies."¹⁷ This critique of bourgeois ideology was practiced with great skill by the Frankfurt theorists. Sympathizers viewed it as a penetrating analysis of contemporary culture, while critics, with equal accuracy, charged that the School fostered an unduly pessimistic cultural outlook. Still the lasting reputation of critical theory was founded on this art of negation. At the same time, in the tradition of Enlightenment thought, critical theory pointed beyond the irrationality of bourgeois production relations toward "the abolition of social injustice;" that is, toward the realization of "the materialist content of the idealist concept of reason."¹⁸ This normative appeal remains cloaked in the rhetoric of idealism. Exactly what is "the materialist content of the idealist concept of reason"? Horkheimer answers this question in the "Postscript" to the essay on traditional and critical social philosophy:

Reason's intuition of itself, regarded by philosophy in former times as the highest degree of happiness, is transformed in modern philosophy into the materialist concept of a free, self-determining society...¹⁹

Critical theory expresses "the interest of a rationally organized future society."²⁰ Its objective is one of social transformation, anticipating "a state of affairs in which there will be no exploitation or oppression."²¹ Reduced to its bluntest and most polemical level, Horkheimer writes, "[critical theory's] goal is man's emancipation from slavery."²² Thus the critical theorists combined their immanent critique of ideology with the normative ideal of an emancipated society.

The goals of critical theory articulated here closely parallel the radical political objectives of Marx. But the relationship between critical theory and Marxism is not unambiguous. As was indicated above, Arato places early critical theory squarely within the tradition of Western Marxism. Friedman, on the other hand, is more sceptical. Looking at the Institute's work as a whole, he sees in their detached and neutral rhetoric a conscious separation from Marx. Friedman concludes that an identification with Marxism was avoided "because the Frankfurt School had come to hold suspect both the truth and the virtue of Marx."²³

At a different level Slater also questions the Frankfurt School's commitment to Marx. He praises the contributors to the Zeitschrift for having clarified the relation between the various aspects of Marxian theory and the category of praxis, but then concludes:

The whole thrust of Frankfurt School activity, though centralizing the problem of 'praxis', was ultimately academic: 'praxis' was a theoretical category, not a constituent of a concrete revolutionary struggle.²⁴

Slater's observation is symptomatic of critical theory's change in attitude toward the working class. Held documents this shift in the work of Horkheimer. He notes that Horkheimer's early position is very close to that formulated by Lukacs in History and Class Consciousness -- where the interests of the proletariat are seen to represent a generalizable interest. Held writes:

For the young Horkheimer, the important thing about the proletariat is that it is developing needs which cannot be satisfied by capitalism's rigid distribution of scarce values -- needs which, if adequately articulated, can be fulfilled only through the realization of capitalism's promise of 'justice, equality and freedom'.²⁵

By the late 1930s, however, the standpoint of critical theory is associated less and less with the actual working class. Thus when Horkheimer comes to write his manifesto, critical theory's concern is "the rational organization of

human activity."²⁶ There is no explicit appeal here to the needs or presumed historical destiny of the proletariat.

Critical theory was perceived by its founders as the moment of mediation between theory and praxis: its role was one of ideological enlightenment, its political objective an emancipated society. This political objective could only be met through revolutionary political activity. At the time of its origin the working class of the Weimar Republic constituted critical theory's agent of social transformation. To this extent critical theory shared in the Marxian problematic. By the late 1930s, however, the notion of emancipation through class struggle was abandoned; the emergence of revolutionary class consciousness within the proletariat was viewed to have been suspended by the successful reorganization of capitalism. The realization of the generalizable interests of the working class gave way to the realization of a rational society. This development represents a shift from Marx back to German idealism.

III. The Concept of Rationality: Critical Theory and Weber

Even after his death in 1920, the controversies surrounding the basic theses of Max Weber continued to shape German scholarship throughout the Weimar period. The

influence that Marxist writers such as Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch had on the development of critical theory is well documented in other studies. What has only recently been considered with any seriousness is the influence of Weber on critical theory. Seyla Benhabib raises this issue in her 1981 article "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory;" which begins with the bold assertion:

Since Weber's analysis of modernity through the category of rationalization, diagnosing the irrationality of this rationalization has been a central preoccupation of critical theory.²⁷

Acknowledgement of this Weberian influence on critical theory may raise more problems than it solves, given the controversies in the critical literature on Weber. Remarkably, very little is known about Weber and the forces which shaped his views. As Wilhelm Hennis points out, "we possibly know less about the social sciences at the turn of the century than about the state of political theory at the time of Hobbes."²⁸ Nevertheless, Held notes that there is some truth to the argument that the history of the Frankfurt School is "marked by a shift in theoretical orientation away from Marx to Weber."²⁹ The concept of rationality is demonstrative of this shift. In juxtaposing Weber's understanding of rationality with that of the Frankfurt School two relationships emerge. During the formative years of critical theory, Weber's position is implicitly

rejected. But under the altered historical circumstances of the 1940s, Weber and the Frankfurt School converge in their diagnoses of contemporary society.

According to conventional interpretation, Weber sought to distinguish 'formal' from 'substantive' reason. Formal reason referred to the ordered process of determining the most efficient means to a given end. In its purest form this instrumental reason was based on a mathematical model. Where the range of means (the possible choices of action) could be reduced to comparable numerical representations, the most rational course of action would employ the most economical means. Substantive rationality, on the other hand, does not exclusively refer to choices between means, but involves choices between conflicting ends. Substantive reason proceeds regressively; conflicting ends are evaluated with reference to 'higher' ends until one faces the question of the 'ultimate' end. Ends can only be rationally justified in relation to higher ends. Therefore ultimate ends, according to the Weberian model, arise from a non-rational choice between competing ethical or political values.³⁰ The critical theorists developed a similar thesis in terms of 'subjective' and 'objective' reason.

As Horkheimer expressed this duality, subjective reason, "is essentially concerned with means and ends;"³¹ it is the calculating reason which is applied to problems in a technical manner. Objective reason, on the other hand, is "a principle inherent in reality,"³² which guides social relations. Horkheimer patterns this distinction on the philosophy of German idealism where reason demonstrated this dual character. With Kant's critical philosophy in mind Horkheimer writes:

As the transcendental, supraindividual self, reason comprises the idea of a free, human social life in which men organize themselves as the universal subject and overcome the conflict between pure and empirical reason in the conscious solidarity of the whole. This represents the idea of true universality: utopia. At the same time, however, reason constitutes the court of judgment of calculation, which adjusts the world for the ends of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than the preparation of the object from mere sensory material in order to make it the material of subjugation.³³

Although cloaked in idealist obscurities, Horkheimer's understanding of the utopian ideal of Enlightenment reason is quite specific. He traces the concept of an objective rationality back as far as classical Greek philosophy, noting that;

Great philosophical systems, such as those of Plato and Aristotle, scholasticism, and German idealism were founded on an objective theory of reason. It aimed at evolving a comprehensive system, or hierarchy, of all beings, including man and his aims. The degree of reasonableness of a man's life could be determined according to its harmony with this totality.³⁴

Phrases such as the 'conscious solidarity of the whole' and the 'harmonious totality' bring us within reach of Horkheimer's notion of objective reason. He observes that the entire humanist tradition of philosophy -- extending back to Greek idealism and including Kant, Hegel, and Marx -- has aimed at establishing a balance "between what is good for the individual and what is good for the totality."³⁵ The harmonious totality (which is objective reason realized), this philosophy holds, is secured through obedience to rationally constructed law. However; "Rationality in the form of such obedience swallows up everything, even the freedom to think ... The individual has to do violence to himself and learn that the life of the whole is the necessary precondition of his own."³⁶ Thus humanism is caught in a paradox: while the individual cannot flourish apart from the community, the maintenance of society suppresses the individual. Horkheimer's reconciliation of this contradiction amounts to a re-affirmation of the utopian content of reason:

The difficulties of rationalistic philosophy originate from the fact that the universality of reason cannot be anything else than the accord among the interest of all individuals alike, whereas in reality society has been split up into groups with conflicting interests. Owing to this contradiction, the appeal of the universality of reason assumes the features of the spurious and the illusory. Reason's claim to be absolute presupposes that a true community exists among men.³⁷

Horkheimer's vision of the harmonious totality, the true community, owes more to Kant's Kingdom of Ends than it does to Marx's socialist society. This is indicative of critical theory's shift to idealism. The concept of objective reason assumes normative status as an anticipated classless society. This unwholesome blend of Marxian materialism and Kantian idealism -- "the materialist content of idealist reason" -- brings critical theory into opposition with Weber. The Frankfurt School counters Weber's 'stoic' theory of reason by positing the emancipatory ideal of objective reason.

In the eyes of the Frankfurt theorists, however, the 1940s witnessed the eclipse of this fundamental concept of objective reason. Its dissolution would lead the critical theorists to a position strikingly similar to that of Weber. No work marks this process of dissolution more dramatically than Horkheimer's and Adorno's joint effort Dialectic of Enlightenment; "their blackest, most nihilistic book."³⁸ Written near the end of the "Nazi terror," Dialectic of Enlightenment set out to discover "why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism."³⁹ Even the formal structure of the text, Connerton observes, demonstrates its distance from 'critical theory'. The book does not consist of a

single, unified argument, but is instead, "a series of mutually referential essays ... followed by a further fifty pages of shorter notes and sketches. The structure of the work enacts a process of disintegration."⁴⁰ The text itself studies the complex relationship between rationalization and domination through the categories of enlightenment and mythology. For the Frankfurt theorists, 'enlightenment' refers to both the philosophy of the Enlightenment (particularly as expressed in German idealism) which displays the dialectic of objective and subjective reason, and, taking world history as a whole as its theme, enlightenment is the liberating reason which in dialectical fashion generates its own opposition. Enlightenment has always been understood as a liberating force standing in opposition to the dogmatic authority of myth: rational explanation breaks the spell of myth thereby escaping from its power. But Horkheimer and Adorno have seen through this relationship and exposed a hidden complicity: "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology."⁴¹

Their analysis starts from the principle, "that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought;" and the observation that, "this very way of thinking, no less than the actual historic forms -- the social institutions -- with

which it is interwoven, contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today [Fascism]."⁴² Together these two propositions generate a contradiction which shatters the foundations of critical theory: freedom is dependent on enlightenment, but enlightenment reverts to domination.

Dialectic of Enlightenment raises both historical and philosophical questions about the status of 'enlightenment'. With their first thesis that myth is already enlightenment, the authors push the notion of enlightened thought "back to the beginning of traditional history."⁴³ As progressive thought, enlightenment aims at liberating the species from the constraints of nature and thereby establishing man's sovereignty over nature. The fundamental principle of myth, on the other hand, is anthropomorphism -- the projection of subjectivity onto nature. The project of enlightenment, therefore, is the disenchantment of the world, the extirpation of animism, or again, the objectification of nature. One can see this development, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, as early as the Homeric epic:

The Olympic deities are no longer directly identical with elements, but signify them. In Homer, Zeus represents the sky and weather, Apollo controls the sun, and Helios and Eos are already shifting to an allegorical function.⁴⁴

Homer already represents an attempt to demystify nature and establish an extra-worldly hierarchy of rationalized, symbolic forces. 'The Homeric spirit takes over and "organizes" the myths, but contradicts them in the process.'⁴⁵ Unlike the case of the shaman's invocations to an animated nature, the identity of spiritual force and material object has been breached by mythic representation. But there is a cost associated with the rationalization of the mythic cosmos:

Myth turns into enlightenment, and nature into mere objectivity. Men pay for the increase of their power with alienation from that over which they exercise their power. Enlightenment behaves towards things as a dictator toward men.⁴⁶

And, in terms of social relations, the objectification of nature leads to the alienation of man from man:

It is not merely that domination is paid for by the alienation of men from the objects dominated: with the objectification of spirit, the very relations of men -- even those of the individual to himself -- were bewitched. The individual is reduced to the nodal point of the conventional responses and modes of operation expected of him. Animism spiritualized the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirits of men.⁴⁷

According to this analysis every technical advance over nature is met with a heightening of repression. The transition from myth to enlightenment generates the conditions of its own reversal: "The curse of irresistible

progress is irresistible regression."⁴⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno turn to Homer's Odyssey to demonstrate this dialectic.

Central to their interpretation of the Odyssey "are the notions of sacrifice and renunciation, in which appear the difference as well as the unity of mythic nature and enlightened mastery of nature."⁴⁹ The cunning Odysseus transforms the ritual of sacrifice from a mere offering into a covenant. The sacrifice becomes a form of rational exchange between the hero and the gods. "Hecatombs of specific magnitude are requited with the favor of the gods."⁵⁰ But in contracting with the natural deities Odysseus has extracted an element of control over nature: "the gods are overthrown by the very system by which they are honored."⁵¹ On the other hand, the hero must pay for his control over nature through renunciation. The trials and tribulations encountered by the wayward seafarer on his journey from Troy to Ithica are read by the critical theorists as allegorical representations. Thus they interpret the encounter with the Cyclops Polyphemus in psychological terms. The captured Odysseus must deceive Polyphemus by telling him that his name is 'Nobody.' His calculated risk pays off when the blinded giant cries out to his bewildered tribesmen that 'Nobody has hurt me.' Through

his trickery Odysseus avoids the punishment of Polyphemus -- a symbol of nature as brute force -- however the hero's triumph is conditioned by self-denial and self-repression. Odysseus' episode with the Sirens develops these motifs with a sociological twist. He is warned that no one can resist the lure of the Sirens' song. But Odysseus knows of two possible means of escaping this stricture. His crew must plug their ears with wax and row with all their strength, while he, having been bound to the mast, listens, a helpless self-sacrifice. Odysseus' bonds neutralizes the temptation of the Sirens -- their song becomes a mere object of contemplation, a work of art. Meanwhile, in holding steadily to their appointed task, the crew "reproduce the oppressor's life together with their own."⁵² Thus to hear the Sirens Odysseus violates his own inner nature by repressing his instinctual drives and establishes a form of social domination over his crew. This for the Frankfurt theorists completes enlightenment's reversal: freedom from nature gained at the cost of social and psychological repression.

The initial thesis of Dialectic of Enlightenment draws into question the historical status of The Age of Enlightenment. In their reading of the Homeric epic, Horkheimer and Adorno find in the characters of Achilles and

Odysseus the "prototype of the bourgeois individual."⁵³ This leads them to postulate that, "In fact the lines from reason, liberalism, and the bourgeois spirit go incomparably farther back than historians who date the notion of the burgher only from the end of medieval feudalism would allow."⁵⁴ The suggestion by the authors is that the origin of bourgeois consciousness is wholly unrelated to the constellation of economic factors which Marx perceived as the determinants of liberal capitalism. Instead the Frankfurt theorists find in the dynamics of a misguided ratio the logic of capitalist modernization. If this insight is correct it amounts to an oblique but powerful critique of historical materialism.

Enlightenment's reversal to myth, the second thesis of the Dialectic, essentially marks the abandonment of the critical theory project. Ultimately Horkheimer and Adorno are forced to recognize that it is irrationality that issues from enlightenment:

The absurdity of the state of affairs in which the enforced power of the system over men grows with every step that takes it out of the power of nature, denounces the rationality of the rational society as obsolete.⁵⁵

Horkheimer and Adorno cannot see in a rationally organized society a totality that escapes totalitarianism. As their

reading of the Odyssey contends: instrumental reason's conquest of external nature is accompanied by social domination. They found corroboration for this thesis in both Stalinism and fascism where modernity meant the co-existence of progress and brutality. The dialectic of enlightenment demonstrates the collapse of the idealist dualism of subjective and objective reason into an instrumental rationality.

There are, of course, several problems with this critique. Of greatest magnitude is the conceptualization of the man-nature relationship presented by Horkheimer and Adorno. They regard this relationship exclusively as one of domination. Compounding this is the critical theorists' double-edged concept of nature which does not adequately distinguish between control over external nature and control over the 'second nature' of social relations. This facilitates an unmediated integration of economic theories of labour with social-psychological theories of interaction. "The consequence of this approach," Connerton notes, "is a reductive treatment of intersubjectivity."⁵⁶ Changes in social relations become an immediate reflex of changes in labour's exchange with nature. This analytical framework generates at least two rather curious contradictions for a critical theory of society which styled

itself as an immanent critique of ideology. First the function of ideology as buffer between the forces and relations of production is virtually eliminated. Second, if the material exchange with nature is the key to unlocking social relations, then a critical theory of society could only be constructed as a critique of political economy and not as a critique of ideology or culture. Of course once the man-nature relationship (in its duality) is restricted to one of domination, all manner of analysis becomes meaningless:

The hope of enlightenment resigns itself to a vision of hopelessness, and the thought of an alternative practice shrinks to the recognition of its impossibility.⁵⁷

As the concept of objective rationality fell into obsolescence the notion of a critical theory of society dissipated. Consequently, the writings of the Frankfurt theorists during the 1940s begin to converge with Weber's pessimistic theory of society.

In Chapter Three we will have cause to systematically examine Weber's social theory in connection with Habermas' project. For this reason the following comments on Weber are somewhat synoptic. It was Benhabib who suggested that;

The reception of Weber's work by the first generation of critical theorists is characterized by the rejection of Weber's ambivalent and resigned commitment to modernity, on the basis of a far-reaching agreement with Weber's diagnosis of the dynamics of modernity.⁵⁸

According to Weber science had reduced nature to a chain of causally related facts devoid of intrinsic meaning. The modern soul confronted by this state of affairs is forced to generate meaning of its own. However the rationalization of social life -- the individuation and alienation caused by an all pervasive division of labour -- increasingly makes this task impossible. Inevitably rationalization leads to a loss of meaning and the division of labour to a loss of substantive freedom. And as Weber explains, modernization is accompanied by civic privatism:

The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world.' Precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness of direct and personal human relations.⁵⁹

To those who could not "bear the fate of the times like a man ... [t]he arms of the old churches are opened widely and compassionately."⁶⁰ Even the man who accepts an ethic of responsibility and confronts the rationalized world can find no easy escape from the burden of a disenchanted nature. Somewhere, writes Weber, "he reaches the point where he

says: 'Here I stand; I can do no other.'"61 The process of rationalization limits individual volition to a narrow sphere of routine activity. The expansion of formal reason erects an "iron cage" around subjectivity.⁶² From this shared perspective of cultural pessimism Weber and the Frankfurt theorists draw strikingly different practical-political consequences.

In the American reception of his writings Weber's ardent nationalism was lost. Particularly after the fall of imperial Germany, Weber became "obsessed with the need for strong political leadership to establish and maintain Germany's position as a world power."⁶³ This need could only be fulfilled by the 'charismatic leader', who, modelled on Nietzsche's overman, could break free of the 'iron cage' and impose meaning on society.⁶⁴ For many German social theorists Weber's political sociology was disqualified in practice. During and after the Second World War, the dispute over the meaning of Weber's work focused on his politics; hovering over this dispute, "present even when unmentioned, was the historical fact of Nazism."⁶⁵ As Habermas has stated, Weber's politics had a different history in Germany:

At the time of the First World War he [Weber] outlined a sketch of Caesar-like leader-democracy on the contemporary basis of a national-state imperialism. This militant latter-day liberalism had consequences in the Weimar period which we, and not Weber, must answer for ... Viewed in the light of the history of influences, the decisionist element in Weber's sociology did not break the spell of ideology, but strengthened it.⁶⁶

This assessment epitomizes the Frankfurt reception of Weber. Marcuse had implicitly linked Weber to German fascism in 1964 in "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber." Euphemistically Marcuse charges that for Weber "formal rationality turns into capitalist rationality," and; "In the unfolding of capitalist rationality, irrationality becomes reason."⁶⁷ Stephen Turner and Regis Factor stress the way in which Marcuse's allegations were inspired by Wolfgang Mommsen's book of 1959, and add as a corrective that; "It was such uses of his argument as Marcuse's that led Mommsen to revise his book."⁶⁸

Unlike Weber, when confronted with a disenchanted world the Frankfurt School retreated from praxis to a "stance of past hope and remembrance."⁶⁹ In the Frankfurt critique of the mid 1940s;

The present is no longer viewed as a contingent moment that can lead into the future, but is viewed as an "eternal now," ... Critical theory becomes a

retrospective monologue of the critical thinker upon the totality of this historical process, for it views the lived present not under the perspective of possible future transformation, but from the standpoint of the past.⁷⁰

Reflecting on this earlier period Habermas writes that "in 1941, Horkheimer and Adorno -- and soon Marcuse as well -- had lost their historico-philosophical faith in the rational potential of bourgeois culture."⁷¹ Having become total, instrumental reason embodied itself in a totalitarian society. The classical form of critical theory fell apart in the face of a one-dimensional process of social rationalization. Marcuse and Adorno both attempted to reconstruct a critical theory of society, although under different conceptual devices. Habermas writes:

Whereas Marcuse shifted the historically eclipsed claim to reason back below the threshold of culture by way of a theory of instincts -- in order to obtain an equivalent for reason in the archaic grounds of a rebellious subjectivity -- Adorno consistently renounced any attempt to gain back normative foundations. He gave himself over to the negativism of a thinking that saw in the solitary experience of a self-denying philosophy, going round in its own aporias, the only possibility of at least pointing to the contents of reason -- however powerless -- disguised in esoteric art.⁷²

As for Horkheimer: Weber's advice to those unable to bear the fate of the times could have been penned in anticipation of Horkheimer's retreat. In his later years Horkheimer

returned to Judaism, believing it impossible to maintain a social theory which lacked theological content. Horkheimer's numerous paradoxical views during this period are discussed by Zoltán Tar and need not be repeated here. It is sufficient to close this section with a comment from Ernst Bloch, a contemporary of Horkheimer, who in a 1976 interview dismissed the former Director of the Institute for Social Research in a single sentence, "As far as Horkheimer is concerned, he became a reactionary."⁷³

IV. Conclusion

This chapter examined the origin of 'critical theory' in the early writings of the Frankfurt School. The critical theory project was an attempt by the Frankfurt theorists to combine a critique of ideology (in the manner of Marx) with a normative standard (objective rationality) derived from idealist philosophy. Given this programme critical theory placed itself squarely within the tradition of Enlightenment philosophy. The problematic it inherited was the mediation of theory and praxis or, to better reflect its radical social agenda, enlightenment and political emancipation. However the objectives of critical theory were never met by the Frankfurt theorists. The reason behind their failure

may be characterized as a theoretical dilemma buttressed by objective reality.

The theoretical dilemma was the dialectic of enlightenment; the undercurrent of idealist philosophy which revealed the instability of the dualism of subjective and objective reason. Nietzsche's analysis of this self-destructive impulse of enlightenment was perhaps the most powerful, Weber's the most systematic. Critical theory could avoid neither. Modern science, the child of subjective (formal, instrumental) reason, stripped away the objective values which idealism had invested in the natural and social worlds. Objective reason was emptied of content as the world was reduced to a universe of discrete facts. Enlightenment took as its project the substitution of reason for dogmatism. But as Friedman observes;

While reason destroys the old myths, it is only a formal structure that is devoid of positive instructions. While liberating man from the illusions of the past, it denies to humanity authentically needed values, because it is incapable of supplying anything beyond facticity and doubt.⁷⁴

Thus enlightenment devalues the world it recreates in the same moment that it devalues the old metaphysics. At this point critical theory converged with the diagnosis of the times that Weber had worked out through the category of

rationalization: the spirit of modern capitalism had encased humanity in an iron cage.

In the face of this nihilist doctrine the resolution of the problem of praxis is embodied in the choice offered by Weber: return into the arms of the old church or, if one has the calling for politics, 'will to power' and grasp for the only moment of authentic freedom -- leadership. The objective realities of the Holocaust and Hiroshima were proof to the Frankfurt theorists that the dialectic of rationalization had worked itself out to its inevitable conclusion. For Horkheimer and Adorno, when the moment of decision arrived both chose to retreat from praxis into abstraction.

This discussion sets the stage for Habermas' resurrection of the critical theory project. The next chapter examines his reply to the one-dimensionality thesis and his attempt to reclaim the emancipatory moment of Enlightenment thought.

Notes to Chapter One

¹Phil Slater, Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School: A Marxist Perspective (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 2.

²Ibid.

³Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923 - 1950 (Boston: Little Brown, 1973), p. 10.

⁴Slater, Origin and Significance, p. 149. This statement appears in a footnote to chapter one.

⁵Ibid., p. 1.

⁶According to David Held the key figures of the Institute and their areas of specialization were as follows: "Max Horkheimer (philosopher, sociologist and social psychologist), Friedrich Pollock (economist and specialist on problems of national planning), Theodor Adorno (philosopher, sociologist, musicologist), Erich Fromm (psychoanalyst, social psychologist), Herbert Marcuse (philosopher), Franz Neumann (political scientist, with particular expertise in law), Otto Kirchheimer (political scientist, with expertise in law), Leo Lowenthal (student of popular culture and literature), Henryk Grossmann (political economist), Arkadij Gurland (economist, sociologist), and, as a member of the 'outer circle' of the Institute, Walter Benjamin (essayist and literary critic)." David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 15.

⁷The most controversial figures in this regard are Erich Fromm and Walter Benjamin. Fromm broke with the Institute for doctrinal reasons and was consequently subjected to heated polemics. The relationship between Benjamin and the Frankfurt School is only now emerging as the secrecy surrounding the Institute's files is slowly lifted. Benjamin's work had a strong impact on Adorno and probably elevated the interest in culture among the Institute members. Most of the dispute over Benjamin's role concerns his lack of formal ties with the Institute and the editorial control exercised by Horkheimer and Adorno over his writings.

⁸Slater, Origin and Significance, p. xiii.

⁹Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, p. 31.

¹⁰Slater, Origin and Significance, p. 15.

¹¹Tom Bottomore, The Frankfurt School (New York: Tavistock, 1984), p. 27.

¹²Andrew Arato, "Introduction to Part I," in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, eds., The Essential Frankfurt Reader (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), p. 3. The various relocations of the Institute naturally had an impact on the work of the membership. With the rise of the Nazis to power the Institute went into exile first in Geneva (February 1933) then in New York (1935). In 1950 Horkheimer, Pollock, and Adorno were invited to return to Frankfurt and re-established the Institute.

¹³See: Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics," in John B. Thompson and David Held, eds., Habermas: Critical Debates (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), pp. 230-232; Slater, Origin and Significance, esp. p. xiii; and Zoltán Tar, The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977).

¹⁴Bottomore, Frankfurt School, p. 16.

¹⁵Slater, Origin and Significance, p. 30.

¹⁶Paul Piccone, "General Introduction," in Arato and Gebhardt, eds., Frankfurt Reader, p. xi.

¹⁷Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, p. 186.

¹⁸Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in Max Horkheimer, Critical Theory: Selected Essays, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et. al. (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 242, henceforth abbreviated CT.

¹⁹Max Horkheimer, "Postscript," in CT, p. 245.

²⁰Horkheimer, "Traditional/Critical," in CT, p. 233.

²¹Ibid., p. 241.

²²Horkheimer, "Postscript," in CT, p. 246.

²³George Friedman, The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School (London: Cornell University Press, 1981), p. 36.

- ²⁴Slater, Origin and Significance, p. 55.
- ²⁵Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, p. 195.
- ²⁶Horkheimer, "Postscript", in CT, p. 245.
- ²⁷Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory," Telos, No. 49 (Fall, 1981), p. 39, [emphasis added].
- ²⁸Wilhelm Hennis, "Max Weber's 'Central Question'", Economy and Society, Vol. 12, No. 2 (May, 1983), p. 139.
- ²⁹Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, p. 65.
- ³⁰I am following Tar's interpretation here, see, Tar, Frankfurt School, p. 86.
- ³¹Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947), p. 3.
- ³²Ibid., p. 5.
- ³³Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 83, henceforth abbreviated D of E.
- ³⁴Ibid., p. 4.
- ³⁵Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason," in Arato and Gebhardt, eds., Essential Frankfurt Reader, p. 29.
- ³⁶Ibid., pp. 29-30.
- ³⁷Ibid., p. 30 [emphasis added].
- ³⁸Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment," New German Critique, No. 26 (Spring-Summer, 1982), p. 13.
- ³⁹Horkheimer and Adorno, D of E, pp. ix-xi.
- ⁴⁰Paul Connerton, The Tragedy of Enlightenment: An Essay on the Frankfurt School (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 62.
- ⁴¹Horkheimer and Adorno, D of E, p. xvi.

- ⁴²Ibid., p. xiii.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 44.
- ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 8.
- ⁴⁵Ibid., p. 43.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., p. 28.
- ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 36.
- ⁴⁹Ibid., p. xvi.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁵¹Ibid.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 34.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 43.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 45.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 38-39.
- ⁵⁶Connerton, Tragedy of Enlightenment, p. 75.
- ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 71.
- ⁵⁸Benhabib, "Modernity/Critical Theory," Telos, p. 40.
- ⁵⁹Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 155.
- ⁶⁰Ibid.
- ⁶¹Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in Ibid., p. 127.
- ⁶²See, Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), pp. 180-182.

⁶³Tom Bottomore and William Outhwaite, "Introduction to the Translation," in Karl Lowith, Max Weber and Karl Marx, Tom Bottomore and William Outhwaite, eds., trans. Hans Fantel (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 15.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 16. Weber's strident nationalism is a persistent theme throughout his political theory. For an early statement of this position see Weber's Freiburg Inaugural lecture of 1895, "The National State and Economic Policy (Freiburg Address)," Economy and Society, Vo. 9, No. 4 (November, 1980), pp. 428-449. The principle difference between this and his later writings appears to be his attitude toward the Caesar-like leader. In 1895 Weber spoke rather disparagingly of the haute bourgeoisie which longed "all too shamelessly for the coming of a new Caesar" (p. 445). Compare this to the closing remarks of "Politics as a Vocation," where Weber extolls the virtues of the leader-hero who dares to reach out for the impossible, see From Max Weber, p. 128.

⁶⁵Stephen R. Turner and Regis A. Factor, Max Weber and the Dispute Over Reason and Value: A Study of Philosophy, Ethics, and Politics (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 203.

⁶⁶Habermas, "Discussion," in Fred R. Dallmayr and Thomas A. McCarthy, eds., Understanding and Social Inquiry (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), p. 71.

⁶⁷Herbert Marcuse, Negations: Essays in Critical Theory (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 204 and 207.

⁶⁸Turner and Factor, Weber/Dispute Over Reason, p. 208.

⁶⁹Benhabib, "Modernity/Critical Theory," Telos, p. 48.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 49.

⁷¹Jürgen Habermas, "Reply to Critics," in Thompson and Held, eds., Critical Debates, p. 232.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Interview with Ernst Bloch by Jean-Michel Palmier, "La Traversee du siecle d' Ernst Bloch. Voyage a 'Blochingen'," Les Nouvelles Litteraires (April 29, 1976), pp. 8-9 and (May 6, 1976), pp. 8-9, quoted in Tar, Frankfurt School, p. 206.

⁷⁴Friedman, Political Philosophy/Frankfurt School, p. 63.

Chapter Two: Enlightenment and the Interest in Emancipation

The previous chapter demonstrated how, under the weight of the thesis of Dialectic of Enlightenment, the project of critical theory was crushed. The collapse of Enlightenment reason left the Frankfurt critique of ideology without a normative standard; the entwinement of instrumental reason and domination left the Frankfurt theorists without hope. The dialectic of enlightenment became a persistent theme in subsequent publications of the critical theorists; including those of the mid 1960s such as Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man and Adorno's Negative Dialectics. But even as these works were being published, Jürgen Habermas was preparing his metacritique which would strive to renew the critical project of the 1930s.

This chapter examines Habermas' work during his Frankfurt period of the 1960s. It argues that his writings on the public realm and his epistemological study Knowledge and Human Interests constitute a critical reply to Dialectic of Enlightenment. Habermas confronts the one-dimensionality thesis by systematically resurrecting the category of practical reason alongside that of technical, instrumental reason. Then in an effort to reunite enlightenment and

emancipation he draws upon the Fichtean notion of 'interested reason'. Finally the theory of the public realm adds a practical-political dimension to critical theory which was lacking in the work of the first generation of Frankfurt theorists. It is, however, Knowledge and Human Interests which demands the greatest attention as it is arguably Habermas' most important contribution to twentieth century philosophy. For this reason it serves as the point of departure for the discussion in this chapter.

I. The Renewal of Practical Reason

The basic theses of Knowledge and Human Interests were first formulated in Habermas' 1965 Frankfurt inaugural lecture. "The section on positivism, pragmatism, and historicism," he states in the preface, "goes back to lectures in Heidelberg in the winter semester of 1963-64."¹ These dates offer important clues to understanding the construction of the text. During this period Habermas was a central figure in the so-called 'Positivist Dispute'; an acrimonious exchange on the subject of sociological method between Adorno and Karl Popper and their followers.² Consequently an interest in the relationship between philosophy and science informs much of the discussion in Knowledge and Human Interests.

In the first part of the text Habermas analyses the "movement of thought" from Kant through Hegel to Marx: a development which he characterizes as "the dissolution of epistemology."³ With Kant's transcendental philosophy; "The critique of knowledge was still conceived in reference to a system of cognitive faculties that included practical reason and reflective judgment as naturally as critique itself ..."⁴ It was a system in which philosophy designated science its proper place alongside practical judgment and aesthetic taste. It is Habermas' thesis, however, that since Kant;

Science has no longer been seriously comprehended by philosophy. Science can only be comprehended epistemologically, which means as one category of possible knowledge, as long as knowledge is not equated either effusively with the absolute knowledge of a great philosophy or blindly with the scientistic self-understanding of the actual business of research.⁵

The references here are to Hegel and Marx, in whose work Habermas finds the "abandoned stages of reflection"⁶ which could have radicalized the epistemological project. It was Hegel who undercut the Kantian system by relocating the critique of knowledge in the history of a self-constituting, phenomenological subject, only, Habermas charges, to bring philosophy to the point where it was forced to surrender epistemology to scientism. Marx, according to Habermas' thesis, conflates the sciences of man and the sciences of

nature hence completing the disintegration of the theory of knowledge. Consequently social theory was subjected to the absolutism of scientific method, and the category of practical reason was lost. According to Habermas, Hegel and Marx failed to recognize that the conditions of possible knowledge are rooted in the natural history of the species. If they had done so, they would have realized that "a radical critique of knowledge is possible only as social theory."⁷ The concept of "reflection", or the "self-reflection" of consciousness, introduced here assumes a central role throughout Knowledge and Human Interests. This concept should be understood as the "relentless discursive examination of the presuppositions and grounds of any claim to cognitive or normative validity."⁸ It is the unrelenting criticism which attempts to overcome a naive understanding of the world.

Habermas approaches the Phenomenology of Spirit from the point of view of an immanent critique of Kant. This starting point allows him to focus on three themes of Kantian epistemology unmasked by Hegel: (i) the paradigmatic status of scientific knowledge, (ii) Kant's specific understanding of the knowing subject, and (iii) the categorical distinction between theoretical and practical

reason. In the Phenomenology Hegel implicitly takes Kant's epistemology to task on these points and counters scepticism's claim to be free of presuppositions. Phenomenological investigation, as proposed by Hegel, challenges Kant's transcendental philosophy by reflecting on the forms of knowledge that emerge historically in the self-formative process of consciousness. The theory of knowledge cannot claim science as its standard a priori since the manifold forms of knowledge must first present themselves to consciousness simply as knowledge per se. Consciousness must judge all competing claims to knowledge on an equal footing and cannot prejudge science as a prototype. As Garbis Kortian observes, epistemology's claim of pure scepticism is "placed in question by its uncritical embrace of a science whose criteria provide a yardstick which immediately determines all valuable forms of knowledge."⁹ Similarly, Hegel rejects the ahistorical subject posited by Kant. Kantian epistemology encounters its subject ready-made in the form of a transcendental concept of the ego. Here the uncritical acceptance of a transcendental self-consciousness leaves in question the transition from natural consciousness to pure self-awareness. Phenomenology takes the genesis of the subject into account in its self-formation. As Habermas writes:

... the consciousness that is about to begin the task of examination, the subject of epistemological investigation is not yet at hand. It is first given to itself only with the result of its self-ascertainment."¹⁰

Finally, in Kant's critical philosophy; "The critique of pure reason assumes a different concept of the ego than does that of practical reason: the ego as the unity of self-consciousness versus the ego as free will."¹¹ On the basis of this consideration Kant postulated a categorical distinction between the cognitive claims of theoretical and practical reason. However, anchoring the development of consciousness in an historical process binds theoretical and practical reason together. Knowing and willing are fused in the ethical actions of historical subjects. The distinction between pure and practical reason becomes problematic.

While Hegel's endeavour radicalized the theory of knowledge, unveiling the dimension within which transcendental philosophy takes shape, there is, Habermas claims, 'something half-hearted' about the Phenomenology. Hegel is critical of the transcendental foundation of Kantian philosophy which presupposes scientific understanding. The phenomenological project, therefore, starts from mere sense-perception and attempts to work up to a modern understanding of the world through a reconstruction of social history. But Hegel's critique of Kant "was

executed on the basis of the pre-suppositions of Schelling's philosophy of identity which compelled it to seek absolute knowledge."¹² And so to be consistent "with the approach of phenomenological investigation, absolute knowledge would be conceivable only as the result of a systematic repetition of the formative processes of the human species and nature at once."¹³ This of course is not a problem for the philosophy of objective idealism which identifies nature and consciousness as the complementary moments of spirit. But herein lies the point of departure for Marx' metacritique of Hegel, since Marx took up Hegel's critique "without sharing the basic assumption of the philosophy of identity."¹⁴ However in his interpretation of Marx, Habermas perceives a double image. On the one hand he finds the rudiments of "an instrumentalist epistemology,"¹⁵ on the other a latent positivism which completes the dissolution of the theory of knowledge.

It was in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts that Marx first tackled the Hegelian system. The strategy of his materialist critique was to separate the notion of the self-formation of consciousness from the philosophy of identity. For Hegel the truth and absolute ground of nature was spirit (mind). Marx argued, to the contrary, that nature or the natural history of the species was in fact the

absolute ground of mind (consciousness). This was the central insight of Marx's historical materialism: that life was not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. The affirmation of an independent and external nature breaks apart Hegel's philosophy of identity. However, reading his work as a dialogue with the tradition of German idealism, Habermas argues that Marx avoids the apparent epistemic dilemma of a subject-object dualism by reconciling the species-subject with nature through the category of social labour. As Körtian explains:

Nature which remains external as first nature can only be constituted for us as objective nature through the mediation of the subjective nature of man in the process of social labour. This leads to the conclusion that the concept of labour as deployed in Marx's analyses is not simply a constitutive anthropological category, but also has an epistemological import ... The concept of social labour which this philosophical anthropology seeks to substitute for the Hegelian concept of mediation, reverts in Habermas's eyes, to the Kantian concept of the synthetic activity of the knowing subject. This concept in its new Marxist version may be termed the concept of social synthesis.¹⁶

Of course Marx did not elaborate this notion of synthesis into a materialist epistemology: the concept of labour remained for Marx first and foremost an economic category. Habermas perceives this as the fatal moment which completed the disintegration of the theory of knowledge.

While the category of labour allowed Marx to analyse the exchange between man and the natural environment, it also erected a barrier to understanding the dynamics of the 'second nature' of social interaction. Marx grappled with this problem in terms of the contradictions between the forces and the relations of production. Marx was able to comprehend the crisis laden movement of the productive forces; a development which followed the logic of an instrumental rationality. But even when identifying the institutional frame of reference of the relations of production, Marx was unable to account for their transformations except in reductionist terms. Habermas locates Marx's error in the fact that he failed to distinguish between the logical status of the natural sciences and the sciences of man. Marx likened his critique of political economy to the methodological rigor of the physical sciences. In doing so, Habermas charges, "Marx reduces the process of reflection to the level of instrumental action."¹⁷ According to such a model, critical-revolutionary praxis could only take shape within the framework of instrumental reason. Here, with the subjugation of critical reflection under the category of instrumental rationality, the disintegration of the notion of practical reason is made complete.

In following Habermas through this movement of thought from Kant to Marx we have in the end run up against the category of instrumental rationality. It is from this perspective that the Frankfurt School began their critique of modernity. Their claim was that this 'one-dimensionality' is an inherent aspect of the faculty of reason. Habermas quite clearly sees this as the outcome of the disintegration of the project of enlightenment. Set against the backdrop of Dialectic of Enlightenment Habermas proposes his counterargument to the critique of instrumental reason.

Habermas' strategy in moving beyond Marx is to introduce alongside of labour the notion of synthesis through interaction. Here he is attempting to draw-out that which remained latent in Marx. Marx maintained at the categorical level that it was material activity or work which designated the dimension within which the natural history of the species develops. However, Habermas writes;

At the level of his material investigations, ... Marx always takes account of social practice that encompasses both work and interaction. The processes of natural history are mediated by the productive activity of individuals and the organization of their interrelations. These relations are subject to norms that decide, with the force of institutions, how responsibilities and rewards, obligations and charges to the social budget are distributed among members. The

medium in which these relations of subjects and of groups are normatively regulated is cultural tradition. It forms the linguistic communication structure on the basis of which subjects interpret both nature and themselves in their environment.¹⁸

This broadening of the categorical framework enables Habermas to distinguish between the overcoming of the objective constraints of external nature and emancipation from socially imposed repressions which manifest themselves in systematically restricted communication. However Habermas must show that the concept of social labour cannot sufficiently capture the dynamics of interaction.

It is in this regard that Habermas looks to the formation of social classes. He points out that "the institutional framework does not subject all members of society to the same repressions."¹⁹ The rules that govern the distribution of the surplus product of labour do not correspond to the objective conditions of social production. The problem of distribution is resolved only through appeal to tradition-bound relations of power; manifested in hierarchically structured social classes. These tradition-bound rules are maintained through institutionalized force and legitimized through the consensus which takes shape in communicative interaction. The historical development of the species appears at one

level as the linear development of the production process; the refinement of the material exploitation of nature through technology and administration. At the level of the relations of production, however, the history of the species

is marked not by new technologies but by stages of reflection through which the dogmatic character of surpassed forms of domination and ideologies are dispelled, the pressure of the institutional framework is sublimated, and communicative action is set free as communicative action. The goal of this development is thereby anticipated: the organization of society linked to decision-making processes on the basis of discussion free from domination.²⁰

The history of class struggle is a process of oppression by and emancipation from communicatively imposed repressions and renunciations. This dimension of communicative action cannot be reduced to a concept of synthesis exclusively mediated through the category of social labour.

Habermas' understanding of the self-formative process of the species is dependent on both the analysis of the 'natural laws' of the economy and the insights of the hermeneutic sciences. Marx, Habermas claims, failed to make this distinction clear:

If Marx had not thrown together interaction and work under the label of social practice (Praxis), and had he instead related the materialist concept of synthesis likewise to the accomplishments of instrumental action and the nexuses of communicative action, then the idea of a science of man would not have been obscured by identification with the natural sciences.²¹

This reductionism, according to Habermas' analysis, opened the door to the positivist interpretation of the social sciences and to the mechanistic understanding of dialectical materialism which has dogged the Marxist tradition -- especially since the Second International.

Habermas' re-examination of Marx reveals two systems of action and two corresponding modes of inquiry:

Empirical-analytic inquiry is the systematic continuation of a cumulative learning process that proceeds on the pre-scientific level within the behavioral system of instrumental action. Hermeneutic inquiry lends methodological form to a process of arriving at mutual understanding (and self-understanding) which takes place on the pre-scientific level in the tradition-bound structure of symbolic interaction.²²

Against the backdrop of these co-ordinated systems of action and inquiry Habermas outlines the central thrust of his work: the cognitive process is guided by knowledge-constitutive interests rooted in action systems which secure the preservation of the species. The empirical-analytic sciences are guided by a cognitive interest which aims at

the production of technically exploitable knowledge. Habermas refers to this as the technical cognitive interest since this form of inquiry "discloses reality from the viewpoint of possible technical control over objectified processes of nature."²³ Elsewhere this has been referred to as the categorical framework of instrumental reason. The hermeneutic disciplines are guided by an interest in the clarification of practically effective knowledge. This practical cognitive interest guides the dimension of practical reason. Here the maintenance of the intersubjectivity of the linguistic community is assured through communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding. This operates at both the level of cross-cultural analysis, and in the critical appropriation of norms embedded in cultural traditions.

Having re-introduced the concept of practical reason into the critique of knowledge, Habermas has confronted the one-dimensionality thesis of the Frankfurt School. However this does not directly address the dialectic of reason and domination. Even practical reason serves the extension of domination when social norms betray an ideological intent. As Habermas remarked earlier: "In false consciousness, knowing and willing are still joined."²⁴ To complete the

critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment Habermas must reaffirm the emancipatory moment of Enlightenment reason.

II. Reason's Interest in Emancipation

Reason's emancipatory power, Habermas argues, first comes to light in the experience of reflection. Through reflection the subject comes to recognize a dogmatic dependence on nature. To recognize that a state of affairs is dogmatic, Habermas asserts, is at the same time to express an interest in its abolition through reason. This notion of interested reason is the foundation for the concept of the knowledge-constitutive interest. "The technical and practical interests can be comprehended unambiguously only in connection with the emancipatory cognitive interest of rational reflection."²⁵ In other words, the cognitive interests display themselves to the extent that they partake in emancipatory practice. The technical cognitive interest is distinguished by the manner in which technique liberates the species from necessary labour. Likewise, the practical interest establishes itself to the extent that discursive practices free decision-making from ideological domination. Ultimately, Habermas' project rests on this claim that an emancipatory interest inheres in reason.

The notion of 'interested reason' is not new to philosophy. This theme was, as Körtgen notes in Metacritique, the central proposition of Enlightenment thought:

The theory of Enlightenment originates in an experience of emancipation from the constraints which arise when social and political relations are not transparent. In the controversy between critical reason and dogmatism, reason is not without bias. Reason, as dictated by the normative status of the theory of Enlightenment, expresses an interest on the part of the subject in emancipation at each stage of its critical reflection.²⁶

As early as 1963 Habermas analysed this theory of Enlightenment in terms of the categorical constellation of dogmatism, reason, and decision.²⁷ His study examines the development of the notion of interested reason from the French Enlightenment through German idealism to Marx's materialism. A closer look at his earlier work is worthwhile since it foreshadows the arguments of Knowledge and Human Interests.

It was in the eighteenth century philosophy of the French Enlightenment, Habermas argues, that the unity of theory and praxis was first founded on the relationship between dogmatism, reason, and decision. In the works of writers such as Helvetius and Holbach dogmatism bears the name of prejudice. The prejudices referred for the most

part to the stifling doctrines of the church; a veil of received opinion which entrenched the false consciousness of the epoch and secured the dominant interests in the institutions of a false society.²⁸ Against the weight of this oppressive authority, enlightenment is equated with education and maturation -- in Habermasian terms, "with the talent for adult autonomy."²⁹ According to Habermas' formulation, the practical moment of decision is internal to this concept of enlightenment. "It [reason] has always made its decision in favour of justice, general welfare, and peace: the reason which defends itself against dogmatism is a committed reason."³⁰ The writers of the French Enlightenment, clinging to a philosophy of naturalism, saw the root of error in a misunderstanding of nature. Reason, then, takes shape in an analysis of the laws of nature, which at the same time is believed to provide instruction for ethical life.

Now under the premises of German idealism, "dogmatism could no longer be overcome by a reason which studies nature and is verified by sense experience."³¹ Kantian philosophy had cut the causal laws of the 'realm of phenomena' and the 'realm of freedom' free of this embeddedness in nature, ascribing them instead to the synthetic achievements of the subject. Thus in Fichte's idealist philosophy the

'prejudice' of the Encyclopedists no longer arises from a misunderstanding of nature, but rather appears under the category of 'dispersal' or 'the scattered self';³² that is, the "fixation of a weak ego or immature consciousness on the external props provided by existing things."³³ Reason must now constitute itself as the critique of reified consciousness.

Fichte holds that in order to shed its dogmatic limitations, consciousness must make the interest of reason one with its own:

The Fichtean Ego is able to bring to light the hidden mechanisms of nature and rigidified consciousness only as a result of a motivation experienced as a need for emancipation. These mechanisms are illuminated through an original act of self-positing where the form of reflection is intellectual intuition.³⁴

Of course, as Hegel subsequently observed, Fichte's critical reason, tied to an autonomous Ego which posits the world and itself, remains profoundly abstract: a philosophy blind to the determinations of history.³⁵ Finally Marx, "representing the third generation of committed spokesmen for enlightenment, ... shows that reified consciousness must be criticized practically at the level of things themselves -- instead of merely epistemologically by a withdrawal into the autonomous subject."³⁶

In this context the concepts of dogmatism, reason, and decision undergo a radical transformation. Anchored in the historically conditioned self-formative process of the species, interested reason can no longer assume the form of a moralizing self-determination.

From institutionalized prejudice, then passing through the mediation of the form of transcendental dispersion, dogmatism now assumes the form of ideology. Reason committed against dogmatism from now on is active as the critique of ideology.³⁷

Ideology-critique, Habermas contends, maintains a dialectical relationship between knowledge and commitment, reason and decision. On the one hand, the critical insight which sees through the dogmatism of a congealed society can only be attained when knowledge is guided by an interest in emancipation; on the other hand, the degree to which this interest may be realized is contingent upon the level of insight into the processes of social development already attained.

This formulation of the relationship between dogmatism, reason, and decision sheds light on the discussion in Knowledge and Human Interests where Habermas returns to the philosophy of German idealism to secure the notion of reason's interest in emancipation. The significant addition

in this text is the emphasis placed on action. Habermas notes:

The concept of an interest of reason already appears in Kant's transcendental philosophy. But Fichte, after subordinating theoretical to practical reason, is the first to develop this concept of an emancipatory interest inherent in acting reason.³⁸

According to Fichte's theory of knowledge, reason is immediately practical in the original act of self-reflection since the critical undertaking of reflection emancipates the ego from dogmatism. This insight, Habermas argues, leads Fichte to grant equal status to theoretical and practical reason, a development which carries significance for the category of the knowledge-constitutive interest: "Only in Fichte's concept of interested self-reflection does the interest embedded in reason lose its secondary character and become constitutive likewise for knowing and acting."³⁹ But Habermas cannot simply appropriate the concept of interested self-reflection from idealism. Instead he situates the act of reflection within the self-formative process of the species. In doing so Habermas establishes the objective parameters which idealism ignored. Habermas recognizes that "the conditions under which the human species constitutes itself are not just those posited by reflection."⁴⁰ The self-formative process of the species is contingent upon the

barriers thrown up by objective and subjective nature. Interested reason aims at overcoming these barriers:

to this extent, it assumes the restricted form of the practical and technical cognitive interests. Indeed, in a certain measure, the concept of the interest of reason, introduced by idealism, needs to be re-interpreted materialistically: the emancipatory interest itself is dependent on the interests in possible intersubjective action-orientation and in possible technical control.⁴¹

For Habermas, then, emancipation is dependent on a release from natural constraints and on a lessening of the constraints of systematically restricted communication.

The dialectic of enlightenment led the first generation of critical theorists to abandon all hope of attaining emancipation through the extension of reason. What they perceived as instrumental reason's usurpation of the role of enlightenment in the conceptual constellation of dogmatism, reason, and decision, ensured that the moment of decision always presented a heightening of reification, the further entrenchment of dogmatism. The error charged against the Frankfurt School concerns their double-edged concept of nature. In Habermas' system the objectification of external nature does not immediately translate into the repression and objectification of human labour. The action complexes of instrumental and practical reason remain relatively

autonomous. Social repression must be analysed at the level of intersubjectively imposed norms: a critical theory of society, therefore, must shift its attention to the blockages which disrupt genuine communicative interaction. Habermas finds support for a theory of ideology constructed along these lines in Freud's metapsychology.

Habermas' argument here is based on the premise that the historical process of social organization and the socialization process of the individual are homologous. According to this analysis, the same forces that drive the individual to neurotic behaviour move society to develop institutions:

What characterizes institutions is at the same time what constitutes their similarity with pathological forms. Like the repetition compulsions from within, institutional compulsion from without brings about a relatively rigid reproduction of uniform behavior that is removed from criticism.⁴²

The organizational mechanisms for social behavior are the cultural traditions and received norms embedded in the institutional framework of a society. To the extent that this institutionalized behavior is removed from criticism -- that is, removed from a discursive process of reflection -- it takes the form of pathological behaviour.

At the communal level, social norms enforce the collective renunciations imposed by a tradition-bound distribution of social rewards and benefits. At the same time collective fantasies provide compensation for these renunciations. Such fantasies, although formed in public communication, remain insulated from criticism, and thus

are elaborated into interpretations of the world and taken into service as rationalizations of authority. Freud calls this the "mental assets of civilization": religious worldviews and rites, ideals and value systems, styles and products of art, ... in short, "illusions."⁴³

To emphasize, these rationalizations take shape in a web of communicative action, but under an institutional framework consisting of compulsory norms, "which not only sanction linguistically interpreted needs but also redirect, transform, and suppress them."⁴⁴ "Freud has acquired in metapsychology," Habermas concludes, "a framework for distorted communicative action that allows the conceptualization of the origins of institutions and the role and function of illusions, that is of power and ideology."⁴⁵

As a model for the critique of ideology, psychoanalysis is conceived as a special form of interpretation. Freud developed a 'depth hermeneutics' in order to deal with a life history that, like a classical text, is corrupted with

distortions. But in contrast to philological hermeneutics, 'psychoanalytic interpretation deals with "texts" that both express and conceal their "author's" self-deceptions.'⁴⁶ The task of the therapist in dialogue with the patient is to reconstruct a systematically distorted life-history. The process of psychoanalytic inquiry is at the same time a process of self-inquiry. The analytic process is successful only when the patient recognizes himself in the interpretation offered by the therapist and realizes the means of overcoming his compulsions. According to Habermas, the psychoanalytic dialogue is self-reflection par excellence: "The analytic situation makes real the unity of intuition and emancipation, of insight and liberation from dogmatic dependence, and of reason and the interested employment of reason developed by Fichte in the concept of self-reflection."⁴⁷ Reading this into the sociological dimension, Habermas argues that:

... just as in the clinical situation, so in society, pathological compulsion itself is accompanied by the interest in its abolition. Both the pathology of social institutions and that of individual consciousness reside in the medium of language and of communicative action and assume the form of a structural deformation of communication. That is why for the social system, too, the interest inherent in the pressure of suffering is also immediately an interest in enlightenment; and reflection is the only possible dynamic through which it realizes itself.⁴⁸

As a critique of ideology, reflection joins the social subject in a dialogue concerning its own self-formative process. The ideology problematic is, therefore, shifted into the realm of communicative action. The systematic distortions of communicative practice wrought by relations of power may be revealed in the light of critical reflection. Internal to this process of enlightenment, as Habermas has repeatedly assured us, is an interest in emancipation: borrowing from Wittgenstein he notes, "analytic insights intervene in life."⁴⁹

Habermas' analysis of the 'movement of thought' from German idealism to Freud has resurrected the project of critical theory -- but only at the level of the history of ideas. In order that the clinical situation outlined above may serve as a practical model for ideology-critique, Habermas must find a social situation capable of internalizing a commitment to discussion free from domination. His theory of the public realm is an attempt to clear such a discursive space. Additionally, his analysis of the decline of the liberal public sphere amounts to a practical-political critique of the instrumental reason thesis. However this very analysis generates a tension between the theoretical and practical aspects of his project: a tension

which undermines the relationship between critical theory and emancipatory praxis.

III. The Public Realm

Since the time of his Habilitationsschrift Habermas has been deeply concerned with the status of the political public realm. As a political concept, he asserts, the public sphere refers to that realm of our social life in which public opinion concerning the activities of the state is formed and reformed.⁵⁰ The term 'public opinion' here includes the powers of criticism and control which an informed public may exercise over and against the ruling structure of a state. A portion of this public realm is constituted in every conversation between individuals assembled as a public body. "Citizens behave as a public body," Habermas writes, "when they confer in an unrestricted fashion -- that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions -- about matters of general interest."⁵¹ Recognition of this principle establishes the parameters for an open discussion of political life: "debate proceeds in accordance with the standards of critical reason and not by simple appeal to traditional dogmas and authorities."⁵² Thus as an ideal, the public

sphere provides a framework for the articulation of an emancipatory political practice. However as Habermas demonstrated in his 1962 text, the emancipatory potential of this ideal has been crippled by a process of structural disintegration which has left in its wake a deformed public sphere and a depoliticized public.

According to Habermas, in feudal society the opposition between public and private -- which was the distinguishing mark of classical civilization -- became fused under the pressure of a static political authority. The categorical distinction between the polis and the oikos ceased to be meaningful as the patriarchal order characteristic of the family was extended to the state. This is not to imply that the notion of public authority ceased to exist. Indeed, throughout the feudal period, the symbols of sovereignty continued to be regarded as "public".⁵³ However, public authority became tied to the personal; to the very physical being of the prince. As Michel Foucault observed:

In a society like that of the seventeenth century, the King's body wasn't a metaphor, but a political reality. Its physical presence was necessary for the functioning of the monarchy.⁵⁴

It is in this sense that Habermas speaks of the feudal order as being characterized by a representative public sphere --

where the medieval ruler 're-presents' the public authority invested in his person before the people.⁵⁵

It was, of course, the social and economic relationships of feudal obligation which held this representative public realm in place. As these relationships began to decay in the face of industrialization and the Reformation, political authority in Europe entered a long process of realignment. The consequent polarization of the feudal authorities (church, nobility, and princes) into private and public elements produced two significant developments for the evolution of the public realm.

The first development was the rise of national and territorial states. The institutional innovations which accompanied the absolutist state -- army, bureaucracy, taxation, regulated trade, diplomacy -- amplified the presence of public authority. At the same time, the established urban corporations and institutions such as the stock exchange and the press, served to consolidate a private sphere of economic activity revolving around labour and commodity exchange. Despite the role of the mercantilist state in assembling a national market network, "the developing system of contracts, private law and private enterprises remained distinct from the political

apparatus."⁵⁶ This precipitated the second development: a growing opposition between the demands of this emerging sphere of bourgeois society and the prerogatives of the absolutist monarch. Importantly, however, civil society was not exclusively a negative force with regard to the state, it was as well a direct concern of the public authority since "the reproduction of life in the wake of the developing market economy had grown beyond the bounds of private domestic authority."⁵⁷

This opposition between public authority and private interest was the impetus for the formation of a critical public realm. By institutionalizing the principle of publicity, the literary public of the Enlightenment sought to replace the secretive politics of the absolutist state with a politics of public supervision; centred on rational discussion free from the interests of either the market or the state. "The public sphere," writes Thomas McCarthy, "as a political public of private persons reasoning publicly, was to exercise a critical function in mediating the relations between the essentially separate realms of civil society and the state."⁵⁸ It was not until the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the principle of the public sphere won institutional recognition; in many cases at the cost of the absolutist monarch.

This idealized image of bourgeois society is reflected in the first modern constitutions as they attempt to demarcate these three spheres of conduct. Public authority is typically limited to a few enumerated functions and, in some cases, is further restricted through a division of power amongst competing institutions. At the same time a sphere of private autonomy is maintained through rights of private property, personal liberty, and equality before the law. Additionally, a public sphere of communicative interaction is guaranteed through a combination of formal institutions and fundamental rights. Generally, it was within the rights of public discussion (freedom of assembly, speech, opinion, and press) and public institutions (such as the 'town hall' or the elected legislature) that the principles of the public sphere were objectified.

It is the conjunction of these two aspects which establishes the foundation of modern democracy. While Habermas rejects the reduction of democracy to mere formalisms, subjectively deduced 'rules of the game' or certain historical institutions, he does not simply dismiss representative government as the apparatus of the bourgeoisie. But substantive democracy can only be realized where decision-making is "dependent on a consensus arrived at in discussion free from domination."⁵⁹ Recognizing the

objective impossibility of such an ideal, Habermas qualifies this, adding:

Here the principle of public discourse is supposed to eliminate all force other than that of the better argument, and majority decisions are held to be only a substitute for the uncompelled consensus that would finally result if discussion did not always have to be broken off owing to the need for a decision.⁴⁷

Expressed in these terms it is clear why, for Habermas, a properly functioning public realm is vital for a democratic state.

As a democratic realm situated between society and the state, the liberal public sphere, founded upon principles of universality and equality, was understood to represent the interests of mankind. However, participation in this new democratic process was restricted to the bourgeoisie -- adult males of property and education. The critical relationship between the public sphere and the state was clearly defined; but from the very beginning the relationship between the public sphere and civil society was problematic. The social basis of the liberal public sphere ensured the transferal of particular economic interests into the public realm.

The decline of the liberal public sphere is due largely to the working out of contradictions triggered by

developments within the economic structure. As Peter Hohendahl explains:

As soon as the development of capitalism causes economic contradictions to be reflected as social problems, difficulties arise for the classical model of the public sphere. The bourgeoisie, which has employed it as an instrument of political change (emancipation), now shows an inclination to adapt the public sphere to the changed circumstances, so that the contradictions between its own particular interests and the interests of the general society are disguised.⁶¹

Coincidentally, a political commitment to public education and a wider diffusion of press and propaganda expands the boundaries of the critical public beyond the bourgeoisie: the conflicts of a developing class society then begin to intrude upon the public sphere. The resulting loss of social exclusivity shatters much of the common ideological foundation upon which the public realm was erected. "Group needs which can expect no satisfaction from a self-regulating market now tend towards regulation by the state."⁶² Thus the public realm becomes a forum for a competition of social interests.

But it is not just the 'intrusion of the masses' that undermines the public sphere. Ultimately it is destroyed as a moment of mediation by the near total integration of the state and the economy. This, Habermas argues, leads to a 'refeudalization' of public life, where large organizations

negotiate political compromises with the state and each other, excluding public discussion whenever possible.⁶³ As laws which arise from the pressures of economic interests cease to represent the consensus of the public, so public discourse loses its character of discussion free from domination. Instead of generating critical public opinion, the public sphere becomes the centre of 'public relations work,' a term which in itself betrays the manufactured nature of public information.⁶⁴

In the early 1960s Habermas still held out the possibility of reinvigorating public discussion. He suggests that the process of refeudalization which has debilitated the public sphere and depoliticized the public, "is opposed by the extension of fundamental rights in the social welfare state."⁶⁵ Important in this regard is the principle of freedom of information; a right which ought to be applied not only to the state but also to those organizations dealing with the state. This would open the process by which political compromises are formed -- which systematically excludes the public -- to general scrutiny. However, Habermas argues, only a body of organized private individuals could effectively exploit the remaining channels of public discourse and intercede in the compromise formation process. He suggests that;

The idea of the public sphere, preserved in the social welfare state mass democracy, an idea which calls for a rationalization of power through the medium of public discussion among private individuals, threatens to disintegrate with the structural transformation of the public sphere itself. It could only be realized today, on an altered basis, as a rational reorganization of social and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations committed to the public sphere in their internal structure as well as in their relations with the state and each other.⁶⁶

However an ambiguity arises in this analysis between a theory of social organization based on the interactions of a plurality of rival interest groups and a theory of democratization based on unrestricted communicative interaction. Habermas opts for the latter alternative but is unable to uncover a dynamic which points to a democratization of the state.⁶⁷ Indeed in his subsequent analysis of new technocratic ideologies he can only identify developments which reinforce the neutralization of the radical potential of the public realm. His analysis of the rise of technocratic consciousness can also be read as a reformulation of the Frankfurt critique of instrumental reason.

The 1968 essay 'Technology and Science as "Ideology"' argues that an increase in state intervention and the emergence of research and technology as leading productive forces, has altered the nature of capitalism in industrially advanced countries. Habermas understands state regulation

of the economy as a programmatic attempt to offset the dysfunctional traits of capitalist economic development while maintaining the private ownership of property. He has in mind system-threatening developments such as the massive unemployment and uncontrollable inflation which was experienced by most western nations during the inter-war years. The direct result of state intervention is a re-integration of the state and civil society which, Habermas argues, repoliticizes the economic sphere and undermines the legitimizing ideology of liberal capitalism. The undisguised introduction of political domination into the relations of exchange makes it impossible to maintain an ideology based on the free exchange of equals. "The root ideology of just exchange, which Marx unmasked in theory," Habermas concludes, "collapsed in practice."⁶⁸ Coupled with this development is the growth of technological innovation.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, Habermas argues, the entwining of research, administration, and technology has completely revolutionized the production process, "converting the system of sciences into a primary force of production."⁶⁹ Propelled by research conducted largely under government contract, primarily in the defense and aerospace industries, technological developments spill over into the private sector. Economic growth, and with it

'social progress' (defined as greater aggregate income), increasingly appears to be dependent on rapid technological change. And, of course, it is the relative prosperity experienced during periods of economic growth which secures mass loyalty and fuels the achievement-oriented ideology of individualistic entrepreneurism. The danger of this technocratic paradigm, Habermas warns, lies in its potential to become "a background ideology that penetrates into the consciousness of the depoliticized mass of the population, where it can take on legitimating power."⁷⁰

These two developments -- the collapse of the ideology of just exchange and the emergence of science as a productive force -- create a need for a new type of political legitimation. Two new ideological forms arise from this change in the political-economic structure. On the one hand, the ideology of just exchange is replaced by a 'substitute program' of social rewards and benefits. On the other hand, the emergence of a technocratic paradigm gives rise to the ideology of technocratic consciousness.

The notion of a self-regulating market was exploded with the reintroduction of political force into the economy; thus creating a need for legitimation. The resurrection of prebourgeois ideologies is not feasible since traditional

worldviews have been critically undermined. The alternative is a welfare state; a program of rewards and benefits (welfare, pensions, unemployment insurance) to smooth over the dysfunctions of the market and bind the loyalty of the masses. But here government action is deflected away from the realization of practical goals and toward the resolution of technical problems. The prevailing substitute program,

is aimed exclusively at the functioning of a manipulated system. It eliminates practical questions and therewith precludes discussion about the adoption of standards; the latter could emerge only from a democratic decision-making process. The solution of technical problems is not dependent on public discussion. Rather, public discussion could render problematic the framework within which the tasks of government action present themselves as technical ones. Therefore the new politics of state interventionism requires a depoliticization of the mass of the population. To the extent that practical questions are eliminated, the public realm also loses its political function.⁷¹

Thus this new welfare state ideology can be maintained only by suppressing practical discourse and reshaping all political issues as technical problems of systems' maintenance. The ideological needs of the welfare state are met in the "quasi-autonomous progress" of science "which is adapted to technical problems and brackets out practical questions."⁷² This is the ideology of technocratic consciousness which, Habermas argues is both 'less

ideological' than all previous ideologies, and yet far more irresistible and powerful than traditional ideologies.

Technocratic consciousness is not an illusory world-view which rationalizes social relations; it does not generate 'false consciousness', nor project an image of the 'good life'. But like the old ideology, technocratic consciousness serves to impede reflection on social life. This is what distinguishes the new form of ideology: "it severs the criteria for justifying the organization of social life from any normative regulation of interaction."⁷³ As such, technocratic consciousness represents the repression of ethics as a category of life. "The ideological nucleus of this consciousness," Habermas writes, "is the elimination of the distinction between the practical and the technical."⁷⁴

The political consequence of the rise of technocratic consciousness is the suppression of practical discourse in favour of technological control. Habermas perceives a scientization of politics and public opinion which attempts to reduce social intercourse to causal, predictable laws so that institutions may be properly constructed to ensure a smoothly operating society. Disturbances in the system, disorder, is the result of mechanical breakdown. The

political scientist becomes the technician who can identify the problems and recommend the appropriate adjustment. The object of political organization becomes the maintenance of a static social order. Classical political values, however, which are dependent upon consensual recognition, notions such as social justice, freedom, equality, notions which can only arise in a public realm devoted to disputation -- an agora or a recognized sphere of public opinion -- are systematically removed from public consideration.

What the Frankfurt School had identified as the irreversible dynamic of instrumental rationality, Habermas reformulates as a structural disintegration of the public sphere. Further, in order to escape the pessimism of the Frankfurt theorists, he holds out the possibility of revitalizing the public realm. He notes that the,

challenge of technology cannot be met with technology alone. It is rather a question of setting into motion a politically effective discussion that rationally brings the social potential constituted by technical knowledge and ability into a defined and controlled relation to our practical knowledge and will.⁷⁵

What is needed, he argues, is a "dialectic of potential and will."⁷⁶ Technological potential must be brought under the control of practically chosen ends. Even so this dialectic could master the power of technological ideology only if it were developed within the framework of "a political

decision-making process tied to the principle of general discussion free from domination."⁷⁷

Here the general structure of Knowledge and Human Interests is integrated into the theory of the public sphere. Habermas reiterates the need to distinguish between the rationalization of systems of instrumental action and those of communicative action -- which entail a lessening of the restrictions on public discourse. The institutional nucleus which secures this emancipatory element of critique and thereby assumes normative status is the public realm. It is at this point, Jean Cohen argues, that one confronts "the central contradiction in Habermas' political writings:"

The assertion that the principles of the bourgeois public sphere still inform political life in late capitalism and the demonstration that the institutional articulation on which these principles were based has been eradicated.⁷⁸

By way of an immanent critique, Habermas salvages the emancipatory and utopian core of liberal democracy in the hope that these principles could guide political action. However he can offer only an abstract alternative to the institutions of advanced capitalism because on the basis of the disintegration of the public realm, he can neither situate these principles in an existing institution nor

identify a dynamic pressing toward their realization.⁷⁹ Thus critical theory is led into a dilemma: the claim that the rationalization of communication interaction could introduce new emancipatory processes of socialization remains a "hypothetical projection"⁸⁰ so long as it is coupled to a normative standard that defies realization; the practical moment of emancipation remains suspended.

IV. Conclusion

In order to renew the critical theory project and take up once again the programme of enlightenment and political emancipation, Habermas was forced to confront the work of his predecessors; in particular, the arguments advanced in Dialectic of Enlightenment. Both the epistemological study Knowledge and Human Interests and the writings on the public realm represented an attempt to settle accounts with the first generation of critical theorists. Habermas reformulated the one-dimensionality thesis by arguing that the instrumental exchange with nature follows a different dynamic than social interaction. The technical mastery of nature develops in the realm of labour. Social interaction takes shape within a linguistic community which facilitates the reproduction of social norms. According to Habermas' model social repression is the result of restrictions built

into communicative interaction and is not the reflex of heightened control over an objectified nature. The instrumentalization of social life, decried by the Frankfurt School as the irreversible logic of rationalization, is recast in terms of a desiccation of the public realm in which moral-practical issues are reshaped as technical problems. This reformulation of the Frankfurt critique is at the same time an attempt to reclaim the concept of practical reason. Having set the theory of rationality back on track, Habermas' next objective was to restore the emancipatory element of critique. This project ran into difficulties both at the practical-political level (as was indicated just above) and at the theoretical level.

Within the theoretical context the act of self-reflection was to provide the decisive link between enlightenment and emancipation. As Habermas proclaimed:

Self-reflection is at once intuition and emancipation, comprehension and liberation from dogmatic dependence. The dogmatism that reason undoes both analytically and practically is false consciousness: error and unfree existence in particular.⁸¹

This formulation must be seen as an attempt to make good on the promissory notes which Habermas had issued in his Frankfurt inaugural lecture; in particular the claim that

"in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one."⁸² Henning Ottmann explains the dilemma which emerged from this immediate identity of knowledge and interest:

The emancipatory interest marks the convergence of the problems of a 'critique' which is supposed to be both a theory of knowledge in general and a critical liberation within a historical situation. The immediate identity of knowledge and interest creates a 'theory problem' and a 'Praxis problem'.⁸³

A theory problem arises since in the process of freeing social practice from particular power structures, reason's claim to universality is undermined. The intimate association between critical reflection and the self-formative process of a particular social subject disqualifies theory's claim to general knowledge. A praxis problem also arises, therefore, because an historically relativised theory cannot legitimate a universally binding practice: "A risky, theoretically unfounded Praxis rears its head behind the identity of knowledge and interest."⁸⁴

It may seem curious that one of the chief criticisms of Habermas' project was that it could lead to blind activism or ideological militancy. Moreover, these charges were raised by sympathetic critics on the political left.⁸⁵ This may indeed be a phenomenon of the political culture of West Germany, reflecting more than anything else the sensitivity of the left to the abuses of theory.⁸⁶ A seemingly more

plausible line of criticism of Knowledge and Human Interests argued that Habermas had given an overly idealistic account of the emancipatory power of reflection and had distorted the nature of the therapeutic situation of psychoanalysis.⁸⁷ These charges led to the conclusion that critical theory could not guide praxis at all.

Responding to his critics Habermas modified his position in the early 1970s. To resolve reason's universal-particular problem, he broke the category of reflection into two sub-routines: self-reflection and posterior reconstruction. "Self-reflection", Habermas explains, "brings to consciousness those determinants of a self-formative process of cultivation and spiritual formation which ideologically determine a contemporary praxis of action and conception of the world."⁸⁸ As insight which reveals particular ideological forms, self-reflection remains "rich in practical consequences."⁸⁹ In contrast, rational reconstructions deal with anonymous rule systems and exclude subjectivity. These reconstructions clear the discursive space for reflection by critically analysing the "presuppositions on which we always already rely naively in rational speech."⁹⁰ Rational reconstructions express the 'pure' knowledge which in logic, mathematics, epistemology, and linguistics forms the core of the philosophical

disciplines. Thus reconstructions "attain an indirect relation to the emancipatory interest of knowledge."⁹¹ This distinction sought to relieve some of the difficulties for theory construction which the identity of knowledge and interest had created. However, it would seem that Habermas has simply re-introduced the Kantian distinction between theoretical and practical reason; a distinction which Knowledge and Human Interests attempted to overcome.

Habermas' work at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg is marked by this shift from critical self-reflection to the logic of reconstruction. The question which arises is whether or not the project of reconstruction strains the theory-praxis relationship to the extent that problems of political emancipation threaten to become dislocated. It is this question which forms the basis for the discussion in the next chapter.

Notes to Chapter Two

¹Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. vi, henceforth abbreviated KHI.

²For the relevant contributions to this dispute see; Adorno, et. al., The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976).

³Habermas, KHI, p. vii.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶Ibid., p. 4.

⁷Ibid., p. vii. Habermas uses the term radical in the strict sense of reference to fundamental roots. Here a "radical critique of knowledge" refers to a theory which uncovers the roots of cognition: for Habermas a theory which discloses the relationship between knowledge and human interests.

⁸Thomas McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), p. 96.

⁹Garbis Kortian, Metacritique: The Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas, trans. John Raffan, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 81.

¹⁰Habermas, KHI, p. 16.

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

¹²Kortian, Metacritique, pp. 79-80.

¹³Habermas, KHI, p. 20.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁵Kortian, Metacritique, p. 86.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 87

¹⁷Habermas, KHI, p. 44.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰Ibid., p. 55.

²¹Ibid., p. 62.

²²Ibid., p. 191.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 17.

²⁵Ibid., p. 198.

²⁶Kortian, Metacritique, p. 48.

²⁷Jürgen Habermas, "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision: On Theory and Praxis in our Scientific Civilization," in Habermas, Theory and Practice, trans. John Viertel, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 253-282, henceforth abbreviated TaP.

²⁸Ibid., p. 257.

²⁹Ibid., p. 258, see also, Jorge Larraín, The Concept of Ideology (London: Hutchinson, 1979), Ch. 1.

³⁰Habermas, "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision," in TaP, p. 258.

³¹Ibid., p. 259.

³²See Kortian, Metacritique, pp. 51-54.

³³Habermas, "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision," in TaP, p. 259.

³⁴Kortian, Metacritique, p. 52.

³⁵Ibid., p. 53.

³⁶Habermas, "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision," in TaP, p. 261.

³⁷Ibid., p. 262.

³⁸Habermas, KHI, p. 198, emphasis added.

³⁹Ibid., p. 210.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 211.

- 42 Ibid., p. 276.
- 43 Ibid., p. 279.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid., p. 281-282.
- 46 McCarthy, Critical Theory of Habermas, p. 196.
- 47 Habermas, KHI, p. 287.
- 48 Ibid., p. 288.
- 49 Jürgen Habermas, "Introduction: Some Difficulties in the Attempt to Link Theory and Praxis," in TaP, p. 23.
- 50 Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," New German Critique, No. 3 (Fall, 1974), p. 49.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 260.
- 53 Habermas, "Public Sphere," NGC, p. 50.
- 54 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, et. al. (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 55.
- 55 Habermas, "Public Sphere," NGC, p. 51.
- 56 Jean Cohen, "Why More Political Theory?" Telos, No. 40 (Summer, 1979), p. 76.
- 57 Habermas, "Public Sphere," NGC, p. 52.
- 58 McCarthy, Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, p. 391.
- 59 Jürgen Habermas, "The University in a Democracy: Democratization of the University," in Habermas, Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science, and Politics, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 7, henceforth abbreviated TRS.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "Critical Theory, Public Sphere and Culture: Jürgen Habermas and his Critics," New German Critique, No. 16 (Winter, 1979), p. 92.

- 62Habermas, "Public Sphere," NGC, p. 54.
- 63Ibid.
- 64Ibid., p. 55.
- 65Ibid.
- 66Ibid.
- 67Cohen, "Political Theory," Telos, p. 84.
- 68Jürgen Habermas, 'Technology and Science as "Ideology",' in TRS, p. 101.
- 69Habermas, "Introduction," in TaP, p. 5
- 70Habermas, "Technology and Science," in TRS, p. 105.
- 71Ibid., pp. 103-104.
- 72Ibid., pp. 106-107.
- 73Ibid., p. 112.
- 74Ibid., p. 113.
- 75Jürgen Habermas, "Technical Progress and the Social Life-World," in TRS, p. 61.
- 76Ibid., p. 61.
- 77Ibid., p. 61.
- 78Cohen, "Political Theory," Telos, p. 82.
- 79Ibid.
- 80Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory," Telos, No. 49, (Fall 1981), p. 50.
- 81Habermas, KHI, p. 208.
- 82Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: A General Perspective," in Ibid., p. 314.
- 83Henning Ottmann, "Cognitive Interests and Self-Reflection," in John B. Thompson and David Held, eds., Habermas: Critical Debates (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), p. 84.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 84.

⁸⁵For a discussion of the critical reception of Habermas' work by the 'congenial left' in Germany see, Fred R. Dallmayr, "Reason and Emancipation: Notes on Habermas," in Dallmayr, Beyond Dogma and Despair: Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Politics (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 220-245.

⁸⁶For a critical reply to the charges linking critical theory to German terrorists movements see, Albrecht Wellmer, "Terrorism and the Critique of Society," in Jürgen Habermas, ed., Observations on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age", trans. Andrew Buchwalter (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), pp. 283-307.

⁸⁷See for example, James Schmidt, "Jürgen Habermas and the Difficulties of Enlightenment," Social Research, No. 49 (Spring, 1982), pp. 196-197; and Ottmann, "Cognitive Interests," in Thompson and Held, eds., Critical Debates, pp. 84-87.

⁸⁸Habermas, "Introduction," in TaP, p. 22.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 23.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 24.

⁹¹Ibid.

Chapter Three: The Dynamics of Rationalization

During his residency as Director of Research at the Max Planck Institute Habermas has significantly recast the foundations of critical theory. In the retrospective "A Reply to My Critics," he concedes that the "attempt to ground critical social theory by way of the theory of knowledge, while it did not lead astray, was indeed a roundabout way."¹ A more direct means of leading into social theory, he contends, is through the theory of language. Reflecting on his work as a whole Habermas writes:

My own efforts can be understood in connection with the undertaking that critical theory broke off at the start of the 1940s. My intention is to renew a critical social theory that secures its normative foundations by taking in the experience of thought gained along the way from Kant through Hegel to Marx, and from Marx through Peirce and Dilthey to Max Weber and George Herbert Mead, and by working them up into a theory of rationality.²


Working up a communications concept of reason is, however, only the first step toward the reconstruction of critical theory. "The next step," Habermas notes, "is to make the concept of communicative rationality applicable to social conditions, to institutionalized loci of interaction."³ This is a matter of identifying a dynamic of societal rationalization specific to communicative action. The

Theory of Communicative Action,⁴ the major publication of the Starnberg period, attempts to carry out these programmatic statements of intent.

The fundamental problem which forms the point of reference for this text is "the question of whether, and if so how, capitalist modernization can be conceived as a process of one-sided rationalization."⁵ This question raises once again the one-dimensionality thesis which Habermas sought to dispatch in Knowledge and Human Interests. The return to this problem is based on the premise that "there is an internal relation between sociology and the theory of rationalization."⁶ This realization forces a direct confrontation with the work of Max Weber; essentially bringing critical theory full circle. In taking up the analysis presented in this text this chapter will (I) examine Habermas' critical appropriation of Weber's theory of rationalization, (II) flesh-out the theory of discursive rationality, and (III) reconnect these theoretical developments to the political problem of emancipatory praxis.

I. Weber's Dialectic of Rationalization

Weber took as his project an analysis of modernization;



that is, the transition from traditional European society to the capitalist society of his own time. The guiding thread of this analysis was his theory of rationalization. Importantly however, as Habermas notes, Weber took up this theme free of the encumbrances of the philosophy of history and nineteenth century evolutionism: he did not uncritically accept the progress of the natural sciences nor repeat the naturalistic fallacies of Enlightenment thought by connecting "the cognitive aspects of scientific progress with the moral-practical aspects of coming-of-age."⁷ Weber's sociological investigations systematically study ethical-religious and societal processes of rationalization; that is, "the emergence of modern structures of consciousness ... and the embodiment of these rationality structures in social institutions."⁸ But when viewed as a whole, Habermas argues, a fundamental inconsistency appears in Weber's conceptual framework. In his analysis of the development of worldviews Weber employs a complex and often unqualified concept of rationality.⁹ The analysis of societal rationalization, on the other hand, is guided by the restricted notion of purposive rationality (Zweckrationalität). Habermas maintains that by casting societal rationalization processes exclusively in the light of purposive-rational action, Weber prejudiced his analysis. The thrust of Habermas' examination is that

Weber's action-theoretic concepts are incapable of comprehending the complex dynamics of the transformation of society. As will be shown, Habermas argues that for an analysis to fully grasp societal modernization it must first incorporate the concept of communicative action. He pursues this thesis by way of a critique of Weber's 'dialectic of rationalization'.

It has become customary (since Talcott Parsons) to divide the various manifestations of western rationalism found in Weber's work into three areas: (i) society, (ii) personality, and (iii) culture. Habermas keeps to this classification.

(i) The distinguishing feature of modern society for Weber, as it was for Marx, is the differentiation of the relatively autonomous realms of the capitalist economy and the modern state. The organization and interaction of these two realms is governed by the institution of formal law. "These three elements," the economy, formal law, and the state, "... are constitutive for the rationalization of society."¹⁰

(ii) The chief object of Weber's interest, Habermas notes, was the penetration of ethical rationalism into the

personality system. Weber found at the level of personality the "methodical conduct of life"¹¹ which he believed to be the most important factor in the rise of capitalism. For Weber, Habermas argues, the Protestant ethic, an ethic of conviction centered around vocational conceptions, provided "the foundation for a cognitive-instrumental attitude to inner worldly happenings, in particular to social interactions in the domain of social labour."¹²

(iii) Cultural rationalization manifests itself through science and technology, autonomous art, and in religiously and juridically anchored ethics. It is within this cultural dimension that the terms of the Weberian dialectic first arise. According to Habermas, with science, art, and ethics "there emerges a differentiation of three value spheres, each of which follows its own logic."¹³ However, the developmental logics of these three spheres -- the cognitive, expressive, and moral -- create a tension in the dynamic of cultural rationalization: "while ethical rationalism retains at first a certain affinity to the religious context from which it emerges, both ethics and religion come into opposition with the other value spheres."¹⁴ A dialectic of rationalization is set in motion here which, when embedded in social institutions, forms the basis for Weber's pessimistic diagnosis of the times.

Habermas' reconstruction of this constellation of rationalization processes lays the foundation for his own theory of modernization. This analysis will be taken up below under three headings: (A) the rationalization of worldviews, (B) societal modernization, and (C) Weber's diagnosis of the times.

A. The Rationalization of Worldviews. Prior to his account Habermas sets out the boundary conditions that Weber built into his sociology of worldviews. First, Weber limits his analysis to developments in the ethical sphere; "more generally, the development of post-traditional legal and moral representations."¹⁵ Habermas notes that cultural rationalization could equally have been traced from the perspectives of scientific or artistic development. Second, Weber's primary concern is with the rise of the capitalist economic ethic: "He is solely interested, therefore, in the ideas that make it possible to anchor purposive-rational action in the system of social labour in a value-rational way, that is, to institutionalize it and to provide a motivational base for it."¹⁶ Habermas' thesis is that these limitations explain why it was that Weber did not realize the full potential of his theoretical framework.

The key to understanding Occidental rationalism lies in the differentiation of the three cultural value spheres which Habermas finds in Weber's sociological studies. Religious worldviews once held ethics, science, and iconic art together. The disenchantment of the world, however, broke this simple unity into its constitutive spheres. Aesthetic expression and science are set free from the constraints of religious symbolism. In the ethical sphere disenchantment manifests itself primarily in changes in the relationship between the believer and God. In his study of 'world religions' Weber develops a two-dimensional classification scheme in order to capture the dynamics of ethical rationalization.

Weber distinguishes religious worldviews according (i) to their representations of deity -- theocentric (a lord of creation) versus cosmocentric (a conception of order), and (ii) to their orientations toward salvation -- their affirmation or rejection of the world. This attitude toward the world is independent of the believer's active or passive life-style. Instead it refers to whether a negative or positive value is placed on society and nature. Weber finds in the theocentric religions of world rejection (where the Judaeo-Christian tradition is the ideal type) the basic

attitudes that satisfy the conditions for ethical rationalization.

In all religious communities that emerge in the wake of a prophecy or a charismatic saviour, the control of ethical conduct first passes to qualified successors and pupils of the teacher. Later this task falls into the hands of a priestly cast.¹⁷ The principal internal opposition to this hierocracy, Weber continues, is a virtuoso-religion. Where the virtuoso-religion combines the vita activa with an inner-worldly asceticism the conditions of religious rationalism have been attained; specifically, "the disenchantment of the world and the blockage of the path to salvation by a flight from the world."¹⁸ Weber concludes:

In inner-worldly asceticism, the grace and the chosen state of the religiously qualified man prove themselves in everyday life. To be sure, they do so not in the everyday life as it is given, but in methodical and rationalized routine-activities of workaday life in the service of the Lord. Rationally raised into a vocation, everyday conduct becomes the locus for proving one's state of grace. The Occidental sects of the religious virtuosos have fermented the methodical rationalization of conduct, including economic conduct.¹⁹

Coupled with a religion of world rejection, this methodical conduct of life cultivates an objectivating attitude which aims at mastering a devalued world. For such a modern

worldview to take hold as an ethic of the time it would have to penetrate all departments of life: "Weber locates this process," Habermas notes, "in the emergence of the Protestant ethic of the calling."²⁰ Further, this vocational ethic must also find institutional embodiment at the societal level.

B. Societal Modernization. The transfer of a thoroughly modern worldview from the level of cultural traditions to institutionalized action contexts, Habermas suggests, could be traced along three paths: (i) as the history of social movements, (ii) as an analysis of the organization of the three cultural spheres into well defined disciplines (the academic pursuit of science, university-based jurisprudence, the literary-artistic public sphere) and, (iii) as the institutionalization of purposive-rational action. Weber directs his attention to the third path. He finds objectivating, purposive-rational attitudes embodied in the two exemplary institutional complexes of modern society -- the capitalist economy and the modern state. In both the economy and in public administration the material means of operation (tools, supplies, resources, finances, etc.) become concentrated "in the hands of the rationally calculating entrepreneur or leader."²¹

The reference point from which Weber investigates societal rationalization is, therefore, the purposive rationality of entrepreneurial activity as it is institutionalized in the capitalist enterprise. From this he derives additional functional requirements: (a) purposive-rational action orientations on the part of a labor force that is integrated into a systematically organized production process; (b) an economic environment that is calculable for capitalist business enterprise, that is, markets for goods, capital, and labor; (c) a legal system and a state administration that can guarantee this calculability; and therefore (d) a state apparatus that provides sanctions for the law and itself institutionalizes purposive-rational action orientations in public administration.²²

Thus for Weber the operative question for an analysis of societal rationalization is: How is it possible for purposive-rational action orientations to become institutionalized in the domain of social labour?

As is well known Weber connects the rise of capitalism to the development of the Protestant ethic. Weber discovered in Calvinism and the Protestant sects not only the teachings of the methodical conduct of life, but also, in the religious congregations, the institutional locus for the socialization of those teachings "in the carrier strata of early capitalism."²³ This methodical conduct of life is characterized by the rationalization of the vocational sphere. The ethic of ascetic Protestantism alters the individual's relationship to God and, at the same time, interpersonal relations. As the believer enters into an immediate rapport with God, social relations are stripped of

their piety becoming estranged and instrumental. The pursuit of self-interest dominates a morally neutralized sphere of social labour.

For the sake of clarity it should be emphasized that the pursuit of self-interest is tied to an ascetic life-style. Weber does not identify the spirit of capitalism with the acquisition of material comfort. Instead "capitalism is identical with the pursuit of profit, and forever renewed profit, by means of continuous, rational, capitalistic enterprise."²⁴ Thus for the puritanical capitalist, the release of the art of acquisition from traditionalistic ethics was met with a compulsion to save or invest but not to consume. Labourers, on the other hand, who could not seek to acquire, were counselled to toil in their vocation as a means of attaining grace:

... the whole ascetic literature of almost all denominations is saturated with the idea that faithful labour, even at low wages, on the part of those whom life offers no other opportunities, is highly pleasing to God.²⁵

Finally, the 'exploitation' of this injunction to work found legitimation in the concept of 'the calling of the businessman.'²⁶ It is at this point that Weber finds the paradox of societal rationalization.

Weber maintains that the Christian ethic of brotherliness is exemplary as a rationalized ethic of conviction. However, as Habermas clearly points out, the ascetic ethic of vocation, in the course of its rationalization, ultimately comes into conflict with a community founded on ethical reciprocity. "The universalistic ethic of brotherliness clashes with the forms of economic-administrative rationality in which the economy and the state are objectified into an unbrotherly cosmos."²⁷ The religious congregation which provides the institutional framework for the transmission of the methodical conduct of life is placed in jeopardy. While the Protestant ethic fulfills the motivational requirements to set capitalist modernization in motion, it cannot secure the conditions of its own stabilization. The ethical ideal of the brotherly congregation collapses when "the individual can pursue his quest for salvation only as an individual."²⁸ The Protestant ethic gives way in the long run to a "utilitarianism that owes its existence to an empiricist reinterpretation of morality."²⁹

Weber's dialectic of rationalization outlined here does not end with this secularized spirit of capitalism. Ultimately a scientifically rationalized interpretation of the world pushes religiously grounded ethics into the realm

of the irrational.³⁰ The cosmos of natural causality created by science stands in opposition to a religious cosmos which attempts to supply 'meaning' to the world. According to Weber's analysis, societal rationalization is self-destructive since it destroys the moral consciousness which had set it in motion. It is this dialectic which informs the pessimism of Weber's theory of modernity. Habermas, however, finds Weber's explanation of the self-destructive pattern of societal rationalization unsatisfactory.

According to Habermas, "Weber takes into consideration the horizon of possibilities opened by the modern understanding of the world only to the extent that it serves to explain the core phenomenon he identified in advance;"³¹ that is, the institutionalization of the purposive rationality of entrepreneurial activity. But this analysis does not adequately explain the failure of other Protestant sects, like the Anabaptists, who wanted to secure an ethic of brotherliness with fewer reservations. These social movements "did not want to divert the potential of ethically rationalized worldviews onto the tracks of disciplined labour by privatized individuals, but wanted rather to convert it into social-revolutionary forms of life."³² This leads Habermas to question:

Whether the methodical conduct of life of those Protestant groups studied by Weber achieved its historical significance only because it actualized a pattern of post-traditional morality that was functional for capitalist enterprise; -- and whether its instability, as observed by Weber, is due to the fact that capitalist development permits post-traditional action orientations only in a restricted form, in the sense that it promotes a pattern of rationalization such that cognitive-instrumental rationality penetrates beyond the economy and state into other spheres of life and there enjoys a preeminence at the expense of moral-practical and aesthetic-practical rationality.³³

These questions could only arise if, when analysing the transferal of cultural rationalization processes into societal action contexts one maintains a broad notion of rationality. However, as noted above, Weber narrows his concept of rational action to the objectivating type and equates a particular form of rationalization with the rationalization of society in general. Habermas maintains that Weber "cannot make the residual problems of his wideranging theoretical approach disappear without a trace. The repressed problems turn up again in his reflections on the state of our times."³⁴

C. Weber's Diagnosis of the Times. The dialectic of rationalization outlined above, according to Habermas, issues in an "existential-individualistic critique of the present age."³⁵ Weber draws two theses from his analysis of rationalization processes. In confronting a rationalized world modern man encounters both a loss of meaning and a

loss of freedom. Habermas (a) lays out Weber's analysis in order to (b) prepare the ground for his own theory of rationalization.

(a) Weber's point of departure for his theory of cultural modernization was the differentiation of three autonomous value spheres. The developmental logics of these realms brought them into conflict and ultimately wore down the ethical sphere of metaphysical-religious worldviews. When transposed to the level of social structures these internal tensions became actualized as conflicts of action. This, in Habermasian terms, leads to a disintegration of the lifeworld into antagonistic life-styles which crystallize around various competing values. In the past the unity of the lifeworld was secured by superordinate religious-metaphysical worldviews:

Both ethically rationalized religious worldviews and cognitively rationalized metaphysical worldviews still held together -- in principles such as God, Nature, Reason, and the like -- the three aspects under which the world can become accessible to rational treatment, ... they were thus able to impart a unitary sense to the life-conduct of those who oriented themselves according to these worldviews in their thought and action.³⁶

In the modern world the ethical unification of society becomes problematic. For Weber the signs of our time point toward a new polytheism:

Many old gods ascend from their graves; they are disenchanted and hence take the form of impersonal forces. They strive to gain power over our lives and again they resume their eternal struggle with one another.³⁷

His imagery suggest an irresolvable struggle between conflicting orders of value and life. Weber's inescapable relativism reflects "the experience of nihilism that Nietzsche had dramatized so impressively."³⁸ What is original in Weber's presentation of the loss of meaning thesis is the manner in which he locates the experience of nihilism in a dialectic of rationalization: "reason splits itself up into a plurality of value spheres and destroys its own universality."³⁹ This loss of meaning presents an existential challenge to the individual to, in Habermas' words, re-establish the unity of the lifeworld "in the privacy of his own biography, with the courage of despair, the absurd hope of one who is beyond all hope."⁴⁰

Meanwhile a growing independence of subsystems of purposive-rational action threatens the freedom of the individual. Weber maintains that the modern economy determines, "with irresistible force," the lifestyles of all those born into it:

Since asceticism undertook to remodel the world and to work out its ideals in the world, material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men ...⁴¹

The fetishism of material production, Weber notes with dramatic flair, has trapped mankind in an "iron cage" of inescapable toil.⁴² Of course Habermas is not convinced of the necessity of these pessimistic conclusions.

(b) Weber's diagnosis of the age stems from the thesis that in a disenchanted cosmos religious action orientations could no longer be reliably reproduced. "This explanation could not hold in an analogous way for modern law," Habermas argues, "since the latter appeared from the start in secularized form."⁴³ Thus Weber pursues a different strategy in his rationalization of law. He disconnects law from the moral-practical sphere, re-interpreting it exclusively as an institutional embodiment of cognitive-instrumental rationality.

Weber's thesis on the loss of freedom is conditional upon the instrumentalization of law. Habermas argues, however, that, unlike religious ethics, formal law is not threatened by the rationalization of the scientific and aesthetic spheres. He maintains to the contrary that as metaphysical worldviews are pushed into the realm of the irrational, legally institutionalized norms become more and more indispensable. In view of this Weber is forced to either 'de-dramatize his vision of an "iron cage" whose

moral-practical substance has dried up, or to assign morality and law to different complexes of rationality.⁴⁴ Weber of course chooses the second alternative and depreciates the parallels between moral development and formal law. This points out that which Habermas sees as the central contradiction in Weber's sociology. On the one hand, Weber develops a complex concept of rationality in order to analytically exploit formal-rational and substantive-rational aspects of action. However, in his actual inquiries, Weber considers societal rationalization exclusively in terms of formal or instrumental rationality. Habermas concludes:

From Weber's sociology of the economy, state, and law, one gets the impression that in modern societies rationalization processes attach only to empirical-theoretical knowledge and to the instrumental and strategic aspects of action, whereas practical rationality cannot be institutionalized independently, that is, with an inner logic specific to a subsystem.⁴⁵

The entire thrust of The Theory of Communicative Action is to secure a means of institutionalizing practical-rational knowledge in the face of what Habermas sees as a selective process of capitalist rationalization. This explains his sensitivity to Weber's loss of meaning thesis, which he argues is not plausible.

Habermas is prepared to accept the differentiation of the concept of rationality into three mutually irreducible value spheres: "That is exactly the signature and the thorn of modernity."⁴⁶ But he refuses to concede that this tripartition of reason yields a polytheism of gods and demons, a pluralism of irreconcilable values. Habermas maintains that the unity of reason in its multiplicity is secured,

at the formal level of the argumentative redemption of validity claims. Validity claims differ from empirical claims through the presupposition that they can be made good by means of arguments. And arguments or reasons have at least this in common, that they, and only they, can develop the force of rational motivation under the communicative conditions of a cooperative testing of hypothetical validity claims.⁴⁷

Thus in the wake of the critical dissolution of substantive reason (Weber) or objective reason (Horkheimer) Habermas proposes a concept of procedural rationality which operates at the level of communicative action. But in order for Habermas to secure this notion of practical reason (as one of three rationality complexes) he must construct a theory of discursive rationality. The next section examines this project. Further, in order to once again banish Weber's gods and demons to their graves, Habermas must demonstrate that his procedural rationality can be made effective in the actual practices of social agents: the experience of

nihilism cannot be overthrown in theory alone. This problem-complex is raised in section three.

II. A Theory of Discursive Rationality

In order to carry out his proposed theory of discursive rationality Habermas brings together two complementary research projects. He develops a theory of communicative action which analytically isolates the process of reaching understanding. To this he couples a theory of argumentation which affords a means of rationally redeeming the 'validity claims' inherent in speech acts.

The basic structure of Habermas' action theory may be represented schematically as follows:⁴⁸

TYPES OF ACTION

Orientation / Situation	to success	to reaching understanding
Non-social	instrumental action	-----
Social	strategic action	communicative action

Here 'actions oriented toward success' redefines that which Weber and the Frankfurt School referred to as purposive-rational action. In this class of actions the agent is

oriented toward attaining a desired end. Means to that end are selected on the basis of an assessment of the situation and success is defined as the appearance of the desired state of affairs. The example of a solitary subject pursuing an objective by intervening in the world or foregoing intervention is instrumental action. Of greater importance is the class of social actions which Habermas divides into two categories. Social interactions oriented to success are strategic when they are rationally chosen in an effort to influence the decisions of a competent opponent. Habermas speaks of communicative action, "whenever the actions of the agents involved are coordinated not through egocentric calculations of success but through acts of reaching understanding."⁴⁹ These terms strategic and communicative do not merely designate two analytic aspects under which the same action could be classified. They represent markedly different attitudes which an actor may adopt in a social situation. Furthermore, Habermas contends, competent speakers ought to be able to distinguish situations in which they are causally exerting an influence upon others (and thereby acting strategically) from those in which they are oriented to coming to an understanding with others. This action framework is a significant development from that which was presented in Knowledge and Human Interests. In particular it recognizes that not all forms

of symbolically mediated interaction are oriented toward mutual understanding. Indeed in The Theory of Communicative Action the concept of reaching understanding is precipitated out as a special form of social interaction.

Habermas conceives 'reaching understanding' in terms of the process of bringing about agreement among speaking and acting subjects.

Processes of reaching understanding aim at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation or strategically through influencing the decisions of opponents.⁵⁰

The parties of a genuine agreement come to a mutual understanding on the basis of the propositional content of speech acts. The analysis of reaching understanding, therefore, is indebted to models of speech; that is, to the structure of 'formal pragmatics'.

Habermas is, of course, aware that language can just as easily be used strategically to manipulate an opponent-in-dialogue. However, reaching understanding, he maintains, is "the inherent telos of human speech," and "the original mode of language use," upon which all other uses of language are parasitic.⁵¹ He turns to John Austin's distinction between

illocutions and perlocutions in order to support these assertions. Habermas' objective in this enterprise is to isolate a special class of actions -- communicative actions -- which are exclusively oriented toward reaching understanding and betray no incidental strategic interests. Thus, following Austin, Habermas differentiates the illocutionary aim of a speech act, the manner in which an utterance is to be understood (as a greeting, command, warning, explanation, etc.), from perlocutionary effects, that is the peculiar force which motivates a hearer to modify his or her behaviour.

To clarify this consider the following example:

- S advises H to take extra precaution in booking an international flight.

In this case S will have achieved illocutionary success if H understands the advice and accepts it as a genuine and sound expression. If as a result H makes inquiries into the safety records of various airlines, S's advice has not had a perlocutionary effect. Instead, H's actions are the consequences of a communicatively achieved agreement. Here H merely fulfills the obligations which were accepted in acknowledging the soundness of S's advice. On the other hand, if, as S had hoped, H immediately cancels his flight plans out of fear, then S has achieved a perlocutionary

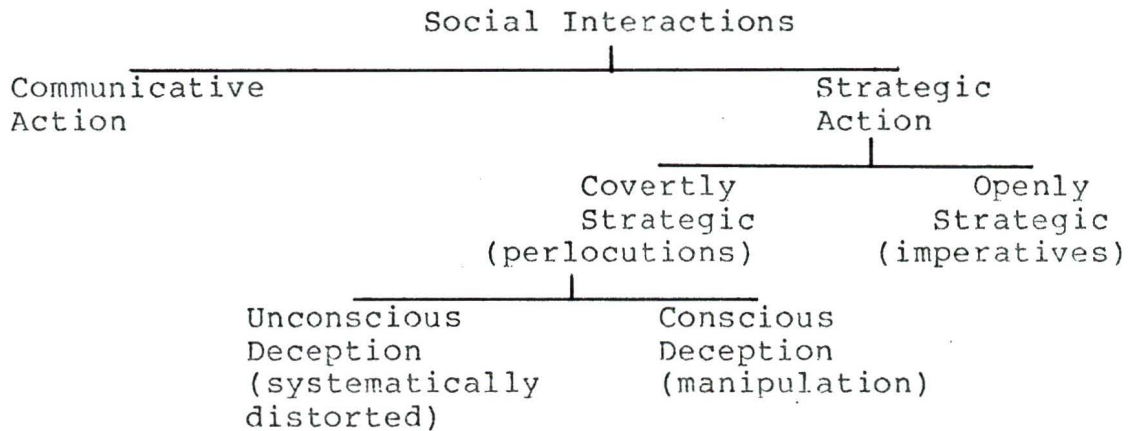
effect. Unknowingly H has modified his actions such that they fall in line with S's objectives. Habermas concludes that: "perlocutionary acts are an indication of the integration of speech acts into contexts of strategic interaction."⁵² Perlocutions represent a strategic use of speech acts. Habermas' claim that perlocutions are parasitic arises from the observation that the illocutionary aim of a speech act must first be understood before the perlocutionary effect may be realized.

The foregoing leads to Habermas' first refinement of the category of social interactions:

I count as communicative action those linguistically mediated interactions in which all participants pursue illocutionary aims, and only illocutionary aims, with their mediating acts of communication. On the other hand, I regard as linguistically mediated strategic action those interactions in which at least one of the participants wants with his speech acts to produce perlocutionary effects on his opposite number.⁵³

However this refinement does not fully capture the dynamics of social interaction. Habermas recognizes that not all illocutionary acts are oriented to reaching understanding. Genuine or simple imperatives, "requests and demands that lack normative authorization,"⁵⁴ are types of strategic illocutionary acts. Thus it is necessary to further filter out those illocutionary acts which are openly strategic.

The following schematic illustrates the network of social interactions recognized by Habermas.⁵⁵



In addition to the cases so far discussed, Habermas distinguishes two forms of social interaction which belie the fact that they are strategic and thus may be confused with bona fide communicative action. These communicative blockages appear as conscious and unconscious deception. Under such circumstances;

at least one of the participants is deceiving the other(s) regarding the non-fulfilment of the conditions of communicative action which he or she apparently accepted; this is the case of manipulation. In the case of systematically distorted communication, at least one of the participants is deceiving himself or herself regarding the fact that he or she is actually behaving strategically, while he or she has only apparently adopted an attitude orientated to reaching understanding.⁵⁶

Habermas is satisfied that the typology presented above exhausts the possible uses of language. He has demarcated

one 'pure' form of social action on the basis of its special illocutionary binding force. These highly idealized communicative acts, oriented exclusively toward reaching understanding, are the building blocks for a theory of argumentation which in turn secures his theory of discursive rationality.

Habermas' linguistic theory takes as its point of departure the thesis that in performing a speech act, the speaker raises a claim to validity which the hearer may accept or reject. In offering such a claim the speaker is obliged to have supporting reasons or grounds to redeem the validity of the utterance if it is challenged. John B. Thompson clearly illustrated this point:

Suppose a flight attendant says to a passenger, "You must stop smoking now". The attendant is making an offer -- or, as Habermas prefers to say, raising a validity-claim -- which the passenger can accept by extinguishing the cigarette or reject by asking "Why?". In the latter case the attendant must give some reasons or grounds which would support the validity-claim raised with the original speech-act, for example by pointing out that the plane would soon be landing and that the safety regulations stipulated no smoking at such a time.⁵⁷

This example is, in fact, an excellent point of reference for Habermas' conception of discursive rationality. In this case the speaker performs a communicative act in the form of a normatively authorized imperative. When the validity

claim inherent in the imperative is questioned by the hearer, the speaker appeals to the regulations of air safety as a reasonable justification for the act. Assuming the hearer thereupon extinguishes the cigarette, the parties have reached a rationally motivated agreement. The rationality of a speech act, therefore, is assessed in light of the internal relation between its content and the reasons provided to secure its veracity. Of course Habermas recognizes that this relationship between validity claims and reasons calls for an expanded notion of both (i) the concept of 'truth' and (ii) our understanding of 'rationality'.

(i) In order to broaden the concept of truth Habermas distinguishes three fundamental validity claims which he argues are raised in every communicative act. A speech act (a) raises a claim to truth in the rigorous sense of a correspondence to an existential state of affairs; (b) makes a claim to rightness in relation to prevailing normative structures; and (c) expresses a claim to truthfulness or sincerity with regard to the experiences of the speaker-subject. Corresponding to these types of validity claims are three 'object domains'; or 'worlds': (a) the objective world of actual entities about which statements of fact are possible; (b) the social world which represents the totality

of normatively regulated intersubjective relations; and (c) the subjective world to which the speaker has privileged access. These worlds form the context within which claims to validity may be contested and/or rationally redeemed. It should be noted that in introducing these concepts Habermas is not preparing a simple heuristic device. He is firm in the belief that this model is empirically grounded:

Communicatively achieved agreement is measured against exactly three criticizable validity claims; in coming to an understanding about something with one another and thus making themselves understandable, actors cannot avoid embedding their speech acts in precisely three world-relations and claiming validity for them under these aspects.⁵⁸

This strongly formulated representation of linguistic competence is the necessary framework for Habermas' reconsideration of reason and rationality.

(ii) 'When we use the expression "rational",' Habermas observes, 'we suppose that there is a close relation between rationality and knowledge.'⁵⁹ Specifically, the rationality of a statement or action depends on the reliability of the knowledge embodied in it. Thompson interprets Habermas to mean that;

In calling an action 'rational' we may presume that the actor knows, or has good reason to believe, that the means employed will lead to success; in calling an expression 'rational' we may presume that it bears some relation to the world and hence is open to objective -- that is, intersubjective -- assessment.⁶⁰

This leads to a bifurcation of the dynamics of societal rationalization: "From one perspective the telos inherent in rationality appears to be instrumental mastery, from the other communicative understanding."⁶¹ And while Habermas' conception of instrumental rationality remains largely embedded in the tradition of Weber and the Frankfurt School, he differs from his predecessors in attaching paramount importance to the comprehensive concept of communicative rationality. Constructing a theory of rationality within the framework of communicative practices leads Habermas back to the concept of validity-claims and their 'world relations'. The rationality of an expression becomes tied to the redemption of criticizable validity-claims.

The intimate relationship between validity claims and rationality enables Habermas, by way of a theory of argumentation, to introduce rationalization processes into moral-practical and expressive systems of action:

Normatively regulated actions and expressive self-presentations have, like assertions or constative speech acts, the character of meaningful expressions,

understandable in their context, which are connected with criticizable validity claims. Their reference is to norms and subjective experiences rather than to facts. The agent makes the claim that his behaviour is right in relation to a normative context recognized as legitimate, or that the first person utterance of an experience to which he has privileged access is truthful or sincere.⁶²

The claims to normative rightness or subjective truthfulness, Habermas maintains, "satisfy the central presupposition of rationality: they can be defended against criticism."⁶³ The rational redemption of the validity claim to sincerity is something of a special case, since the rationality of self-presentations lies for the most part in the agent's consistency. Erratic or contradictory expressions of value, or statements which strike an observer as being out of character are indications of contestable validity claims. However since the agent has privileged access to the motives behind such statements, testing these claims is problematic.

At any time, of course, the offer of a validity claim may be turned down. Where consensus fails to come about, that is where mutual understanding is not at hand, the participants in a communicative situation, if they wish to avoid a strategic (forcible) resolution, have recourse to the 'court of appeal' of discursive argumentation.⁶⁴ Habermas asserts that, "the concept of communicative

rationality, which refers to an unclarified systematic interconnection of universal validity claims, can be adequately explicated only in terms of a theory of argumentation".⁶⁵ With the term argumentation he has in mind a special speech situation which is "distinct from the communicative practices of everyday life."⁶⁶ What Habermas had in earlier works referred to as the 'ideal speech situation', reappears in The Theory of Communicative Action as a series of special forms of 'discourse'.

In discursive argumentation an expression containing a problematic validity claim is thematized. "Participants in argumentation" Habermas insists, "have to presuppose in general that the structure of their communication, by virtue of features that can be described in purely formal terms, excludes all force -- whether it arises from within the process of reaching understanding itself or influences it from outside -- except the force of the better argument (and thus that it also excludes, on their part, all motives except that of a cooperative search for the truth)."⁶⁷ Habermas distinguishes four types of argumentative discourses (and one special case -- explicative discourse⁶⁸): (i) theoretical discourse, which resolves the claims to the truth of cognitive - instrumental expressions; (ii) practical discourse, which determines the rightness of

a norm of action embedded in moral-practical statements; (iii) aesthetic criticism, which seeks to assess the adequacy of evaluative statements; and (iv) therapeutic critique, which attempts to uncover the self-deception of insincere or untruthful expressions. In the following schematic the different types of argumentation are shown in relation to their respective validity claims and types of expression:⁶⁹

Types of Argumentation

Reference Dimensions Forms of argumentation	Problematic Expressions	Validity Claims
Theoretical discourse	Cognitive-instrumental	Truth
Practical discourse	Moral-practical	Rightness of norms
Aesthetic criticism	Evaluative	Adequacy of standards
Therapeutic critique	Expressive	Truthfulness or sincerity
Explicative discourse	-----	Comprehensibility of symbolic representations

Habermas understands argumentation, then, as a type of speech in which participants attempt to systematically ground or criticize controversial validity claims with reasons. The 'strength' of an argument lies in its ability to rationally motivate the participants in a discourse to accept the validity claim in question. In these highly idealized discursive situations the participants 'suppose that a rationally motivated agreement could in principle be achieved, whereby the phrase "in principle" expresses the idealizing proviso: if only the argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough.'⁷⁰

It is within these counterfactual speech situations that Habermas finds the nucleus for institutionally secured processes of communicative action. In particular, he sees the discursive redemption of normative validity claims as a means of setting moral-practical rationalization free from subsystems of purposive-rational action. Habermas is certain that his theory of communicative action can resolve the weaknesses of Weber's action theory since it is not fixated on the category of purposive rationality. He concludes:

The aspects of the rationality of action that we found in communicative action should now permit us to grasp processes of societal rationalization across their whole breadth, and no longer solely from the selective viewpoint of the rationalization of purposive-rational action.⁷¹

On the strength of this expanded action theory Habermas reformulates the dialectic of rationalization which led Weber (and similarly the Frankfurt School) to a pessimistic resignation to modernity. In reintroducing the political problem of emancipation, the next section examines whether Habermas' theoretical certainty has been gained at a cost of access to praxis.

III. Rationalization and the Problem of Emancipation

The theory of discursive rationality outlined above gives Habermas the opportunity to reconstruct the rationalization of society. He draws a sharp distinction between the rationalization of teleological and communicative action systems. According to this model societal rationalization proceeds at two levels: (i) as the perfection of purposive-rational action and (ii) as the displacement of traditional authority -- that is, normatively ascribed agreement -- by communicatively achieved agreement. In answer to the question posed at the outset of The Theory of Communicative Action, Habermas demonstrates that by focusing exclusively on subsystems of purposive-rational action, Weber conceives capitalist modernization as a process of one-sided rationalization. A non-selective theory of modernization is accessible only

after one has analytically assimilated the perspective of action oriented to reaching understanding.⁷² But Habermas is fully aware that societal modernization has not been accompanied by a rationalization of communicative action systems. As he noted in 1979:

In the course of capitalist development and of a politically uncontrolled process of accumulation, the partial administrative and economic rationality that is functional to such an economic system gradually penetrates and restructures ever broader spheres of life, which should on their own be evolving completely different forms of rationality -- that is, practical and moral agencies, democratic and participatory processes of forming a collective will.⁷³

Weber had analysed this very same phenomenon, albeit under different concepts, in terms of the clash between the ethic of brotherliness and the various orders and values of the world. From the vantage point of the theory of communicative action, Habermas is also able to see that "the process of societal rationalization appears as contradictory from the start."⁷⁴ For Habermas the dialectic of rationalization arises between the dynamics of everyday communicative practice tied to the intersubjective structures of the lifeworld and the growing complexity of subsystems of purposive-rational action coordinated through the steering media of money and power:

These steering media replace language as the mechanism for coordinating action. They set social action loose from integration through value consensus and switch it over to purposive rationality steered by media.⁷⁵

It is these media of money and power which, Habermas argues, must be institutionally and motivationally anchored in the lifeworld. The contradictions of societal modernization arise not between types of action, but between mechanisms of social integration:

The paradox of rationalization of which Weber spoke can then be abstractly conceived as follows: The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible a kind of systemic integration that enters into competition with the integrating principle of reaching understanding and, under certain conditions, has a disintegrating effect on the lifeworld.⁷⁶

This phenomenon of disintegration or the 'colonization of the lifeworld' -- which is in many respects reminiscent of the earlier thesis on the 'refeudalization of the public realm' -- assumes paramount importance in Habermas' social theory since it paves the way for the emergence of new, and potentially emancipatory, social movements: these new social conflicts "arise at the seam between system and life-world."⁷⁷

The lifeworld, to backtrack somewhat, is the common stock of culturally reproduced knowledge that forms the necessary background context within which communicative

action must be embedded.⁷⁸ As a background consensus, the lifeworld cannot as a whole be rendered problematic. Once an element of the lifeworld is thematized and raised to the level of discursive examination, Habermas contends, it ceases to belong to the lifeworld. In fact Habermas insists that the lifeworld is so unproblematic that we cannot call up its elements at will:

The fact that certain elements of the life-world become problematic is an objective process. It depends on the problems that press in on us from outside, insofar as something has become problematic behind our backs.⁷⁹

As we saw above Habermas perceives a very real threat to the lifeworld in an "ever more pervasive process of commodification and bureaucratization"⁸⁰ which seems bent on undermining the communicative infrastructure of society. The types of developments that Habermas has in mind as being 'lifeworld threatening' cover a wide spectrum of economic and administrative decision-making, for example: nuclear and environmental policies, urban planning, educational programmes, and the administration of choices concerning lifestyle. Social movements can coalesce around any of these issues -- for instance, the neighbourhood group that forms to protest the construction of a highway through a residential area, or the massive mobilizations

characteristic of peace movements. Of course the problem that arises for a critical theory of society lies in identifying which of these movements hold the potential for strengthening the lifeworld by releasing the rationalization of communicative action.

This fundamental problem is taken up by Benhabib in her essay on critical theory. She notes that in opposition to the first generation of critical theorists; "Habermas does not view the history of Western humanity as a dialectic of enlightenment, but as the unfolding of the utopian promise of an unredeemed logic of discursive rationality."⁸¹ However this 'project of modernity' which Habermas identifies -- the release of the emancipatory rationalization of communicative action -- is thwarted by the selectivity of capitalist modernization. Here again critical theory lapses into an all too familiar dilemma: Habermas' conception of an emancipatory rationality does not emerge from existing structures in the lifeworld; instead "a theoretically articulated rationality seeks to become embodied in the life world."⁸² The transition from the counterfactual situation of discourse to natural situations of interaction becomes critical if this dilemma is to be resolved.

Habermas suggests that the formal-pragmatic structure of communicative competence can be "brought progressively closer" to complex natural situations by dropping the "strong idealizations" built into the theory of communicative action.⁸³ However he warns in an interview;

One should not imagine the ideal speech situation as a utopian model for an emancipated society. I use it only to reconstruct the concept of rationality,...⁸⁴

The implication here that the normative foundation of critical theory remains an idealization leads to a paradox. Benhabib formulates the 'new aporia' of critical theory in the following terms:

the more the theoretical conditions for the fulfillment of modernity are elaborated in the form of an evolutionary theory of discursive rationality, the further removed does the prospect of an emancipated society appear, for a counterfactually conceived structure of discursive rationality articulates an emancipatory ideal that cannot guide emancipatory praxis, since it belongs to the concrete life-history of no social subjects, but to the evolutionary potential of the species in general.⁸⁵

In Habermas' shift from the theory of enlightenment to the theory of societal rationalization it would seem that the voice of political emancipation has been muted.

In 1968 Habermas perceived a new conflict zone emerging in the administered public realm. At that time he singled

out the student movement as the only protest potential which gravitated toward this new zone. In the long run, he concluded then, "student protest could permanently destroy ... [the] ... crumbling achievement ideology, and thus bring down the already fragile legitimating basis of advanced capitalism, which rests only on depoliticization."⁸⁶ By the late 1960s Habermas had become disillusioned with the student movement and criticized its leadership for what he perceived as their authoritarian and dogmatic activism. In turn the students mounted a polemic against Habermas and his retreat from political involvement. Perhaps as a consequence of this experience, in the 1980s Habermas cautiously refrains from sanctioning any emergent social forces. In eminently academic fashion he points to a diverse spectrum of conflicts, radical and traditional, from 'greens' to fundamentalists, which resist the colonization of the lifeworld. But this even he admits is no substitute for political analysis.⁸⁷ Quentin Skinner complains that surely we deserve more from our social philosophers than such grand theorizing -- which in Habermas' case he likens to reading Luther.⁸⁸ The characterization aside, Skinner has touched a chord. If, following Weber, we are forced to choose between the various gods and demons which 'strive to gain power over our lives,' we must at the very least be entitled to a programme to determine the one from the

other. Thompson hits the mark when he notes that "few tasks seem more urgent than the continuation of that project of the critique of ideology which appears to have faded into the background of Habermas's work."⁸⁹

In the conclusion of his otherwise sound survey of Habermas' development, James Schmidt turns apologist when he writes:

The attempt to interpret social movements in light of an evolutionary theory always runs the risk of falling into that peculiar ventriloquism in which the theorist construes certain silences in political and social movements as signs of what has been silenced and -- in the name of "emancipatory praxis" -- attempts to lend these movements a voice. Emancipation, if it is not to become such a mystifying trick, may have to content itself with the more modest task of sketching out what potentialities lie open, regardless of what agents may or may not be on hand.⁹⁰

But certainly this is no longer emancipation any more than my thought of freedom is its realization. To follow Schmidt in this emphatically more theoretical direction is to abandon praxis entirely.

Benhabib takes an alternative route in order to reclaim the political relevance of critique. She recognizes that critical theory cannot extract itself from its paradoxes in a simple act of partisanship: "Theoretical impasses cannot

be solved by leaps of faith; ..." on the other hand she admonishes writers like Schmidt adding, "... but neither can the project of a critical theory of society with emancipatory intent abdicate partnership in that self-formative dialogue of theory and practice."⁹¹ Of course Benhabib's comments are really meant for Habermas and not his apologists. The deeper cause of critical theory's slide into 'meta-theoretical normative agnosticism' lies in Habermas' enlightenment model of theory and practice. Habermas discusses politics not as the actions of real political agents, but in terms of an enlightened public whose praxis consists in critical reasoning.⁹² Benhabib's comments echo those of Agnes Heller who unsparingly attacks Habermas' political aloofness:

the lack of the sensuous experiences of hope and despair, of venture and humiliation, is discernable in the structure of his theory: the creature-like aspects of human beings are missing.⁹³

The message of the critics is clear: the political theorist must first be a political activist. This idea is not new, indeed one expects that it would have formed the basis of Marx's critique of Habermas.

Notes to Chapter Three

¹Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics," in John B. Thompson and David Held, eds., Habermas: Critical Debates (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), p. 232.

²Ibid.

³Axel Honneth, et. al., "The Dialectics of Rationalization: An Interview with Jürgen Habermas," Telos, No. 49 (Fall, 1981), p. 9.

⁴Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I, Reason and the Rationalization of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); henceforth abbreviated TCA, I. Presently only the first volume of this text is available in English. A translation of the second volume System and Lifeworld: A Critique of Functionalist Reason is in preparation.

⁵Ibid., p. 140.

⁶Ibid., p. 137.

⁷Ibid., p. 149.

⁸Ibid., p. 156.

⁹For a discussion of the complexity of Weber's use of 'rationality' see, Rogers Brubaker, The Limits of Rationality: An Essay on the Social and Moral Thought of Max Weber (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 107. Brubaker finds no fewer than sixteen different uses of the term rationality in Weber's work.

¹⁰TCA, I, p. 158.

¹¹Ibid., p. 164.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., pp. 163-164

¹⁴Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 197.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 198.

¹⁷See Max Weber, "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions," in From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds. and trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), pp. 327-328.

¹⁸Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in Ibid., p. 290.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 291.

²⁰TCA, I, 215.

²¹Ibid., p. 217.

²²Ibid., pp. 218-219.

²³Ibid., p. 223, [emphasis added].

²⁴Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), p. 17.

²⁵Ibid., p. 178.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷TCA, I, p. 227; compare this to Weber: "The religion of brotherliness has always clashed with the orders and values of this world, and the more consistently its demands have been carried through, the sharper the clash has been;" from "Religious Rejections", in From Max Weber, p. 330.

²⁸Weber, "Social Psychology," in From Max Weber, p. 282.

²⁹TCA, I, p. 228.

³⁰Weber, "Social Psychology," in From Max Weber, p. 281.

³¹TCA, I, p. 221.

³²Ibid., p. 232.

³³Ibid., pp. 232-233.

³⁴Ibid., p. 222.

³⁵Ibid., p. 244.

³⁶Ibid., p. 246.

³⁷Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation," in From Max Weber, p. 149.

³⁸TCA, I, p. 247.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Weber, Protestant Ethic, p. 181.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³TCA, I, p. 243.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 251.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 254.

⁴⁶Honneth, et. al. "Dialectics of Rationalization," Telos, p. 29.

⁴⁷TCA, I, p. 249.

⁴⁸This typology is adapted from Ibid., p. 285.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 286.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 287.

⁵¹Ibid. pp. 287 and 286.

⁵²Ibid., p. 292.

⁵³Ibid., p. 295.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 305.

⁵⁵This schematic is adapted from Ibid., p. 333.

⁵⁶Habermas, "Reply to Critics," in Thompson and Held, eds., Critical Debates, p. 264.

⁵⁷John B. Thompson, "Rationality and Social Rationalization: An Assessment of Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action," Sociology, Vol. 17, No. 2 (May 1983), p. 280.

⁵⁸TCA, I, p. 308 [emphasis added].

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 8.

⁶⁰Thompson, "Rationality and Social Rationalization," Sociology, p. 282.

⁶¹TCA, I, p. 11.

⁶²Ibid., p. 15.

⁶³Ibid., p. 16.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 17.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁶Thompson, "Rationality and Social Rationalization," Sociology, p. 282.

⁶⁷TCA, I, p. 25.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 21-22; Habermas describes explicative discourse as "a form of argumentation in which the comprehensibility, well-formedness, or rule-correctness of symbolic expressions is no longer naively supposed or contested but is thematized as a controversial claim." This seems to refer to a discourse concerning the very foundations of linguistic competence.

⁶⁹This schematic is taken from Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 42.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 335.

⁷²Ibid., p. 340.

⁷³Jürgen Habermas, "Conservatism and Capitalist Crisis," New Left Review, No. 115 (May-June, 1979), pp. 74-75.

⁷⁴TCA, I, p. 342.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 342-343.

⁷⁷Jürgen Habermas, "New Social Movements," Telos, No. 49 (Fall, 1981), p. 36.

⁷⁸Jürgen Habermas, "On the German-Jewish Heritage," Telos, No. 44 (Summer, 1980), p. 129.

⁷⁹Honneth, et al. "Dialectics of Rationalization," Telos, p. 17.

⁸⁰Habermas, "German-Jewish Heritage," Telos, p. 130.

⁸¹Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory," Telos, No. 49 (Fall, 1981), p. 53.

⁸²Ibid., p. 54.

⁸³TCA, I, p. 328.

⁸⁴Detlev Horster and Willem van Reijen, "Interview with Jürgen Habermas: Starnberg, March 23, 1979," New German Critique, No. 18 (Fall, 1979), p. 42.

⁸⁵Benhabib, "Modernity/Critical Theory," Telos, p. 54. [The italics which appear in the original have been dropped].

⁸⁶Jürgen Habermas, 'Technology and Science as "Ideology",' in Habermas, Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), p. 122.

⁸⁷Habermas, "New Social Movements," Telos, p. 33. This comment is taken from a note to the text.

⁸⁸Quentin Skinner, "Habermas's Reformation," New York Review of Books, 7 Oct. 1982, p. 38.

⁸⁹Thompson, "Rationality and Social Rationalization," Sociology, p. 293.

⁹⁰James Schmidt, "Jürgen Habermas and the Difficulties of Enlightenment," Social Research, No. 49. (Spring, 1982), p. 207 [emphasis added].

⁹¹Benhabib, "Modernity/Critical Theory," Telos, p. 55.

⁹²Ibid., p. 58.

⁹³Agnes Heller, "Habermas and Marxism," in Thompson and Helds, eds., Critical Debates, p. 21.

Conclusion

It was suggested at the outset of this discussion that the development of critical theory is the result of an on-going struggle with the legacy of the Enlightenment. In the sociological writings of the Frankfurt School this struggle manifested itself in a vain effort to hold together the Enlightenment dualism of subjective and objective reason; a dualism which threatened to dissolve into a scientistic rationality and relativistic morality. At the political level, the critical theorists struggled to find an agent of social transformation capable of realizing the 'normative aspect' of the theory of Enlightenment; the emancipation of the social subject. Ultimately the rise of fascism and the triumph of instrumental reason convinced the Frankfurt theorists of the disintegration of the project of the Enlightenment. The collapse of classical critical theory was documented in Chapter One through an analysis of Dialectic of Enlightenment. Also raised in the first chapter was the argument that critical theory's disillusionment with enlightenment was symptomatic of a convergence with Weber's pessimistic theory of rationalization. While there is little direct evidence to support this claim, the circumstantial evidence is very powerful. In fact the central theses of Dialectic of Enlightenment -- the

disenchantment and rationalization of the world -- appear to have been cribbed from Weber's sociology of world religions. It should come as no surprise then that in his efforts to reassemble critical theory, Jürgen Habermas has been forced to confront not only the work of his predecessors in Frankfurt but also the massive oeuvre of Weber.

Turning to Habermas it was argued that his development of critical theory may be divided into two distinct periods. During his Frankfurt period of the 1960s Habermas prepared a critical re-examination of the dialectic of enlightenment. Essentially he produced a metacritique of the Frankfurt School through a reworking of the classical texts of Enlightenment philosophy -- principally in the epistemological study Knowledge and Human Interests. In this text Habermas undertook a materialist appropriation of the Fichtean notion of an emancipatory interest which resides in the act of critical self-reflection. In this manner Habermas attempted to restore the differentiated unity of theoretical and practical reason. This programme represents an effort to salvage the project of enlightenment from a self-propelled retreat into mythology.

During this same period Habermas developed a political theory based on an immanent critique of the liberal public sphere. The public sphere was to serve as the institutional nucleus for an emancipatory political praxis. With this in mind Habermas attempted to identify within the protest movements of the 1960s a social force capable of carrying through the emancipatory objectives of his theoretical studies. This effort to draw theory and praxis together was unsuccessful. On the one hand, the idealized image of the public realm demanded a form of rational political activity that was beyond the grasp of particular social movements engaged in real political struggles. On the other hand, the proclaimed unity of enlightenment and emancipation apparently realized in the act of self-reflection was perceived by some as an invitation to ideological militancy. Neither of these alternatives pointed toward an emancipated society organized on the basis of communication free from domination. In conclusion, Habermas' work at Frankfurt was unable to lead to the fulfillment of the project of the Enlightenment.

The 1970s saw Habermas take up residence as Director of Research at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg. The work of this period is marked by a number of important breaks

with the central motifs of the Frankfurt School. One is first struck by Habermas' shift to analytic philosophy from the tradition of German historicism. But this change is only a symptom of a much deeper theoretical realignment. In the work of the 1960s the study of language -- symbolically mediated interaction -- was a means of gaining access to the otherwise private life-history of an epistemic subject. Formal pragmatics takes as its point of departure the public character of language: Freud gives way to Wittgenstein. The shift here is away from the "epistemic subject and the private contents of its consciousness" to a collection of subjects manipulating a common object.¹ Thus critical theory breaks with the philosophy of consciousness in order to take up the philosophy of language.

In this thesis this development was examined in terms of a shift from the project of enlightenment to the project of modernity. The project of enlightenment sought to develop a theory of rationality which could guide consciousness to the level of an autonomous, mature subject. The project of modernity, taking as its point of departure a critical reading of Weber, is concerned to identify a process of rationalization capable of socializing individuals into a communicatively structured lifeworld.

But this shift, it was argued, has exacted a heavy toll from critical theory. A dilemma arises for Habermas in that he is unable to locate any existing institutions or developing social movements capable of setting into motion the emancipatory rationalization of communicative action. In the end the absence of such a social agent -- and indeed the impossibility of such an agent given the highly idealized conditions of communicative rationality -- marks a retreat from the problem of praxis. This conclusion, however, must remain tentative. For if not in Habermas, then in the representatives of a new generation of critical theory, there appears to be a recognition of the importance of engagement with actual political struggles in order that the essential dialogue between theory and praxis may be restored.

What remains to be discussed is the question of how the preceding analysis throws light on the current modernism/postmodernism debate in which Habermas is a central figure. Andreas Huyssen provides a sound overview of the issues involved in this dispute in an article entitled "Mapping the Postmodern."² Huyssen relates how a visit to the 'Seventh Documenta' exhibition in Kassel, Germany in 1982 awakened him to the meaning of the postmodern. According to the

exhibit catalogue the show sought; "To disentangle art from the diverse pressures and social perversions it has to bear."³ Here, then, as Huyssen points out, was the resurrection of that old notion of art: "The museum as temple, the artist as prophet, the work as relic and cult object, the halo restored."⁴ As with most discussions of postmodernity, Huyssen's analysis begins with aesthetics. However he is quick to map in the political contours:

Documenta 7 can stand as the perfect aesthetic simulacrum: facile eclecticism combined with aesthetic amnesia and delusions of grandeur. It represents the kind of postmodern restoration of a domesticated modernism which seems to be gaining ground in the age of Kohl-Thatcher-Reagan and it parallels the conservative political attacks on the culture of the 1960s which have increased in volume and viciousness in these past years.⁵

The culture of the 1960s is under heavy attack -- a fact that does not sit well with a generation of social theorists who came to political consciousness in that era. It is not enough that the reactionary tide of the seventies and eighties has washed away the gains of the left. Now the very image of the sixties as the 'golden age' of a liberalized, modern culture threatens to tarnish and fade into obscurity.

The weak point of this whole debate is the allegation that the postmodern critique of the culture of the sixties

is necessarily conjoined to political conservatism. This, of course, was the charge Habermas laid against the representatives of French poststructuralism. To his credit Huyssen sees beyond these polemics. He argues that critical thought must work with that which is at hand and attempt to exploit the few avenues of resistance opened up by postmodernism. This however stands in contrast to Habermas' wholly negative assessment of the postmodern.

The following observations take a somewhat different approach to Habermas' critique of postmodernity. It is suggested that his (over)reaction to modern French social theory is in fact only remotely culturally motivated. The aesthetic debate is merely a convenient hook upon which to hang an essentially theoretical difference.

The discussion of Habermas' critical theory in chapters two and three focused on two similar dilemmas: the Frankfurt School's dialectic of enlightenment and Weber's dialectic of rationalization. The common experience which gives rise to these two dilemmas, and the spectre which relentlessly haunts Habermas' critical project, is the nihilism that issues from Nietzsche's destruction of Enlightenment reason. This Nietzschean motif emerges again

in modern French philosophy. Habermas is quite correct when he traces the 'French path to postmodernity' from Nietzsche through Bataille to Deleuze, Foucault, and Derrida;⁶ and it is this Nietzschean motif that disqualifies post-structuralism in the eyes of critical theory.

The debate between Habermas and the poststructuralists is not so much modernity versus postmodernity, but is instead a conflict between two fundamentally different visions of modernity. As Huyssen points out:

The French vision of modernity begins with Nietzsche and Mallarmé...Modernity for the French is primarily...an aesthetic question relating to the energies released by the deliberate destruction of language and other forms of representation. For Habermas, on the other hand, modernity goes back to the best traditions of the Enlightenment, which he tries to salvage and to reinscribe into the present philosophical discourse in a new form.⁷

Benhabib locates these themes in the debate between Jean-François Lyotard and Habermas. Lyotard maintains that it is not possible to formulate universal criteria of validity for speech acts: language games are ultimately irreconcilable and incommensurable. This leads once again into a polytheism of values and, so Benhabib argues, to "a politics of justice beyond consensus."⁸ Habermas is clearly not prepared to abandon the normative ideal of arriving at a

linguistically mediated consensus. This notion of a communicative foundation is absolutely essential to his ethical project:

In everyday life,... no one would enter into moral argumentation if he did not start from the strong presupposition that a grounded consensus could in principle be achieved among those involved.... in regard to these basic questions of ethics I am myself inclined...to a cognitivist position, according to which practical questions can in principle be settled by way of argumentation.⁹

The fundamental difference, then, between Habermas and Lyotard is that the former still maintains the universality of the grand narrative of reason against the latter's plurality of discourses. Interestingly, today it is Habermas' claim which must be cautiously formulated:

In claiming universal validity -- with, however, many qualifications -- for our concept of rationality, without thereby adhering to a completely untenable belief in progress, we are taking on a sizeable burden of proof.¹⁰

In spite of this burden Habermas energetically defends the universal core of modernity against all who would proclaim its dissolution. The irony of this situation would appear to be that in the debate between critical theory (modernity as ethical universalism) and poststructuralism (modernity as the energy of destruction), Kant and Nietzsche struggle as contemporaries. Twentieth century social theory remains bound by the dialectic of enlightenment.

Notes to the Conclusion

¹Seyla Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean-François Lyotard," New German Critique, No. 33 (Fall, 1984), p. 110.

²Andreas Huyssen, "Mapping the Postmodern," Ibid., pp. 5-52.

³Catalogue, Documenta 7, quoted in Huyssen, Ibid., p. 6.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

⁶Jürgen Habermas, "The French Path to Postmodernity: Bataille Between Eroticism and General Economics," Ibid., pp 79-102.

⁷Huyssen, "The Postmodern," Ibid., p. 33.

⁸Benhabib, "Epistemologies of Postmodernism," Ibid., p. 111.

⁹Jürgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I, Reason and the Rationalization of Society, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 19.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 138.

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FROM ENLIGHTENMENT TO MODERNITY: CRITICAL THEORY AND THE
RETREAT FROM PRAXIS

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ROBERT COLIN SUTHERLAND