

Jürgen Habermas's Critical Social Theory

by

GRAHAM ROBERT TODD

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in
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GRAHAM ROBERT TODD

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The thesis discusses the methodological and epistemological elements of Habermas's critical theory. Habermas's applications of his theory to the political sociology of modern capitalism are also considered. The connection between Habermas's communicative action theory and his early study of cognitive interests is assessed. The critical dimensions of Habermas's theory and its application to the study of politics are examined in light of the continuing themes of labour and interaction within his work.

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I would like to acknowledge the gracious patience of my advisor, Professor Ken McVicar, and the sometimes bewildered but always dependable support of my parents, my brother Blake, and Vivian.

My advice to anyone contemplating their own study of "Jürgen": Read slowly and write fast.

cum res animum occupavere verba ambiunt

Seneca

ABBREVIATIONS

CES	<u>Communication and the Evolution of Society</u>
CTJH	<u>The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas</u> ¹
HCD	<u>Habermas: Critical Debates</u> ²
HM	<u>Habermas and Modernity</u> ³
KHI	<u>Knowledge and Human Interests</u>
LC	<u>Legitimation Crisis</u>
LS	<u>Lifeworld and System</u> ⁴
RRS	<u>Reason and the Rationalization of Society</u> ⁵
TRS	<u>Towards a Rational Society</u>
TP	<u>Theory and Practice</u>

¹ Thomas McCarthy, (Boston: MIT Press, 1978).

² John B. Thompson and David Held, editors.

³ Richard Bernstein, editor.

⁴ Volume two of The Theory of Communicative Action

⁵ Volume one of The Theory of Communicative Action

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

My intention with this thesis is to come to terms with a series of questions regarding the ontological assumptions of modern social science methodology, and alternative approaches to the analysis of society. Thus my general emphasis will be on the epistemological dimension of social theory. My approach to the methodological and epistemological questions raised in the practice of social science will focus on the work of Jürgen Habermas. The thesis will concentrate on the exposition and analysis of the relevance for Political Science of Habermas's presentation of these issues.

Originally, an interest in communication had led me to consider a comparison of the methodological approaches to the study of society and politics in the work of Murray Edelman, Michael Shapiro, Harold Lasswell, William Connolly, and others: all of which utilized communicative models, though at different 'levels of inquiry'.⁶ It was at this

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See, Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics Chicago : U of Illinois Press, 1964; Michael Shapiro, Language and Political Understanding New Haven: Yale U P, 1982; H. D. Lasswell, Propaganda, Communication and Public Opinion New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1946; William Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse 2nd ed. New

point that I came upon the work of Jürgen Habermas. In developing a comprehensive and critical appreciation of modern society Habermas engages three important areas of discussion within social theory: that concerning the historical development and evolution of society; the debate surrounding the cognitive significance of social science theory; and the issues raised by his own analysis of the social pathologies that result from the systemic constraints affecting the political administration of modern social formations. Of course all of these debates are related, but each raises specific concerns that I will address throughout my presentation.

I have chosen to focus on Habermas's work alone and to minimize the comparative dimension of the work for three reasons. First, in the course of his work Habermas explicitly addresses most if not all of the major epistemological questions facing modern social science and does so in a way which invites analysis and reflection. Second, Habermas's alternative approach to social analysis, based as it is on an "empirical philosophy of history with a practical intent", provides a broad critical challenge to the ontological assumptions of contemporary social theory and philosophy of science in and of itself. Third, the communicative model of social action Habermas develops is in keeping with the recent "linguistic" or "communicative turn"

in the social sciences and in this context still allows for a discussion of more general developments in contemporary social theory.

The general approach of the thesis will be interwoven with responses to several more specific questions. What sort of ideological or historical explanation can be given for the recent linguistic resurgence in the social sciences and how does Habermas's communicative model of social action figure in this movement? Indeed, can his own insights into the modernization, elaboration and rationalization of society and of social scientific practice be applied to his own work? And, of primary importance, how adequately does the "critical theory" perspective address or correct the methodological and epistemological problematic of modern social science that he identifies?

In a sense the three main areas of discussion Habermas has entered into are connected to three themes I wish to address in this thesis. Habermas's social theory essentially attempts to rescue the "enlightenment project" by advancing a critical methodology for understanding social evolution, a critical epistemology as an alternative to positivistically inspired scientism in politics, and a critical empirical application of his theory to the sociopathologies of politics dominated by

"monetary-administrative complexity".⁷ Habermas's most recent attempt to develop a theory of rationality in The Theory of Communicative Action explicitly connects these three themes to his overall approach. For Habermas, any social theory "has to face the problem of rationality simultaneously on the metatheoretical, methodological, and empirical levels".⁸

The theoretical claims of social science must be addressed "critically" in the sense of a critical self-reflection upon the power and interests imbedded within them. Social science is ultimately to be assessed in terms of its potential to further the cause of human emancipation and the establishment of social and political practices free of exploitation and domination. Thus, for Habermas, epistemologically critical social science must be combined with a critical methodology that reveals the latent interests embedded within the institutions and communicative interaction of society. Its application must be empirical.

⁷ RRS, xlii. There is considerable overlap in each of these themes but the earliest development and impetus for each of these debates can be located in specific works. The most extended elaboration of his theory of social evolution can be found in Theory and Practice, the second half of Towards a Rational Society, and Communication and the Evolution of Society. His most concise treatment of epistemology is found in Knowledge and Human Interests. Applications of his theory to the situation of modernity can be found in Legitimation Crisis and Lifeworld and System. These ideas are all touched upon throughout The Theory of Communicative Action.

⁸ RRS, 7.

As Bernstein notes:

...for Habermas, the task was to appropriate the most promising developments in the social sciences and integrate them into a critical social science. A Critical Theory without empirical content could too easily degenerate into an empty rhetorical gesture. There was a real danger that Critical Theory might "regress" to ... "critical criticism".⁹

1.1 ORGANIZATION AND APPROACH

The first substantial chapter of the thesis will summarize the relevant points in Habermas's presentation of the nature and development of modern social formations. Specifically, Chapter One will address the notion of the transformation of rationality, a primary indicator of 'modernity' for Habermas. Our summary will emphasize the implications of adopting such an analysis for politics and Political Science. This will require that we explore several points related to Habermas's conceptual categories of reason, rationality, and rationalization. It is in the 'reconstruction' of Weberian sociology and the development of a theory of communicative competence that Habermas formulates his "theory of rationality". Habermas's theoretical explication of the origin and nature of modern reason and the operationalization of rationality in reconstructive method has important implications for his theories of social evolution and the state. Thus our

⁹ Bernstein "Introduction", HM, 8.

analysis will stress the relationship of rationality to the phenomenon of social evolution in the context of the more general 'theory of modernity'.

The first chapter will thus draw on a multiplicity of materials in order to situate the more specific analysis which follows. Among the important sources for the chapter will be the theoretical essays from Communication and the Evolution of Society which will be useful for the exposition of Habermas's view of social evolution. Habermas's most extensive discussion of modern rationality is found in his reconstruction of the Weberian notions of reason and rationalization that he undertakes in Reason and the Rationalization of Society, the first volume of his most recent work, The Theory of Communicative Action.

Chapter Two will begin by focussing on the effects, both methodological and practical, of the historical situation of society and social science outlined in the first chapter. Specifically, the arguments Habermas advances against the scientization of politics, which form part of his critique of positivist epistemology in the social sciences, will be the object of discussion in this chapter. This will naturally require some discussion of the main characteristics of the positivist theory of knowledge which is the object of his critique. In this regard it will be necessary to refer to developments and debates in the field

of the philosophy of science in general as well as to the specific methodological arguments which occur within social science. Discussion of the general orientation of positivism from Comte to the logical positivism of the "Vienna Circle" will be supplemented by reference to specific concerns arising from within the field of political science.¹⁰

Habermas's critique of positivism centers on his attempt to disengage the idea of valid knowledge from the exclusive domain of science and to elaborate a theory of the human and social interests that knowledge represents. Our primary reference in this chapter will be to Knowledge and Human Interests, his most extended and direct attack on positivistic social science.

A further goal of this chapter will be to summarize the basic elements of Habermas's presentation of the scientized version of public life that he sees resulting from the predominance of technical over practical reason and decisionistic versus communicative approaches to politics. Our discussion here will necessarily draw upon the theory of social evolution presented in the first chapter in order to highlight the connections between Habermas's analysis of the development of modernity and his critical epistemology.

¹⁰ Habermas's references to the "scientizing" effect that philosophical positivism has on political practice address the discipline of Political Science only indirectly.

Habermas's method seeks to empirically ground the historically specific developmental patterns of modern society, while his critique of positivist epistemology underscores the link between theory and practice. In this way the practice of social science is located within the more general context of societal rationalization.

The third chapter will examine the theoretical applications of Habermas's alternative "philosophy of history with a practical intent". One reconstruction that we will assess is Habermas's theory of "legitimation crisis".¹¹ For Habermas, theories of legitimation and the contemporary capitalist state must be considered in the context of the instrumental nature of modern political rationality. The reality of the phenomenon of societal rationalization has reposed the practical tasks of critical social science which must now go beyond a purely historical-materialist explanation of crisis. To address this problem, Habermas attempts to synthesize an approach drawing on Marxist and systems theory analyses. Important sources for this section of the thesis will be Legitimation Crisis and Volume two of The Theory of Communicative Action, Lifeworld and System. Especially important for consideration here are the methodological and

¹¹ Or as Habermas terms it in more conventional Marxist language, "late capitalism" is considered in terms of its latent "crisis tendencies". See Legitimation Crisis trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975).

epistemological issues raised by Habermas's synthesis of disparate and seemingly politically incompatible approaches to social theory. Habermas's particular approach to critical social theory has developed through the course of his work as he has responded to criticism by modifying and adopting elements from a variety of sometimes competing or rival approaches to his own. The problem of reconciling the notion of emancipatory interests derived from critical theory with a systems theoretical analysis that minimizes the effects of agency in history is only one example of the difficulties such a syncretistic approach to theory may pose.

Our assessment of critical theory will be interspersed throughout the thesis. In the concluding chapter we will be able to decipher some of the impetus for the linguistic turn in social science in general, in critical theory more specifically, and in Habermas in particular. It will be evident that communicatively based models of social action are particularly compatible with the epistemological orientation of critical theory. Habermas responds to the aporias in both Marxist and neo-Marxist critical theory through a broader and more positive interpretation of the notion of reason.

With its emphasis on language, Habermas's critical theory is a distinct break from the critical theory of the

Frankfurt School. The critique of modernity offered in Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment essentially rests upon the traditional foundation of the philosophy of the subject. The critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as Marcuse's One Dimensional Man, is a critical theory of consciousness which has as its goal the critique of societal rationalization and the dominance of scientific reason. Habermas on the other hand has a much more sanguine view of the potential of rationality, one which reappropriates elements of Hegel's notion of reason rather than exclusively adopting the negative aspects of Weber's idea of the "iron cage".¹² For Habermas it is language rather than consciousness which informs the conceptual strategy of his critical theory. His translator and commentator, Thomas McCarthy, neatly summarizes Habermas's view of the importance of communication:

To put it rather roughly, since speech is the distinctive and pervasive medium of life at the human level, the theory of communication is the foundational study for the human sciences; it discloses the universal infrastructure of socio-cultural life.¹³

Habermas's focus on the practical use of language as opposed to the philosophy of the subject allows him to escape the "negative moment" of Horkheimer and Adorno's prognosis and

¹² See Wellmer "Reason, Utopia and The Dialectic of Enlightenment", HM, 51.

¹³ McCarthy, CTJH, 282.

the inevitability of Weber's "iron cage", since he locates the motive and the possibility for human freedom in the structure of human communication rather than the changeable focus of subjective consciousness. For Habermas, language is less subject to either the distortion of "mass deception" and false consciousness or the technical management of "bureaucratic rationality".

Habermas's theory of communicative action eschews the positivistic 'neo-tradition' in social science and attempts to encompass questions of practical moral concern by employing an empirically grounded approach to critical theory that features human emancipation as the ultimate goal of social scientific knowledge. Freedom from exploitation and domination in both the economic sphere of labour and the cultural sphere of symbolic and normative interaction is the goal of emancipation. It is in this second symbolic dimension of 'interaction' that Habermas locates his "counterfactual" standard for emancipation [Herrschaftsfreiheit], the ideal speech situation in which all participants have an equal opportunity to initiate dialogue and to communicate rationally. This communicative element reintroduces a transcendental standard for rationality to the essentially normative epistemological claims of critical theory - one which can be empirically verified - thus contributing to the elaboration of an "empirical science of history with a practical intent".

If it is possible to characterize the entire corpus of Habermas's work as comprising a singular and consistent approach to the study of society, the most accurate label may well be that of a "critical theory of communications". The exploration of this theme will lead us to conclusions regarding the application and utility of Habermas's social theory. Questions concerning the political dimensions of social theory and the public practice it legitimates will be addressed throughout the paper but the concluding chapter will provide the main focus for a political analysis of the "practical intent" of Habermas's work.

The conclusion of the thesis will present a commentary on Habermas's view of the nature and cognitive status of social science theory and method. In part, our assessment revolves around the key theme of a linguistically-conceived epistemological critique of social science. Our final assessment of Habermas takes this approach as well and turns the critical theoretical account of communicative action into its own critique. In one sense, if the ambiguities inherent in Political Science discourse derive from the "competencies" required in the symbolically prestructured object domain of the social sciences, it can be said that the same problems which are endemic to the discipline as a whole are revisited in Habermas's own critique which in itself constitutes a very particular form of theoretical discourse.

A further aim of the final chapter will be to assess some of Habermas's more recent work in light of the overall project he has set himself. The primary sources here will consist in the two volume work The Theory of Communicative Action (1987). It is here that the critique of the practical intent of the critical theory of communication is most telling. The level of complexity and abstraction in this most recent work seriously begs the question of practical application. Habermas's fundamental argument regarding the structure or nature of language and social theory centers on the assertion that a rational social structure free from domination is presupposed in the very nature of speech and interaction. On this account it is then possible to "reconstruct" the latent emancipatory interest in existing social theory. In "reconstructing" the work of Parsons, Weber, Mead, Durkheim and Marx, Habermas engages in his most ambitious synthesis to date. But it may be asked whether such a "reconstructive science" is compatible with the intentions of critical theory. The effort to synthesize a grand theory of social evolution on the basis of a theory of communicative action may only represent an exercise in philosophical anthropology largely divorced from practical concerns. Thus, this part of my analysis focuses on the implications of a communicative action model of social evolution for the science and practice of politics.

The utility of Habermas's critical theoretical perspective must be assessed in this light. The study of any set of phenomena requires rigorous use of language if it is to be construed as scientific, but Habermas's counterfactual ideal speech situation as a standard by which to measure the validity of theoretical discourse may not provide the grounds for a truly emancipatory theoretical practice to emerge. Given this state of affairs, perhaps the empirical cum normative approach that critical theory implies, precisely because it embraces such ambiguity, should be considered, despite its flaws, to be as viable an 'alternative epistemology' as any other. From this theoretical perspective, the task for students of politics is to develop a critical, ethical-practical theory of politics on a solid empirical basis. Such a science of politics which would seek ways to institutionalize the communicative and emancipatory practices of unrestrained political consensus rather than unreflexively optimize the technical administration of the means of domination.

In any case, the outcome of these epistemological differences finds force more in diverging notions of the "practical intent" of social science than in the actual scientific content of one or another theory or method. That is, in the final analysis, social theory itself is an inherently political practice, both because of and in spite

of the scientific and human interests embedded within our theoretical constructions.

Chapter II

CRITICAL METHOD: THE RECONSTRUCTION OF RATIONALITY

Jürgen Habermas's theory of society is based in fundamental notions concerning the nature of human reason. This chapter will address the methodological questions raised by Habermas's adoption of Weberian categories in his critical-theoretical "reconstruction of historical materialism". It will focus on Habermas's deployment of the notions of reason and rationalization in his theory of social evolution an effort to develop an overall appreciation of the methodology of his critical social science.

Given the range of sources and disciplinary contexts in which these methodological ideas are developed, such an assessment will necessarily violate the detail of some of the theoretical positions that are summarized here. With this in mind, the analysis that follows essentially parses out Habermas's understanding of rationality into two related domains: first, a view of rationality which sees it as a category within theory; and second, a view which emphasizes the operationalization of rationality as a methodological assumption. I argue that the critical methodology of

reconstructive science has the progress of reason in history as its object of analysis. At the same time such a methodology must assume the existence of rational principles in the organization of historically specific social formations. The theoretical problems occasioned by this methodological configuration will form part of our assessment.

Of course methodological questions cannot be entirely separated from epistemological ones. In fact, much of the motivation underlying Habermas's development of a systematic methodological approach for critical social science is clearly connected to his own particular understanding of normal scientific practice. Thus, while the detailed analysis of his epistemological critique of the philosophy of science will be the subject of the Chapter Two, the discussion in this chapter will necessarily refer to Habermas's views concerning the social significance of modern science. If Habermas's critique of normal science is a fundamental factor underlying his own alternative of "reconstructive science", then his views on the nature of scientific reason and the practice of research must be considered in our assessment of his methodological approach.

The present chapter is organized as follows. The first section presents a summary of the critical theoretical reception of Weber's notion of rationalization as well as

Habermas's general orientation towards the social theory of early Frankfurt School. The second section deals with Habermas's discussion of Weber and the categorization of modernity in terms of the progress of reason, the transformation of rationality, and societal rationalization. The third section links Habermas's discussion of Weber with the development of "reconstructive science" and his attempt to devise a general theory of social evolution on the basis of rationally reconstructed social competencies. In the fourth and final section of this chapter some preliminary observations regarding critical methodology and political science will be sketched for further discussion in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

2.1 CRITICAL THEORY AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WEBER

Throughout the course of his work Habermas has elaborated a view of the methodological requirements of critical social theory.¹ To this end he has attempted to develop a methodology which includes two fundamental components: an empirical dimension which emphasizes the historical reconstruction of rationality rather than the development of formally systematized deductive-nomological statements; and a practical-ethical orientation towards the elimination of domination and repression. As McCarthy remarks:

¹ See McCarthy CTJH, 126.

...critical social theory is empirical without being reducible to empirical-analytical science; it is philosophical but in the sense of critique and not of first philosophy; it is historical without being historicist; and it is practical, not in the sense of possessing a technological potential but in the sense of being oriented to enlightenment and emancipation.²

In Chapter Three I will assess the critical methodology Habermas employs in his own theory of society in relation to these desiderata, but for the present discussion my remarks will be restricted to the general context and development of Habermas's "reconstructive science".

While his approach has been criticized for its eclectic tendencies³ Habermas's recent programmatic statements continue in this syncretistic vein:

My intention is to renew a critical 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 Pierce and Dilthey to Max Weber and George Herbert Mead, and by working them up into a theory of rationality. This is a matter of explicating a concept of reason that falls prey neither to historicism nor to the sociology of knowledge, and that does not stand abstractly over against history and the complex of social life.⁴

The single most important figure that Habermas engages in this theoretical venture is Max Weber. In his most recent work on the theory of communicative action, Habermas devotes most of Reason and the Rationalization of Society as well as

² McCarthy CTJH, 126.

³ c.f. Göran Therborn, Jürgen Habermas : A New Eclecticism", New Left Review, 67, May 1971, 69-83.

⁴ Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics" in HCD, 232.

the concluding "intermediate reflections" [Zwischenbetrachtung] to Weber's theory of rationalization. Part of Habermas's treatment of Weber focuses on his remarkable influence on the work of Western Marxists such as Lukács, Horkheimer and Adorno.

The affinity of Weber's theory of rationalization to neo-Marxist analyses of advanced commodity capitalism rests in the recognition of fundamental differences between the liberal capitalism that was the focus of Marx's critique, and the state administered capitalism of the modern era.⁵ In his major work, Economy and Society, as well as in much of his lesser known material, Weber's principle domain of inquiry is that of capitalist social relations and the societal rationalization they imply.⁶ On the same theme, Western neo-Marxists focused on the reification of culture that capitalist societal rationalization brought about.⁷

Weber's recognition of the social and cultural relevance of capitalist economic practice parallels that of Marx, and the bulk of his scholarship focuses on explaining the rise of the "most fateful force in our modern life - capitalism".⁸ Unlike the Marxian approach however, Weber's

⁵ Roderick, Habermas and the Foundations of Critical Theory (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986.), 36.

⁶ c.f. Karl Löwith, Max Weber and Karl Marx (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), 20-21ff.

⁷ Roderick, 35-37.

inquiry is more specifically directed at the "peculiarities" of the "Western bourgeois class".⁹ In this sense he is generally regarded as having placed greater emphasis on the cultural dimensions of processes of historical change than does Marx for whom history is properly understood in terms of dialectical materialism. This aspect of Weber's theory rendered it particularly useful for the critical reformulation of orthodox Marxist categories of analysis.¹⁰

The Weberian idea of historical change rests in the thesis of societal rationalization. A general summary will recall that his theory of societal rationalization saw two simultaneous and converging developments taking place in the process of modernization. First, the unifying force of traditionally shared convictions is sapped during the development of capitalism, reducing culture to a hodge-podge of competing "gods and demons". Second, the predominance of instrumental means-end reasoning in public life stimulates the bureaucratization of economic practice and politics. Thus, in the pessimistic diagnosis Weber offers, reason is a double edged sword: it both presupposes a rational social order and underpins an ultimately irrational process of societal rationalization which comports various pathological

⁸ Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Scribner, 1958) 24.

⁹ Löwith, 17ff.

¹⁰ Roderick, 36.

effects. The negative effects of modernity include the loss of meaning [Sinnverlust] that follows upon the diminution of tradition and collectively shared convictions in the cultural sphere, while in the political and economic domains a loss of freedom [Freiheitverlust] is the inevitable result of an increasingly bureaucratic administration of public life. It is this negative dimension of societal rationalization that constitutes the dark side of Weber's conception of reason and the paradox of modernity. Horkheimer and Adorno's idea of the "dialectic of enlightenment" is an attempt to theoretically overcome this paradox and is the clearest representation of Weber's influence on neo-Marxist critical theory.

The neo-Marxist reassessment of Marx's political economic critique of capitalism was partly a response to the conceptual difficulties inherent in the materialist conception of history.¹¹ The work of both Lukács and the Frankfurt School constituted a reformulation of Marxist theory in which "the vocabulary shifted to absorb the Weberian analysis of rationalization in much the same manner in which Marx adopted the categories of political economy in order to demonstrate their historical reification of human productivity".¹² Albrecht Wellmer succinctly sums up

¹¹ T. Schoyer The Critique of Domination (Boston: Beacon, 1973), 32-33. c.f. McCarthy, CTJH, 19.

¹² *ibid.*, 202.

the relationship between Weber and neo-Marxian critical theorists:

...they adopted the negative dialectics of progress from Weber and, at the same time, criticized his notion of formal and instrumental rationality as a "truncated" conception of rationality which did not even allow him to conceive of the possibility of a rational organization of society which would be in accord with an emphatic conception of reason. This emphatic conception of reason would comprise the ideas of freedom, justice and happiness, and therefore would provide a vantage point from which the rationalized societies of the twentieth century could be criticized as "irrational", as fundamentally violating the idea of rationality in their internal organization.¹³

However, critical theory was not always successful in its attempt to reappropriate Weber's concepts. As Jay has noted, critical theorists of the Frankfurt School did not advance a theoretically adequate conception of the notions of rationality and theoretical truth.¹⁴ Habermas's emphasis on the political significance - both positive and negative - of human reason and societal rationalization, and his attempts to empirically reconstruct a critical theory of social evolution are in part an attempt to redress this missing element in critical theory's appropriation of Weberian concepts.¹⁵

¹³ Wellmer "Reason...", HM, 44. Emphasis in original

¹⁴ M. Jay The Dialectical Imagination (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1973), 63. To frame this in the language of logical-positivism, critical theory lacks a clear set of criteria for cognitive significance.

¹⁵ c.f. S. White, "Rationality and the Foundations of Political Philosophy: An Introduction to the Recent Work

Habermas wishes to redirect mainstream critical theory away from its traditional concern with the consciousness of the knowing subject and towards a theory of rationality immanent in the communicative action of social agents. In this view, the ultimately negative outcome of the dialectical progression of the enlightenment that was envisioned by critical theorists such as Horkheimer and Adorno, results from their preoccupation with the philosophy of the subject. Because Horkheimer and Adorno's critical reflection upon the "destructive aspects of progress" focuses on the position of subjective consciousness in modern society they can offer little hope of transcending this state of affairs.

In the view presented in The Dialectic of Enlightenment, the subjective and subjected consciousness of the atomized modern individual is drawn into the machinery of mass production with little prospect for effective resistance. Paradoxically, having "extirpated mythology" and raised the spectre of the autocratic self as an element of exchange and domination, the ideology of enlightenment then permits the unrestrained subjugation of subjectivity. Instead of a naturalistic ego identity, reified and rationalized society constructs the self, which becomes an element in the rationalized organization of economic production:

of Jürgen Habermas" Journal of Politics, vol. 41, 1979, 1158.

The social work of every individual in bourgeois society is mediated through the principle of self; for one, labor will bring an increased return on capital; for others, the energy for extra labor. But the more the process of self-preservation is effected by the bourgeois division of labour, the more it requires the self-alienation of the individuals who must model their body and soul according to the technical apparatus. This again is taken into account by enlightened thought: in the end the transcendental subject of cognition is apparently abandoned as the last reminiscence of subjectivity and replaced by the much smoother work of automatic control mechanisms. Subjectivity has given way to the logic of the allegedly indifferent rules of the game, in order to dictate all the more unrestrainedly.¹⁶

On Horkheimer and Adorno's account, the liberating power of enlightened reason is transformed into an instrumental force which, instead of furthering the emancipation of individuals from the dictatorial demands of self-preservation, "serves as a general tool" in the interests of a more total form of political domination.¹⁷ In part then, the Frankfurt School's emphasis on the cultural dimensions of critique stemmed from a perceived need to critically reflect upon the political and social effects of the dominance of scientific reason and the overall project of the Enlightenment. This involved a philosophical reformulation of the tenets of classical Marxism. McCarthy puts this as follows:

¹⁶ M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment (New York: Continuum, 1987), 29-30.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 30.

For Marx, the overcoming of philosophy as philosophy was the precondition for establishing critique as scientific. For Horkheimer and Adorno, in contrast, the overcoming of scientism was the precondition for restoring Marxist theory as critique.¹⁸

For Horkheimer and Adorno scientism was bound up with the "identity-logic" characteristic of the scientific mode of thought itself. This negative view of scientific rationality, together with the acceptance of Weber's negative assessment of the emancipatory potential of modern society, ultimately led to a rejection of politics and an overwhelmingly pessimistic vision of modernity. As Wellmer concludes:

Under these conditions ... and without Marx's optimistic evaluation of the logic of modern rationalization processes, the attempt to defend an idea of reason, which would comprise the ideas of truth, justice, and happiness can in the end appear only as an impotent protest against Max Weber's negative verdict about the fate of reason in the modern world.¹⁹

For Habermas on the other hand, the "eclipse of reason" brought about by the rise of a highly rationalized and bureaucratically administered system of production where "adjustment becomes the standard for every conceivable type of subjective behavior",²⁰ is not an inevitable or politically irresistible tendency of modern society. His

¹⁸ McCarthy CTJH, 20.

¹⁹ Wellmer "Reason ...", HM, 50.

²⁰ M. Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), 96.

critique of modern technical rationality differs from that of Horkheimer and Adorno in that it "puts the cognitive instrumental aspect of reason in its proper place as part of a more encompassing communicative rationality".²¹

In transforming the paradigm of rationality from the context of subjective consciousness to one emphasizing communication and the pragmatic use of language, Habermas puts forward a view in which the historical subject is more surely embedded within a social, political and historical context.

A subjectivity that is characterized by communicative reason resists the denaturing of the self for the sake of self-preservation. Unlike instrumental reason, communicative reason cannot be subsumed without resistance under a blind self-preservation. It refers neither to a subject that preserves itself in relating to objects via representation and action, nor to a self-maintaining system that demarcates itself from an environment, but to a symbolically structured lifeworld that is constituted in the interpretive accomplishments of its members and only reproduced through communication. Thus communicative reason does not simply encounter ready-made subjects and systems; rather, it takes part in structuring what is to be preserved.²²

Thus, unlike Horkheimer and Adorno, in which the alienated self is enslaved to the instrumental reasoning process of self-preservation, Habermas positions the subject within a community of social agents where politics is still possible.

²¹ RRS, 390. Emphasis in original.

²² *ibid*, 398.

In his reappropriation of Weber, Habermas seeks to establish a communicative foundation for rationality and action that neither Weber nor the exponents of early critical theory were able to distinguish. At the methodological level, Habermas's reconstruction of Weber's notion of rationality makes evident that his deployment of Weberian categories involves their assimilation to the ethical-practical ends of critical social science. Such is the case for Habermas's rehabilitation of the positive and rational dimension of the Enlightenment in general.

2.2 REASON AND RATIONALIZATION IN HABERMAS AND WEBER

In taking up Weber's thesis, Habermas rejects both the "negative dialectic" of rationalization advanced by post-Weberian critical theory and Weber's own conclusions regarding the loss of meaning and the loss of freedom inherent in modern society. However, the empirical fact of rationalization is no more at issue for Habermas than it was for the early Frankfurt school. Habermas's acceptance of rationalization as a primary feature of modernity is clear.

I would like to defend the thesis that there were compelling reasons for Weber to treat the historically contingent question of Occidental rationalism, as well as the question of the meaning of modernity and the question of the causes and side effects of the capitalist modernization of society, from the perspectives of rational action, rational conduct of life, and rationalized worldviews.²³

²³ RRS, 7.

For Habermas though, unlike Weber, the reflective and critical spirit of reason means that the immanent potential for rationally motivated emancipation is not ruled out by the dialectical advance of barbarity and enlightenment. In Habermas's theory, reason and rationalization are not necessarily locked into a process of mutual negation.

As Habermas notes, the use of the term "rational" assumes "a close link between rationality and knowledge", recalling however that "rationality has less to do with the possession of knowledge than with how speaking and acting subjects acquire and use knowledge".²⁴ Habermas's concept of rationality focuses on the application of knowledge and thus ultimately involves questions regarding the relationship between theory and practice. In general, Habermas's understanding of the notion of reason forms a continuum with a tradition of German transcendental philosophy that includes Kant and Hegel. For each of these thinkers a strong and positive conception of "Reason" is a fundamental and universal element of philosophical systems which serve to elucidate the grounds for establishing good reasons at the particular level.²⁵ To a certain extent Marx, as an inheritor of Hegelian dialectics, adheres to this notion as well, though certainly not in its transcendental form. Habermas locates Marx's analysis and his own within this

²⁴ *ibid*, 8.

²⁵ q.v. M. Pusey, Jürgen Habermas (New York, 1987), 15-16.

constellation of social theories of rationality:

Marx wanted to capture the embodiments of unreason. In the same sense, we are also concerned today with the analysis of power constellations that suppress ... the claim to reason announced in the teleological and intersubjective structures of social reproduction themselves - and that allow it to take effect only in a distorted manner.²⁶

As we shall see Weber makes much different use of the notion of reason in his theory of societal rationalization.

Weber's "historico-theoretical problem"²⁷ is to relate culture to economic practice in such a way that the "peculiarities" of bourgeois values are linked to the structure of capitalist society. While quite thoroughly empirical Weber's case study/ideal typical form of inductive theoretical logic leaves his theory "open-ended" in terms of scientific confirmation. Epistemologically, such a approach not only presents a problem from the positivist perspective of verification, but, even on a looser application of criteria for "cognitive significance", Weber leaves undecided what exactly it is that best characterizes modern capitalist society. Capitalism is alternately defined as a cultural phenomenon related to the transformed values implicit in the "vocational ethic" of the "rational conduct of life", and as a "modern economic order" that is

²⁶ Habermas, "A Reply to my Critics", HCD, 221.

²⁷ This is Parson's term. *quod vide.*, The Structure of Social Action (New York: Free Press, 1961), 488.

... bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force.²⁸

The liberal political strategy running through Weber's theory may account for his ultimately ambiguous assessment of modern society. In keeping with a late 19th century liberal view of human nature, Weber emphasized the role of reason in history. In the opening methodological section of Economy and Society, he defines the task of his sociology as the analysis of culture and society in terms of "meaningful social action".²⁹ Such a view compels Weber to assimilate economic and social change to the systematic transformation of the values and underlying rationality which guide the social actions of individuals. In this sense Weber's understanding of history is fundamentally determined by his philosophical anthropology in which the Liberal notion of the autonomous individual is seen as the specific achievement of modern capitalism. The idealistic emphasis of this approach stands in stark contrast, for example, with the emphasis in the early Marx on the alienation of human beings from their labor. So important is this essentially Liberal notion to Weber's theory that he locates both the

²⁸ M. Weber, The Protestant Ethic, 181. On the vocational ethic see Economy and Society (Berkeley: UC Press, 1978), 556.

²⁹ Economy and Society, 4-24.

emancipatory and sociopathological elements of capitalist modernity in the unfettering of the individual from traditional social structures and forms of rationality.

For Weber, the rationality of modern capitalist society at once liberates individuals from the the irrational forces of tradition and traps them within an "iron cage", posing the dual problems of loss of meaning and loss of freedom. The loss of meaning is accomplished by the wearing away of tradition in the process of capitalist modernization, which strips away the traditional structures of meaning leaving a world of disenchantment [Entzauberung] in their place. The loss of freedom results from the increasing dominance of purposive-instrumental reason in the organization of society. Instead of providing a means for the realization of individual freedom, reason, in the guise of social institutions that have been formally rationalized according to the demands of purposive-instrumental rationality [Zweckrationalität], constructs a bureaucratized political and economic order which constrains and administers the range of free choice available for the individual.³⁰ Paradoxically, to the extent that is an 'empirical phenomenon' at all, individual "freedom of the will" for Weber is bound up with the tradition disintegrating force of technical reason:

³⁰ See, Ferrarotti Max Weber and the Destiny of Reason (New York, 1982), passim.

... we associate the strongest empirical 'feeling of freedom' with precisely those actions which we know ourselves to have accomplished rationally, i.e. in the absence of physical or psychic 'compulsion'; actions in which we 'pursue' a clearly conscious 'purpose' by what to our knowledge are the most adequate 'means'.³¹

Thus, while Weber celebrated the modern realization of enhanced possibilities for individual agency he remained hesitant in his assessment of the value of modern forms of rationality and institutional structures. In his seminal critique of Weberian sociology, Karl Löwith comments on the consequences of Weber's ambiguous liberal interpretation of modernity:

[Weber] denied the intrinsic value of all modern institutions, but affirmed them nonetheless as the given means towards a freely chosen purpose. On the other hand, it was precisely our recognition of the subjectivity of our ultimate judgements of purpose and value, and our ultimate decisions, that was to assure the objectivity and realism of scientific thought and political action. In consequence, Weber's position became one of permanent opposition, with the unique aim of defending the autonomous individual amidst and in the face of the individual's growing dependence on the political and economic world.³²

The "permanent opposition" of Weberian political sociology can be likened to critical theory without practical content. The autonomous individual is not only pitted against the technical power of bureaucratized economic practice, but actually contributes to the

³¹ M. Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences (New York: Free Press, 1949) 124ff.

³² Löwith, 49.

institutionalization of bureaucratic reason by adopting a canon of methodical and rational conduct in life.³³ One is liberated from the arbitrariness of tradition by reason, only to be incorporated into a larger process of societal rationalization that demands voluntary submission to the instrumental standards of economic reproduction.

That an increasingly atomized culture and an increasingly effective administration can both result from the liberation from affect and the force of tradition is partly due to Weber's view of rationality. For Weber, the rationalization of ethics and culture in the areas of religion, art, and law through the adoption of universal standards of salvation, esthetics, and justice, is inevitably connected to the adoption of methodical and rational conduct of life based on generalized principles. That is the development of rational Weltanschauungen is connected to the development of rational economic and life practices.

Weber's reduction of reason to a category within his action theory disconnects its application from the agency of subjects and emphasizes its structural connections within culture. Such a understanding of rationality implies that it is outside the conscious control of political practice and develops simply as a response to larger cultural forces. At its worst, modern reason then appears as a form of

³³ Economy and Society, 556. c.f. Habermas, RRS, 268-274.

neo-tradition which cannot critically reflect upon the political institutions of modern society but instead structurally underpins the irrational dimensions of capitalist exploitation. In Weber's theory we are unable to practically direct human reason towards political liberation.

The historical dimensions of the rationalization process that is so crucial to Weber's understanding of modernity and capitalist economics, are themselves somewhat inconsistent. The process of disenchantment [Entzauberung] that Weber places at the time of the Protestant reformation, takes place exclusively within the cultural sphere of ethics and religion. It is this rationalization of world-views which then motivates the development of a rationalized economic and political bureaucracy. What is missing from Weber's theory though is a discussion of the ethical (not to say religious) domain of modern capitalism. The implication is that ethical-practical questions cannot be addressed in the context of a modern form of rationality. The relationship between modern ethical and cultural practices and modern political formations is not considered in Weber. Instead, he is content to connect the development of generalized rational standards in the precapitalist cultural and ethical practices of the Protestant reformation with the rationalized organizational practices of modern

capitalism.³⁴

Habermas asserts that Weber's rationalization process is a narrowly posited one. Theorizing the rationalization of society in terms of a strictly means-end form of reason [Zweckrationalität] ignores the role of practical-ethical considerations and the development of reasonable "normative structures". Weber's original thesis included a more comprehensive reading of the rationalization process which extended beyond the instrumental-technical domain. His discussion of the confluence of instrumental and value rational action orientations underlying the "methodical practice of life" or vocation [Beruf] makes this clear.³⁵ As Habermas notes, Weber's contention that Occidental rationality was an outgrowth of the rationalization of religious morality and the belief in the universality of ethical principles situates his theoretical dilemma regarding modernity.

He [Weber] is interested, on the one hand, in the rationalization of worldviews; he has to clarify the structural aspects under which cognitive, normative, and expressive problems can be systematically detached and developed in accord with their inner logics. On the other hand, he is interested in the institutional embodiment of the modern structures of consciousness that developed along the path of religious rationalization, that

³⁴ A related question - also not addressed - would concern how the cultural and ethical rationality of the medieval period was reflected in medieval or precapitalist political practices. c.f. Habermas, "History and Evolution" Telos, 39, Spring 1979, 38-39.

³⁵ c.f. Max Weber, Economy and Society, 556.

is, in the transposition of cultural rationalization into societal rationalization.³⁶

Ultimately though, it is the instrumental calculating form of means-end reasoning necessary for the capitalist transformation of the material world which comes to dominate Weber's theoretical schema.³⁷ For Habermas this results from Weber's theoretically constricted notion of rationality based in a model of social action that gave predominance to purposive-rational entrepreneurial activity:

Weber did not pursue the systematic line of his two-stage approach, moving from cultural to societal rationalization. ... That is to say ... in the transition from cultural to societal rationalization, there is a noticeable and consequential narrowing of the concept of rationality in Weber's action theory - which is, in any case, tailored to the type of purposive-rational action.³⁸

Thus, even though Habermas's theory of society places a greater emphasis on the Weberian notion of rationalization in the assessment of capitalist modernity than on, say, the historical materialist critique of capitalist political economy offered by Marx, he nonetheless differs with Weber in two important respects. First, Habermas's methodology is explicitly practical, placing a value on freedom and autonomy [Herrschaftsfreiheit] whereas Weber advocates "value freedom" [Wertfreiheit]. Second, Habermas's empirical

³⁶ RRS, 168. Emphasis in original.

³⁷ *ibid*, 218. c.f. Alexander Theoretical Logic in Sociology (Berkley, 1983) 102-104.

³⁸ RRS, 221-222.

claims rest on the attempt to connect the material forces of history to the development of worldviews [Weltanschauung], "normative structures", and modes of reasoning.³⁹ In contrast, the empirical dimension of Weber's work is largely comparative and focuses on the elaboration of historically transcendent "ideal types".⁴⁰ These methodological differences underlie Habermas's reluctance to equate the development of post-traditional rationality in the sphere of jurisprudence (the separation of morality and legality) with a totalizing societal rationalization along the instrumental lines that Weber foresaw.

For Habermas, Weber's negative dialectic of rationalization "[uncoupled] the development of modern law from the fate of moral-practical rationality" but incorrectly subsumed the development of legal institutions and ethical practice under the rubric of "cognitive-instrumental rationality".⁴¹ Weber demonstrates how the Protestant ethic of vocation and modern post-traditional law are instrumental to the process by which "cognitive-instrumental rationality is

³⁹ See "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures", CES, 95-129. In several fundamental respects Habermas remains closer to Weber than to Marx. c.f. Agnes Heller, "Habermas and Marxism", HCD, 37.

⁴⁰ On ideal types see Weber's "'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy" in The Methodology of The Social Sciences, 89-91.

⁴¹ RRS, 242.

institutionalized in the economy and the state ... [but] this does not of itself yield his pessimistic prediction of a reification of the subsystems into an 'iron cage'".⁴² As Wellmer notes, the rationalization of purposive-rational action systems alone may further "the extension of technical control" but "rationalization of communicative action would entail a decreasing degree of repressiveness and rigidity, increasing role distance and the flexible application of norms - socialization without repression."⁴³ Habermas's reconstruction of Weber's theory in terms of a theory of communicative rationality allows him to introduce refinements to Weber's action theory that overcome the negative dialectic of the "iron cage".

Unlike Weber who "chooses purposive-rational action as the reference point of his typology" of action,⁴⁴ Habermas contends that action grounded in other forms of rationality is equally important in explaining societal rationalization. The loss of meaning [Sinnverlust] and loss of freedom [Freiheitverlust] which Weber associates with the rationalization process are the result of a conceptual perspective in which "the rationalization of action systems has to be restricted to the establishment and diffusion of

⁴² *ibid*, 248.

⁴³ A. Wellmer, "Modernity and the Aporias of Critical Theory", Telos 49 (Fall 1981) 50.

⁴⁴ RRS, 281. c.f. Economy and Society, 24-25.

the types of purposive-rational action specific to various subsystems" such as the market and the bureaucracy of the state.⁴⁵ But for Habermas, "if processes of societal rationalization are to be investigated in their entire breadth, other action-theoretical foundations are required".⁴⁶

Habermas's reconstruction of Weber attempts to chart an alternative to societal rationalization construed as a loss of freedom and meaning. Rationalization on the theoretical basis of communicative action contains a positive element which sees rationalization not as the bureaucratic institutionalization of instrumental rationality, but "as the expanded possibility for collective learning and as the (gradual) institutionalization of reason in society".⁴⁷ The positive ethical dimension of Habermas's critical appropriation of Weber rests in the connection between communicative reason and Weber's action theory. In this sense the reconstruction of rationalization revives the emphatic notion of reason. As Habermas notes:

The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions for the communicative sociation of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the species.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *ibid*, 284.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Pusey, 32.

⁴⁸ RRS, 398.

But, if the realization of this potential is connected to the societal rationalization process, then Habermas has embarked upon a theoretical elaboration of the evolutionary dynamics of social formations. As it will be pointed out, evolutionary models and the "reconstructive science" that informs such an approach, relate to critical theory in a problematic way.

2.3 RECONSTRUCTIVE SCIENCE AND SOCIAL EVOLUTION

Habermas employs the term 'reconstruction' in two distinct senses. There is the sense in which "reconstruction signifies taking a theory apart and putting it back together again in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself".⁴⁹ It is in this sense, in which reconstruction is akin to a theoretical operation of conceptual reinterpretation, that Habermas can be said to "reconstruct" historical materialism and systems theory. Habermas's reappropriation of Weber and the notion of societal rationalization, discussed in the preceding section, is an example of reconstruction in this sense as well. There is also a second, more specifically methodological sense in which the task of reconstruction is seen to be "meaning explication in the sense of rational reconstruction of generative structures underlying the

⁴⁹ "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures", CES, 95.

production of symbolic formations".⁵⁰ This methodological emphasis informs Habermas's usage of reconstruction in his theory of social evolution and comprises a testable empirical element which theoretical reconstruction does not emphasize. Of course reconstruction in both senses - empirical or theoretical - can be seen as part of Habermas's overall methodological approach. This section will concentrate on the latter more specific aspects of the operation called reconstruction, pointing up methodological questions surrounding reconstructive science as they relate to Habermas's general theory of rationality.

The importance of rationality for Habermas does not stop with his use of it as a category in the theoretical elaboration of modernity, but extends to the methodological operationalization of the notion of rationality in the practice of reconstructive science. At the level of theoretical construction, Habermas, with Weber, views modern societies as examples of the process of rationalization that accompanies the growth of the productive forces and systemic complexity of capitalism. At the methodological level, reconstructive science attempts to "reconstruct individual competencies rationally" and to elucidate the preconditions of individual and social development "in terms of reconstructable logical patterns and empirical

⁵⁰ "What is Universal Pragmatics?", CES, 13.

mechanisms".⁵¹

In "A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests" (1973) Habermas introduces the notion of reconstructive science in order to distinguish the type of knowledge derived from critical reflection upon particular instances of distorted communication or political domination, from the type of knowledge generated by critical reflection upon the conditions required for the actual production of rational competencies, such as the reconstruction of the knowledge-constitutive "cognitive interests" that underlie scientific practice.⁵² This latter form of knowledge, which Habermas admits he mistakenly subsumed under the general category of critical reflection in Knowledge and Human Interests is now seen to originate in reconstructive science.⁵³ In the "Postscript", the Kantian "search for the transcendental ground of possible theoretical knowledge"⁵⁴ now "becomes assimilated to programmes of rational reconstruction",⁵⁵ while the Hegelian notion of critique

⁵¹ Habermas, "A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests, Philosophy of the Social Sciences vol. 3 (June, 1973), 184.

⁵² The notion of reconstruction as method is mentioned earlier (1971) in the "Introduction" to the 4th German edition of Theory and Practice. Cognitive interest theory will be considered in Chapter Three. On the relation of rational reconstruction to cognitive interest theory see Alford (1985) 331ff.

⁵³ "A Postscript", 182.

⁵⁴ *ibid*, 182.

that includes the "analytical emancipation from objective illusions" remains within the purview of critical science per se.⁵⁶

For Habermas there are now three types of science : 1) the scientific, and non-reflective objectivating sciences, which are the subject of reflection and epistemological critique proper to the 2) critical sciences; and 3) the reconstructive sciences, which have as an object domain the objective actions and sentences of subjects that are governed by general rules of competence.⁵⁷ With a neutral role in the explication of intuitive knowledge that is abstracted from practical concerns, reconstructive science is distinct from both critical theory and from normal, "objectivating" science which is suffused with technical-instrumental form of reasoning. Reconstruction introduces a new category of science in which the 'know-how' or intuitive competence of historical subjects is related in conceptual terms that have a basis in everyday existence rather than the objectivating discourse of science, which,

⁵⁵ Hesse "Science and Objectivity", HCD, 110.

⁵⁶ "A Postscript", 183. This distinction had been pointed out by McCarthy (1978), 94-95.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* Habermas is refining his earlier model of science which was based in cognitive interest theory and took account of only three fundamental cognitive orientations, to include his newly devised reconstructive method. The schema presented here does not discount the cognitive interests bound up with the "hermeneutic sciences". c.f. Hesse, 110.

according to Habermas, tends to "displace" the reality of lived human experience.

With his new method Habermas is attempting to give an empirical dimension to his speculative social theory in order to "justify the substantive values and emancipatory of critical theory".⁵⁸ But the question then arises as to whether he is risking these very principles in doing so. If rational reconstructive method is to provide the empirical component for Habermas's "empirical philosophy of history with a practical intent", then substantive claims to reason would have to be reconstructed in such a way as to disconnect them from practical questions that are not immediately part of the competence being reconstructed in order for them to be redeemable empirically. Such methodological requirements would appear to be incompatible with the ethical intentions of critical social science.

The combination of Habermas's notion of communicative rationality with reconstructive science paradoxically leads him to adopt a position in which reason itself is reduced to a methodologically operationalizable concept. Rationality viewed as a communicative achievement is linked to the reconstruction of "the intuitive knowledge of competent subjects" required for successful communication.⁵⁹ In this

⁵⁸ c.f. Alford, "Is Jürgen Habermas's Reconstructive Science Really Science?", Theory and Society 14 (1985), 335.

⁵⁹ "What is Universal Pragmatics?", CES, 9.

sense there is an assumption of the rationality of the competences to be reconstructed implicit in the very procedure of reconstruction itself. Reconstructive science can be said to employ an operational concept of human reason in which method defines the nature of the forms of rationality to be reconstructed. Such an operational approach verges on the kind of scientistic reduction that Habermas has warned against in his critique of normal science.⁶⁰

Implicit in all applications of reconstructive method is an evolutionary understanding of social change. In Habermas's view this is because reconstructive method lends itself naturally to developmental theories.

The attempt to reconstruct individual competence rationally has helped bring about a strange new type of science ... [such as] ... the genetic sciences after the fashion of cognitivist developmental psychology.⁶¹

Habermas's own genetic theory of social evolution is modelled on the paradigm cases of reconstructive science that he identifies with Chomsky's theory of generative grammar and Piaget's cognitive development models. The genetic methodological orientation of reconstructive science provides the impetus for Habermas's attempts to delineate homologous, reconstructable patterns in the development of cognitive capacities, the acquisition of pragmatic language

⁶⁰ c.f. Alford, 335.

⁶¹ "A Postscript", 184.

skills, and the evolution of society.

Cognitive developmental psychology has shown that in ontogenesis there are different stages of moral consciousness, stages that can be described in particular as preconventional, and postconventional patterns of problem solving. The same patterns turn up again in the social evolution of moral and legal representations. ... [I]t should not surprise us that there are homologous structures of consciousness in the history of the species, if we consider that linguistically established intersubjectivity of understanding marks that innovation in the history of the species which first made possible the level of sociocultural learning.⁶²

In conceding that cognitive innovation and the "development of normative structures is the pacemaker of social evolution",⁶³ Habermas links the acquisition of culturally stabilized rational competence with the process of historical material transformation.

As Schmid notes, Habermas's evolutionary theory proceeds according to four assumptions. 1) The reconstruction of the normative structures governing social evolution is possible and will reveal the innate developmental logic of a given social formation - such as Western European capitalism. But, if it is valid, evolutionary theory must be universal in its application. Thus, 2) the stages of development revealed through reconstruction represent homologous stages in the social learning levels, "steering capacities", and problem solving abilities of any society. 3) Reconstruction

⁶² "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures", CES, 99.

⁶³ *ibid*, 120.

of these evolutionary stages must be accompanied by a theory which explains how "individually acquired learning abilities" are "transposed into societal learning processes". 4) Social evolution is conceived of as a particular process of learning that is homologous to development of normative structures at the individual level but not subject to the same conditions.⁶⁴ For Habermas, social evolution is to be understood "as a two-staged activity of problem solving by macro-systems"⁶⁵ in which the actual historical level of development of the society is distinct from the evolutionary process itself. Reconstruction of historically existing social formations focuses on "the organizational principles" or "institutional core that determines the dominant form of social integration",⁶⁶ whereas evolutionary theory reconstructively reveals the contingent "structural possibilities for the rationalization of action".⁶⁷

The methodological assumptions of reconstructive science, which is at the core of Habermas's understanding of rationality, ultimately spill over into the theoretical

⁶⁴ "Historical Materialism and ...", CES, 121. See also Schmid, "Habermas's Theory of Social Evolution", HCD, 167.

⁶⁵ "History and Evolution" Telos 39, Spring 1979, 31.

⁶⁶ "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism", CES, 154.

⁶⁷ "Historical Materialism and ...", CES, 122.

logic of this type of analysis. From the perspective of evolutionary theory, the reconstruction of societal rationalization can not help but reveal it as a process of social learning. But this formal description of the rationalization of social action as a theoretical category, has to be distinguished from the reconstruction of "intuitive knowledge" or reason, which is a methodological operation. Habermas's reconstructive science does not adequately meet this challenge.

This is most evident in Habermas's reconstruction of Weber's theory in which it is quite possible to conceive of the successful rationalization of society as an indication of its supposed rational content as well.⁶⁸ In this context, the reconstruction of communicatively achieved reason introduces an assumption of substantive rationality into the process of social evolution. Despite his claim that unrestrained communicative rationality presupposes a society free of domination and exploitation,⁶⁹ what Habermas seems to do is to add weight to the assumption that formal rationalization is a substantively rational process of learning and socio-cultural evolutionary adaptation.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁸ c.f. Marcuse's negative interpretation of Weberian rationalization in classical critical theoretical terms. "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber" Negations: Essays in Critical Theory J. Shapiro trans. (Boston: Beacon, 1968).

⁶⁹ c.f. RRS, 398.

⁷⁰ See, Giddens "Reason Without Revolution?", HM, 95-121.

methodological problem then becomes one of how Habermas's reconstruction of rational competence can be separated from the historical process of rationalization. From the perspective of reconstruction, the instrumental and bureaucratic rationalization of politics could conceivably be considered as a rational solution to the historically posed problem of a proto-capitalist accumulation crisis in a traditionally structured feudal economy. When critical reflection on the ethical-practical dimensions of the "activity of problem solving by macro-systems" is foregone in favour of ethically neutral reconstructive method, the emphatic form of reason that subtends the emancipatory interests of critical theory is diminished in importance.

2.4 POLITICAL RATIONALITY

It is clear that Habermas's understanding of human reason has a particular political relevance for his social theory. In order not to anticipate the discussion in the final chapter of the thesis the following remarks will be limited to a brief propaedeutic summary.

As a preliminary note, the very fact that Habermas theorizes modernity in terms of both the emancipating and dominating capacities of reason strikes a fundamentally liberal chord. The upholding of individualistically conceived freedom and the critique of institutions are

fundamental tenets of the belief, basic to liberal political philosophy, that autonomous and rational individuals rather than the arbitrary force of institutions best ensure the politically good society. As Löwith notes, Weber's analysis of capitalism, which sees the means-end rationality of economic practices as connected by "elective affinity" to the universalizing reason inherent in Protestant morality, "is an inherently neutral perspective but one which is evaluated ambiguously".⁷¹ The same might be said of Habermas's model of social evolution in which the homology of individual competence and social learning theoretically neutralizes the process of societal rationalization which is itself interpreted in an ambiguous fashion. While the use of the notion of reason at the level of individual competence might serve to reintroduce a 'cognitive standard' for rational and conscious agency in social theory, the practical aims of the rationally motivated agent may be rendered theoretically irrelevant to the critique of evolutionarily adapted and instrumentally rationalized institutions. Such a calculus recalls Weber's notion of the iron cage.

From the perspective of Habermas's evolutionary model, the prospect of establishing political practices on the basis of substantively rational political claims appears unlikely. Habermas seems to reinforce Weber's emphasis on

⁷¹ Löwith, 25.

the instrumental and formal rationality characteristic of modern capitalist institutions while doing little to substantiate his own communicatively conceived critique of Weber's narrow form of rationalization. It also remains to be seen how appropriate reconstructive method is to critical theory. If the reconstruction of rational competence yields a theory of social evolution in which political practice is subsumed into a general process of institutional rationalization, how does such a method advance the human interest in freedom latent in communicative action?

The logical structure of Habermas's theory offers no way out of these difficulties. Even his critique of capitalism proceeds by way of a reconstruction of elements of systems-functionalism which are then connected to his evolutionary theory. In this reconstructed version of Marxist crisis theory the irrational structures of exploitation, mediated through the integrative mechanisms of the state and economy, generate political crises by virtue of "legitimation deficits" in the social system. These speculative attempts at empirical applications of reconstructive method will be the subject of Chapter Four. For a fair assessment of these questions not only methodological, but epistemological issues concerning the practical and ethical dimensions of Habermas's social theory must be considered. Thus, in Chapter Three, Habermas's

epistemological critique of the problematic relation of theory to practice will be explored.

Chapter III

CRITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF POLITICS

Any "theory of society conceived with a practical intent" must confront the question of the relationship of theoretical knowledge to practice. Practice, in the sense that Habermas intends it, comprises more than simply technical questions of methodological operationalization or empirical verification. Instead, Habermas approaches the theory-practice problem from a perspective which critically reflects upon the "systematic relationship between the logical structure of a science and the pragmatic structure of [its] possible applications."¹ In his discussion of scientific approaches to knowledge about society, Brian Fay summarizes the effect of positivistic social science on political practice as follows:

If politics were to become an applied science, it is argued, its conjectural, arbitrary, emotional and personal elements would drop out, and its arguments would assume the same neutral characteristics as those of engineering.²

¹ "Some Difficulties in the Attempt to Link Theory and Practice", TP, 8.

² B. Fay, Social Theory and Political Practice (Allen & Unwin: London, 1975), 22.

For Habermas such a situation would exclude a practically oriented and politically mediated search for the good life and, in essence, would signal the end of politics.³ Influenced by Habermas's critique of positivism, Fay locates the motive for pursuing social scientific knowledge in the stabilizing influence and social control capacities such knowledge can provide. With public and scientifically verifiable information, politics could be streamlined into a rational and organized social process.

In political arguments there would be, as there are in scientific arguments, reliable public standards of ascertainable truth, and therefore the possibility of a universally recognizable decisive solution to a particular problem. It is in this way that a social science would be able to eliminate the 'anarchy of opinion' which characterizes modern political thinking.⁴

For Fay, the effect that positivist social science of this type has on political practice is seen most clearly in the transposing of the theoretical dichotomy of fact and value into the practical separation of means and ends in the formation of public policy. On the positivist understanding of "policy science", the "social engineer" need not take account of the practical or evaluative aspects of a policy decision but need only consider the most effective means for implementing it since political decisions are taken on the basis of criteria supposedly completely unrelated to the social scientific means of carrying them out.

³ This is Fay's position as well. q.v. *ibid*, chapter 5.

⁴ *ibid*, 23.

In Habermas's view, theory ultimately affects practice in this fashion because of the particular epistemological assumptions and cognitive interests that underlie positivist social science. Habermas's critical social science rests on the epistemological critique of the claims implicit in positivist understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. Ultimately, it is the cognitive interests that Habermas sees underlying the knowledge claims of science which determine the implicit "systematic relationship" between theory and practice so important for politics. If positivist epistemology corresponds to a technical interest that is the result of the material demands of natural science, then the predominance of this cognitive interest in technical control has definite implications for social theory and political practice. In societies which increasingly are organized according to principles of instrumental control and technical efficiency, and in which practical critique and emphatic and positive understandings of human reason are systemically marginalized, theoretical reflection must be trained on the dominant philosophy of science if a critical understanding of knowledge and human interests and the relationship between theory and practice is to be established. Habermas's solution is to elaborate a cognitivist epistemological critique which links the instrumental and material context of the production of knowledge to the

social practice of its application through the medium of "interests". The result is a reconstruction of the philosophy of science in terms of a theory of cognitive interests.

In Habermas's view, the science of modern technically administered social formations draws upon conceptions of the relationship of theory to practice which "bisect" rationality and transform politics into a series of questions requiring technical solution, ignoring the emphatic notion of reason which takes the rational realization of human freedom as its foundation. Thus, for Habermas it is evident that the "underlying 'interest' [which] establishes the unity between [the] constitutive context in which knowledge is rooted and the structure of the possible application which this knowledge can have", is the proper object of critical reflection since theoretical knowledge cannot be disconnected from the ethical content it embodies and the political practices it legitimates.⁵ It is precisely this reflective dimension that Habermas contends is lacking in modern philosophy of science.⁶

Habermas's critical theory of knowledge and his efforts to elaborate an emancipatory connection between social theory and political practice center on the critique of

⁵ "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 9.

⁶ c.f. KHI, 69.

positivism he offers in Knowledge and Human Interests and the view of politics and social philosophy he outlines in Theory and Practice. From a general perspective, the relationship of theory to practice is primarily an epistemological question, but one which concerns empirical investigation and methodological issues as well.⁷ An adequate evaluation of Habermas's contribution to the philosophy of science must take account of the overall epistemological thrust of his work. I will assess Habermas's views on the linkage of science and politics through an examination of his critique of positivism and the scientization of politics. Specifically, I will argue that despite his emphasis on practical questions, Habermas's is foremost an epistemologically critical theory of society. The discussion will thus situate Habermas's critical epistemological orientation to social science in relation to the practical goals he has set for his social theory in general.

Habermas's early accounts of the relationship between theory and practice must be considered in relation to later developments in his epistemological critique of science and reformulation of critical theory. Habermas's presentation of the issues surrounding the relationship of theory to practice comprises three fundamental aspects: 1) an element of empirical investigation which seeks to characterize the

⁷ c.f Habermas, "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 3.

relationship of science, politics and the public sphere in advanced capitalism; 2) an epistemological critique of the relationship between human interests and theoretical knowledge; 3) and an excursus on the methodological requirements of critical social theory.⁸

The present chapter will focus on Habermas's discussion of the problematic features of the relationship between theory and practice as well as reflect upon the relationship between the epistemological and methodological dimensions of Habermas's own work. The chapter is organized with a view to assessing the importance of these two themes. The first section considers the theory-practice problematic in the context of Habermas's comparison of the classical doctrine of politics with modern "scientized" political practice. The second section links Habermas's epistemological critique of science to his theory of cognitive interests which is part of his general critique of the positivist philosophy of science. The third section will discuss the epistemological questions surrounding Habermas's elaboration of a critical epistemological foundation for critical theory. In this context Habermas's tendency to collapse empirical and methodological claims into epistemological arguments provides a clear demonstration of the problematic relationship of theory to practice in his own work. The

⁸ "Some Difficulties...", TP, 3. The methodological dimension was considered in the first chapter of the present work.

concluding section of the chapter briefly considers the implications of such a theoretical strategy for Political Science.

3.1 SCIENCE AND POLITICAL PRACTICE

Theory has its most direct impact upon social practice when its object domain is the nature and organization of social action itself. If the epistemological foundations of a given theory of society predispose it towards a form of rationality which emphasizes technical control, then theoretical knowledge about social action develops within a set of boundaries for cognitive significance that limit the relevance of that theory for the moral or ethical dimensions of the social practice it presumably is meant to enhance or improve. The 'limited practical relevance' of theory in this sense, has an even more significant practical impact upon society when the general situation of social theory is such that it has become largely irrelevant or even dangerous for the development of a rational (in the emphatic sense), and emancipated society. Habermas contends that this is the case.

It may of course be argued that the impact of theory is greatest when its outcome results in the material transformation and modification of forms of social

interaction as a result of technological innovation.⁹ For Habermas however, the material technological innovation occasioned by the advance of science has to be distinguished from the ideological influence of scientific rationality on social practice. It is the predominant position of science and scientific reasoning as the arbitrating standards for the validity of knowledge which is most relevant to the theory-practice problematic.

For as our civilization has become increasingly scientific, the dimension within which theory was once directed to practice has become correspondingly constructed. The laws of self-reproduction demand of an industrially advanced society that it look after its survival on the escalating scale of a continually expanded technical control over nature and a continually refined administration of human beings and their relations to each other by means of a social organization. In this system science, technology, industry and administration interlock in a circular process. In this process the relationship of theory to practice can now only assert itself as the purposive-rational application of techniques assured by empirical science. The social potential of science is reduced to the powers of technical control - its potential for enlightened action is no longer considered.¹⁰

Habermas conceptually distinguishes the relevance of instrumental rationality for the practical application of knowledge from the use of technology in the process of

⁹ An example of this is Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional, technological consciousness, which adopts a material explanation for the impact of science on society. c.f. One Dimensional Man (Beacon: Boston, 1964). Habermas 'reconstructs' Marcuse in TRS, 81-122.

¹⁰ "Dogmatism, Reason, and Decision: On Theory and Praxis in Our Scientific Civilization", TP, 254.

economic production. Bound up with the purposive and instrumental forms of rationality and action that are a necessary part of human material existence, technology predates the existence of the modern scientific rationality that now informs the range and appropriateness of its application.

Technological development thus follows a logic that corresponds to the structure of purposive rational action regulated by its own results, which is in fact the structure of work. Realizing this, it is impossible to envisage how, as long as the organization of human nature does not change and as long therefore as we have to achieve self-preservation through social labor and with the aid of means that substitute for work, we could renounce technology...¹¹

It is the predominance of purposive-instrumental rationality that lends the particular character to the relationship of theory and practice in modern social formations. Thus, in one sense, Habermas's critique of science rests on the fundamental conception of reason that informs his reconstruction of Weber's rationalization hypothesis.¹² The dominance of technical rationality derives partly from the nature of capitalist social relations which reinforce such attitudes towards practical life and in effect leads to the "formalization of one sole relation to life, namely the experience of success as feedback control, built into systems of social labor and already realized in

¹¹ "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", TRS, 87.

¹² c.f. *ibid*, 90, where Habermas makes this connection explicit.

every elementary accomplishment of work".¹³

The effective dominance of technical scientific rationality is reflected in the fact that theoretical knowledge which does not extend the instrumental control and technical efficiency of our social practices does not have available to it the socially sanctioned epistemological resources required for it to be considered as scientifically valid knowledge. Thus, the spillover effect of experimental techniques and scientific rationality may qualify such largely abstract and probabilistic fields of study as astronomy and meteorology as forms of 'science', whereas efforts to establish criteria for the validity of knowledge about social life on ethical-practical grounds must confront the charge of ideological bias. In Habermas's view the prevalence of instrumental scientific rationality makes the development of practical theoretical knowledge about politics and the elimination of unnecessary forms of domination and exploitation less likely.

The empirical, analytical sciences produce technical recommendations, but they furnish no answer to practical questions. ... Emancipation by means of enlightenment is replaced by instruction in control over objective or objectified processes. Socially effective theory is no longer directed toward the consciousness of human beings who live together and discuss matters with each other, but to the behavior of human beings who manipulate. As a productive force of industrial development, it changes the basis of human life, but it no longer reaches out critically beyond

¹³ "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision...", TP, 264. translation modified. c.f. McCarthy CTJH, 7n12.

this basis to raise life itself, for the sake of life, to another level.¹⁴

Ultimately, Habermas's critical reflection on the relationship of theory to practice is linked to his critique of science. It is in the context of the critique of scientized political practice and social theory that Habermas's views on the theory-practice problematic of modernity have their most direct political relevance.

There are two fundamental aspects to Habermas's critical assessment of modern science. In the first instance Habermas is interested in the theory of knowledge which underlies and informs the practice of scientific research. The second aspect of his critique includes a more direct treatment of the practical outcomes such research may have. In the context of a critique oriented towards both the sociologically visible effects of science and the pragmatic implications of its epistemological assumptions, Habermas addresses the effect of scientific rationalization on political action, thus confronting the theory-practice problematic at a level of theory closely tied to the practical ends of critical social science.

To pose the practical political questions of modernity in epistemological terms may seem a rather roundabout way of establishing a critique, but for Habermas, the "expansion of the rational form of science and technology, i.e. the

¹⁴ "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision...", TP, 254-255.

rationality embodied in systems of purposive rational action, to the proportions of ... the 'historical totality' of a life-world"¹⁵ lies at the root of the transformation of politics from an activity based foremost in the achievement of practical goals to one in which priority is given to the technical means of problem solution. The existence of scientifically influenced theoretical discourses regarding rationality promotes the development of a science of society in which social action comes to constitute the object domain of theories implicitly committed to "scientized" practice. Scientifically rationalized politics is a politics in which the non-reflexive, objectivating and instrumental form of rationality proper to positivistic natural science is afforded an inroad into the action orienting norms that govern political practice.

In a scientific civilization, positivistic social science merely responds to the political requirement for a 'science of decision' which methodologically guards against the irrationality of decisions "which cannot be sufficiently legitimated through reason."¹⁶ The models of politics developed within this approach to social inquiry represent a thoroughly scientized understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. In scientized politics:

¹⁵ "Technology and Science...", TRS, 90.

¹⁶ "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion", TRS, 63.

The dependence of the professional on the politician appears to have reversed itself. The latter becomes the mere agent of a scientific intelligentsia, which in concrete circumstances, elaborates the objective implications and requirements of available techniques and resources as well as optimal strategies and rules of control. If it is possible to rationalize decisions about practical questions, ... then the politician in the technical state is left with nothing but a fictitious decision-making power. The politician would then be at best something like a stopgap in a still imperfect rationalization of power, in which the initiative has in any case passed to scientific analysis and technical planning.¹⁷

In Habermas's view, the emphasis on the technical and instrumental ideals of regulated social interaction so prevalent in the theoretical discourse of modern social science, has mediated the contemporary understanding of the relationship of theory to practice and thus irrevocably changed our conception of politics. This "scientization" of political life proceeds by three related developments. First, scientifically grounded social theory "aims at establishing once and for all the conditions for the correct order of the state and society ... regardless of the historical situation".¹⁸ The consequent objectification of the interrelationships of social life under the timeless categories of scientifically correct order "detaches the social to such an extent from the praxis of life that the application of the insights derived from social philosophy

¹⁷ *ibid*, 63-64.

¹⁸ "The Classical Doctrine of Politics in Relation to Social Philosophy", TP, 43.

cannot itself be scientifically controlled".¹⁹ Secondly, under such conditions the relationship of theoretical knowledge to its practical and socially relevant applications becomes a primarily technical question rather than a moral-practical one.²⁰ Thirdly, and perhaps most consequentially, the outcome of such a changed theoretical-practical constellation is of fundamental importance for politics. As Habermas somewhat categorically puts it:

[H]uman behavior is therefore to be now considered only as the material for science. The engineers of the correct order can disregard the categories of ethical social intercourse and confine themselves to the construction of conditions under which human beings, just like objects within nature, will necessarily behave in a calculable manner. This separation of politics from morality replaces instruction in leading a good and just life with making possible a life of well-being within a correctly instituted order.²¹

Despite the dominance of scientific rationality in modern culture, there are difficulties with the technocratic approach to public administration. When the relationship between theory and practice is conceived of in positivistically restricted terms, and the political activity of public discussion and the pursuit of practical social goals is reduced to a series of decisions largely guided by the procedure-dominated discourse of technocratic

¹⁹ *ibid*, 46.

²⁰ *ibid*, 43.

²¹ *ibid*, 43.

administration, normative and ethical questions are excluded from 'rational' public discussion. The technocratic self-understanding of political practice brings about a situation in which practical policy problems are unable to be satisfactorily resolved according to the technical standards of the prevailing purposive-instrumental form of rationality. Scientized politics thus paradoxically creates "a growing scope for pure decision", keeping alive an element of irrationality in the otherwise scientifically rationalized organizational structures of society.²²

Habermas notes:

Within the framework of research operations that expand our power of technical control we can make no cogent statements about "value systems," that is about social needs and objective states of consciousness, about the directions of emancipation and regression. Either there are still other forms of decision than the theoretical-technical for the rational clarification of practical issues that cannot be completely answered by technologies and strategies, or no reasons can be given for decisions in such issues. In that case we would have to return to the decisionistic model.²³

In the extreme case, 'decisionistic' models of this sort introduce the possibility of a politics based solely in the uncritical commitment required for efficient decision-making. Technocratic social engineering, based in purely decisionistic commitment, thus runs the risk of being

²² *ibid*, 46. See "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision...", TP, 263-268, for Habermas's discussion of decisionism.

²³ "The Scientization of Politics and Public Opinion", TRS, 64.

not only uncritical but irrational, since practical and ethical questions cannot be rationally considered within the technical-instrumental political discourse of our scientific civilization.

Under the influence of the positivistic philosophy of science, the social sciences have institutionalized the exclusion of ethical practice from political consideration. The effects of this tendency have become evident only recently and represent the culmination of a break between "classical politics" and the scientized political practice of modernity.

Since the clarification, which Max Weber brought about, in the so-called value-judgement controversy, and the precise definition of a positivistic "logic of investigation", the social sciences have been separated completely from the normative elements that were the heritage of classical politics, a heritage now quite forgotten - that, in any case, was how the matter presented itself in these sciences' understanding of themselves in the philosophy of science.²⁴

It was not always this way, Habermas contends. According to Habermas, the classical doctrine of politics was more oriented towards developing the capacity of practically-guided understanding required for engagement in the search for the ethically good life. The modern, scientific counterpart to this approach seeks to efficiently control political order through scientific knowledge and "piece-meal" social engineering.²⁵

²⁴ "Classical Doctrine ...", TP, 44.

For Habermas there are three fundamental differences between the classical and modern conceptions of politics.

1) In the classical conception, "[p]olitics was understood to be the doctrine of the good and just life; it was the continuation of ethics."²⁶ Politics was what assured the humanity of communal life since the social and public spheres of interaction act to advance human nature : it was only within the polis that the zoon politikon became truly human. In the modern era, commencing with Kant, the ethical dimensions of conduct are viewed from a subjective perspective which isolates them from the technical and utilitarian legality of public life. Kant's categorical imperative is an example of the separation of ethics and practice that began to inform modern politics.²⁷

2) The classical doctrine focused on praxis, or knowledgeably guided action, and excluded the idea of techne or "expert mastery of objective tasks" from the political realm.²⁸ In the modern version of political practice that Habermas sees as being first advanced by Hobbes, ethics is excluded and "mankind owes its greatest advances to technology, and above all to political technique, for the correct establishment of the state."²⁹

3) Classical politics was never conceived of

²⁵ c.f. Ricci (1984), 166-169.

²⁶ "Classical Doctrine...", TP, 42.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ "Classical Doctrine...", TP, 42.

in terms of a "rigorous science" but in terms of the "capacity of practical philosophy [which] is phronesis, a prudent understanding of the situation".³⁰

With Vico, who critiqued the early form of political science espoused by Machiavelli, More, and Hobbes from within the tradition of 18th century humanist rhetorical philosophy, Habermas agrees that as far as political knowledge is concerned "[u]ncertainty with respect to action grows greater, the more rigorous the criteria for scientific verification selected for this domain".³¹ Thus, in reckoning the profits and losses incurred in the transition from the classical politics of Aristotle to that of the modern era Habermas concludes that "the moderns achieved the rigor of their theory at the cost of the access to praxis".³² The transition from classical to modern politics coincides with the transformation of the relationship between the theoretical content of social philosophy and its implications for political practice.

Habermas locates the break with classical politics in the work of Machiavelli, Hobbes and More. "Machiavelli and More, each in his own way, carried out the divorce of

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ *ibid.*, 46.

³² "Classical Doctrine...", TP, 79.

politics from ethics. ... Just like the techniques for securing power in Machiavelli, so in More the organization of the social order is morally neutral. Both deal not with practical questions but technical ones."³³ While their achievements lack the methodological rigor that would qualify them as truly scientific,³⁴ they nonetheless distanced themselves from the classical conception of politics and laid the groundwork for the Hobbesian vision of politics. With Hobbes, theoretical knowledge concerning politics begins to take an objectivating and unreflective attitude towards social practice. As Habermas puts it:

It was Hobbes who first studied the "laws of civil life" with the explicit purpose of placing political action from now on on the incomparably more certain basis of that scientifically controlled technics which he has come to know in the mechanics of his time.³⁵

The culmination of this modern, uncritical understanding of the relationship between theory and practice is to be found in positivist philosophy of science. As Habermas remarks:

Positivism marks the end of the theory of knowledge. In its place emerges the philosophy of science. ... [B]y making a dogma of the sciences' belief in themselves, positivism assumes the prohibitive function of protecting scientific inquiry from epistemological self-reflection.³⁶

³³ *ibid*, 54.

³⁴ *c.f.* *ibid*, 57-58.

³⁵ *ibid*, 61.

The exclusion of practical questions from valid social scientific knowledge finds its primary epistemological support in the positivism expounded by Comte, Mach, Saint-Simon and the Vienna Circle. In positivism, rigorous scientific method replaces the communicative and consensual aspects of the theory of knowledge, just as technical control replaces communicative political practice in scientized politics. Technocratic politics and positivistic epistemology both conceal a commitment to technical and instrumental forms of reason.

3.2 THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF POSITIVISM

For Habermas, positivism "is philosophical only insofar as is necessary for the immunization of the sciences against philosophy."³⁷ The association of all valid knowledge with scientifically guided procedures for its derivation is the result of the scientism of "science's belief in itself."³⁸ Positivism serves to immunize science against the practical-ethical reflection of critique in order to assure the validity of scientifically derived knowledge. This cognitive orientation is at the heart of the positivist philosophy of science. "That we disavow reflection is

³⁶ KHI, 67.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ KHI, 4.

positivism".³⁹ The fundamental critical experience of reflection is what is missing from scientized approaches to research.

[P]ositivism ... makes use of elements of both the empiricist and rationalist traditions in order to strengthen science's belief in its exclusive validity after the fact, instead of to reflect [reflektieren] on it, and to account for the structure of the sciences on the basis of this belief.⁴⁰

In contrast, Habermas takes a critical approach to the cognitive interests underlying the structure of the sciences. Knowledge and Human Interests is the focal point of Habermas's critique of positivist philosophy of science, a work which he characterizes in critical methodological terms as having undertaken the "rational reconstruction of the history of science."⁴¹

In Habermas's view, positivism itself began as a philosophy of history.⁴² The prime example of this usage of "positive science" occurs in Comte's elaboration of three stages of history which places the esprit positif at the end of a continuum of human progress which passes from the "theological" age through the "metaphysical" to the point where la philosophie positive becomes possible. For Comte, the development of human society is thus marked by the

³⁹ *ibid*, vii.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 4-5.

⁴¹ "A Postscript", 159.

⁴² KHI, 71.

progress of knowledge from the theological state of pre-modernity to the era of positive scientific knowledge. The designation of theological, metaphysical and positive stages in the transformation of human society relies on the epistemological foundations for valid knowledge that Comte sees as typical of each era in history.

Thus, in one sense, positivism can be conceived of as scientific practice culturally reflecting upon its own historical significance. But as a philosophy of history whose object domain is the history of scientific knowledge itself, positivism has as a larger project the creation of a culture of science in which epistemological questions surrounding the certainty of scientific knowledge are resolved in favour of the notion of a general unity of scientific method. In Comte's own words:

il s'agit désormais de créer un ordre tout entier de conceptions scientifiques qu'aucun philosophe antérieur n'a seulement ébauché, et dont la possibilité n'avait même jamais été nettement entrevue.⁴³

The spirit of positive philosophy not only animates the enterprise of natural science but, taken to its limits, demonstrates "la possibilité actuelle de concevoir et de cultiver la science sociale à la manière des sciences pleinement positives".⁴⁴ Thus, from the beginning,

⁴³ Auguste Comte, Physique social: cours de philosophie positive tomes IV, V, VI (1842) (Hermann: Paris, 1975), 13.

positivism eschews any a priori division between natural and social science. The presumed epistemological unity of science, together with the "imperious needs" of society, pushes Comte to develop a positivist science of social intervention which he refers to as "social physics". The unity of scientific method, ensuring the validity of knowledge about society, allows not only for the accurate scientific description of politics but for the development of truly scientific prescriptions for political intervention:

il est très clair que la philosophie positive, en indiquant la conformité spontanée de chaque regime politique effectif à la civilisation correspondante, afin que ce regime ait put s'établir et surtout durer, enseigne aussi, d'une manière non moins nécessaire, que cet ordre naturel doit être le plus souvent fort imparfait, par suite de l'extrême complication des phénomènes. Bien loin de repousser, en ce genre, l'intervention humaine, une telle philosophie en provoque, au contraire, éminemment la sage et active application, à un plus haut degré que pour tous les autres phénomènes possibles, en représentant directement les phénomènes sociaux comme étant, par leur nature, à la fois les plus modifiables de tous, et ceux qui ont le plus besoin d'être utilement modifiés d'après les rationnelles indications de la science.⁴⁵

The emphasis on the social utility of intervention guided by positive science is evident. Saint-Simon echoes the explicit connection of science with political practice, characterizing political questions as being "eminently

⁴⁴ *ibid*, 14.

⁴⁵ Comte, 117.

positive and answerable."⁴⁶ Saint-Simon comments further on the possibility of a society organized according to the tenets of 'positive science' in which "[political] decisions can only be the result of scientific demonstrations, absolutely independent of all human will."⁴⁷ In future scientific endeavor, social control and scientific practice will be closely related since "technology will then be no longer exclusively geometrical, mechanical, or chemical, etc., but also and primarily political and moral".⁴⁸

Not only does positivism construct a history of human society which "justifies the sciences scientific belief in themselves"⁴⁹ by equating the progress of scientific method with human progress in general, but, from its earliest philosophical stages in Comte and Saint-Simon, it is directly concerned with "the intellectual management" of "scientifically indicated" political interventions into social relations. On a related front, the supposition of epistemological unity regarding what constitutes valid knowledge about either human society or physical nature inevitably extends the natural sciences' concern with technical control over nature into the practice of social

⁴⁶ H. Saint-Simon, Selected Writings on Science, Industry, and Social Organization K. Taylor ed., trans. (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 209.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Discours sur l'esprit positif, 59 ff. cited in KHI, 77.

⁴⁹ KHI, 72.

science. That Comte held such a sanguine view of the right application of science to the social realm was perhaps the result of his political concerns regarding order, progress, and the rule of law.⁵⁰ But whether or not his theoretical logic was explicitly or indirectly political, positivism's view of history as the history of increasingly effective scientific control over nature, and its commitment to the epistemological unity of valid scientific knowledge, justifies the belief in the ability of social science to aid in the technical control of political and social forces within an orderly and integrated society. These themes, which are revisited in later formulations of positivism, are manifest in Comte's earliest discussions of positivist philosophy, where history is reduced to the history of science and the hope is held out that politics can be intellectually managed according to scientific principles of la philosophie positive.

According to Comte, positivist philosophy is "profoundly characterized by the necessary and permanent subordination of the imagination to observation which constitutes the truly scientific mind, as opposed to the theological or

⁵⁰ As J-P. Enthoven notes in his introduction to Comte's Physique sociale, op cit.: "it is in Cours de philosophie positive that the system of knowledge and the science of power announce their complicity" (1). Significantly, Comte's scientific method and his political philosophy both center on similar concepts of law, classification, order, and stages of development.

metaphysical".⁵¹ Such an orientation has as its primary object domain the actual and observable elements of the real world. Positive science is the science of the positive : that is, it deals with the real rather than the imaginary (reel - chimerique); that about which one can be certain as opposed to remaining undecided (certitude - l'indecision); and the exact rather than the indefinite (le precis - le vague). As well, for Comte, positivism focuses on useful knowledge as opposed to vain abstraction (l'utile - l'oiseux) and thus lays claim only to relative rather than absolute truth (le relatif - l'absolu).⁵²

That reality appears regular, knowable and as a object separate from the observing subject may be more the result of the predominance of the Cartesian world view in modern western culture than an indication of the correspondence of positivist epistemology with the fundamental ontological categories of human reason. Like Descartes, Comte's philosophie positive is essentially an attempt to address the 'problem of knowledge' from a primarily methodological perspective. For Cartesian doubt Comtean positivism substitutes rigorous "unity of method and doctrinal homogeneity".⁵³ As Habermas notes, "at the only level positivism allows, science can be defined only by the

⁵¹ Comte, 102. My translation.

⁵² c.f. Discours sur l'esprit positif, cited in KHI, 74.

⁵³ Comte, 14.

methodological rules according to which it proceeds".⁵⁴ With a predominant focus on method and a method which emphasizes observation and law-like deduction, positivism in essence "marks the end of the theory of knowledge. In its place emerges the philosophy of science".⁵⁵

Comte's emphasis on the primacy of observation versus imagination is revisited in later formulations of positivism expressed in the work of the members of the Vienna Circle. Recodified in the discourse of analytic philosophy, the positivism of the Vienna Circle focused on the distinction between meaningful statements and pseudo statements. On this account, synthetic and analytic statements are the only forms of the linguistic expression of knowledge which possess cognitive significance for science. Valid knowledge must be framed in terms of a pure logical relationship (analytic statement) or a contingent relationship that can be confirmed on the basis of factual observation (synthetic statement). Carnap, writing in 1931, during a period of enthusiastic reception for positivist philosophy of science, goes so far as to say that the replacement of "metaphysical concept poetry" by the new logically analytic language of empirical science had rendered practical discourse superfluous.

⁵⁴ KHI, 74.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 67.

Before the inexorable judgement of the new logic, all philosophy in the old sense, whether it is connected with Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Kant, Schelling or Hegel, or whether it constructs a new "metaphysic of Being" or a "philosophy of spirit", proves itself to be not merely materially false, as earlier critics maintained, but logically untenable and therefore meaningless.⁵⁶

In such an epistemological framework the rational consideration of practical questions falls outside the purview of scientifically valid knowledge. In this way positivism isolates reason from decision, and absolves science from providing a knowledgeable ground for action. "Prior to positivism, critical knowledge referred to a scientific orientation in action." But, with the advent of a positivistic philosophy of science, "the two cognitive functions [reason and decision] were distinctly separated and both deprived of their power of orientation for action".⁵⁷

While Anglo-American analytic philosophy has taken positivism to task for its epistemological assumptions, the explicitly political dimensions of its theoretical program have been overlooked.⁵⁸ It is clear, however, that the positivism of the Vienna Circle was not only political in the indirect epistemological sense. The Vienna Circle

⁵⁶ Rudolf Carnap, "The Old and the New Logic" in Ayer Logical Positivism (New York, 1966), 134.

⁵⁷ "Dogmatism, Reason and Decision...", TP, 263.

⁵⁸ See Keat, The Politics of Social Theory (Chicago, 1981), 29.

positivists intended their philosophy of science to be as applicable to social life as Comte and Saint-Simon intended "la science positive" to be. In their programmatic statement Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung: Der Wiener Kreis, the political tasks of the Circle are made clear. The connection between logical positivism and scientific political practice is an integral part of the Vienna Circle's program which:

will organize lectures and publications about the present position of the scientific world-conception, in order to demonstrate the significance of exact research for the social sciences and the natural sciences. In this way intellectual tools should be formed for modern empiricism, tools that are also needed in forming public and private life. ... we have to fashion intellectual tools for everyday life, for the daily life of the scholar but also for the daily life of all those who in some way join in working at the conscious re-shaping of life.⁵⁹

Building on early accounts of positive science, the positivism of the Vienna Circle transformed epistemology into the philosophy of science.⁶⁰ The theoretical and critical discourse surrounding the certainty, validity, and political interests of knowledge was reduced to a philosophical process whose primary task "was to analyze knowledge statements with the aim of making such

⁵⁹ Neurath, Empiricism and Sociology (Boston, 1973), 305. Neurath is citing the program of the Ernst Mach Society. For Habermas, Mach's physicalist ontology based in a "doctrine of elements" is a further example of positivist reductionism (KHI, 81ff).

⁶⁰ c.f. KHI, 4.

propositions clear and unambiguous".⁶¹ In the analytical philosophy favoured by the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle, the division between cognitively significant and metaphysical statements defines the boundary of useful science. Theories, and the claims to knowledge they underpin, prove problematic when they cannot be easily reduced to verifiable observational statements. If statements cannot be easily tested, then the general cognitive significance of a system of interrelated statements cannot be assessed.⁶² The epistemological strategy of logical positivism remains consistent on this point. The solution to the quandary of the cognitive significance of theoretically systematized knowledge is to reduce the epistemologically contestable elements of a given theory to the degree of refutability or confirmability of the axiomatically related theoretical statements it contains.

Carl Hempel's modestly reformulated version of "logical empiricism" attempts to come to terms with the imprecise nature of theory and to situate theoretical knowledge within the framework of a positivist understanding of meaning. Commenting on an earlier article Hempel notes:

Cognitive significance cannot well be construed as a characteristic of individual sentences, but only of more or less comprehensive systems of sentences

⁶¹ Caldwell, Beyond Positivism (Boston, 1982), 13.

⁶² c.f. *ibid*, 23ff.

(corresponding roughly to scientific theories). A closer study of this point suggests strongly that, much like the analytic-synthetic distinction, the idea of cognitive significance ... [would be] better replaced by certain concepts which admit of differences in degree; such as the formal simplicity of a system; its explanatory and predictive power, and its degree of confirmation relative to available evidence.⁶³

What remains clear in Hempel's account is that the critically assessed practical dimensions of knowledge itself do not enter into the assessment of its validity which is still to be determined according to the methodological procedures proper to its creation. The validity of knowledge still rests on the methodological determination of the validity of theoretical statements and practical and ethical claims have no epistemological status.

The level of abstraction of a philosophical process that focuses on the logical analysis of scientific statements cloaks the overall methodological emphasis of logical positivism as an epistemological position. In Hempel's incrementalist approach to cognitive significance, knowledge is measured in terms of the parsimony of the theoretical statements upon which it is based, the technical efficacy or predictive power it provides, and the level of evidential or empirical verification that an essentially unreflective positivist methodology is able to ascertain. In this light, theories which address the normative dimensions of forms of

⁶³ C. Hempel, "The Empiricist Criterion of Meaning", in Ayer, 129.

social organization are sui generis cognitively less significant than those which lend themselves to technical control.

In an instrumentally rationalized society which accords great value to the technical mastery of the world made possible by science, the epistemological criteria for valid or cognitively significant scientific knowledge are of great importance for the practical realm of politics as well. The interaction between the epistemological perspective of science and the practice of social research provides numerous cases in which scientific knowledge justifies a particular research strategy or public policy. A researcher working within an expert scientific culture in which the general rules for cognitive significance are based in the epistemological framework of logical positivism will recognize certain theoretical explanations as being more meaningful than others. For example a social theory which utilizes conventional economic measures and addresses the effectiveness of public policies in stabilizing investment markets would be more more cognitively significant than an approach that directly addresses the value of capital markets in terms of their negative or positive impact on the practical domain of human life. While the former approach can readily compare the technical efficacy of policy measures in terms of a factual object domain, the latter

theory must support its essentially normative claims with empirical evidence that can be politically and practically contested. The hypothetical-deductive analysis of the first theory tests the validity of theory on logical positive grounds of factual confirmation, building the validity of knowledge claims into the methodology of research. Since the knowledge generated is immediately applicable for purposes of technical control of social processes, the epistemological contestability of the theory is largely irrelevant to its supposed validity. The practical and political contestability of the claims to knowledge resulting from the second theory render them a priori cognitively less significant within the logical positivist epistemological framework since their application presupposes communicative and political interaction rather than technical decision.

In terms of logical positivist science, practical questions are undecidable. The epistemological reduction of the range of possible knowledge that takes place in positivist model of science brackets out the explicit consideration of normative claims to knowledge since critical reflection on the ethical dimensions of the practice that science legitimizes cannot be included as a meaningful operation in the generation of knowledge. For Habermas, the possibility of a critically reflective

dialogue being integrated into the investigative procedure of positivist, empirical-analytical science is remote. The nature of scientific reasoning precludes the establishment of such a dialogue since "deduction, induction, and abduction establish relations between statements that are in principle monologic."⁶⁴ The instrumental and technical rationality required by science is uncommunicative and thus anti-political.

I can use syllogistic reasoning to yield statements for a discussion, but I cannot argue syllogistically with an other. Insofar as the employment of symbols is constitutive for the behavioral system of instrumental action, the use of language involved is monologic. But the communication of investigators requires the use of language that is not confined to the limits of technical control over objectified natural processes. It arises from the symbolic interaction between societal subjects who reciprocally know and recognize each other as unmistakable individuals. This communicative action is a system of reference that cannot be reduced to the framework of instrumental action.⁶⁵

For Habermas the danger in a scientistic culture is that the political and communicative interactions which uphold the community or "lifeworld" will become "colonized" by the instrumental forms of reason proper to a science which seeks technical control of nature.⁶⁶ In such a situation the practical concerns of political and communicative interaction are subordinated to the technical efficiency of

⁶⁴ KHI, 137.

⁶⁵ KHI, 137.

⁶⁶ c.f. LS, 113-197.

social systems.

The ultimate outcome of an understanding of knowledge which excludes both questions of value and statements which cannot be verified in logical empirical terms, is to discount the interests bound up with science itself. The theoretical question of what constitutes valid knowledge most certainly guides, directly or indirectly, the practice of scientific research. It is precisely this contestable relationship between theory and practice that positivism's scientistic self understanding of scientific practice excludes from consideration. When knowledge is reduced to method and theory to the operations required to confirm it, the possibility that a given theoretical logic may have practical political significance is not considered. In Habermas's view, scientism's practical outcome is to reduce politics to a decisionistic process, since theory and practice, as well as epistemology and method, collapse into each other in the positivist philosophy of science.

Habermas believes that normative claims to knowledge can admit of truth, only on the basis of a different set of criteria for cognitive significance. If we are unable to rationally consider the truth and validity of the practical questions important to the political life of our communities, it is because of the dominance of scientific models of politics and "the conviction that we can no longer

understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science."⁶⁷ Critical epistemological reflection on the cognitive interests which connect scientific knowledge with its domain of practical application is part of Habermas's attempt to harness the technical power of science for the practical ends of human emancipation.

3.3 COGNITIVE INTERESTS AND CRITIQUE

It is in Knowledge and Human Interests that Habermas first elaborates his theory of cognitive interests. In a later commentary, Habermas refers to the technical-instrumental orientation of science and the interpretive orientation of hermeneutic inquiry as expressive of "anthropologically deep-seated interests, which direct our knowledge and which have a quasi-transcendental status".⁶⁸ This "quasi-transcendental" status is linked to the fundamental role of cognitive interests in guiding the process of scientific inquiry and the elaboration of forms of possible knowledge. In Habermas's account, specific and discernable interests inform the "structure of the possible application" of knowledge that is generated from within both the natural and human sciences, and the "critically oriented sciences" of

⁶⁷ KHI, 4.

⁶⁸ "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 8.

Marx and Freud.

Cognitive interest theory thus involves deciphering the process by which society generates and utilizes knowledge. But Habermas's theory is quite distinct from the approach deployed in the sociology of knowledge. The "quasi-transcendental" character of the interests which constitute knowledge is a clear indication that Habermas is dealing with fundamental concerns surrounding the validity, certainty, and epistemological foundations of knowledge. Rather than the sociology of knowledge, cognitive interest theory concerns the theory of knowledge per se. In Knowledge and Human Interests Habermas approaches epistemology from a critical perspective.

Such an epistemological emphasis is perhaps not out of place in a work which addresses itself to issues in the philosophy of science. But an emphasis on epistemic questions is part of a general tendency in Habermas's work which he attempts to justify as follows:

There are two reasons for stressing the connection between epistemology and social theory. For one thing, the constituent elements of social systems cannot be adequately understood without epistemological clarification of the status of those cognitive achievements which are both dependent on truth and related to action. For another, the epistemological attempts to reconstruct cognitive competence take the form of hypotheses which can be indirectly tested by being used in the construction of theories of social evolution.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ "A Postscript", 160.

The reconstruction of the cognitive competencies or knowledge utilized in the reproduction of human social life, which Habermas characterizes as a "logical analysis of the development and use of theories", is one such attempt.⁷⁰ Epistemological reflection on cognitive interests is Habermas's methodological approach to both the critique of science and the development of a critical theory of knowledge. As Kortian notes: "Self-reflection may be understood as an instrument which makes the reconstruction of knowledge possible".⁷¹ Such an approach poses the question of the relationship of theory to practice in "scientific civilization" in terms of a model of knowledge constituting interests.

Cognitive interests are knowledge constituting interests which, similar to Kant's transcendental categories, create the conditions of possible knowledge and experience. Rooted in the natural history and material circumstances of the human species, cognitive interests retain only a quasi-transcendental character in comparison with Kantian cognitive faculties. As Ottman puts it "interests are 'beings-in-between' [inter esse] or mediators between life and knowledge".⁷² But cognitive interests are not a source of ideological bias or distortion which must be overcome in

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 159.

⁷¹ Kortian (1980), 59

⁷² Ottman "Cognitive Interests and Reflection", HCD, 82.

order to yield scientifically valid theoretical knowledge.

Rather, they result from the imperatives of a sociocultural life-form dependent on labor and language. Therefore the technical and practical interests of knowledge are not regulators of cognition which have to be eliminated for the sake of the objectivity of knowledge; instead, they themselves determine the aspect under which reality is objectified, and can thus be made accessible to experience to begin with. They are the conditions which are necessary in order that subjects capable of speech and action may have experience which can lay a claim to objectivity.⁷³

These interests are universal in their scope, that is they comprise the entire horizon of possible experience or knowledge. Furthermore, the interests underlying the objectifying experience of the material world are, to all intents and purposes, invariable and arise from the instrumental manipulation of the material world that "is equally binding on all subjects that keep alive through labor".⁷⁴

Habermas views scientific inquiry as proceeding in the context of three fundamental constellations of human interests. The natural sciences and certain applications of social science aim at producing deductive-nomological knowledge which furthers the capacity for instrumental control over their respective object domains. The

⁷³ "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 9.

⁷⁴ KHI, 35. Habermas is speaking here of the invariability of the cognitive dimensions of the labor process that are mediated by our necessary and binding relationship with the material world. He is not denying the importance of political and economic divisions within the labor process itself.

humanities or 'human sciences' [Geisteswissenschaften] aim at achieving accurate interpretation or understanding [Verstehen] of a meaningful symbolically structured domain of inquiry. The "critically oriented sciences" aim at reflection and critique in order critically direct action beyond its seemingly "natural" constraints. Each form of inquiry is informed by a specific set of knowledge constitutive interests.

There are three categories of processes of inquiry for which a specific connection between logical-methodological rules and knowledge-constitutive interests can be demonstrated. This demonstration is the task of a critical philosophy of science that escapes the snares of positivism. The approach of the empirical-analytic sciences incorporates a technical cognitive interest; that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences incorporates a practical one; and the approach of the critically oriented sciences incorporates the emancipatory cognitive interest.⁷⁵

In a later version of his theory Habermas modifies his categorial elaboration of possible forms of scientific inquiry to include reconstructive method. In the most recent formulation, reconstructive science is situated between empirical and hermeneutic science, incorporating elements of both approaches and serving to distinguish two forms of reflection: ethical critique and the reconstruction of the conditions of possible knowledge.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ "Appendix", KHI, 308.

⁷⁶ See "A Postscript". c.f. Hesse, HCD, 109-114 and hereabove, 44.

In Habermas's view, the three cognitively fruitful approaches to inquiry establish limits to our culturally conditioned view of scientific reality and nature.

Orientation toward technical control, toward mutual understanding in the conduct of life, and toward emancipation from seemingly 'natural' constraint establish the specific viewpoints from which we can apprehend reality as such in any way whatsoever. By becoming aware of the impossibility of getting beyond these transcendental limits, a part of nature acquires, through us, autonomy in nature.⁷⁷

For Habermas, only the emancipatory interest in autonomy can be said to have an a priori status inherent in the nature of reflective critique itself.⁷⁸ In the technical and practical interests bound up with the empirical-analytical and hermeneutic sciences, unacknowledged external conditions lead to an illusory conception of pure theory in which the self-understanding of science rests on "unswerving application of their methods without reflecting on knowledge-constitutive interests".⁷⁹

It is in the context of this objectivating tendency of uncritical science that the theoretical knowledge derived from unreflective cognitive interests in technical control and pragmatic preservation of the cultural medium of symbolic interaction has its greatest impact on social practice. As a consequence of objectivating and

⁷⁷ "Appendix", KHI, 311.

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 314.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, 315.

unreflective theory,

the positivist self-understanding of the nomological sciences lends countenance to the substitution of technology for enlightened action. It directs the utilization of scientific information from an illusory viewpoint, namely that the practical mastery of history can be reduced to technical control of objectified processes. The objectivist self-understanding of the hermeneutic sciences is of no lesser consequence. It defends sterilized knowledge against the reflected appropriation of active traditions and locks up history in a museum.⁸⁰

The debilitating effects of positivistic conceptions of social theory on political practice have been explored earlier in this chapter. It is Habermas's contention that an unreflective form of hermeneutic inquiry which reifies traditional forms of consciousness can have equally as negative effects on the political process.⁸¹

Habermas sees the reflective power of critical theory as providing a critical epistemological corrective to the objectivating theoretical influence of science on social practice. The "practical consequences of a restricted, scientistic consciousness of the sciences can be countered by a critique that destroys the illusion of objectivism".⁸² Through critical reflection on the cognitive interests underlying science, Habermas hopes to resolve the

⁸⁰ "Appendix", KHI, 316.

⁸¹ Habermas develops this critique of hermeneutics further in "A Review of Gadamer's Truth and Method", Dallmayr (1977), 335-363.

⁸² "Appendix", KHI, 316.

problematic and unreflective relationship between theory and practice. At the epistemological level, cognitive interest theory attempts to critically recapture the technical power of science and the practical achievement of understanding in hermeneutic inquiry. Reflective critique is seen as furthering the practical emancipation of historical subjects towards autonomy and freedom from the "seemingly natural" social relations of power and domination that technocratic social science and reified cultural tradition serve to reinforce.

Such emphasis on the epistemological elements of critique reveals an obvious bias towards cognitivist explanations of social action. By withdrawing critique to the epistemological level, Habermas avoids directly confronting the theory-practice question and paradoxically engages in an process of abstraction that has similar results to the type of objectifying self-understanding he charges science with being subject to. As Melvyn Hill points out, "Habermas follows the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body, and reduces questions of society to questions of cognition".⁸³ From the perspective of cognitive interest theory the practical power of reflection appears considerable. The objectifying tendency within the technical and practical interests underlying science and hermeneutics dissolves in

⁸³ M. A. Hill, "Jürgen Habermas: A Social Science of the Mind" Philosophy of Social Science 2 (September 1972) 257.

face of "the emancipatory power of reflection." This is a power "which the subject experiences in itself to the extent that it becomes transparent to itself in the history of its genesis".⁸⁴

Thus, at the ontological level, Habermas seems to actually equate reflective critique with autonomy. "In self-reflection, knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility [Mündigkeit]" . It is as if the possession or the "experience" of critical knowledge - the transparent critical appreciation of one's genesis - is itself a form of freedom since "the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a movement of emancipation".⁸⁵ This ontological conflation of the cognitive process of reflection with the experience of freedom and autonomy is revisited in the distinction of the fundamental categories of cognitive interest themselves. In this context, the "anthropological status" of cognitive interests is at issue as well. Habermas seems to see labour, interaction and power - the basic conditions within which knowledge-constitutive interests take form - as being anthropologically equivalent categories of human experience.⁸⁶ But as McCarthy notes, "critical self-reflection does not, on the face of it, possess the

⁸⁴ KHI, 197.

⁸⁵ KHI, 197-198.

⁸⁶ KHI, 313.

same anthropological primordiality as the mastery of nature and the achievement of understanding in ordinary language communication".⁸⁷

Cognitive interest theory is best understood in the context of Habermas's overall critical theoretical project. Originally, Erkenntnis und Interesse (1968) [Knowledge and Human Interests] developed as an extension of the discussions of science and critical theory undertaken in Theorie und Praxis (1963) [Theory and Practice] in order to critically sketch out the process by which political-economic and "anthropologically deep-seated" human interests are inscribed in scientific knowledge. But, in avoiding any claims to ethically guide practice other than through relentless reflection, Habermas's approach verges on merely critical criticism. As one commentator notes, "the attempt to ground practice in the transcendental conditions of theory does justice to neither".⁸⁸ With the development of reconstructive method Habermas's later formulations of cognitive interest theory remain consistent in this attempt, perhaps in an effort to epistemologically redeem the neutral (interest free?) methodology of reconstruction in the interests of practical critique.⁸⁹ The conceptual ambiguity

⁸⁷ McCarthy CTJH, 92-93.

⁸⁸ McCarthy CTJH, 98. Referring to Dietrich Böhler.

⁸⁹ c.f. "A Postscript" 160-161, "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 7-9.

of reflection, which Habermas addresses in "A Postscript", partly results from his attempt, through cognitive interest theory, to construct both a theory of knowledge and a critical theory capable of instigating social change. In Habermas's version though, a critical epistemology that attempts to be both practical and reflective proves to be theoretically problematic.

3.4 POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

The relationship between theory and practice goes to the heart of Political Science. Ideas which concern social organization and public administration, decision making technologies and scientific theories of political behavior are forms of knowledge which are directly implicated in social practice. Political knowledge and theory constitute potential interventions into political practice. In this sense Political Science, to the extent that it studies socially relevant public policy and the power relationships that impact upon it, is called upon to adopt a critical orientation. Since Political Science primarily produces "knowledge that orients action" it includes inescapable ethical implications.

This is exactly the kind of knowledge that is functionally necessary for a practically rational guidance of the productive power of science together with its social consequences and by-products.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?",

The relevance to a critically-oriented political science of Habermas's epistemological reflection on the relationship of theory to practice is evident. Fay's approach similarly incorporates elements of general theory. But Fay has elaborated a precise means for methodologically incorporating critique into scientific procedure.⁹¹ Habermas's approach tends to logically and theoretically separate the critically reflective epistemological moment of knowledge from its practical application. Böhler critiques Habermas for this tendency, stating that:

Practical emancipation, as a historical self-reflection, does not aim at the pursuit of universal knowledge or reflection as such. Rather it aims at the practical transposition of the situational knowledge that particular individuals and groups can gain through clarifying their personal life history or their social situation. Thus historical self-reflection is not a matter of formal-emancipatory knowledge for the sake of knowing and in general, but of practical-emancipatory knowledge for the sake of action and in a concrete situation.⁹²

While Habermas's contention that the sciences are inherently monological may have merit, the dialogical element of critical reflection only enters into the practical considerations of his own theory in an indirect fashion.⁹³

Philosophical-Political Profiles, 16.

⁹¹ c.f. B. Fay, Social Theory and Political Practice (Allen & Unwin: London, 1975).

⁹² Dietrich Böhler, cited in McCarthy CTJH, 98.

⁹³ Alford suggests that the concept of monologicality is employed merely as "technical argot and as rhetoric". Science and the Revenge of Nature (U Press of Florida, 1985), 106-108.

Habermas thus overestimates the power of a logically isolated reflection which may be crucial for a critically oriented Political Science since the object domain of Political Science concerns social action which is often inseparable from cognition.

Habermas's views on science have changed since the first publication of Knowledge and Human Interests. In the second volume of The Theory of Communicative Action he has shifted the focus from scientism to functionalist reasoning. In the chapter that follows traces of Habermas's tendency to collapse empirical claims into epistemological ones are evident even in the context of the empirical applications of his critical social theory. A cognitivist theory of practice that emphasizes cognition over action provides the epistemological backdrop to Habermas's political sociology of modern capitalism, which largely focuses on the critical reconstruction of systems theory.

Chapter IV

CRITICAL ANALYSIS: LEGITIMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Thus far our summary and analysis of Habermas's work has made clear his concern with establishing the epistemological foundations of critical theory. However, in the course of his engagement in methodological and epistemological arguments, Habermas has outlined a series of significant and interrelated empirical generalizations regarding modern capitalist social formations. The empirical applications of critical theory that Habermas has developed in the course of his primarily philosophical and epistemological enterprise, provide important insights into the real dimensions of his notion of an "empirical philosophy of history with a practical intent". In part, the empirical research he has undertaken connects with later programmatic statements regarding the place of a theory of rationality in social science.¹ An examination of Habermas's applications of critical social science reveals a pattern of research in which a gradual transition is effected, away from early critical reflections on the aporias of historical materialism and towards the elaboration of foundations for a methodology of critical theory.

¹ c.f. RRS, 136-141.

In general, the empirical contributions Habermas has made to the analysis of society can be divided into two distinct phases which accord with this transition in theoretical strategy. In his earlier studies of contemporary capitalist society Habermas focuses part of his critique on what he sees as obsolete Marxist categories of analysis.² As part of this effort Habermas undertakes to critically reappropriate the systems theory approaches of Niklas Luhmann and subsequently Talcott Parsons.³ In the later and most recent stages of his work Habermas shifts the focus of his research away from the critique of historical materialism and towards a concern with the epistemological bases of science and critical theory.⁴ In this phase, the empirical dimension of Habermas's work is reduced in importance as he sets out to elaborate the epistemological foundations of critical theory in terms of a theory of communicative action. Habermas admits in a subsequent commentary that to "expound the

² c.f. "Technology and Science as Ideology", TRS, 107-122. Habermas devotes very little attention to contemporary authoritarian state socialism. One exception is "Between Philosophy and Science: Marxism as Critique", TP, 184-186. See also Arato's (1982) essay in HCD, 196-218.

³ See LC and J. Habermas and N. Luhmann Theorie der Gesellschaft oder Sozialtechnologie Was Leistet die Systemforschung? (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp: 1971). Habermas's surprisingly extensive treatment of Parsons appears in LS, volume two of The Theory of Communicative Action.

⁴ The turning point in this transition seems to be KHI and "A Postscript" where Habermas first begins to connect his emerging theory of communication with the methodological requirements of critical theory. c.f. KHI, 192,210-213,314; "A Postscript", 166-171.

universality of the concept of communicative action" without the epistemic "guarantees of the great philosophical tradition" may prove empirically taxing.⁵ His strategy is thus to opt for an approach which attempts to "introduce the theory of communicative action in connection with ... the theory of rationalization".⁶

In the context of this overall strategy Habermas critically reconstructs the work of a series of important social theorists including Durkheim, Mead and Marx. However, at this point he chooses to focus principally on the work of Max Weber, whose theory of societal rationalization we have discussed in Chapter One, and Talcott Parsons, whose attempt to fuse a normative theory of action with a systems theory of action-orienting pattern variables provides the inspiration for Habermas's critical analysis of modern social pathologies on the basis of a communicative theory of action. With his reconstruction of Weber, Habermas demonstrates how an understanding of societal rationalization according to the principles of a critical theory of communicative action differs from an analysis based solely on a purposive-instrumental model of rationality. With his reconstruction of Parsons, Habermas critically readapts the action-theoretic elements of Parsons' early theories to accord with those elements of

⁵ RRS, 138-139.

⁶ *ibid*, 137.

Parsonian systems theory he feels are important to the task of explaining the politics of modern societies on the basis "systemically induced lifeworld pathologies".⁷ However, the empirical aspects of this effort are not central to his intentions. Habermas states his purpose for these reconstructions as follows:

I shall take up conceptual strategies, assumptions and lines of argument from Weber to Parsons with the systematic aim of laying out the problems that can be solved by means of a theory of rationalization developed in terms of the basic concept of communicative action.⁸

Thus, while his most recent publications have tended to shift away from the critique of the philosophy of science, Habermas's "empirical" work still bears the stamp of the same fundamental concern with the philosophical grounds of valid knowledge. Habermas is considered to be one of the foremost representatives of the critical theoretical approach to social science. Since much of his work relates directly or indirectly to the question of the relationship between theory and practice that is fundamental to this approach, the characterization would appear to be fair.⁹ Nonetheless, it is obvious that Habermas's approach to social science is primarily an epistemologically critical one which places much stock in the power of reflection and

⁷ LS, 197.

⁸ RRS, 139-140.

⁹ c.f. discussion in "The Dialectics of Rationalization: An Interview", esp. 5-12.

is less concerned with critically guiding the actual practice of social change.

In following the unfolding theoretical logic outlined above, from the critique of established historical materialist analysis to the empirical elaboration of a communicative epistemological foundation for critical theory, Habermas has participated in a paradigm shift in critical social science from "purposive activity to communicative action".¹⁰ The present chapter is organized along similar lines. In the first section the connection between epistemological critique and empirical theory is outlined with reference to Habermas's distinction between labour and interaction. Habermas's theory of communicative competence will be considered in this context as well. In the second section Habermas's attempt at speculative empirical analysis in Legitimation Crisis is summarized. Section three briefly outlines Habermas's appropriation of Parsons in Lifeworld and System. In the final section, a short commentary attempts to place in perspective the critical dimensions of Habermas's empirical applications of his social theory.

¹⁰ RRS, 140. c.f. Roderick, 156-166.

4.1 LABOUR AND INTERACTION

In the "Appendix" to Knowledge and Human Interests Habermas formulates five important theses regarding human interests which link the primarily epistemological critique comprised by cognitive interest theory to the reconstruction and empirical investigation of modern society. These theses will only be briefly introduced at this point since for the purposes of this chapter our discussion will focus on those specific elements of Habermas's presentation which are crucial to the transposition of his theory of knowledge constitutive interests into an empirical project.

In systematically restating the primary aims of cognitive interest theory, Habermas maintains the following points: 1) That "the achievements of the transcendental subject have their basis in the natural history of the human species" and that cognition is thus imbedded in a social network in which "orientation toward technical control, toward mutual understanding in the conduct of life and toward emancipation from seemingly 'natural' constraints establish the specific viewpoints from which we can apprehend reality as such".¹¹ 2) That knowledge serves as a tool in self-preservation but transcends the mere instinct for survival. The "cognitive processes to which social life is indissolubly linked function not only as means to the reproduction of life; for

¹¹ "Appendix", KHI, 311-312.

in equal measure they themselves determine the definitions of this life".¹² Consequently, 3) these definitions are shaped by the social medium of "work, language and power" in which they are articulated.¹³ As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Habermas holds to the notion that critical reflection can act as a force in emancipation. It is language which underpins the interest in autonomy and gives expression to the emancipatory knowledge that is generated through critical reflection. "Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us", giving rise to the thesis 4) that "in the power of self-reflection, knowledge and interest are one".¹⁴ This unity of knowledge and interest in reflection, Habermas feels, should not be construed ideologically as pure philosophy "wanting to derive everything from itself". Thus 5) the reflective unity of knowledge and interest in seeking emancipation "proves itself in a dialectic that takes the historical traces of suppressed dialogue and reconstructs what has been suppressed".¹⁵ The emancipatory power of reflection is empirically redeemed through historical reconstruction.

¹² "Appendix", KHI, 312-313.

¹³ *ibid*, 313.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 314.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 314-315.

Of these five theses, the final three are most relevant for the empirical dimensions of Habermas's theory. Thesis 3) links cognitive interest theory to the socially embedded milieu of work and language. Here knowledge is subject to the political forces of the state and economic interests. As Habermas notes:

The human species secures its existence in systems of social labour and self-assertion through violence, through tradition-bound social life in ordinary-language communication, and with the aid of ego identities that at every level of individuation reconsolidate the consciousness of the individual in relation to the norms of the group. Accordingly the interests constitutive of knowledge are linked to the function of an ego that adapts itself to its external conditions through learning processes, is initiated into the communication system of a social life-world by means of self-formative processes and constructs an identity in the conflict between aims and social constraints. In turn these achievements become part of the productive forces accumulated by a society, the cultural tradition through which a society interprets itself, and the legitimations that a society accepts or criticizes.¹⁶

The technical cognitive interest which prioritizes instrumental control, and the practical cognitive interest which constitutes knowledge on the basis of hermeneutic understanding, are empirically expressed in the social realms of labour and interaction. These categories are fundamental to Habermas's empirical reconstruction of society and his theoretical reconstruction of historical materialism. The transcendental character of these categories is reflected in the assertion that "labour and

¹⁶ "Appendix", KHI, 313.

language are older than man and society"¹⁷ and goes some distance in explaining the consistent application and thematic importance of the dichotomous elements of instrumental and communicative action orientations.

Habermas first distinguishes the categories of labour and interaction in his discussions of Hegel and Marx.¹⁸ In the context of Habermas's overall theoretical project, the distinction is part of an effort to critically reconstruct the mechanistic aspects of Marxian analysis. In Habermas's view, Marx does not sufficiently explicate the role of language and culture in the general process of social reproduction. From this perspective Marx's proposal for a radical revolutionary break with the reifying and alienating forces of technical-instrumental reason in all of their politically and economically institutionalized forms is necessarily a narrowly-posed solution to the social ills plaguing capitalism.

Marx does not actually explicate the interrelationship of interaction and labour, but instead, under the unspecific title of social praxis, reduces one to the other, namely: communicative action to instrumental action. ... [T]he productive activity which regulates the material interchange of the human species with its natural environment, becomes the paradigm for the generation of all the categories; everything is resolved into the self-movement of production. Because of this, Marx's brilliant insight into the

¹⁷ "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism", CES, 137.

¹⁸ See "Labor and Interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena Philosophy of Mind", TP, 142-169; and KHI, 25-42.

dialectical relationship between the forces of production and the relations of production could very quickly be misinterpreted in a mechanistic manner.¹⁹

The motivation for this reconstruction is not only to be found in the attempt to render Marx's theoretical logic more consistent and to increase the methodological scope of Marxian inspired social theory. More importantly, in the context of his theoretical reconstruction of historical materialism Habermas is attempting to adapt Marxist critique to the changed empirical circumstances of capitalism. Increasingly, the application of science and technology as crucial social forces in the development of capitalist economic production has rendered Marx's labour theory of value less relevant to the critique of the private accumulation of socially produced surpluses.²⁰ Because of this and other related tendencies, "capitalist society has changed to the point where two key categories of Marxian theory, namely class struggle and ideology, can no longer be employed as they stand".²¹

Labour and interaction are thus concepts that form part of the critique of Marxism and the attempt to develop a critical model of society that accounts for the rationalizing influence of science. As well, labor and

¹⁹ "Labor and Interaction...", TP, 168-169.

²⁰ "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", TRS, 104-105.

²¹ *ibid*, 107.

interaction are part of the critique of the types of rationality and interest that mediate the history of human society. With the appearance of Knowledge and Human Interests and Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie', the reconstructed concepts of labour and interaction are deployed both as empirical explanations of society and as part of Habermas's epistemological critique of science.²² Labour and interaction, as empirical elements of the process of self-formative development [Bildungsprozesse] of human culture and society, are thus connected to the knowledge-constitutive interests which underpin the sciences.

The distinction of three sets of knowledge-constitutive interests ultimately revolves around a fundamental dichotomy between purposive-rational and communicative rationality. As Giddens notes, the third set of emancipatory interests "lacks content, and obtains its existence from the bringing together of nomological and hermeneutic concerns in the critique of ideology".²³ Thesis 4) above, reflects the essentially formal character of emancipatory interests in this sense, which, "in the power of self-reflection", express an interest in autonomy and freedom from domination.

²² Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie' was published at the same time as Erkenntnis und Interesse but appeared in English translation as part of TRS before the latter work was translated to appear as Knowledge and Human Interests.

²³ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction", HCD, 153.

Giddens's general objections to Habermas on this point converge on the tendency in such a dichotomous theoretical schema to reduce labour solely to purposive-instrumental action and interaction to the consensual norms which govern it.²⁴ Such an approach does not allow for an accounting of the fact that "there is more to interaction than the norms to which it is oriented".²⁵ As well, as McCarthy notes, a focus on the exclusively purposive-rational elements of labour implies that the labour process is "not governed by social norms, not grounded in intersubjectivity, not sanctioned by convention, in short, not social."²⁶

Habermas's response to these criticisms involves him in the elaboration of a further set of distinctions in his typology of social action.²⁷ This approach rests in his effort to elaborate an empirical dimension of thesis 5) through the application of reconstructive method to the domain of pragmatic speech acts. Habermas's theory of universal pragmatics can thus be conceived of as an attempt to empirically ground the human interest in autonomy and freedom in the reconstruction of the categories of competent communicative action.

²⁴ Giddens, "Labour and Interaction", HCD, 156-157.

²⁵ *ibid*, 158.

²⁶ McCarthy CTJH, 26.

²⁷ "A Response to My Critics", HCD, 263-269.

Habermas's attempts to sketch out a more intricate explanation of varieties of social action do not satisfactorily resolve the problems created by the analytical gulf introduced by the labour-interaction dichotomy. In responding to Giddens, Habermas introduces the following schematic set of distinctions together with

Schema of Action Types

Sphere of action	Actor	
	Oriented to success	Oriented to reaching understanding
Non-social	Instrumental action	---
Social	Strategic action	Communicative action

various refinements to the notion of interaction.²⁸

But despite developing formal distinctions between forms of social action and communication, Habermas's division of work and interaction still stands. Associated with instrumental action, labour remains a fundamentally 'less social' category than interaction.²⁹ Grounded in the technical

²⁸ "A Response to My Critics", HCD, 263. See also "What is Universal Pragmatics", CES, 208n2, for Habermas's summary of the importance of the modifications he introduces to the notion of social and communicative action.

²⁹ This understanding of the relationship between labor and interaction appears in Habermas's latest treatment of the subject. c.f. RRS, 284-288; LS, 185-197.

cognitive interest in manipulation and, control of objectified procedures, the labour process does not include within itself the cognitive potential for emancipation and autonomy.

In Knowledge and Human Interests Habermas indicates in which direction he feels a possible epistemological foundation for the knowledge constitutive human interests in emancipation may lie.

The human interest in autonomy and responsibility is not mere fancy, for it can be apprehended a priori. What raises us out of nature is the only thing whose nature we can know: language. Through its structure, autonomy and responsibility are posited for us. Our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus.³⁰

Whereas the societal rationalization that Weber describes proceeds according to purposive-instrumental reason, rationalization according to the standards of communicative action reintroduces the emphatic notion of reason understood as autonomy and freedom from domination. At the level of empirical investigation Habermas connects this potential rationalization process to a tentative model of social evolution which has as its aim the elaboration of "developmental-logical connections for the ontogenesis of action competence".³¹ The communicative rationalization of society would replace the organizational principle of

³⁰ "Appendix", KHI, 314.

³¹ "Toward a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism", CES, 154.

instrumental reason with a set of institutional norms and practices guided by the counterfactual possibility of communicatively shared generalizable interests.³²

While instrumental action corresponds to the constraint of external nature and the level of the forces of production determines the extent of technical control over natural forces, communicative action stands in correspondence to the suppression of man's own nature. ... A society owes emancipation from the external forces of nature to labour processes Emancipation from the compulsion of internal nature succeeds to the degree that institutions based on force are replaced by an organization of social relations that is bound only to communication free from domination.³³

The accumulation and deployment of knowledge constituted through the mediation of the "quasi-transcendental" interests connected to instrumental and communicative forms of rationality is a continuous process. Habermas's notion of the ongoing engagement of an actor in communicative actions within society is similar to the speech act theory of John Searle.³⁴ It is on the basis of such a theory of pragmatic speech acts that Habermas develops a theory of communicative competence which places the emancipatory interest in autonomy and responsibility on an empirically verifiable level of analysis. The ability of speakers to reach political consensus on the basis of undistorted

³² See LC, 113. c.f. Wellmer "Communications and Emancipation", On Critical Theory O'Neill ed. (New York, 1976), 246.

³³ KHI, 53.

³⁴ c.f. White, 1159.

communicative actions oriented towards mutual understanding both expresses this interest in freedom and serves as a "counterfactual" standard for its realization.

According to Habermas, in the ideal situation, where speech is undistorted by political or economic interest and participants have an equal opportunity to engage in communication, would naturally produce an agreement in which solely the force of the better argument would prevail. This ideal is implicitly understood by all participants in communication.

No matter how the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding may be deformed, the design of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied in the structure of potential speech.³⁵

Such a counterfactual yet empirically ascertainable speech situation provides the means for disclosing the "normative implications that lie in the concept of possible understanding".³⁶ In counterfactually imputing an ideal situation of communication free from the distorting influence of power and instrumental rationality, competent speakers reconstitute the standards of "truth, freedom and justice" which are called upon in asserting validity claims in communication.³⁷

³⁵ "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence", 372.

³⁶ "Some Difficulties ...", TP, 17.

³⁷ "Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence", 374.

In Theory and Practice Habermas summarizes the validity claims inherent in communicative action. Four fundamental claims must be satisfied for communication to successfully take place : 1) the comprehensibility of expression - the statement must be understandable; 2) the authenticity of the speaker - whether or not the speaker believes the statement to be true; 3) the truthfulness of the expression itself and 4) the normative rightness of the expression with respect to existing values.³⁸ The universality of these claims arises from their implicit connection with the fundamental distinction between labor and interaction that informs the self-formative process of social reproduction.

In action oriented to reaching understanding, validity claims are 'always already' implicitly raised. These universal claims (to the comprehensibility of the symbolic expression, the truth of the propositional content, the truthfulness of the intentional expression, and the rightness of the speech act with respect to existing norms and values) are set in the general structures of possible communication. In these validity claims communication theory can locate a gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason, a claim that must be recognized de facto whenever and wherever there is to be consensual action. If this is idealism, then idealism belongs in a most natural way to the conditions of reproduction of a species that must preserve its life through labor and interaction, that is, also by virtue of propositions that can be true and norms that are in need of justification.³⁹

³⁸ "Some Difficulties...", TP, 18.

³⁹ "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures", CES, 97.

In communicative action the validity claims underlying competent interaction are "assumed naively" without recourse to argument. When problematic validity claims are introduced into communication they require the displacement of communication to the level of discourse where claims to validity are virtualized or suspended and are open to discursive argument. In discourse "facts are transformed into states of affairs which may or may not be the case, and norms are transformed into recommendations and warnings which may be correct or appropriate but also incorrect or inappropriate".⁴⁰

The naive assumption of validity in normal communicative action is possible because of institutionalized forms of discourse and the existence of a social stock of "pre-understanding" [Vorverständigung] that provides actors with the ability to refer to pre-interpreted meanings and understandings. In communicative action "oriented towards understanding" the redemption of validity claims is "always already" required for competent interaction to occur. Thus, as noted, the rationalization of communicative action means "extirpating those relations of force that are set in the very structures of communication".⁴¹ For Habermas the achievement of a rational society in which truth and

⁴⁰ "Some Difficulties...", TP, 19.

⁴¹ "Historical Materialism and the Development of Normative Structures", CES, 119.

normative rightness are reconciled depends upon the elimination of systematic distortion in social interaction. The empirical test of the degree of actual historical realization of such a rational society corresponds with the degree to which communicatively achieved rational consensus of discursive will-formation can be said to serve as the predominant organizational principle within a society.⁴²

Emphasizing the communicative and interactionist elements of the empirical dimension of his project, Habermas seeks to ground the human interest in freedom in a linguistically and pragmatically presupposed counterfactual ideal of undistorted communication. It is in discourse, which is susceptible to institutionalization in theoretical or practical form, that generalizable interests in freedom are articulated and can be rationally justified. In the discursive bracketing and argument over the value of normative validity claims, the process of collective will-formation is able to give voice to communicatively shared political aspirations. It is in the category of discourse as an analytical concept that Habermas's concern with the foundation and validity of knowledge is 'empirically' expressed in his theory of society. But in his effort to provide a communicative epistemological foundation for human interest in autonomy and responsibility, Habermas has bracketed the real material and

⁴² LC, 113.

practical intention of the interest in freedom from his own theoretical discourse. It is as if Habermas feels that the experience of politically mediated exchange with the material world or the simple moral practical value of emphatic reason are not sufficient to ground claims to emancipatory knowledge. From this perspective Habermas's motivation in developing an empirical application of communicative action theory in universal pragmatics and communicative competence is clear: the reconstruction of the logical qualities of speech and communication must redeem normative knowledge which otherwise would be left without cognitive support.

This pattern is revisited in Habermas's political sociological analysis of contemporary capitalist society. By linking the discussion of communicative competence and the ideal speech situation to the systematic crisis-inducing tendencies of capitalism, and by adopting aspects of systems theory for his analysis of political legitimation, Habermas transposes the labour-interaction dichotomy into an opposition between the priorities of system-maintenance versus the rationality of normative validity claims. Habermas views the "suppression of generalizable interests" through the mediation of system-legitimizing ideology as a depoliticizing restriction on communication and, in a more general sense, as an element in the developmental logic of

legitimation problems.⁴³ Whether the critical analysis of the empirical dimensions of distorted communication succeeds in its practical aims will be the focus of the section that follows.

4.2 CRISIS AND LEGITIMATION

Together with his discussion of the scientization of politics Habermas's treatment of legitimation crises is one of the few occasions where he directly confronts explicitly political themes. The concept of crisis has unmistakable political overtones. Habermas notes that the metaphorical basis of societal crisis differs significantly with respect to the medical understanding of crisis as an objective force of illness. Social crisis has more in common with the dramaturgical conception in which "crisis signifies the turning point in a fateful process that, despite all objectivity, does not impose itself from the outside and does not remain external to the identity of the persons caught up in it".⁴⁴

From this classical tragicomic understanding of crisis and the related concept of history as an eschatological process, Marx developed "a social-scientific concept of system crisis".⁴⁵ Habermas agrees with the basic critique of

⁴³ LC, 110-114

⁴⁴ LC, 2.

systems-theoretic concepts of crisis and does not want to add to the "history of Marxian dogmatics". Instead he wishes to introduce a "social-scientifically useful concept of crisis".⁴⁶ As it stands, systems theory "does not take into account the internal causes of a 'systematic' overloading of control capacities."⁴⁷ His own approach attempts to critically reconstruct the systems theory of society by incorporating an 'internal' perspective of a "symbolically structured" lifeworld into a systems theoretic approach to the crisis tendencies of capitalism.

The adoption of the theoretical element of the lifeworld as an interactively constituted domain of social identity, thematically reposes the distinction between instrumental and communicative reason expressed in the fundamental categories of labour and interaction. By introducing this critical reconstruction Habermas is now able to distinguish between systemic crises which result from "unresolved steering problems" and "crisis ideologies" in which the "consciousness of crisis often turns out to have been misleading".⁴⁸ At the level of the lifeworld, social integration is preserved through identification with traditional norms and values. But the perception of crisis

⁴⁵ *ibid.* c.f. TP, 212ff.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ LC, 4.

in the domain of societal identity does not always correspond with empirical indicators of social disintegration. On the other hand, systems maintenance and systemic crisis can be considered as empirically demonstrable occurrences in history. Of course systemic crisis has considerable impact upon the lifeworld and can even be initiated by social identity crises. Taking account of this:

A social scientifically appropriate crisis concept must grasp the connection between system integration and social integration. ... We speak of social integration in relation to the systems of institutions in which speaking and acting subjects are socially related [*vergesellschaftet*]. Social systems are seen here as life-worlds that are symbolically structured. We speak of system integration with a view to the specific steering performances of a self regulated system. Social systems are considered here from the point of view of their capacity to maintain their boundaries and their continued existence by mastering the complexity of an inconstant environment.⁴⁹

The distinction between systemic and social integration serves as a theoretical continuation of the dichotomy between labour and interaction that Habermas elaborated in his theory of cognitive interests. The rationality required in systems maintenance is clearly connected to the realm of technical and instrumental interest whereas social integration at the level of the life-world points up the practical interest in intersubjective understanding.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *c.f.* LC, 9-10.

In the preface to Legitimation Crisis Habermas remarks that despite "the close connection between material questions of a theory of contemporary social formation and foundational problems [which] can be clarified within the framework of a theory of communicative competence" he is "concerned that the clarification of very general structures of hypotheses not be confused with empirical results". The task of an integrated and critical systems-lifeworld approach to crisis theory is to formulate empirically testable hypotheses. These theoretical propositions are best formulated at the "level of analysis at which the connection between normative structures and steering problems becomes palpable".⁵¹

For Habermas this level of analysis is situated in a "historically oriented analysis of social systems" which reveals the teleological values of social systems. The teleologically directed values of social systems mediate between the "cultural definitions of social life" and the instrumental imperatives of system maintenance - between the predominant discourse of interpreted tradition and the material reality of a given society. In connection with the theory of social evolution the teleological elements of cultural tradition and system imperatives combine to determine the "organizational principle" which governs the

⁵¹ *ibid*, 7.

developmental logic of a given social formation.⁵²

Organizational principles limit the capacity of a society to learn without losing its identity. According to this definition, steering problems can have crisis effects if (and only if) they cannot be resolved with the range of possibility that is circumscribed by the organizational principle of the society.⁵³

The organizational principle which mediates between the normative structures and the system requirements of advanced capitalism rests in administrative steering and the state regulation of capitalism. In Habermas's model, state-regulated capitalism refers to two related sets of phenomena. From one perspective it refers "to the process of economic concentration" and the globalization of economic planning, capital accumulation, and commercial and labor markets. "On the other hand, it refers to the fact that the state intervenes in the market as functional gaps develop".⁵⁴ Habermas believes that under the conditions of globalizing capitalist accumulation, the modern state has "repoliticized the relations of production" by its intervention into the economic system - an intervention which the dysfunctional side effects of social production and private accumulation required.⁵⁵ Intervention and

⁵² LC, 7. c.f. "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism", CES, 154-158.

⁵³ *ibid*, 7.

⁵⁴ LC, 33.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 36.

regulation, which in effect "recouple the economic system to the political", also connect the cultural norms which serve to integrate the institutional order of capitalism to the administrative steering performances of the state, thereby revealing the political contingency of the social order.

In state-regulated capitalism the linking of purposive-instrumental steering with the validity claims 'always already' underlying the economic and political subsystems "creates an increased need for legitimation".⁵⁶ The connection of these normative structures to the steering problems which accompany state regulation raises the possibility that norms previously taken for granted now be required to be justified.

The state apparatus no longer, as in liberal capitalism, merely secures the general conditions of production ... but is now actively engaged in it. It must therefore - like the pre-capitalist state - be legitimated, although it can no longer rely on residues of tradition that have been undermined and worn down during the development of capitalism.⁵⁷

Framing the concept of political legitimation in terms of the theory of communicative competence, Habermas connects the redemption of universal pragmatic validity claims to the acceptance of normative structures which subtend and legitimize the organizational arrangements of society. From this perspective "[l]egitimacy means that there are

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ LC, 36

good arguments for a political order's claim to be recognized as right and just; a legitimate order deserves recognition".⁵⁸

For Habermas, the legitimacy of advanced capitalism is assured through a system of "formal democracy" which permits "administrative decisions to be made largely independently of the specific motivations of the citizens".⁵⁹ The public realm is thus "structurally depoliticized" a tendency which is further reinforced by the existence of apolitical orientations such as "civic privatism", a form of "political abstinence combined with an orientation to career, leisure, and consumption".⁶⁰ But in this context a crisis of political legitimacy is only one of several possible crisis tendencies. The four types of system crises Habermas that delineates center on potential deficits within the three subsystems of society that are manifest either in terms of systemic or social integration.⁶¹

Each of these forms of crisis, if carried to the point of "political eruption", will issue in a full scale delegitimation of the existing political system. The four fundamental crisis forms are the result of separate but

⁵⁸ "Legitimation Problems in the Modern State", CES, 178.

⁵⁹ LC, 36.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 37.

⁶¹ LC, 45.

Schema of Crisis Tendencies

Point of Origin	System Crisis	Identity Crisis
Economic System	Economic Crisis	---
Political System	Rationality Crisis	Legitimation Crisis
Socio-cultural System	---	Motivation Crisis

related dysfunctions in the coordination of the social system. Economic crisis tendencies result when the economic system does not produce the requisite quantity of consumable values. Motivation crises arise from a lack of socio-culturally generated "action-motivating meaning". Rationality crises develop when the administrative system is unable to produce an adequate quantity of rational decisions. Legitimation crises result when the legitimation system is unable to provide adequate generalized motivations (such as civic privatism) for socially integrative legitimation to be maintained.⁶²

Habermas's assertion is that the logic of the development of advanced state-regulated capitalism itself propels it towards a situation in which crises of these sorts are more likely to occur. The economic system under capitalism experiences value deficits as part of a larger tendency

⁶² *ibid*, 49.

towards falling rates of profit. The force of social integration provided by the major action-motivating meanings generated in the socio-cultural system, such as civic and familial-vocational privatism, is being eroded as the rationalizing influence of capitalism fragments the traditions which produce such motivational orientations. Motivation crises occur when the "socio-cultural system changes in such a way that its output becomes dysfunctional for the state and the system of social labor".⁶³ Political crises can take two forms: rationality crisis which occurs where "the state apparatus cannot, under given boundary conditions, adequately steer the economic system"; or legitimation crisis which, while it does not endanger system integration, causes "norms previously fixed by tradition and belonging to the boundary conditions of the political system to be publically thematized".⁶⁴ In other words, under the conditions of a legitimation crisis, everything comes up for question and public discussion.

It is the context of legitimation crises that Habermas appends a further element of his communicative action model onto the discussion crisis theory. While there can be no effective "administrative production of meaning", the discursively developed "normative power built into the institutional system of a society" can nonetheless act to

⁶³ LC, 75.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 47.

suppress generalizable interests through ideological limitation of communication.⁶⁵ In his later work this thesis is developed in terms of communicative action theory to include the notion of a "colonization" of the socio-cultural lifeworld by the purposive-rational imperatives of system maintenance.

4.3 LIFEWORLD AND SYSTEM

The categories of life-world and system which Habermas utilizes to clarify the "very general structures of hypotheses" in Legitimation Crisis are reintroduced in the second volume of The Theory of Communicative Action. Habermas has now shifted his theory entirely into the paradigm of communication - philosophy of consciousness and political economic critique have given way to a theoretical model based in communicative action.

The concepts of lifeworld and system were first deployed in Legitimation Crisis as part of Habermas's analysis of modern capitalism which at this point focused primarily on the systemic elements of crisis. In Lifeworld and System he is concerned with the integration of the notions of the sociocultural lifeworld and societal system in a general theory of communicative action. This effort is distinct

⁶⁵ LC, 70, 113.

from Habermas's earlier attempts to reconstruct historical materialism from the perspective universal pragmatics.

It is not my intention to carry further our formal-pragmatic examination of speech acts and of communicative action; rather, I want to build upon these concepts so far as they have already been analyzed, and take up the question of how the lifeworld - as the horizon within which communicative actions are "always already" moving - is in turn limited and changed by the structural transformation of society as a whole.⁶⁶

The lifeworld is formed by the "always already" existing intersubjective background knowledge within which communicative action takes place. As such, it constructs the horizons of "the forms of intersubjectivity of possible understanding".⁶⁷ The structures of the lifeworld thus mediate the transcendental conditions of possible intersubjectivity in the same way that cognitive interests constitute possibilities for objectivity.

Utilizing Parsons, Habermas reconstructs a model of society in which action-orienting structures of the socio-cultural lifeworld are increasingly subject to the steering influence of systems. In Parsonian terms, the pattern maintenance function of the cultural subsystem of action orientation is increasingly subject to the pattern variables proper to the maintenance of the political and economic subsystems. For Habermas, the problem with Parsons's systems theory of society, as with systems theory

⁶⁶ LC, 119.

⁶⁷ LC, 126.

generally, is that it "can allow only empirical events and states into its object domain and must transform questions of validity into questions of behavior".⁶⁸ Concentrating on steering media and modalities of systemic integration, systems theory is unable to conceptualize the communicative and interactive achievements which are crucial to socio-cultural integration. The functionalist elements of systems theory which concentrate on boundary maintenance and stability, render it incompatible with a communicative theory of action. With Parsons, this unreflective functionalist approach to theory is compounded by the fact that his model progressively assimilates his action theoretic concepts to the logic of systems theory because of his inability to explain social action on the basis of purposive-instrumental rationality.

Parsons's original formulation brought together a voluntaristic conception of action and a normative model of social order in a critique aimed at the utilitarian rationalist approach to the sociology of action and the empiricist formulation of the Hobbesian problem of order.⁶⁹ The conceptual dilemma posed by the adoption of this action theoretic approach to social order rests in the difficulty of assimilating the voluntaristic elements of freely chosen

⁶⁸ LC, 6.

⁶⁹ LS, 205.

action to the generation of a normative order.⁷⁰ Thus, the voluntaristic understanding of the "elementary unit act" posited in The Structure of Social Action begins to give way in Parson's later work, The Social System. Action is now explained by reference to a stock of cultural pattern variables which orient actor's choices along the dimensions relevant to personal motivation, social goals or cultural values.⁷¹ Unable to provide an action-theoretic explanation of how values are generalized and incorporated into social institutions, Parsons's theory begins to prioritize the subsystems of personality, society and culture with a view to explaining how action is systemically coordinated according to pattern variables specific to each domain.⁷² The nascent conceptual category of the socio-cultural lifeworld is abandoned as Parsons resolves the growing internal inconsistencies of his action system "by abruptly ceding basic conceptual primacy to systems theory".⁷³

In leaving behind an action theoretic paradigm for a systems theory of society, Parsons must now account for the coordination of the elements of the lifeworld in systemic terms. The three domains of personality, culture and society

⁷⁰ LS, 215.

⁷¹ Parsons The Social System (Glencoe, 1951) 58ff.

⁷² The pattern variables correspond to Parsons's later and well-known A-G-I-L paradigm of Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and Latent pattern maintenance.

⁷³ LS, 234.

are now viewed by Parsons as "subsystems of action orientation" and as being subject to the coordination of a "hierarchy of control" that steers and coordinates the subsystems with one another and with the behavioral system of the physical organism. Action is now understood in terms of action subsystems and soon the general action system itself is subsumed into a systems theory of society.⁷⁴ Habermas's reconstruction effort follows the logic of Parson's theory construction in an effort to extract the categorial remnants of the nascent concept of the socio-cultural lifeworld and draw distinctions between these communicative aspects of interaction and the steering capacities and instrumental imperatives of the maintenance social systems.

Habermas wishes to reincorporate the system-lifeworld distinction into a general theory of communicative action. The three orders of the lifeworld: personality, culture, and society, represent fundamental components of socio-cultural interaction.

Our idea, that the symbolic structures of the lifeworld are reproduced by communicative action, points the way now to a fruitful analysis of the interconnections between culture, society and personality. If we inquire how cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization can draw upon the same mechanism of mutual understanding, in different ways, the

⁷⁴ LS, 238-256. Society, culture, personality and the behavioral system of the organism themselves some occupy one quadrant within Parsons's larger A-G-I-L system. See LC, 251.

interdependencies among the three lifeworld components come into view.⁷⁵

At the analytical level a connection exists between the logic of Parsons's theory construction and the development of modern social foundations. Just as Parsons systematized the notion of the lifeworld and subjected it to the theoretical logic of purposive-rational systems functionalism, so social evolution thematizes the same set of problems at the level of actual historical development.

The formula - societies are systemically stabilized complexes of action of socially integrated groups ... stand[s] for the heuristic proposal that we view society as an entity that, in the course of social evolution, gets differentiated both as a system and a lifeworld. Systemic evolution is measured by the increase of a society's steering capacity, whereas the state of development of a symbolically structured lifeworld is indicated by the separation of culture, society, and personality.⁷⁶

Habermas's communicative action model incorporates the lifeworld-systems theory approach and Weber's rationalization thesis into a more precise explanation of social evolution than existed in his earlier work. As societies develop, the communicatively structured lifeworld is progressively rationalized and differentiated. In much the same fashion as his reconstruction of Weber's theory of the instrumental rationalization of early capitalism introduced the possibility of communicative rationalization,

⁷⁵ LS, 222.

⁷⁶ LS, 152.

Habermas's theory of the rationalization of the lifeworld views the interactive and communicative dimensions of society as a necessary element that must be critically appended to the functionalist understanding of social systems. It is only through the rationalization of the lifeworld and the interplay of personality, culture and society that the differentiated political and economic subsystems of society can take form.⁷⁷

The rationalization of the lifeworld allows for the structural differentiation of the social system according to the purposive-instrumental criteria of systems maintenance and steering capacity. Modernity is fundamentally connected to the "uncoupling of system and lifeworld". In this context the "fundamental problem of social theory is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by the notions of 'system' and 'lifeworld'".⁷⁸ Since Habermas's reconstructive method comprises the notion of evolutionary development, his analysis of the relevance of lifeworld rationalization for the development of social subsystems includes a necessary perspective on the developmental dynamics of system maintenance and lifeworld interaction. The potential for overlap between systemic prerogatives and the communicatively preserved action motivations of the lifeworld lends a paradoxical quality to

⁷⁷ LC, 172-179.

⁷⁸ LS, 151.

modernity. "The rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively on the lifeworld itself".⁷⁹

The coordination of action both through intersubjective consensus and functional interconnections between subsystems leads to "systemically induced lifeworld pathologies" which are fundamentally structured by the steering media proper to the social subsystem involved. As an example Habermas refers to the influence of the steering media of money and power on the lifeworld.

The transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from lifeworld contexts. Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude towards calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while bypassing processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but replace it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are embedded are devalued in favour of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action.⁸⁰

For Habermas, the influence of monetary and bureaucratic steering mechanisms becomes pathological "when systemic imperatives force their way into domains of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization".⁸¹

⁷⁹ LS, 186.

⁸⁰ LS, 183.

While Habermas admits that "this assumption needs to be tested empirically" he believes it allows social theory to more accurately explain such emerging political phenomena as the environmental movement, the resurgence of religious fundamentalism and 'neo-conservatism'. The new political problems these movement address have less to do with economic and social security than with questions regarding the quality of life, equal rights, participation, self-realization and human rights. In these new conflicts "which arise along the seams between system and lifeworld" what is at stake is a colonization of the lifeworld which threatens the integrity of social systems.⁸²

When stripped of their ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside - like colonial masters coming into a tribal society and force a process of assimilation upon it. The diffused perspectives of the local culture cannot be sufficiently coordinated to permit the play of the metropolis and the world market to be grasped from the periphery.⁸³

In this example the nature of the shift from a purposive-rational to a communicative model for the development of modernity is clear. With the reconstruction of Weber in volume one of The Theory of Communicative Action⁸⁴ and the development of a communicative action model

⁸¹ LS, 374.

⁸² LS, 395.

⁸³ LS, 355.

⁸⁴ RRS, 143-271.

based on the system-lifeworld distinction, Weber's theory of modernity and his theses concerning the loss of freedom and the loss of meaning are now able to be interpreted from the perspective of an understanding of societal rationalization based in a communicative theory of action. Habermas comments that Weber's approach to bureaucratic rationalization of modern society "can best be appreciated if we understand the bureaucratization of spheres of action as the model for a technicizing of the lifeworld that robs actors of the meanings of their own actions".⁸⁵

Returning to the essential conceptual distinction between system and lifeworld, Lifeworld and System picks up the discussion left off in Legitimation Crisis. In reconstructing Weber's theory of rationalization and Parson's systems theory Habermas is attempting to show how the specific communicative rationalization of the lifeworld gives rise to social systems of action coordination which can have pathological effects on society. Weber's rationalization thesis thus describes the process of societal rationalization correctly but theoretically misconstrues it as a linear developmental process proceeding according to purposive-instrumental reason. In Habermas's lifeworld-system approach the domains of communicative and instrumental reason are related in a more dialectical fashion. Thus the dichotomy between labor and interaction

⁸⁵ LS, 302.

is revisited in the emphasis on separable realms of action and rationality in the lifeworld and system.

4.4 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The epistemologically oriented nature of Habermas's social theory fundamentally structures his approach and choice of categories for empirical analysis. However, just how Habermas's discussion of crisis theory and legitimation problems is meant to advance the status of the practical aims of critical theory is unclear. Just as unclear is how Habermas's systemic explanation of new social movements and oppositional groups in terms of conflict between system and lifeworld serves the emancipatory interest of critical theory. Perhaps it is Habermas's intention for his theory of communicative action to feed into reflection and thereby direct the practice of resistance to the colonizing and reifying force of systems imperatives. But there is no guarantee that resistance to the instrumentalizing force of purposive-rational subsystems of action will advance the freedom and autonomy of the actors involved since there exists no institutional form which can embody the emancipatory interest of critical theory other than language and the communicatively structured lifeworld itself.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ c.f. the discussion of the 'institution' of the working class and new social movements in "Dialectics of Rationalization", 21-27.

McCarthy points out that "in the absence of an identifiable 'agent of social transformation' [Habermas] is forced to remain at the level of pointing out broad crisis tendencies intrinsic to the structure of advanced capitalism. His critique retains an anonymous character, addressed to 'mankind as such' and thus to no group in particular.⁸⁷ Of course the question of the addressee of theory is a perennial issue for critical theory, but Habermas's approach in both Legitimation Crisis and Lifeworld and System remains uncharacteristically unreflective on this point. Other than the fact that Habermas innovatively combines elements of systems theory with the phenomenological concept of the lifeworld, the work seems a straightforward attempt at a functional and systemically-oriented speculative empirical inquiry.

Nonetheless, Legitimation Crisis bears the traces of a concern for the communicative epistemological foundations of critical knowledge. In spite of providing an excellent opportunity for elaborating upon the material or moral-practical basis for critical theory, the investigation of the crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism still serves as a forum for the empirical elaboration of an essentially epistemological distinction between labour and interaction. The similarity of the labour-interaction distinction to that between the instrumental imperatives of systems maintenance

⁸⁷ McCarthy CTJH, 385-386.

and the interactive elements of social integration has already been mentioned. Whether the empirical distinction between system and social integration is fundamentally sound or not, the abstract connection with Habermas's epistemological categories is evident. The continuous utilization of a conceptual dichotomy rooted in epistemological categories may explain the lack of an analysis of the concrete and practical aspects of the theory of crisis.

The emphasis on epistemological foundations relates to a basic tendency to emphasize the communicative realm and accept the essential instrumentality of labor and material reproduction. The fundamental, "anthropologically deep-seated" character of the dichotomy between labor and interaction belies the uneven theoretical attention Habermas has given to each of its elements. The elaboration of an intricate and wide-ranging theory of communicative action has no equivalent in a 'theory of labour' per se. Habermas is committed to a linguistically and communicatively conceived epistemological foundation for critical theory. This concern with epistemological questions explains the predominance of interaction and communication over labour processes and the material dimensions of social reproduction and political domination in his social theory. It remains to be seen how an immanent communicative critique for which

there is "no possible external sources of validity" can provide an epistemological foundation secure enough to motivate practice.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Wellmer, "Reason, Utopia...", HM, 53.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated the ways in which Habermas's concern for the epistemological foundations of critical social science has influenced the development of his theory. In his methodology of rational reconstruction, in his explicitly epistemological critique of cognitive interests and in the empirical applications of his theory to the study of modern social formations, Habermas's work reflects a primary interest in providing an epistemological basis of 'good reasons' for redeeming the 'validity claims' of critical theory. While the partisan preference for such 'quasi-foundational' approaches runs the risk of establishing a systematic bias in theory,¹ Habermas is content to accept a value-laden component in his theory as the price for a cognitivist approach to social science. We can speak of Habermas as a 'cognitivist' in the sense of his belief that any commitment to socially binding norms can, at least potentially, be rationally justified.²

¹ This is something which Foucault's 'anti-foundational' approach explicitly rejects and for which Habermas's reconstructive method is an attempted solution. c.f. White, The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas: Reason, Justice and Modernity (New York, 1988), 128-136.

² The non-cognitivist position sees commitment to ethical or normatively binding positions as the result of an

Not only does the metatheoretical element of Habermas's work reveal a cognitivist preference for social theory that is epistemologically grounded in a communicative model of knowledge, Habermas's approach to social analysis reveals the same commitment to a requirement for 'good reasons' for social action as well. Universal pragmatics and the theory of communicative competence are examples of Habermas's attempts to apply the same principle of 'good reasons' at the level of social analysis. Habermas's concern with basic action-orienting rationality in his social theory and his wider appreciation of the transcendental notion of 'Reason' predispose him towards adopting a linguistically conceived epistemological foundation for critical theory in which "our first sentence expresses unequivocally the intention of universal and unconstrained consensus".³

The following section provides a brief review and assessment of some of the themes touched upon in the discussion. The treatment of these issues essentially parallels the development of the central methodological, epistemological, and empirical analytical questions that were laid out in the main body of the thesis. As well, in the final section a summary is presented of some of the political applications of communicative action theory.

existential decision. c.f. White, Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas, 48-65.

³ KHI, 314.

5.1 ASSESSING THE CRITICAL PROJECT

The difficulties attending an approach which lodges epistemological, "quasi-transcendental" claims together with the methodological claim to objectivity within a theoretical model built around the the idea of communicative action have been enumerated throughout the thesis. Primary among them is the tendency for reconstructive method to invariably reveal the rational character of historical change since it focuses on those interactive elements of analysis which Habermas's general theory tends to cast in the positive light of communicative reason. The evolutionary bias of reconstructive method was dealt with in section 2.3 of the thesis.

A second and related problem involves Habermas in imputing a rational or cognitive component to language and interaction that does not always exist. This aspect of Habermas's theory posits a "counterfactual" ideal-speech situation as the goal of all undistorted communication. Habermas's theories of communicative competence and universal pragmatics were outlined in section 4.1 whereas the general features of reconstruction are presented in Chapter 2. As Canovan notes, even though Habermas's notion of the ideal speech situation free from distortion is counterfactual, "he can't avoid treating it as an empirical possibility because this is essential to his radical

political stance."⁴

The crux of the third difficulty lies in Habermas's "unstated assumption that to understand a speech act is to agree with it".⁵ The neutral methodology of reconstruction obfuscates the need to critically address the political or practical implications of theory let alone the use of language itself. Misgeld's critique of Habermas is most telling here. In Misgeld's view, universal pragmatics, the reconstructive method underlying Habermas's theory of communicative action, is an essentially unreflective method which seeks to

explain how historically specific modes of communication originate, and how their distortions are systematically organized. Yet the ability to decipher them as distorted cannot issue from mere reliance on historical reconstruction or a reconstructionist theory of the pragmatic universals of speech. It also requires at least, that one risk one's preunderstanding as an act of practical discourse, and that one engage in a communicative action denying, in its accomplishment, its own communal basis. Such a rupture, opening a cleavage in communally shared understandings, cannot be secure of its own groundedness no matter how elaborate the theories instructing it. It remains a practical situated activity.⁶

⁴ Canovan, "A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt" Political Theory vol. 11: no. 1, 1983, 111. Canovan regards Habermas as "radical" but critiques his consensual view of politics.

⁵ B. Fay, Critical Social Science (New York, 1987), 188.

⁶ Misgeld, "Critical Theory and Hermeneutics", On Critical Theory J. O'Neill ed. (New York, 1976) 182.

Critical theory thus cannot 'break' with the distorted communicative basis of its own tradition on a a priori scientific grounds but only as part of practice. It is the reflection upon this epistemological moment that reconstructive method blocks. Language and communication may be unremittingly distorted precisely because they are political. Habermas's reluctance to see reconstruction as a practically situated political act is linked to his optimistic view of the task of reconstruction in revealing the rational competence inherent in distorted communication.

Habermas's sanguine understanding of language use is based in a consensus model of truth which leads to a naively quietistic view of politics.⁷ Canovan does not hesitate to point up that this concept of politics is excessively intellectualist. "Habermas appears to believe that free politics is a matter of citizens first of all talking, and then, after they have all formed a common conviction and will, proceeding to act as one."⁸ The objections which could be raised to this perspective are numerous. The main theme of the criticisms of this consensual view of politics is that it brackets out the conflicts and disagreements which are at the heart of political life. Speaking of the conflicting claims to truth implicit in various definitions

⁷ I am unable to address the questions raised by Habermas's consensus theory of truth. For discussion see McCarthy, CTJH, ch. 3.

⁸ Canovan, 109.

of politically significant terms, William Connolly points out that certain concepts are "essentially contested" and that through conceptual debate and political discourse provoked by disagreement they "contribute to the political dimension of social life in a singularly profound way."⁹ Habermas's approach does not allow for a theoretically fruitful consideration of non-consensus oriented action. Politics does not consist only in strategic or deceptive communication but in politically relevant dissensus and silence. The existence of exclusive minority caucuses within social organizations and acts of civil disobedience are in a sense communicative actions and strategies which are not aimed at short term or immediate consensus. Habermas seem to ignore that political change and the achievement of collective objectives can occur despite the lack of binding majority consensus.

5.1.1 Reason and Knowledge

Habermas's commitment to a social theory based in communicative reason was established in sections 2.2 and 2.4 where the themes of reason and rationalization were developed. In general, Habermas's understanding of reason is quite expansive and 'emphatic' in the sense of critical theory's usage of the term. But in practice, the notion of

⁹ Connolly, The Terms of Political Discourse (Princeton, 1985), 39.

reason so essential to the practical aims of critical theory is reduced to the status of a methodological operation.

Beginning with the presentation of the historical transition from traditional to modern society, Habermas's application of reconstructive method tends to equate rationality with the rational reconstruction of communicative competence. This approach in fact corresponds to one of the research programmes Habermas suggests in his most recent work. Rationality is 'reduced' to reconstructable action in the sense that "to expound the universality of the concept of communicative rationality" requires that it be linked to the "development of the concept of communicative action". Such a research program focuses on "rationally reconstructing universal rules and necessary presuppositions of speech actions oriented to reaching understanding".¹⁰ Thus, ironically, the reconstruction of communicative rationality reduces reason to the pragmatics of language use, stripping it of any normative claims which cannot be communicatively substantiated. A speaker who has not mastered the competency requirements for redeeming pragmatic validity claims would be unable to articulate reasonable political positions. Members of minority cultures who have not attained communicative competence in the larger cultural domain would thus be relegated a priori to the realm of the

¹⁰ RRS, 138.

'unrational' if not the irrational.

5.1.2 Knowledge and Practice

From rationalization and rational reconstruction our focus moved to the epistemological critique of science offered in Knowledge and Human Interests. Here, Habermas's critique of the unreflective technical interest of positivistic science placed the concern for the relationship between theory and practice at the level of epistemological reflection. Presenting the theory of knowledge as a form of social critique, Habermas built upon his earlier considerations regarding the relationship of theory to practice developed in Theory and Practice. In this formative part of Habermas's critique, the thesis of the scientization of politics provided an example of the possible empirical effects of scientistic conceptions of the relationship of theory to practice.

The key element in any application of critical theory must be its conception of the relationship of theory to practice. Brian Fay, who has developed systematic approaches to critical social science characterizes critical theory as a theory which "wants to explain a social order in such a way that it becomes itself the catalyst which leads to the transformation of this social order".¹¹ Habermas's

¹¹ B. Fay Critical Social Science (New York, 1987), 27

critique of positivism focuses on the unintentional effects of an unreflective approach to knowledge.

The emphasis on method in positivist epistemology allows the fundamental question of practice to be excluded from the discourse science. When epistemology is no longer a reflection upon 'how we know' but upholds instead the instrumental concern for methodological consistency, questions regarding the relationship of theory and observation are given less attention. Simply put, the interests and intent of science are not able to be critically assessed when method is considered in isolation from a general theory of knowledge or when the theory of knowledge has become the logical philosophy of method. Secondly, as the critical assessment of the relationship between theory and method is given less attention **within** science, a technical and decisionistic approach to the relationship of scientific theory and social practice takes shape in the scientized culture of the public realm. 'What we do with what we know' becomes a mainly technical question, just as 'how we know' becomes a primarily methodological one.¹²

¹² For an interesting treatment of this dichotomy in a related context c.f. A. Pickel, "Never Ask Who Should Rule Karl Popper and Political Theory" Canadian Journal of Political Science March, 1989 XXII:1 83-105.

In certain respects, theory and practice are related in ways similar to the relationship between the epistemological and methodological dimensions of theory itself. If method is thus conceived as one moment in the epistemological, methodological, and empirical articulation of theory, it is possible to explain Habermas's emphasis on critical reflection in his discussions of the theory of knowledge as a critical corrective to the neutral methodological orientation of reconstructive science.

5.1.3 Practical Critique

The dominance of scientific and technical reason in modern society in turn relates to a series of analytical applications of critical theory to the political sociology of modern capitalism. In this context, our examination of Habermas's theory of communication, and his investigation of modern state-regulated capitalism in sections 4.1 through 4.3 revealed the continuing importance of the epistemological distinction between communicative interaction and instrumental rationality at the level of empirical investigation.

Habermas's theoretical emphasis has clearly been on the communicative element of this dichotomy. As Ingram notes, the communicative dimensions of Habermas theory have been articulated separately from any notion of critical practice.

Only a concept of practical reason that can be fully articulated independently of action, with its inevitable strategic constraints, and aesthetic intuition, with its quasi-speculative, contemplative preunderstanding of totality, suffices for him as a possible basis for critical theory. In attempting to grasp the two horns of this dilemma, however, Habermas seems to have assimilated practical reason to communicative rationality - and more specifically, to discursive, theoretical reason.¹³

The problem of relating theory to practice in communicative action partly results from the fact that Habermas wishes to maintain the autonomy of theory formation from action. Nonetheless there are several ways in which communicative models respond to specific aporias in critical theory as our summary of Habermas's critique of early critical theory in section 2.1 revealed.

A variety of criticisms of Habermas's general position relate to the specific applications of his theory in the areas of political legitimation and the explanation of modern politics. Only two of these opposing positions will be mentioned here. Part of Habermas's critical effort has been directed at reformulating Marx's original critical project to take account of the change circumstances of capitalism. Because of this Habermas's relations with the political left have been problematic.¹⁴ The more orthodox Marxist position on Habermas's "revisions" is represented by Therborn. Commenting on Habermas's general position he

¹³ Ingram, 74.

¹⁴ c.f. "Dialectics of Rationalization".

remarks:

[O]ur task today is not to be the critical conscience of bourgeois social thought but to break with it; it is not to construct 'critical social sciences' peacefully and parasitically coexisting with traditional ideological output, but to reject the alleged scientificity of the latter and to set out upon the path of true science cleared by Marx.¹⁵

On the question of legitimation, Held wonders if Habermas's cognitive and communicative model of a political order being worthy of recognition because of potentially good reasons for its justification is at all close to the mark as far as the stability of modern political systems is concerned. For Held it is "fragmentation" of solidarity in the workplace and contemporary culture which contributes most to political stability. In effect the "political order is regarded as 'worthy' but because of the adoption of an instrumental attitude towards it; compliance most often comprises pragmatic acquiescence to the status quo."¹⁶

¹⁵ G. Therborn "A Note on Habermas" Western Marxism: A Critical Reader (London, 1983), 128.

¹⁶ Held, "Crisis Tendencies, Legitimation and the State", HCD, 190.

5.2 POLITICS OF MODERNITY

In a "backward glance" at Habermas's work to this point it is possible to see how, in his own accounting of modernity, the theory of communicative action is able to assimilate the Weberian model of societal rationalization. Weber's model of bureaucratic rationalization is reconstructed in Habermas's thesis of the "systemic technicization" and colonization of the communicatively structured lifeworld. David Ingram notes there is considerable overlap between the empirical dimensions of the notions of system and lifeworld since "one can no more dissociate material reproductive functions from the family than divorce symbolic reproductive functions from the business community".¹⁷ While Habermas assigns system and lifeworld to distinct categories in his analysis he does not give a clear definition to either concept. As Ingram remarks, in such a context it may be more useful "to think of lifeworld and system as relating to logically distinct functions that overlap with institutions".¹⁸

With an approach that poses the communicative actions of the lifeworld against the instrumental imperatives of social systems Habermas hopes to gain theoretical access to social movements which theories based on classical antagonisms of

¹⁷ D. Ingram, Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason (New Haven, 1987), 115.

¹⁸ *ibid*, 115-116.

capital and labor, party identification or status differentiation are unable to explain. Habermas believes his model can account for new political movements concerned with such issue areas as the north-south conflict, the politics of food production and health, tax protest, and affordable housing. The various cultural and linguistically based autonomy movements around the world can also be included in this perspective. For Habermas, these movements have a common life-world system basis in which

the issue is not primarily one of compensations the welfare state can provide, but of defending and restoring endangered ways of life. In short, the new conflicts are not ignited by distribution problems but by questions having to do with the grammar of forms of life.¹⁹

But much of Habermas's explanation of modernity relies on the functionalist reason that his reconstruction of systems theory was meant to critique. Conceived of in terms of communicative action theory, the emerging political conflicts typical of modern society are organized around resistance to the colonizing and reifying force of purposive-rational subsystems of action and the steering media of money and power. At least one feminist critic of this conceptual scheme has suggested a different perspective. For Fraser, the political and economic systems may be just as 'colonized' by the patriarchally structured 'lifeworld' of the domestic household and predominant

¹⁹ LS, 392.

cultural norms.²⁰ In terms of his own approach Habermas gives examples of "alternative practice" that are supposedly aimed at strengthening the resistance of communicatively structured domains of action against the steering mechanisms of power and money.²¹ Functional logic appears when he indicates that even the systemically induced pathologies of modern society serve a historical purpose since, in a larger sense, they "give rise to the problem situations that objectively afford contemporaries a privileged access to the general structures of the lifeworld".²² In such a context the question arises as to whether alternative practice is actually no more than an 'adjustment' to prevailing patterns of social organization.

Habermas's critique of functionalism, as in his reconstruction of Weber, connects reconstruction, rationalization and evolution in such a way as to necessarily situate modernity at the end of a continuum of rational advancement. Based on a theoretical logic of reconstruction, communicative action theory to a certain extent shares a paradoxical 'practical neutrality' with reconstructive method, despite the critical aims Habermas intends for it. The evolutionary logic bound up with the

²⁰ N. Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory?", New German Critique 35 (1985), 119-124.

²¹ LS, 395.

²² LS, 403.

reconstruction of modernity on the basis of the uncoupling of lifeworld and system would not predispose the theory towards advocating the practical activity of resisting systemic colonization of the lifeworld that Habermas appears to pointing towards in the final pages of Lifeworld and System. If reconstruction reveals that certain spheres of activity 'belong' to a greater or lesser degree to either the purposive-rationally organized subsystems of the economy and the state or the communicatively structured lifeworld, then this "presupposes the inherent rationality of an uncoupling of lifeworld and system".²³ Such an understanding cannot lend support to the attempt to subject the priorities of economic administrative steering to the practical concerns of communicative rationality.

The relativism of evolutionary models is compounded by the ethno-centric relativism of a theoretical approach in which the "end-state towards which the developmental process is construed as heading is decidedly Western in conception".²⁴ This brings to mind McCarthy's point that

without an adequate understanding of the 'end-states' of development in other cultures, and thus the modes of thought and types of knowledge valued by them, we are determined before the fact to construe their performances as exhibiting a more or less deficient mastery of our competences rather than as expressing a mastery of a different

²³ Ingram, Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason (New Haven, 1987), 116.

²⁴ McCarthy "Rationality and Relativism: Habermas's 'Overcoming' of Hermeneutics", HCD, 70.

set of skills altogether.²⁵

In a critique of Habermas, Anthony Giddens notes the passing from favour of evolutionary models of social change with approval and is critical of Habermas's transposition of Piaget and Kohlberg's models of cognitive development into the field of social theory.²⁶ In this sense, a theory of social evolution more closely connected to Levi-Strauss's structuralism than to Lévy-Bruhl's developmental schema of primitive and advanced "mentality" may more accurately represent the difficulties attending the notion of 'advanced' and 'primitive' societies.

5.3 THE THEORY OF JÜRGEN HABERMAS

If critical theory is to be distinguished by its understanding of the relationship between theory and practice then we can consider Habermas to be a critical theorist if only for his position on this question. But there are several problems which Habermas's method brings to bear on his critical position. On his own account of the problematic relationship between the theory of knowledge and the methodology of reconstruction, Habermas accepts that the "know how" divulged through his own reconstructive method "has no practical consequences" and bears only "an indirect

²⁵ McCarthy, HCD, 70.

²⁶ Giddens, "Reason without Revolution...", HM, 119.

relation to the emancipatory interest of knowledge".²⁷ While Habermas recognizes the difficulty of linking the methodological categories of reconstructive science with the practical aims of critical theory he has no solution for this critical theoretical dilemma. Ironically, Habermas's contention that positivism must retain metaphysical elements in order to justify its own activity has some merit,²⁸ in the sense that positivism cannot provide reasons for doing science on the basis of positivist philosophy of science alone. It would seem, however, that, in the case of reconstruction, critical theory must remain blind to its own practical goals if it is to redeem empirically its claims to knowledge. For the problematic relationship of theory to practice Habermas substitutes a problematic and only partly reflective form of critical theory.

The relevance of this problematic critical position to political questions is made evident in Habermas's treatment of classical versus modern "scientized" politics. Habermas's stylized reconstruction of More and Machiavelli misses those elements of an interpretation of science that would be provided by addressing the concrete political practice of science.²⁹ Habermas's chosen approach is instead to assess politics critically not in terms of the practical

²⁷ "Some Difficulties", TP, 23-24.

²⁸ c.f. KHI, 80.

²⁹ c.f. Alford, Science and the Revenge of Nature, 73.

and ethical goals of political action itself, i.e. at the "phenomenological" level, but in terms of the epistemological propensities of scientism in politics - an approach which poses the problematic relation of theory to practice in decidedly abstract terms.

In a commentary which relates to the application of his own theory, Habermas accepts that the social theory of historical materialism, to the extent that it is mediated through the phenomenological horizons of social practice, is critically self-reflective only in an indirectly epistemological sense. This is true since, methodologically, there is no way of "disengaging social theory from the epistemological mediation of phenomenological self-reflection". Linked inextricably to material reality and experience, critique then becomes conflated with the phenomenological dimensions of empirical science and, in its materialist version, "assumes the form of the critique of ideology".³⁰ If, at the phenomenological level, the emphasis on ideology critique in Marx's phenomenology partly obscures the distinction between empirical science and practical critique, the philosophical emphasis of Habermas's work can certainly be said to conflate practical critique and epistemology.

³⁰ KHI, 62.

The relevance of the communicative action model and Habermas's lifeworld-system paradigm for the "new politics" and for theory formation in Political Science has been noted. The utility of such an approach is not restricted to the clearly 'communicative' object domains of research on propaganda, political communication, and international diplomatic relations. A theory of communication with a critical standard of undistorted ideal speech can be applied to analyses of the decision-making process.³¹ As White notes, a theory of communicative action may provide a more secure theoretical grasp of modern political contests over 'interest'.³²

A possible reason for Habermas's commitment to a communicative epistemology may be the affinity between the theoretical elements of his approach. Reconstructive methodology was conceived on the basis of Chomsky's notion of generative grammar, which explains the impetus for the development of a theory of communicative action based in universal pragmatics - itself derived from the application of reconstructive method. The receptivity of a communicatively-structured object domain to critical reflection offers another possible explanation. Ideology critique, cognitive interest theory, and epistemological

³¹ c.f. R. Kemp, "Planning, Public Hearings and the Politics of Discourse" in Critical Theory and Public Life J. Forester ed. Boston, MIT Press: 1985, 177-201.

³² c.f. White, Recent work of Jürgen Habermas, 88.

reflection all focus on language, which can be approached in terms of its 'surface' or 'depth' structure, in terms of its genealogy, the logical elements of discourse, the pragmatics of language use or the rule-governed process of its creation.

All of these approaches comprise a reconstructive moment which, while 'empirical', allows for an explicit normative or value oriented perspective to be immediately included in the analytical procedures of research. Language, as an empirical phenomenon, allows critical theory to elude the charge of idealism while still maintaining the normative elements of critique. In this sense, given the recent 'linguistic turn' in his approach, Habermas's theoretical edifice is by now so thoroughly penetrated with the concept of communicative rationality that his commitment to it is implicit, despite the fact that he is aware of its limitations.³³ As we have shown Habermas's latest work is the culmination of longstanding trends in his thought. Habermas locates the underlying political motive for his recent work in "the reconciliation of the decayed parts of modernity, the idea that without surrendering the differentiation that modernity made possible in the social and economic spheres, one can find forms for living together in which real autonomy and dependency can appear in a

³³ LS, 2.

satisfying relation ... of 'friendly life together'".³⁴

The examination and analysis of Habermas's critical theory offered in this thesis helps to place the critical component of his theory of society in perspective. Some of the main difficulties with Habermas's theory result more from his propensity to respond to criticism by adopting elements of opposing approaches into his own and by his willingness to modify his position when he feels that critical reappraisal warrants it.³⁵ In this sense Habermas presents a 'moving target' for analysis. In this thesis the thematic continuity and connections between various elements of Habermas's work have been established in the context of his overriding epistemological concern for critical reflection. This is perhaps the most inspirational if not the most empirically or scientifically fruitful aspect of Habermas's work. For to reflect is to be conscious of the objectivating nature of scientific method and its effects on social and political life. Such reflection is of relevance whether its object is the statistical derivation of class and status in social science and the formulation of social policy on the basis of "decision making technologies", or the statistical construction of viable biological habits in

³⁴ "Dialectics of Rationalization", 28. The cited remark is from Brecht. c.f. *ibid*, 27 where Habermas comments that part of his aim is to "[inject] communicative everyday praxis into institutions. This was once a conservative view."

³⁵ c.f. "A Response to my Critics", HCD.

ecology and the formation of environmental policy on the basis of 'disinterested' science. In this sense the power of reflection is vindicated in Habermas's theory. As to its practical direction Habermas provides no programmatic answers. The theorist has no privileged position from which to do so since in the "process of enlightenment there can only be participants".

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