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The Speculative Philosophy of History and Normativity: Habermas' Middle Period

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The Speculative Philosophy of History and Normativity: Habermas' Middle Period

By

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B.A., Bennington College, 2009

Advisor: John Lysaker, Ph.D.

An abstract of a dissertation submitted to the faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy

2020

Abstract

The Speculative Philosophy of History and Normativity: Habermas' Middle Period

By Rebekah Spera

The question of reason's relationship to history poses a challenge for critical theory. If reason or rationality emerges out an historical process and is historically conditioned, not guaranteed metaphysically, on what normative and theoretical basis can present conditions be criticized as "irrational"? Critical theory must be able to posit something beyond what is merely given in the present historical moment without claiming to stand outside of history. The philosophy of history as a philosophical concept does not receive much attention, either from critical theorists or contemporary philosophers in general. It is usually taken for granted that however a critical theory tries to solve the difficulties raised by reason's relationship to history, it can and must do so without a philosophy of history.

This dissertation is a revisitation of the role that philosophy of history plays in orienting the tasks and scope of critical theory through an examination of the middle period of Jürgen Habermas' philosophical development. I make the case that Habermas' split from his former mentors at the Frankfurt school marked by the *Theory of Communicative Action* ought to be understood as an attempt to resolve the dilemma posed by reason's relationship to history without depending a speculative philosophy of history for its normative grounding. Through an analysis of his writings on historical materialism in the 1970s, I argue that Habermas not only has a philosophy of history, but that the philosophy of history does essential normative work for him and ultimately determines the orientation—and limitations—of his vision of critical theory. Habermas' reformulation of critical theory on the basis of his theory of modernity shows the stubborn difficulty facing anyone undertaking the task of formulating a basis for normative critique while avoiding relying upon a philosophy of history. What the case of Habermas suggests, I conclude, is that there is something that critical theory has not yet satisfactorily resolved concerning the relationship between history and reason. It is necessary for critical theory to reapproach the philosophy of history as an open question.

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Introduction

"The real social function of philosophy," writes Max Horkheimer in one of his early essays, "lies in its criticism of what is prevalent."[1] If a critical theorist wishes to appeal to some idea of reason or rationality to undertake this "criticism of what is prevalent," the question of reason's relationship to history poses a perennial challenge. If reason or rationality emerges out an historical process and is historically conditioned, not guaranteed metaphysically, on what normative and theoretical basis can present conditions be criticized as "irrational"? If reason itself is bound to history and cannot stand outside of its own historical situation, how can social ills be diagnosed? In formulating a normative basis for critique that satisfactory answers these questions, a critical theory faces two dangers. On the one hand, it must avoid treating what is historically and culturally provincial as immutable or universal. On the other hand, it must avoid complete relativism, which leaves the theorist with no critical purchase and dissolves all normative claims that are based on some idea of reason or rationality. To put it another way, an analysis must be able to posit something beyond what is merely given in the present historical moment and without claiming to stand outside of history. Within these parameters, the lines along which criticism can be undertaken are going to be determined by underlying suppositions about how reason emerges within the historical process. In other words, it seems like a critical project requires some form of philosophy of history in its normative foundation if it is to navigate between the Scylla of ahistorical universalism and the Charybdis of total relativism.

At the same time, the philosophy of history (particularly the "speculative" philosophy of

[1] Max Horkheimer, "The Social Function of Philosophy" in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 265

history) as a philosophical concept does not receive much attention these days, either from critical theorists or contemporary philosophers in general, for a number of reasons. One of the most obvious is that the philosophy of history summons to mind the specter of Hegelian metaphysics. Another (somewhat related) reason is that "the philosophy of history" seems to entail a metanarrative about the whole course of human or natural history, which seems quasi-religious, discredited, or ideologically suspect. It is usually taken for granted that however a critical theory tries to solve the difficulties raised by reason's relationship to history, it does so without a philosophy of history.

The middle period of Jürgen Habermas' philosophy, marked by the publication of his monumental *Theory of Communicative Action* (*TCA* from now on), is perhaps the most comprehensive and clearest articulation of a critical project that does not simply assume that the philosophy of history is passé. Instead, Habermas explicitly sets out to resolve the dilemma posed by reason's relationship to history by constructing a program for critical theory that does not depend on a speculative philosophy of history for its normative force. The *TCA* lays out an alternative path forward for critical theory that escapes the binds of subject philosophy and the philosophy of history by appealing to the implicit but universal rules of intersubjective communication oriented towards reaching understanding. The goal of this reorientation is to avoid the total critique of reason while preserving critical theory's ability to identify and contest distortions and social pathologies that arise. Through the reconstruction of the universal pragmatics of speech, the normative basis for critical theory ostensibly becomes those unavoidable presuppositions of communicative action and not the philosophy of history.

This project is a revisitation of the role that philosophy of history plays in orienting the

tasks and scope of critical theory through an examination of this period in Habermas' philosophical development. I argue that Habermas not only has a philosophy of history, but that the philosophy of history does essential normative work for him and ultimately determines the orientation—and limitations—of his vision of critical theory. Habermas' reformulation of critical theory on the basis of his theory of modernity shows the stubborn difficulty facing anyone undertaking the task of formulating a basis for normative critique while avoiding relying upon a philosophy of history. What the case of Habermas suggests, I would argue, is that there is something that critical theory has not yet satisfactorily resolved concerning the relationship between history and reason. How can we think of reason as being historically determinate and yet the source of critical insight concerning social conditions? Is it possible to do critique without a philosophy of history, implicit or no? Can an alternative philosophy of history avoid the specter of Hegel? How can we determine what is contingent, subject to critical transformation, and what is not? The philosophy of history is the location where questions of progress, knowledge, and normativity converge, and attempts to sidestep it run the risk of unconsciously depending on a philosophy of history that invisibly circumscribes the boundaries of critique. Going forward, I think that it is necessary for critical theory to revisit the philosophy of history as an open question.

Chapter Overview:

My first chapter examines what, precisely, I mean by "philosophy of history" and why it has fallen out of favor in philosophy generally by giving a genealogical account of the distinction between so-called "analytic" and "speculative" philosophies of history. This distinction, I argue, is produced not by inherent differences between philosophies of history but rather as a way to

discredit certain philosophies of history. I trace the production of the distinction and the aversion to philosophies of history labelled as "speculative" to an ahistorical model of rationality presupposed by Anglo-American analytic philosophy. This ahistorical idea of reason, I argue, itself presupposes a philosophy of history. The category of the speculative philosophy of history does not capture any actual distinction among kinds of philosophies of history; rather, it ought to be understood as any account of reason's relationship to history. I conclude by clarifying that when I refer to the philosophy of history, I mean a speculative philosophy of history in this sense.

Chapter two opens with a discussion of why question of the philosophy of history is pressing for critical theory in particular. I argue that the shift in critical theory marked by the publication of the *TCA*, often called critical theory's "linguistic turn," is more properly understood as a turn away from the philosophy of history. I then look closely at how Habermas himself characterizes his departure from the first generation of critical theory through his criticisms of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* in both the *TCA* and *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. This analysis sheds light on what he believes the failures of the first generation of critical theory to be and why he believes these failures are a consequence of their dependence on the philosophy of history.

So if Habermas wants to move critical theory away from the philosophy of history, does he succeed? In my third chapter, I turn to an understudied stage in Habermas' philosophy: his writings from the 1970s on social evolution. Through a careful reading of *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (*CES*), I make the case that even though Habermas (and most readers of Habermas) do not believe that he is constructing a philosophy of history, the *CES* does in fact

present a philosophy of history. He has a progressive, developmental model of social evolution, posits laws of historical development, and even hypothesizes homologies between personality systems and social systems.

Having established that, at least during the 70s, Habermas does have a philosophy of history, the first part of chapter four tackles the question of what function the *CES* plays in his later philosophy. The general consensus among scholars is that the *CES* is a minor interlude in his long career, a consensus bolstered by the fact that Habermas never returns explicitly to that work in later years. Against this consensus, I claim (along with David Owen and Amy Allen) that Habermas requires the theory of history outlined in the *CES* to undergird the normative dimension of his later philosophy. Habermas' philosophy of history is essential to the viability of his later thought in spite Habermas' self-understanding of his philosophical project post-*TCA* as having done away with the philosophy of history once and for all.

This, I claim, is not in and of itself reason to dismiss Habermas out of hand. Rather, it calls for a deeper consideration of how Habermas reimagines critical theory in light of both his attempt to move it out from under the shadow of the philosophy of history and the way his implicit philosophy of history is operant in his thought. To that end, the second half of the fourth chapter examines the new role that Habermas envisions for philosophy and critical theory. In the fifth and final chapter, I look at how Habermas puts his critical theory into practice in *BFN*, linking what some have seen as an oddly conservative turn in his thought with the way his philosophy of history determines his approach to the question of democratic legitimacy. I then examine his view of system and lifeworld and show how Habermas' revised version of critical theory forces him to presuppose that the lifeworld contains within itself the ability to resist

colonization. This, I argue, leaves the critical aspect of his theory at the mercy of an undistorted lifeworld, which is itself placed outside of the scope of criticism.

Having demonstrated the consequences of Habermas' implicit philosophy of history for his critical theory, in the coda to my project I suggest that critical theory ought to reexamine the presupposition that the philosophy of history is avoidable. What the case of Habermas suggests, I will argue, is that critical theory ought to reexamine the philosophy of history consciously, since what one presupposes about the relationship between history and reason constitutes the conditions for critique.

Chapter 1
What is the Speculative Philosophy of History?

Introduction

Before I can make the case that a critical theory ought to return to a more intentional engagement with the philosophy of history, I must clarify what, precisely, I mean by "the philosophy of history." Since the philosophy of history has largely fallen out of the conversation in critical theory (as well as philosophy more generally), when it is invoked it is seldom clearly or consistently defined. In this chapter, I will give an overview of the history of how the philosophy of history has been understood in Anglo-American analytic philosophy over the course of the 20th century in order to define what I mean by the philosophy of history and to explain why the philosophy of history has fallen out of favor generally.

In the 20th century, Anglo-American philosophy experienced a groundswell of interest in the philosophy of history. Predictably, this lead to a flurry of articles and books attempting to relate it to other better-established branches of philosophy (such as epistemology), to establish firm distinctions among kinds of philosophy of history, and, ultimately, to justify its right to exist. By the mid-twentieth century, the mainstream Anglo-American conversation had succeeded in pushing certain kinds of philosophy of history to the side—to whit, those burdened with the epithet "speculative." How widely the term "speculative philosophy of history" is bandied about in the secondary literature does not, I will argue, reflect a real consensus about what a "speculative philosophy of history" is. Rather, the invention of the category was an attempt on the part of mid-century Anglo-American philosophers to legitimize the philosophy of history by purging the field of the kinds of questions and figures that ran counter to the philosophical fashion of the day.

This chapter is divided into three sections, the first of which is an overview of how the term "speculative philosophy of history" emerged out of the historical and social anxieties that plagued Anglo-American philosophical discourse in the 20th century. The second section makes the case that the term "speculative philosophy of history" is so protean that even philosophers working in the same tradition on the same sets of problems at the same time are unable to agree about which philosophies are speculative and which are not. More tellingly, even within the works of the individuals who adopted this distinction as the final word on the philosophy of history cannot keep themselves from making claims that, following their own stated understanding of the term, qualify as speculative. In the third section, I give an account of how the genealogy of the term "speculative philosophy of history" is intimately bound to the model of reason the practice of Anglo-American philosophy presupposes and why the term captures what I mean when I refer to the philosophy of history. I conclude by offering a definition of the speculative philosophy of history.

Part 1: A Genealogical Account of the Speculative Philosophy of History

Speculative philosophies of history, also known as substantive or metaphysical philosophies of history, are defined in contradistinction to critical or analytic philosophies of history.[2] While the term "speculative" has a Hegelian and "critical" a Kantian tenor, these connotations are misleading. Though no detailed account of how they came to be terms of art for the philosophy of history in the 20th century has yet been written, in his discussion of the critical and speculative schools of the philosophy of history, W.H. Walsh claims that they originated in

[2] These terms are all used interchangeably in the secondary literature. The term "speculative" is much more widely used than the term "substantive" or "metaphysical" for reasons I will delve into later in this chapter, but the secondary literature uses the term "analytic philosophy of history" about as often as "critical." For the sake of simplicity, and because these terms are used interchangeably, I will use the term "analytic" throughout.

the philosophy of C.D. Broad, a claim echoed by Ralph Gruer.[3] C.D. Broad was an English philosopher whose career spanned from the start of World War One into the 1970s. His main interests lay not with the philosophy of history, but with the history of philosophy, the philosophy of science, epistemology and the philosophy of religion. The division between speculative and analytic philosophy of history that Walsh and Gruner attribute to him comes from Broad's 1924 paper "Critical and Speculative Philosophy." In this short, cursory piece, Broad claims that there are two modes of philosophy, modes distinguished from one another by their respective methods. Critical philosophy is concerned with clarifying and evaluating concepts and presuppositions operative in various spheres of discourse, both philosophical and non-philosophical. Speculative philosophy, on the other hand, takes as its starting point critical philosophy's assumption that concepts are adequate to the reality they are meant to describe. Speculative philosophy maintains that the real is a totality that can be grasped in thought or in a mystical intuition.[4] These two kinds of philosophy, he writes, "cannot be wholly separated from one another," and, in fact, require one another.[5] How exactly these two terms that were originally coined by a now more-or-less forgotten student of Russel and Moore to distinguish two forms of philosophy[6] came be the battle lines drawn in Anglo-American debates about the philosophy of

[3] W.H. Walsh, *Philosophy of History: An Introduction* (New York: Harper, 1960), 14-15; Ralph Gruer, "The Concept of the Speculative Philosophy of History" (*Metaphilosophy* 3 no. 4 (October 1972), doi:10.1111/j.1467-9973.1972.tb00592.x), 283-284

[4] See C.D. Broad, "Critical and Speculative Philosophy" in *Contemporary British Philosophy: Personal Statements* (ed. J. H. Muirhead (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1924)), 15-17. In this paper Broad stresses the importance that speculative philosophies ought to take seriously religious and mystical experience. While he doubts that it can accomplish what it sets out to accomplish, he seems to see the speculative philosophy of history as good practice for the human mind, a palliative for the subject limited and distorted by devoting attention exclusively to problems in science or critical philosophy.

[5] Ibid., 4

[6] As a side note, it is interesting that while C.D. Broad's two modes of philosophy co-exist peacefully and even, to some extent, require one another, the two supposedly correlative branches of the philosophy of history are rarely taken equally seriously in the secondary literature. In fact, an early and quite influential article by Maurice

history is unclear. Whatever the reason, in the English-speaking philosophical world during the inter-war period and after World War II, literature on the philosophy of history adopted Broad's distinction to orient discussions of the philosophy of history.

This distinction arose in part as a response to the complexity inherent in the philosophy of history. The term "history" itself is ambiguous. History can either refer to the actual succession of events that occurred in the past or the body of knowledge created by historians about the past. If history is understood as the work of historians, history's uncertain place among other branches of knowledge gives rise to further complications. Is history a science? Does history aim at producing a kind of truth? Does history belong properly to the humanities? What kind of knowledge is knowledge of history? What is history's proper relationship to philosophy, and, more importantly to the philosopher's mind, what are the interventions philosophers can make in history?

In addition to the basic ambiguity of the word "history" and history's oft-disputed location as a discipline, Anglo-American philosophers faced another obstacle to making a place for discussions of history in philosophical circles—this time a political obstacle rather than a semantic or disciplinary one. While the philosophy of history originated in Medieval philosophy or even, depending on whom one asks, as early as Plato, the authors most famously associated with the philosophy of history belonged to the 19th century. These philosophies of history, from Herder's down through Hegel's, are part and parcel of metaphysical, or even religious, philosophical systems. During the early to mid 20th century, by the time these questions about the practice and discipline of history became of interest to philosophers and analytic philosophy of

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Mendelbaum in 1948 makes the case that the philosophy of history (by which he means those theories that would later be classified as speculative philosophies of history) and philosophy of historiography (work done in what would later come to be known as analytic philosophies of history) are, at bottom, incompatible. (Maurice Mendelbaum, "A Critique of Philosophies of History," *Journal of Philosophy* 45 no. 14 [July 1948]: 365-378, doi: 10.2307/2018939)

history started to be distinguished from its speculative step cousin, analytic philosophy had become the prevailing philosophy in the Anglo-American world. So naturally, when the English speaking philosophical community began to think seriously about the philosophy of history in the 20th century, much work had to be done disavowing any connection to the monstrous metaphysical systems (mostly German) that had come to be synonymous with the philosophy of history.

In addition to the metaphysical tenor that the philosophy of history inherited from its most notable German progenitors, in the wake of the two world wars, intellectuals in Europe and the United States became disenchanted with grand, triumphalist historical narratives associated with 19th century philosophies of history. In fact, to many, certain 19th century philosophical systems and their attendant philosophies of history seemed complicit with the rise of fascism in Europe.[7] Furthermore, the academic environment during the Cold War cast suspicion on one of the major philosophers of history: Karl Marx.[8] Patrick Gardiner echoed the general consensus of Anglo-American philosophers in the mid 20th-century when he observed that "the classical conception of philosophy of history has suffered a heavy loss of prestige."[9] The distinction was made to stave off the effect of this "heavy loss of prestige" by drawing a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate kinds of philosophy of history.

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[7] For two notable examples, see the essay "Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power" by Isaiah Berlin (*The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, Ed. Henry Hardy & Roger Hausheer [New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998] 581-604) and Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies Volume II, The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath* (London, George Routledge & Sons, 1947).

[8] See "Philosophy of History at the End of the Cold War" by Krishan Kumar (in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker [Malden: Blackwell, 2009], 550-560). For an interesting if controversial interpretation of the effect McCarthyism had on the development of post-war American and British philosophy, see John McCumber's *Time in the Ditch: American Philosophy in the McCarthy Era* (Chicago: Northwestern UP, 2001).

[9] Patrick Gardiner, "Introduction" in *The Philosophy of History* (London: Oxford UP, 1974), 1

So why have I given an account of how the distinction between critical or analytic philosophy of history and the speculative philosophy of history came to be without, as of yet, having explained what it is? As I shall demonstrate in the next section, in spite of its importance for 20th century philosophy of history and the near-ubiquitous use it enjoys to this day, philosophers can't distinguish "speculative" from "analytic" philosophies of history consistently. When a term is widely adopted without having a stable or consistent referent, the best way to understand a term like "speculative philosophy of history" is to look to its genealogy rather than simply its manifest content. This genealogy tells a story about the politics of academic philosophy in the mid-20th century, but, more importantly, it suggests that the failed attempt to repress certain kinds of questions about history by relegating them to a philosophical category of ill repute is symptomatic of a deeper issue that analytic philosophy has with history.

Part 2: The Speculative versus the Analytic Philosophy of History

Superficially, the difference between speculative and analytic philosophies of history appears to be fairly obvious. According to the literature, analytic and speculative philosophy of history are differentiated simply by their respective domains of inquiry: the analytic philosophy of history deals with specific questions concerning how historians go about writing histories, while a speculative philosophy of history attempts to address history as a totality. An analytic philosopher of history will ask questions such as, "Is there a normative element in writing history?" or "What is the epistemic status of first-person accounts of historical events?", while a speculative philosopher of history may deal with questions such as, "Does history have a *telos*?" or "Does history progress cyclically or linearly?" In practice, however, when it comes to marking which clusters of theoretical problems and which theories belong properly to one or the other—

in short, when it comes to delineating an exact boundary between speculative and analytic philosophy of history—this difference is anything but self-evident.

The inconsistencies in the writings of the relatively few Anglo-American philosophers in the mid-20th century who were in conversation with each other about the philosophy of history could constitute a book in and of themselves. For my purposes and in the interest of brevity I will confine myself to a key example taken from one of the more noteworthy writers during this period to show how slippery the distinction between analytic and speculative is even in the works of its earliest proponents.

W.H. Walsh's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, written in 1958, compares the distinction between the speculative and analytic philosophy of history with the two possibilities that come from scientific thinking. On the one hand, scientific thinking can give rise to philosophy that is concerned with the objects of science (philosophies of nature or cosmologies) and, on the other hand, to philosophy that takes scientific thought as its object (philosophy of science). In the same way, according to Walsh, the philosophy of history really encompasses two separate activities. The speculative philosophy of history corresponds to the philosophy of nature insofar as it takes history itself to be its object, and the analytic philosophy of history corresponds to the philosophy of science because it is concerned with historical thought. Walsh stresses that these two fields are distinct from one another both with respect to their methodologies and their proper objects of study.[10] He stresses that while the anti-metaphysical sensibilities of the philosopher may rightly be rankled by the fancifulness of both the philosophy

[10] Walsh, 15

of nature and the speculative philosophy of history, it does not follow that they need also reject the philosophy of science and the analytic philosophy of history.

Walsh takes it as given that one can do the philosophy of science without entailing some kind of philosophy of nature, a presupposition that is far from self-evident (for instance, how could one have a philosophy of science without an account of how it is that scientific forms of knowledge capture the truth of natural objects?). In the same way, he supposes that an analytic philosophy of history can do away with larger questions that fall into the realm of speculation. For Walsh, the questions proper to analytic philosophy of history address history's relationship as a discipline to other forms of knowledge, the epistemological character of historical fact, what level of objectivity is proper to the practice of historians, and explanation in history. Yet it is not clear how these questions, which Walsh admits are "closely interrelated" to one another,[11] can be addressed without relying upon presuppositions about history as such. For example, the claim that that a philosopher can write about what attitude the historian ought to adopt when writing history while completely bracketing questions about what the historical process is doesn't stand up to even a cursory scrutiny. If the inquiry is strictly about history defined only as the work that historians do, how can anyone talk about either epistemic or ethical norms without appealing to questions of truth about historical objects or the relationship between the past and the present? How can a philosopher maintain that there are better or worse ways of writing history while remaining completely agnostic concerning what it is that historians are actually writing about? If a philosopher wants to maintain that the writing of history ought to be guided by any norms at all, they must appeal to something existing outside the bodies of work historians actually write.

[11] Ibid., 16-17; 19-22; 22-25

They must have some notion of what history is and what it does, both in its writing and its status as a partially unknown human (or non-human) past.[12]

The impossibility of avoiding treading into "speculative" territory is even more obvious when it comes to talking about causation in history, a topic that entails questions not only about what constitutes a discrete historical process that can be said to be causally connected to what came after it (or "colligation" as it is known in the literature), but also broader questions about "laws" of history.[13] In his discussion of historical explanation, Walsh valiantly tries to speak only of the practice of historians without making appeals to history as such, and while he does emphasize that he is only trying to describe what historians find necessary in writing history (constructing causal narratives and treating the past as a whole), he cannot help but make inferrences about the historical process itself, going so far as to ascribe what he calls "a kind of surface rationality" to historical events. This "surface rationality" refers not only to the fact that historians "explain events by pointing to ideas which they embody," but also to the actual experience of the historical agents those historians are describing, agents who, Walsh writes, "had little if any conscious awareness of the ideas in question."[14] Walsh's inability to remain strictly within the domain of the work of historians without venturing into deeper "speculative" questions about the nature of history itself is further illustrated by the fact that he hovers uncomfortably

[12] As side note, the speculative philosophy of history is often criticized for doing violence to the work of actual historiographers in the process of constructing grand theories about history itself. The analytic philosophy of history, on the other hand, is often commended for, to borrow a term from late Wittgenstein, leaving things exactly as they are and making itself beholden to those who actually work in the discipline. At the same time, much of analytic philosophy of history consists in either telling historians what it is they are actually doing or telling them how they ought to be doing it. While I do not mean to suggest that philosophy ought not to make interventions in other disciplines, I only want to note that allegedly "speculative" philosophies of history do not have a monopoly on not minding the boundaries between disciplines.

[13] Walsh, 23 and 24

[14] Ibid., 63

between description and prescription. In spite of his protestations to the contrary, he is not just concerned with what historians do but he is also concerned with how historians *ought* to write history. He writes that the processes of explanation to which historians can appeal "must be to explanation of a quasi-scientific type, involving the application of general principles to particular cases," a claim which invokes not only a standard for the proper way to write a history but also to "general principles" or laws of history. This slippage between the analytic and speculative topics in the philosophy of history is symptomatic of the fact that the concerns of analytic philosophy of history always entail implicit idea about history itself, and philosophers (not just Walsh) who try to keep to strictly analytic concerns cannot keep speculative questions at bay in spite of their best efforts.

The distinction between the analytic philosophy of history and the speculative philosophy of history reflects the desire of analytic philosophers to put a safe distance between themselves and metaphysical speculation and not a clear boundary in the subject matter itself. Unsurprisingly, when 20th century philosophers look back to philosophies of history from the 18th and 19th centuries that predate this distinction, they do not identify which philosophies of history are speculative or analytic with any real consistency. For example, Alan Donagan claims speculative philosophies of history are all theodicities, while he lauds Vico's *New Science* as an "achievement in critical philosophy of the history . . . of the first magnitude,"[15] and names him along with Descartes as the forebearer of the analytic philosophy of history.[16] William Dray, on the other hand, places Vico squarely in the speculative camp along with Hegel and Toynbee.[17]

[15] Alan Donagan, *Philosophy of History* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 7
[16] Ibid., 4-9
[17] William Dray, *Philosophy of History* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968), 60

Of course, when applying newly-minted philosophical categories to systems that predate these categories one could scarcely hope to find philosophers in complete agreement, since new philosophical wine cannot be expected to fit perfectly into old theoretical skins. But this inconsistency extends even to the classification of 20th century philosophers of history. For example, Dray writes that Collingwood took "a middle road with regard to the problem of attributing purpose [to history],"[18] while never questioning Collingwood's status as an analytic rather than a speculative philosopher of history. This means that even while Dray acknowledges that Collingwood entertains the question of whether or not history is purposive (a question unambiguously speculative according to all Anglo-American philosophers who write on the subject), Collingwood's work remains, somehow, safely analytic.[19] Of course, these philosophers working in the 50s, 60s and 70s were writing as the analytic philosophy of history was only just beginning to gain traction as a field of study, so it may be supposed that in the years since then secondary literature would have arrived at a clearer understanding of the distinction between the analytic and speculative philosophy of history. This, however, is not the case, and the terms continue to enjoy nearly ubiquitous use in the secondary literature on the philosophy of history.[20]

I am not the first person to notice the inconsistency that plagues discussions among Anglo-American philosophers about speculative versus the analytic philosophy of history. As

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[18] Ibid., 209

[19] Although he calls Collingwood, along with Oakeshott, "idealists," he never addresses why it is that these "idealists" count as analytic rather than speculative philosophers of history.

[20] As recently as 2009, in the introduction to *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, Aviezer Tucker distinguishes between the critical philosophy of history, which he closely allies with critique in the Kantian sense, from analytic philosophy of history, which he limits to scholarship on the language of historiography. Of course, if an educated person who was not a specialist in the philosophy of history were asked to guess what these terms denoted, this would not be an unreasonable guess; however, as even a cursory glance at 20th century discussions makes clear, critical and analytical are used interchangeably and taken to be synonymous with one another in the philosophy of history, and furthermore that they are used to denote branches of study that cannot be limited to either a Kantian critique or the philosophy of language.

early as 1956, R.V. Sampson argues that "the speculative philosophy of history may not properly be divorced from the critical function, since any hypothesis concerning the direction of 'laws' of history must presuppose certain epistemological assumptions concerning what kind of knowledge it is possible to have about the past."[21] After making this pronouncement and going on to claim that analytic philosophy of history requires the speculative philosophy of history to ground it, he largely ignores the distinction throughout the book. About fifteen years later, Rolf Gruner draws attention to the incredible diversity of philosophies that are lumped together under the "speculative" umbrella. He observes that the philosophies categorized as speculative philosophies of history range from the millennial tradition in the Middle Ages and St. Augustine[22] to Spengler and Toynbee and draws the conclusion that "the speculative philosophy of history has been conceived too narrowly."[23] One could just as easily infer from the wide variety of work categorized under the heading "speculative philosophy of history" that the opposite is the case.

To call all of these philosophies, with their wildly varying suppositions, both ontological and ethical, metaphysical and political, "speculative philosophies of history" does not do justice to the vast differences among them.

H. Fain, also writing in the 70s, criticizes the distinction from a different point of departure. According to Fain, in practice the overlap between the speculative and analytic philosophies of history is too extensive to neatly distinguish between the two, and he concludes in his book *Between Philosophy and History: The Resurrection of the Speculative Philosophy of*

[21] R.V. Sampson, *Progress in the Age of Reason* (London: William Heinemann, 1956), 2
[22] Ibid., 286
[23] Ibid., 291

History in the Analytic Tradition that the distinction ought to be done away with entirely.[24] This is a view he shares with Berkley B. Eddins and others.[25] In his introduction to the 2009 volume *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, Aviezer Tucker tries to sidestep the distinction entirely, claiming that while "existing philosophical jargon distinguishes *critical* or *analytic* philosophy of history from *substantive* or *speculative* philosophy of history," these terms are "unsatisfactory because [they are] too vague and value laden and [reflect] obsolete philosophical positions and distinctions."[26] He proffers "philosophy of history" and "philosophy of historiography" as more neutral and satisfactory substitutes. I will turn to the question of whether or not the distinction ought to be done away with later in this chapter, but for the time being it is important to mark both how important the invention of the distinction was for legitimizing the philosophy of history in the eyes of Anglo-American philosophers and how, upon closer scrutiny, there is no way to neatly divorce analytic from speculative concerns in the philosophy of history.

This also explains why, apart from a few outliers who use the slightly less pejorative "substantive," the most widely adopted term is "speculative." As a word, "speculative" comes with a lot of philosophical baggage, not the least of which is its strong association with Hegelian philosophy. While the idea of taking history as a totality isn't limited to Hegel's philosophy of history, regardless of how else scholars see fit to sort philosophies of history prior to the 20th century, Hegel invariably features prominently as the most notorious exemplar of the speculative philosophy of history. After all, Hegel's *Lectures in the Philosophy of History* is both the best

[24] Haskell Fain, *Between Philosophy and History: The Resurrection of Speculative Philosophy of History within the Analytic Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton UP), 207-232

[25] See Berkley B. Eddins, "Speculative Philosophy of History: A Critical Analysis" (*Southern Journal of Philosophy* 6 no. 1 (Spring 1968): 52-58, doi:10.1111/j.2041-6962.1968.tb02025.x)

[26] Tucker, 3-4

known and most reviled work in the field. Gruner points out that introductory literature the subject is treated by focusing on a few famous examples, usually from the 18th and 19th century, most often Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.[27] As William Drey notes, the Hegelian system is generally "regarded, even by those who have never read a word of it, as a paradigm of how not to theorize about the past."[28] The Hegelian connotation of the term "speculative" combined with the notoriety of Hegel's *Lectures in the Philosophy of History* has ensured that all scholarship on the speculative philosophy of history has remained under the shadow of Hegel. Patrick Gardiner expresses this aversion colorfully when he notes in *The Nature of Historical Explanation* that the philosophy of history evokes the image of "a submarine monster, dredged from the deep waters of 19th century metaphysics, its jaws occasionally opening to emit prophecies in a dead (or at any rate foreign) tongue—the language of Hegelian dialectic."[29]

Thus, with the invention of the category "speculative philosophy of history" Anglo-American philosophy created a fundamentally ambiguous category that through connotative fiat dismisses philosophies of history with which they disagree by associating them with the great bugaboo Hegel. As Tucker notes, "speculative . . . is essentially a term of abuse."[30] The analytic/speculative distinction was made to define a legitimate field of study by holding in abeyance the philosophy of history's association with metaphysics. Yet even as analytic philosophers dismissed the speculative philosophy of history as bunk, it also fascinated them. Even as their writings bore witness to how inextricably linked analytic and speculative questions actually are, the Anglo-American philosophers of history attempted to disavow the allure of

[27] Gruner, 285
[28] Drey, *Philosophy of History*, 2
[29] Patrick Gardiner, *The Nature of Historical Explanation*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1978), ix
[30] Tucker, 4

speculative questions by dismissing them as merely the by-products of historical vicissitude. Before the distinction came into the wide-spread use it has enjoyed from the 1950s up to the present day in the literature, Maurice Mandelbaum's early and influential article “A Critique of the Philosophies of History” gives an historical explanation for the persistence of what would later be termed speculative philosophies of history.[31] His broader argument is that the philosophy of history (the speculative philosophy of history) necessarily exists in conflict with the philosophy of historiography (the analytic philosophy of history), but in the end he notes that the philosophy of history fulfills a human need to regard the individual as part of a grand social process, and that philosophies of history emerge out of social and political crises that unmoor and disorient the individual.[32] Based on the malleability of the terms, I would argue instead that the need to distinguish between what he termed philosophy of history and philosophy of historiography (what came to be the speculative philosophy of history and analytic philosophy of history) emerged not from there being a clear, essential difference between the two, but rather from a combination of historical, social, political and institutional factors that shaped academic discourse in Anglo-American academic philosophy. This is why, in spite of the numerous and conflicting accounts of what qualifies properly as analytic or speculative philosophy of history, the distinction was first created and continues to be used to this day.

In the end, the distinction did the kind of work that it was meant to do insofar as it allowed Anglo-American philosophers to open up new largely (if not strictly) epistemological

[31] As an aside, it is interesting that this 1948 article presages the terminology Tucker prefers in his introduction, with philosophy of history generally referring to what would, broadly, be termed speculative philosophy of history in later literature and philosophy of historiography describing more-or-less the domain of analytic philosophy of history.

[32] Maurice Mandelbaum, “A Critique of the Philosophies of History” (*Journal of Philosophy* 45 no14 (July 1948): 377-378, doi: 10.2307/2018939

avenues of inquiry into history and historiography. Apart from a few eccentric outliers and halfhearted defenses of the historical importance of the speculative philosophy of history in introductory textbooks, the speculative philosophy of history remains widely discredited while the analytic philosophy of history is a thriving field of study in the English-speaking philosophical world.

Part 3: Why the Speculative Philosophy of History?

Given that, as I have argued, the term "speculative philosophy of history" was invented to allow Anglo-American philosophers in the 20th century to write about history without being guilty of bad metaphysics, a question arises: why continue to use it? After all, Tucker is absolutely right to note that the terms analytic and speculative are value-laden and vague, and that they are merely the products of the historical environment in which they were introduced. So why not follow Tucker and concede that the distinction ought to be done away with altogether, replaced with the more neutral and, arguably, less muddled[33] terms "philosophy of history" and "philosophy of historiography"?

[33] As an aside, I am not wholly convinced that replacing "analytic/critical philosophy of history" with "philosophy of historiography" and "speculative philosophy of history" with "philosophy of history" will do away with the vagueness that plagues the distinction. This is evident in the distribution of topics within the volume that Tucker edited. Among the papers dealing ostensibly with philosophy of historiography rather than the philosophy of history are articles on causation (Aviezer Tucker, "Causation in History," 98-108), historical objectivity (Paul Newall "Logical Fallacies of Historians," 262-273) and the ontology of objects in historiography (Lars Udehn, "The Ontology of the Objects of Historiography," 209-219), to cite just a few examples. It is unclear how work that tackles how to make causal inferences from historical documents, or talks about the ontological status of the objects if historiography can avoid minimally presupposing if not proffering outright a meta-historical model of change that could, arguably, be termed speculative. To be fair, the terms are more neutral than "speculative" and "analytic," and I suspect that under whatever umbrella term invented to neatly separate the philosophy of history from the philosophy of historiography will never be neat enough to satisfy the philosopher's yen for clarity and distinctness. In part this is due to the complexity of the subject itself and the wide array of scholarship it is meant to describe, and I strongly suspect it is in part because, much as "speculative" and "critical" philosophy in C.D. Broad's sense require and, to an extent, presuppose one another, philosophy of historiography entails a philosophy of history.

My answer to this question is twofold. First, and most simply, their persistent use in the secondary literature up to this day alone would be a compelling reason to continue to use them. The second reason is both more important to this project as a whole and merits a longer reply. In Anglo-American philosophy, the invention of the distinction between analytic and speculative philosophy of history is symptomatic not only of the resurgence of interest in talking about history within a delimited scope of inquiry and with a newly legitimized range of permissible questions. The distinction, I will argue in the next section, also is symptomatic of an ahistorical understanding of reason. Since this project is concerned with the aims of critical theory and the relationship between the philosophy of history and accounts of reason, the fact that the term "speculative philosophy of history" emerges from an attempt to neutralize the threat history poses to certain models of reason marks the speculative philosophy of history as a way to explain the sense in which I use term "the philosophy of history" for this project. A speculative philosophy of history is as any philosophy of history that gives an account of how it is that reason emerges from history. I will argue that even models of reason such as that presupposed by analytic philosophy and the formal-discursive model offered by Habermas as an alternative to his Frankfurt School predecessors entails some "speculative" philosophy of history.

I have suggested that analytic philosophy as a whole has a particular model of rationality and that this model of rationality entails a philosophy of history. *Prima facie*, this claim seems outrageous for at least two reasons. The first and most obvious is that, generally, analytic philosophy is known for eschewing broad, general questions in favor of focusing on local problems, leaving the broader questions in abeyance. The second reason, which is partially a consequence of the first, is that analytic philosophy as a branch of philosophy is notoriously difficult to define satisfactorily. Given the diversity of tenets upheld by those under its umbrella,

the claim that analytic philosophy has a unified conception of reason seems obviously false. After all, analytic philosophy encompasses everything from the Vienna Circle to ordinary language philosophy in the mid-20th century to the current diffuse variety of schools from antirealists to neo-positivists.[34] Doctrinally, analytic philosophy is and, arguably, has always been, fairly diverse.

Perhaps the most obvious specific difference that sets analytic philosophy apart is the emphasis it places on what Scott Soames calls a "piecemeal approach" to problems[35] as well as on logical argumentation for the clarification of these local philosophical quandaries. Even this, however, isn't quite satisfactory to Hans-Johann Glock, who argues in *What is Analytic Philosophy?* that attempting to come up with a definition of analytic philosophy on these grounds does an injustice to its sheer variety. The "piecemeal procedure" cannot be said to distinguish analytic philosophy from other kinds of philosophy, he notes, because so many analytic philosophers do have large theoretical and systematic programs.[36] He even claims rational argumentation isn't enough to define analytic philosophy, since the "rational definition" excludes major figures in analytic thought, such as the late Wittgenstein, and includes too many fringe continental figures, such as Nietzsche and Pascal.[37] Glock's answer to his book's titular question is that analytic philosophy cannot be defined in a traditional sense, but rather must be understood as a group of philosophical works that share a Wittgensteinian family resemblance.

Family resemblance, however, fails to account for at least one element of analytic philosophy is broadly consistent: its ahistorical treatment of philosophical texts and its

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[34] Scott Soames, *Philosophical Analysis in the 20th Century, Volume 1: The Dawn of Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), xii
[35] Ibid., xiv–xv
[36] Hans-Johann Glock, *What Is Analytic Philosophy?* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008), 164-168
[37] Ibid., 174-178

indifference—even hostility—to both the history of philosophy as well as history itself. As Peter Hylton writes in his 1993 book on the history of analytic philosophy,

> Analytic philosophy has largely rejected historical modes of understanding. . . . It struck me as strange that the period I write about, which was crucial to the formation of the analytic tradition, had been largely neglected. This neglect, however, is not accidental: it is the result of the general repudiation of the historical mode of understanding within analytic philosophy. In particular, analytic philosophy seems to think of itself as taking place within a single timeless moment.[38]

Hylton is marking an aspect of analytic philosophy for which it has been often criticized: that is, its tendency to be a-historical. Analytic philosophy treats philosophical problems as if their historical context were philosophically irrelevant. He (probably unknowingly) echoes Fain's complaint that Anglo-American philosophy regards its own history as if its "impetus . . . comes soley from within, that it proceeds sealed off from the stormy winds of broader [historical] intellectual controversy."[37] A few years lager, Hans Sluga, responding to Hacker's history of analytic philosophy, also notes that analytic philosophers' strange neglect of the history of their own field has both lead to and sprung from their tendency to read every text in the history of philosophy in a present. He writes,

> Past philosophers are read as if they were writing today; ethics and politics are discussed only in terms of abstract principles, not in terms of the lives that human beings actually lead; the fact that concepts are historical structures is ignored in favor of a vague Platonism.[39]

Hylton's evaluation doesn't necessarily point to an attitude toward history broadly, but rather of an attitude to the history of philosophy, while Sluga, on the other hand, speaks of the two more or less interchangeably. Sluga's main purpose in his article is to give an account of analytic philosophy that, *pace* Hacker, doesn't see analytic philosophy in terms of content but in terms of

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[38] Peter Hylton, *Russel, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Clarenden Press, 1990), vii, 37; Fain, 9

[39] Hans Sluga, "What has history to do with me? Wittgenstein and Analytic Philosophy" (*Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 41 no. 1 (1998): 99-121, doi:10.1080/002017498321959), 103

Foucaultian discourses as established in *The Archeology of Knowledge*.[40] He describes the analytic aversion to historical thinking as "residual and unreflective," but in truth it is constitutive to the model of rationality upheld by the practices of mid-twentieth century Anglo-American philosophy. This tendency to approach historical texts in a timeless present that Hylton and Sluga (both of whom write within an analytic milieu) observe, as well as the pervasive neglect of the history of the field itself, is symptomatic of the forgetting of history entailed by the a-historical model of reason analytic philosophy presupposes.

So if Glock's assertion that analytic philosophy resists hard and fast definitions is correct, how can this near-universal aversion to history be understood given the multifariousness of analytic philosophy? And, furthermore, on what grounds can I claim that this aversion to history is bound up with an idea of reason shared by analytic philosophy as a whole? Aaron Preston in his book *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* provides, I believe, an interpretation of analytic philosophy that both does justice to the variety to which Glock rightly draws his reader's attention and accounts for its pervasive ahistoricity at the same time. "One of the most commonly made observations about [analytic philosophy]," Preston writes, "is that it appears to have some deep and abiding connection to modern science," that "scientism—the view that knowledge can be obtained best or only via the methods of modern science – is what has primarily animated the analytic tradition."[41] Preston, however, is careful to note that the scientism of analytic philosophy is not doctrinal; that is to say, that it is not a dogma cognitively entertained by every analytic philosopher. Instead, following Kuhn's analysis of paradigms in *The Structure of Scientific*

[40] Ibid., 104
[41] Aaron Preston, *Analytic Philosophy: The History of an Illusion* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 124

Revolutions, Preston claims that scientism, while not a doctrine that distinguishes analytic from non-analytic philosophy, is related systematically to analytic philosophy.[42] He writes,

> In this way, at both the corporate and individual levels, the cognitive elements in and behind a paradigm and its adoption become fossilized in non-cognitive processes and states. But these non-cognitive phenomena are inherently fossils of those original cognitive phenomena. Thus a paradigm's founding views, those in and behind it and its adoption, remain logico-historically connected to the communal form of life and the individual stances and habits of practice the paradigm inspires, despite the latter's noncognitive nature (133)

In other words, analytic philosophy in its present stage operates as a normal science in the Kuhnian sense, while the doctrinal scientism that founded it is preserved in practices and noncognitive assumptions that give the historical and social practices of analytic philosophy their institutional coherence. This model accounts for both the doctrinal variations in analytic philosophy as well as its tendency, for the past 80 or so years, to understand philosophy primarily as a set of problems that may be troubled, clarified, or solved through logical argumentation and analysis of concepts. Since the scientism is non-cognitive— "fossilized," as Preston puts it—it circumscribes the boundaries of permissible kinds of philosophical considerations as well as providing the model of rationality that analytic philosophy in its practice implicitly presupposes.

Scientism is the view that the only real form of knowledge is the kind of knowledge produced in the sciences. From the standpoint of scientism, if philosophy produces knowledge, it proceeds in accordance with the methods and findings of scientific inquiry; if philosophy does not do this, it does not produce knowledge.[43] The way analytic philosophy on the whole is practiced, as Soames puts it, with "a widespread presumption . . . that it is often possible to make

[42] Ibid., 128-130

[43] Preston notes that the claim that philosophy is not a science is perfectly compatible with a scientistic view of philosophy, provided that, like Wittgenstein in both the *Tractatus* and the *Investigations*, this claim is made with the understanding that philosophy also does not provide knowledge about the world (Preston 126-127).

philosophical progress by intensively investigating a small, circumscribed range of philosophical issues while holding broader, systematic questions in abeyance"[44] accords with Preston's claim that scientism frames the practice of analytic philosophy.

Whether individual analytic philosophers would assent to doctrinal scientism or not, the widespread focus on local philosophical problems with an eye to "philosophical progress" mirrors scientific practice and knowledge production. Furthermore, the scientism of analytic philosophy accounts for what Hylton describes as "its rejection of historical modes of understanding."[45] Both science and analytic philosophy view their history as a progression; that is to say, they take the present condition of their field to be the apex of knowledge, and the work of scientists and philosophers in the past is judged relative to the standards set by current thinking.

The form of reason analytic philosophy presupposes, therefore, is radically cut off from its ties to history, both in history in the broader sense as well as the history of philosophy. Following the model of scientific rationality in accord with the scientism that comprises its undercurrent, even history taken more narrowly as the history of the discipline is viewed as a study functionally separate from the proper practice of philosophy and irrelevant to it.[46] The material conditions out of which this notion of reason emerged are not taken into account, as reason claims for itself a universal scope and, whether this is acknowledged or not, a transcendental criteria for truth. This accounts for the neglect to which Hylton and Sluga draw their readers' attention. The only relationship to history possible for reason under these

[44] Soames, xv
[45] Hylton, vii
[46] Anglo-American philosophy in the 20th century was the first time that philosophy was taken to be categorically distinct from the history of philosophy.

assumptions is that of a thoroughgoing presentism. The history of the discipline is a curio cabinet of innovations and mistakes, the meaning of which is laid wholly bare to the knowing gaze of the present-day (which is as much to say, enlightened) philosopher. Past philosophical systems, once discredited, are useful only as a novelty or a cautionary fable about muddy thinking. History construed more broadly as the set of conditions that obtained in the past can only be a field for epistemological questions about how we can know anything about it, epistemological questions posed and answered before the tribunal of a trans-historical rationality.

In approaching philosophy as a cluster of problems that are subject to definite resolutions when exposed to rational scrutiny, the analytic philosopher is committed to the assumption that philosophical content is hermetically against its own historicity. The context, the modes of expression, the medium of philosophical writing and anything else apart from what is accessible to analysis becomes so much extra-philosophical chaff from which the philosophical (propositional, argumentative, *rational*) wheat must be sifted. This approach to philosophy commits the philosopher to the belief that the subject position of the philosopher socially and historically is irrelevant to philosophy proper. This a-historical approach stems from the belief that reason is universal, that reason can give immediate transparent access to philosophical meaning across space, time, and language, that reason is the same for all thinking persons.

Concluding Remarks

The rejection of the speculative philosophy of history, as cloudy as the concept may be in the secondary literature, is intimately bound up with the a-historical model of reason that the scientism of analytic philosophy presupposes. For the purposes of this project, when I refer to the philosophy of history I mean it in the sense captured by the definition I offer here of the speculative philosophy of history. There is a case that could be made to use the term “speculative

philosophy of history" not in spite of but precisely because it is a term of abuse invoked to preserve reason's detachment from history. I understand the philosophy of history to mean the "speculative philosophy of history," which is a schema of history that contains within it an account of how it is that reason comes to be. Dray observes that while "the construction of speculative systems of history is . . . somewhat out of fashion," he adds that "it is frequently, if uneasily, believed that whether we study the subject or not, we all in fact have an implicit philosophy of history."[47] Given the way I have chosen to define the speculative philosophy of history, the "uneasy belief" Dray describes is justified. Whether or not a speculative philosophy of history is explicitly articulated, every model of rationality carries with it an implicit speculative philosophy of history, whether this speculative philosophy of history holds that human societies inevitably deteriorate into barbarism or that history is the story of our gradual ascention from ignorance to higher forms of reason. While I would claim that analytic philosophy, understood as operating within an implicit framework of scientism, entails a philosophy of history, given that analytic philosophy is not an enterprise that is, by its very nature, committed to critique or emancipation,[48] this fact need not trouble the analytic philosopher overmuch.

So far, I have examined the term "speculative philosophy of history" from the standpoint of its genealogy and made a case that a productive way to think about the definition of the term is standing for an account of reason's relationship to history. Since this project takes the emancipatory goal of critical theory as its starting point, my aim is to demonstrate that if I am right and it is impossible to have an account of rationality without having an attendant

[47] Dray, 2
[48] See Glock, 179-203 and Soames, xiv

speculative philosophy of history, it is uncritical and unreflective to fail to articulate this speculative philosophy of history. As I will argue in the coming chapters, attempting to do away with the speculative philosophy of history in an account of rationality, far from allowing the critical theorist to slough off pseudo-metaphysical postulates, results in an unconscious reliance on the philosophy of history.

Chapter 2
The Speculative Philosophy of History and Critical Theory

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I made the case that the term speculative philosophy of history, in spite of its nearly ubiquitous use in the secondary literature, is an artifact of 20th century analytic philosophy's attempt to distance itself from philosophies the prevailing philosophical culture deemed too metaphysical. Rather than suggesting that the term speculative philosophy of history ought to be done away with entirely, I maintain that the very ambiguity of the term and its disreputable history are indicative of something troubled in deep philosophical waters, a trouble that will not vanish merely by changing the language.[49]

Since the term the speculative philosophy of history was born out of a movement that was, on the whole, invested in affirming an a-historical model of rationality (a model of rationality that holds that reason is insulated from historical contingencies), the speculative philosophy of history ought to be understood as a theory of history that gives an account of how reason comes to be. I also claimed that every model of rationality entails a speculative philosophy of history, whether or not this philosophy of history is explicitly articulated or not. In other words, any account of rationality entails an account of human history – even if the theory claims that reason is trans-historical and universal. If this claim is true, and if every account of

[49] There is a tendency among philosophers to try to dissolve or resolve seemingly intractable or somewhat uncomfortable philosophical problems by coining new terms or, in some cases, working through the difficulty by shifting their philosophical lexicon entirely. When we see philosophers doing this, generally it is a sign that rather than accepting the proffered revised language at its word, we should look more carefully at this new language. Language invented to think a way around a philosophical problem can instead be read as marking a place where something is being passed over or repressed in the philosophical discourse.

rationality brings with it a speculative philosophy of history of some kind, then the field of the speculative philosophy of history ought not to be relegated to the margins of our field or reduced to an embarrassed footnote as a philosophical folly. Rather, the speculative philosophy of history ought to be revisited – not in order to resuscitate some long dead absolutism, but to engage critically and thoughtfully with what is presupposed in any given model of rationality about its relationship to history. The speculative philosophy of history ought to be revisited and not merely dismissed.

While this is a need for philosophy as a whole, the need to think about the speculative philosophy of history is particularly urgent for critical theory. In all its varied iterations from its inception in Max Horkheimer's inaugural address in 1931 up to the present day, critical theory is unified by the question of critique. What is the normative and epistemological basis for unmasking domination, and how can domination be recognized and overturned? How can a rational or irrational social order be diagnosed as such? If reason is historically conditioned and emerges out of contingent and a-rational social determinations—behind the back of consciousness—how can it provide a normative standard for criticizing a society on the grounds of society's "irrationality"? Any satisfactory answer to these questions demands a critical theory that has an idea of history and an account of how it is that reason emerges from social and historical processes – or, to put it another way, it needs to have an articulated speculative philosophy of history.[50]

[50] In much the same way that the distinction between analytic and speculative philosophies of history is not made consistently in the secondary literature, different critical theorists have different things in mind when they refer to the philosophy of history (see chapter 3). For the purposes of this project, I derived my definition of the philosophy of history through a genealogical account of the speculative philosophy of history. However, since the distinction between analytic and synthetic philosophy of history does not track in critical theory (every philosophy of history in critical theory is, on my definition, a speculative philosophy of history), from hereon out

And indeed, one of the most notable works produced by the first generation of Frankfurt School critical theorists provides an extended philosophy of history at the heart of its critique. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (*DOE* from now on), published in 1944, presents a speculative philosophy of history that traces instrumental reason from its grounding in the first confrontation of the human species-subject with the world to the abstraction of exchange in late capitalism. This work, however, was the last sustained effort in the tradition of critical theory to provide such an account as an integral part of its theoretical framework.

Critical theory underwent a significant change twenty years later, a change that put critical theory into step with mainstream philosophy's disavowal of the philosophy of history, with the publication of Jürgen Habermas' *The Theory of Communicative Action* in 1966 (*TCA* from now on). Habermas, along with Axel Honneth and Karl-Otto Apel, is among the best-known inheritors of Frankfurt School critical theory, and his landmark two-volume work marked a seismic shift in the conversation about critical theory away from the more Hegelian-inflected works of his former mentors to a formalist-discursive model of rationality focused on intersubjective agreement, heavily influenced by the linguistic turn in analytic philosophy (a change that some have called critical theory's "linguistic turn").

Habermas' *TCA* reframed the way that critical theory approaches its central mission of critique. Habermas tries to ground reason not in the deep history of the subject's confrontation with the world but in the ideal conditions of communication free of domination. Reason itself is no longer

I will simply refer to the philosophy of history. Just keep in mind that I mean the philosophy of history in the sense that I defined speculative philosophy of history in the first chapter.

complicit in domination or power; the critical theorist's task is to recognize the grounding of reason in a construction of communicative action as the *telos* of speech itself. This shift is motivated by what Habermas sees as both the practical and theoretical limitations of the *DOE* and his frustration with what he views as the quietistic—even irrationalist—impasse that lead to Adorno's later work in aesthetics.

Habermas' philosophy is a comprehensive example of a theory of rationality that explicitly rejects the speculative philosophy of history in the tradition of critical theory, and so in this chapter I will begin by taking a close look at the substance of his criticisms of Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy. Of course, at first blush Habermas' criticisms in the *TCA* and elsewhere do not seem to hinge on the philosophy of history, since he spends very little time addressing this topic directly. His relatively sparse comments about the philosophy of history in the *DOE* would seem to be conceptually dependent upon his rejection of subject philosophy, and not the other way around (even if only by virtue of how much more ink he spills talking about the fundamental error of subject-philosophy). Given how much time Habermas spends emphasizing that his account of reason is a rejection of the philosophy of the subject, this reading is certainly more obvious. I, however, interpret Habermas' rejection of the philosophy of subject against the grain. In fact, I will argue that Habermas' rejection of the philosophy of the subject is part and parcel of his rejection of the philosophy of history.

So in this chapter, I will begin by taking giving an account of critical theory more broadly in order to put the impact of Habermas' philosophy and its reception within the context of the larger currents of thought in this tradition. Then, in Section 2, I will take an in-depth look at Habermas' criticism of Horkheimer and Adorno, both in the *TCA* as well as in his later

philosophy, in order to give an account of why Habermas split with his progenitors and what is at stake for him.

Part 1: The TCA as the Crossroads of Critical Theory

I have claimed that the call for renewed attention to the philosophy of history is particularly pressing for critical theory and that Habermas fundamentally shifted the conversation in mainstream critical theory away from giving explicitly articulated accounts of the relationship between reason and history. In order to substantiate these claims, I will first give an account of what I mean by "critical theory" and Habermas' position in the larger conversations in this tradition.

Of course, the idea that critical theory has a "mainstream" in the first place may seem reductive. After all, taking critical theory as a totality inevitably excludes a number of figures who may be called critical theorists in certain contexts. Even when confined to the "founders" of critical theory, the first generation of the Frankfurt School, it would be a mistake to overemphasize their similarities. Part of the difficulty is that the term "critical theory" has come to be a catchall term that denotes, as Jon Simons put it in his introduction to *From Agamben to Zizek: Contemporary Critical Theorists*, "a divergent set of theories that distinguish themselves from conventional or traditional theories"[51] (whatever "conventional or traditional theories" may mean in this case). This definition of critical theory, while descriptively faithful to how the term is often used, is so broad as to make the task of finding any

[51] Jon Simons, "Introduction," *From Agamben to Zizek: Contemporary Critical Theorists*, ed. Jon Simons (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2010), 1

philosophical coherence among the thinkers that fall under this umbrella an impossible or, at the very least, misguided task.

I take "critical theory" in a narrower sense. Critical theory refers specifically to the works of those thinkers involved with the *Institut für Sozialforschun* and those who take these thinkers as their most immediate influence and primary interlocutors. Of course, this raises the question of why, precisely, I think that the philosophy of history as I defined in at the end of the last chapter is an urgent question for these philosophers particularly. What unifies critical theorists? At its inception, Horkheimer's inaugural address characterizes the mission of the *Institut* as a collaboration between philosophers and fields that conduct empirical research, particularly the social sciences.[52] As the years went on, however, in the shadow of the Second World War and the exile of the principle members of the *Institute*, this aspiration, while present in the writings of some members of the Frankfurt School, was broadened or abandoned entirely by some of its founding members in their later years.

While there has been some attempt to clarify the unity of critical theory by reference to its methodology,[53] and at least one scholar has gone so far as to say that critical theory itself does not form any kind of unity,[54] I think the unity of Frankfurt School critical theory lies in its preoccupation with critique that is informed by an investment in the liberatory possibilities of reason. Even in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, derided by Habermas as a nihilistic work that no

[52] Max Horkheimer, "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," from *Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings*, trans. John Torpey (Cambridge: MIT Press), 10

[53] See Piet Strydom's *Contemporary Critical Theory and Methodology* (New York: Routledge, 2011)

[54] See David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (University of California Press, 1980), 14

longer holds out any hope for Enlightenment reason whatsoever,[55] Adorno and Horkheimer stress that "we are wholly convinced . . . that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought."[56] Of course, how, precisely, reason is potentially liberatory or what, exactly, constitutes rationality varies from critical theorist to critical theorist; however, they all share a vision of critical theory as engaged in a project of critique through reason. This is quite close to Axel Honneth's description of critical theory as work that recognizes that "the living conditions of modern capitalist societies . . . [results] in a pathological deformation of our capacities for reason" and "aim[s] at exploring the social causes of a pathology of human rationality."[57][58]

If this is the unifying mission of critical theory, then the publication of the *TCA* marked a substantial change in the register of how this critique takes place. As Habermas remarks at the end of the second volume of the *TCA*, the aim of the work is to shift the normative foundations of critical theory away from "the philosophy of history on which earlier critical theory still relied"[59] toward a pragmatic-linguistic, quasi-transcendental model which provides a much more modest scope for critique. The *TCA* is a call to a return to the early interdisciplinary aspirations of the Frankfurt school.[60] The scope for critique is ostensibly more modest since it is localized;

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[55] Jürgen Habermas and Thomas Y. Levin, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*" (*The New German Critique* 26 [1982]), 13

[56] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), xiii

[57] Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason*: *On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. James Ingram et al. (New York: Columbia UP, 2009), vii

[58] My definition is quite close, but not quite the same. Honneth suggests in *Pathologies of Reason* that critical theory is invested in exploring the "social causes" of pathological rationality, as if critical theorists all see the distortion that comes about under late capitalism as something that encroaches on what would otherwise be a an undistorted reason. At least for Adorno and Horkheimer in the *DOE*, the distortion does not come from outside of reason but is rather inscribed within reason itself. In this case, historical contingency does not corrupt reason; rather, reason itself has within it the seeds of its own regression into mythology (*DOE*, xiii-xiv)

[59] Jürgen Habermas, *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Volume 2 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (*Boston:* Beacon Press, 1984), 383

[60] Ibid.

critical theory "must refrain from critically evaluating and normatively ordering totalities, forms of life and cultures, and life contexts and epochs *as a whole.*"[61] Critical theory, then, does not generate its own interpretations or re-frame conversations in the social sciences; rather, "it resembles the focusing power of a magnifying glass," an endeavor that depends wholly upon the social sciences from first to last.[62]

In effect, the goal of the *TCA* is to shift the conversation away from what Habermas saw as the dead-end of an account of reason based in the philosophy of history towards an ostensibly more practical, pragmatic reason that can be located within existing discourses and practices. The *TCA* reformulated the project of critical theory and closed off the question of the philosophy of history. The present state of critical theory, as Peter Uwe Hohendahl observes in "From the Eclipse of Reason to Communicative Action and Beyond," is such that the majority of theorists have, as he puts it, "by and large . . . accepted the foundations of Habermasian thought."[63] Of course, there are "outsiders" who view Habermas as "the great rationalist spoiler of critical theory," but these thinkers return to Adorno and Benjamin from the standpoint of aesthetic theory and not with a concern for reason or the philosophy of history.[64] Even among those who reject the linguistic turn in critical theory inaugurated by Habermas disregard what I will argue in the following section is the core of the break between Habermas and the first generation of the Frankfurt School. In this way, critical theory as a whole fell into step with the mainstream of 20th century philosophy by either disavowing the philosophy of history or quietly ignoring it.

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[61] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 383

[62] Ibid.

[63] Peter Uwe Hohendahl, "From the Eclipse of Reason to Communicative Rationality and Beyond," in *Critical Theory: Current State and Future Prospects*, eds. Peter Uwe-Hohendahl and Jaimey Fischer (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 18

[64] Ibid., 19. There are some exceptions—see section 1 of chapter 4.

Part 2: Habermas and The Dialectic of Enlightenment

I have, so far, followed the convention in secondary literature when I refer to the second generation of the Frankfurt School as critical theory's "linguistic turn." And, given that the *TCA* is largely concerned with formulating an account of rationality based on the conditions that are *a priori* necessary in the idea of speech oriented toward achieving understanding, the "linguistic turn" may seem like an apt shorthand for this transformation. However, even when confined to those thinkers who are what we might call "mainstream" figures in the Frankfurt School after Habermas, to say that Habermas' definitive contribution to changing the conversation in critical theory is characterized by an emphasis on the philosophy of language isn't entirely correct. While this is true of Karl Otto-Apel,[65] Axel Honneth, who is equally if not more well known, has worked primarily on questions of intersubjective recognition and group identity formation, more inspired by Hegel than the linguistic aspect of Habermas' philosophy.[66] While I think that there is something true about calling the *TCA* the "linguistic turn" in critical theory,[67] I argue that the more essential and decisive shift in critical theory brought about by the *TCA* is not its turn to the philosophy of language, but rather its attempt to ground the normative force of its critique in something other than the philosophy of history.

In the secondary literature and in narratives about the development of thought in the Frankfurt School, this crucial dimension of the shift from the earlier to later critical theory is

[65] Karl Otto-Apel, *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*, Trans. Georgia Warnke (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984)

[66] Axel Honneth, *The I in We* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012)

[67] I will develop this idea in greater detail later in this chapter; for now, I will say that insofar as "linguistic turn" brings to mind the linguistic turn in analytic philosophy, it is apt.

often either overlooked entirely or downplayed.[68] Insofar as the publication of the *TCA* is widely regarded as the decisive moment for the second generation of the Frankfurt school, it is easy to understand why. While Habermas does dedicate a few sections to discussing his predecessors, comparatively speaking most of the *TCA* is dedicated to constructing Habermas' account of communicative reason. Thus (not unreasonably) most scholars have taken the turn to the conditions of intersubjective communication to be the decisive factor in this division.

Given how little time Habermas himself spends discussing the philosophy of history in the *TCA*, why do I claim that his interpretation of Adorno's philosophy of history is an important motivating animus of his project? Before I look to Habermas' text in greater detail to make the case that the *TCA* was written in part as a response to a particular problem he has with Adorno and Horkheimer's account in the *DOE*, it is worth noting that while the philosophy of history is widely overlooked as an important factor in the shift from first to second generation Critical Theory, I am not the only one who has noticed this. In 1979, Axel Honneth published the article "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno" intending to clarify what he saw as an all-to-often misinterpreted moment in the history of critical theory. For Honneth, the publication of the *TCA* and its intervention is "equivalent to a change of paradigm within

[68] Interestingly enough, it seems more scholars writing on the "linguistic turn" in the 1970s marked the importance of the philosophy of history in the break between the first and second generation of Critical Theory than they have done in more recent discussions of Habermas' linguistic turn do (for one example of a recent essay that makes no mention of the importance of the philosophy of history, see the introductory essay "Reasoning, Language and Intersubjectivity" to the 2004 volume *Critical Theory After Habermas* (eds. Dieter Freundlieb et al [Boston: Brill Leden, 2004]). In addition to Axel Honneth's early remarks (see Footnote 21), Albrecht Wellmer argues in his 1976 essay "Communications and Emancipation: Reflections on the Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory" (in *On Critical Theory*, ed. John O'Neill [New York: Continuum, 1976], 206-230) that the difficulties Habermas' linguistic turns resolved in Critical theory stem from "the latent reductionism of Marx's philosophy of history" (245).

critical theory," and yet this turn "has not hitherto been fully analyzed."[69] Honneth has a polemical intent in reconstructing what he sees as Habermas' implicit critique of Adorno,[70] making the case that Habermas is the true inheritor of the original ambitions of the Frankfurt School.

Much like Habermas himself, he believes that Adorno gives up on the practical political aspirations of earlier critical theory (in this work he rails against the "pessimism" of Adornian philosophy[71]) and that unearthing the substance of Habermas' disagreements provides a way to orient future conversations in critical theory (and, presumably, to avoid repeating his same mistakes). While his reading of Adorno is less than charitable or nuanced,[72] in this essay Honneth is prescient in his analysis of what is at the heart of Habermas' disagreement with Adorno: Habermas' rejection of Adorno's philosophy of history as presented in the *DOE*. According to Honneth, Habermas' main problem with Adorno's philosophy is that it takes "the logic of historical development [to be] a process of increasing reification,"[73] a view of history that locates fascism at the apex of the developmental logic of Enlightenment reason itself.

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[69] Axel Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno," trans. David Parent, *Telos* 39 (1979), 45

[70] I must confess that I am puzzled by Honneth's claim that Habermas' reorientation of Critical Theory and disagreement with Adorno is "implicit" (Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation," 46), given, as we shall see, the numerous instances Habermas is fairly explicit in his criticisms. Perhaps the dearth of attention that had been given at the time to the historical dimension of the shift caused him to believe that this lack was not just present in the secondary literature but also in the work itself. Of course, in many ways the work that Honneth does in this article anticipates what Habermas himself says in the *TCA*.

[71] Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation," 46-7; 48

[72] To be fair to Honneth, his stance on towards Adorno has softened considerably since the late 70s (likely because, prior to the publication of the *TCA* two years after the publication of this essay, the first generation of the Frankfurt School still dominated the movement).

[73] Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation," 46-7; 48

Honneth thus concludes that "Habermas departs from Adorno with a philosophy of history rooted in entirely different concepts,"[74] where the guiding concept underpinning Habermas' philosophy is a history of reason that is based on intersubjectivity rather than the development of consciousness out of nature. Thus, on Honneth's view, Habermas' philosophy is principally motivated by his concern with the philosophy of history as presented by his philosophical progenitors, and, far from being a rejection if the philosophy of history, his work simply presents a different account of it.

Honneth was right about the centrality of the philosophy of history in Habermas' split with Horkheimer and Adorno (the article was written two years before the *TCA* was published). However, in the *TCA*, Habermas does not characterize his position as having "philosophy of history rooted in different concepts" from Adorno. He writes in "The Tasks of a Critical Theory" that his work, rather than merely providing an alternate philosophy of history, shifts the normative foundations of critical theory away from the philosophy of history as such. "The theory of communicative action," he claims, "is meant to provide an alternative to the philosophy of history on which earlier critical theory still relied, but which is no longer tenable."[75] While Habermas certainly does have a kind of philosophy of history, he emphasizes that his theory decouples the normative power of critical theory from its dependence on an account of history. The pragmatic requirements for coordinating human actions – communicative reason – eclipses history as the foundation for norms.

[74] Ibid., 49
[75] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 397

If the problem of the philosophy of history is central to Habermas' repudiation of earlier models of critical theory, then the first task is to determine on what terms he himself establishes this departure. I will argue later that his relationship with the philosophy of history is far more deep and troubled than his own remarks would indicate, but for the time being I will turn to his relatively scant remarks upon the subject in order to see how he understands the problematic. This raises three interrelated questions. What does Habermas mean by "the philosophy of history" in the works earlier critical theorists (such that, on his own account, he doesn't have a philosophy of history)? Why does he believe that this philosophy of history was the ground for critique in earlier critical theory? Finally, why does this reliance on the philosophy of history to ground critique ultimately fail, in his view? To that end, I will begin by looking at his remarks in the *TCA* before turning to both the chapter he dedicates to the *DOE* in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (PDM from now on). Once I have given an overview of how he frames his philosophical departure from Horkheimer and Adorno, in the final section of this chapter I will discuss what this suggests for Habermas' understanding of and relationship to the philosophy of history and its role in grounding the norms of critique.

Part 3: The Dialectic of Enlightenment *in the* Theory of Communicative Action

In order to get at the heart of how Habermas himself frames his departure from the earlier generation of critical theory in the *TCA*, it is necessary to see how these criticisms are deployed within the systematic framework of his overall project. He opens the *TCA* by asking how philosophy, whose "basic theme" is reason, can continue now the illusion that philosophy can grasp totality has been dispelled. In other words, once philosophy has acknowledged that it cannot grasp the whole and once philosophers have become reflective (and have come to

recognize that grasping the whole requires a "view from nowhere"), how can philosophy proceed? The solution, according to Habermas, has been to change the mode in which philosophy speaks. Rather than thinking of a "philosophical worldview," philosophers have turned to localized problems in order to investigate "the formal conditions of rationality in knowing."[76] Thus, philosophical thought no longer operates independently of specialized domains of particular knowledge (whether aesthetic knowledge, moral knowledge, or scientific knowledge), but instead starts from within these domains to work out how claims in each domain are validated and under what conditions.[77]

Thus Habermas sets the stage for his argument in the *TCA* by claiming that in the wake of the failure of First Philosophy, he grounds his account of reason and rationality in the pragmatic conditions of argumentation and speech as they are already presupposed and practiced, in however distorted a way, in communities of speakers and actors. This account of reason and rationality, one that relies on existing modes of justification and what he famously calls the "unforced force of the better argument,"[78] was at the time a new orientation in critical theory. Why was this new orientation, this "linguistic turn," needed?

Where he specifically addresses this question is the first place in the *TCA* that he delves in any depth into the philosophy of history. He begins his analysis of where critical theory went astray with the way Western Marxists, starting with Lukacs and continuing on through

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[76] Jürgen Habermas, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society,* Volume 1 of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 2

[77] For a history of the Western Marxist tradition's relationship to the idea of totality, including Habermas, see Martin Jay's book *Marxism and Totality: Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). Jay identifies Habermas as presenting a view of philosophy that is what he calls a "decentered" (rather than an expressive" wholism (507).

[78] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 306

Horkheimer and Adorno, modify Weber's account of modernity as a process of rationalization. According to Habermas, the loss of freedom that Weber discusses is originally a loss defined entirely in action-theoretical terms: the loss of freedom occurs when organizations and institutions develop their own logics and operate independently of their members. Weber maintains that modernization replaces traditional motivators for action with rule-based and calculative rationality, culminating in the "iron cage" that traps subjects of capitalism within the limited and impersonal confines of economic self-interest.[79] Modernization makes possible not just instrumentalized action but also action oriented to reaching intersubjective understanding in order to "coordinate action."[80] Thus, on Habermas' reading of Weber, modernization simultaneously produces two phenomenon that counteract each other: on the one hand, the mechanism for coordinating action that takes place in language, allowing actors to reach understanding through the intersubjective procedure of rational justification, and on the other hand, the mechanism that coordinates actors non-linguistically—that is, through the steering media of money and power. Habermas' revision of Weber's rationalization thesis distinguishes between rational and irrational methods of coordinating action not by the substantive ends towards which the action is coordinated, but rather by the means through which social integration is achieved.[81]

[79] Of course, I do not mean to imply that Habermas takes Weber's account entirely as it is. While Lukacs and, following him, Horkheimer and Adorno break with Weber by interpreting modernization in terms of the lifeworld, Habermas breaks with Weber's account of modernization as a monolith. For Habermas, modernization creates the pre-conditions for communicative rationality insofar as it produces separate value spheres, each with their own form of validity. Precisely how much work this account of modernity does in grounding the normative power of the *TCA* is disputed, and is a question I will return to in Chapter 3.

[80] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 341

[81] Ibid., 342

Starting with Lukacs, Habermas writes, critical theory took up Weber's rationalization thesis and divorced it from its action-theoretical context and made "a connection between the differentiation of a capitalist economy steered through exchange value . . . and the deformation of the life-world."[82] The middle term between the rationalization of institutions under capitalism and the deformation of the life world for Lukacs is commodity fetishism, which determines the form of objectivity for all forms of life under developed capitalism.[83] Thus, Lukacs reinterprets Weber's rationalization thesis in such a way that the commodity form is determinate for all forms of knowledge, a condition that Lukacs believes may be overcome dialectically.

Lukacs recognizes that the Absolute in Hegel ultimately fails, since the reconciliation of theoretical and practical reason in a distorted world only reproduces an "a priori" deduction of the existing totality. However, according to Habermas, Lukacs still adheres to Hegelian logic, believing that theory can accomplish this reconciliation provided the philosopher can also grasp the world-historical process through which the present state of total reification came about. Habermas writes,

> "A metaphysics transformed into a dialectical philosophy of history must not only be capable of a conceptual perspective from which the unity of the abstractly separated moments of reason can be grasped; beyond this, it must believe itself capable of identifying the subjects who will establish this unity practically and of showing them the way. *For these reasons, Lukacs supplements his theory of reification with his theory of class consciousness.*"[84]

Lukacs' revision of Weber leads him to the conclusion that reification is the true condition of contemporary life and that commodity fetishism has become the form of thinking itself. Lukacs then takes this reading of Weber within a framework of Hegelian logic, and this

[82] Ibid., 354-5
[83] Ibid., 356-7
[84] Ibid., 364

leads him to deploy a dialectical philosophy of history to reunite practical and theoretical reason. The problem with this for Habermas is that this requires that the philosopher not only be able to grasp the present totality but also the world-historical process that produced this totality such that the philosopher can bring about this reconciliation and recognize the agents of historical change. This, for Habermas, claims too much for philosophy.

Habermas' view on the philosophy of history and its relationship to his larger systemic commitments in the *TCA* may be extrapolated in part from his treatment of Lukacs in this section. Habermas is motivated in part to write the *TCA* in order to orient critical theory in a way that does not require a philosophy of history to ground its norms and, while this point is not foregrounded in the first few pages of the book where he discusses his larger programmatic interests, he stresses that philosophy is now post-metaphysical. In other words, grand theories that position the philosopher with a view of totality (whether it be the totality of the historical process or of being) have lost their credibility, and philosophy must renounce its claim to this perspective. This renunciation echoes the usual criticisms of the philosophy of history (ones that are most often denigrated with the term “speculative” in any case), and Habermas raises this same criticism of Lukacs' philosophy of history. On Habermas' account, Lukacs' theory of reification, which emerged out of his coupling of Weber's rationalization thesis with Hegelian logic, leads Lukacs to find a way out of the total triumph of instrumental reason by positing a super-human perspective from which not only the present totality can be grasped but the whole course of history may be understood. The liberatory potential of Lukacs' philosophy is dependent upon a philosophy of history. In the very beginning of the *TCA*, while Habermas' general summation of the current state of philosophy does not mention the philosophy of history

explicitly, his problems with Lukacs points to both the centrality of the problem of the philosophy of history for his work as a whole and a key objection to the philosophy of history as such. He sees the philosophy of history as requiring a transcendent point of view, and he rejects this because this point of view entails claiming a kind of knowledge impossible for a subject. From what position could one recognize the world-historical processes that lead to the present state of total reification such that one could think reconciliation, behind alienation itself?

Habermas' criticism of Lukacs places his problems with his use of the philosophy of history front and center. The same is not true for his criticism of Horkheimer and Adorno, whom he takes to task more for the dire, quietistic consequences of their account than the substance of their arguments. He does mention that they have a philosophy of history, and that this philosophy of history, together with their adhesion to the philosophy of the subject, is responsible for their renunciation of the aspirations of critical theory from the 1930s.

Habermas notes that like Lukacs, Horkheimer and Adorno take Weber's rationalization thesis and extend it beyond an action-theoretical context into the lifeworld itself. They, however, reject Lukacs' neo-Hegelian philosophy of history and renounce the possibility of restoring the unity of reason—as Habermas puts it, for Horkheimer and Adorno (as for Weber) "objective reason cannot be restored, not even in dialectical concepts."[85] Lukacs hangs his hope for overcoming instrumental reason on dialectical thought, and thus locates the problem of reification only in the understanding. This way the unity of reason could be reconstructed in the mediation of form and content. Adorno and Horkheimer depart from Lukacs by radicalizing their critique: in their view, identifying thought itself "betrays the utopian content in cognition."[86]

[85] Ibid., 372
[86] Ibid., 373

Habermas claims that by adopting Lukacs' thesis of total reification and rejecting his objective idealism, Horkheimer and Adorno are put in a position in which they need to denounce the whole as untrue, and to do this they trace their account of domination to the origins of identifying thought itself. The *DOE* works through the consequences of this denunciation through three steps that generalize the category of reification, according to Habermas. First, contra Lukacs, they claim that identifying thought is the distal cause of the commodity form and not vise-versa. Second, they locate domination in the constitution of subject/object relations as such, dating back to the prehistory of the subject and its confrontation in the world. Lastly, they equate domination of outer nature with domination of inner nature, such that domination is at the root of life itself.[87] "This . . . generalization of the concept of reification," Habermas writes, "leads to a concept of instrumental reason that shifts the primordial history of subjectivity and the self-formative process of ego identity into an encompassing historico-philosophical perspective."[88] In other words, for Horkheimer and Adorno, reification is both total and constituative for the emergence of subjectivity as such, and the *DOE* tells the story of this subject from the first emergence of the "I" down through the return of repressed nature in the diabolical forms of fascism. In short, they replace Lukacs' objective idealist philosophy of history with a different philosophy of history.

While Habermas foregrounded the philosophy of history as a criticism of Lukacs, curiously he does not do the same for the philosophy of history as it is presented in the *DOE*. Rather, he focuses instead on the aporias and resignation that stem from their generalized theory

[87] Ibid., 378-9
[88] Ibid., 380

of reification, on the *consequences* of their commitment their philosophy of the subject and their philosophy of history. He writes,

> "This philosophy of history opens up a catestrophic view of a relation between spirit and nature that has been distorted beyond recognition. But we can speak of distortion only as the original relation of spirit and nature is secretly conceived in such a way that the idea of truth is connected with that of a universal reconciliation—where reconciliation includes the interaction of human beings with nature, with animals, plants, and minerals."[89]

For Habermas, the problem with critical theory in the *DOE* is its impossible position: Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy of history characterizes all advances of reason as coming at the expense of the subject's relationship to inner and outer nature, while at the same time they, unlike Lukacs, reject philosophies that would reconcile spirit and nature through thinking the totality. Thus, that Adorno and Horkheimer's theoretical commitments lead them away from the earlier practical aspirations of critical theory is Habermas' main objection. He writes,

> "In the shadow of a philosophy that has outlived itself, philosophical thinking intentionally retrogresses to gesticulation. As opposed as the intentions behind their respective philosophies of history are, Adorno is in the end very similar to Heidegger as regards his position on the theoretical claims of objectivating thought and of reflection: The mindfulness of nature comes shockingly close to the recollection of being."[90]

When he mentions the philosophy of history directly in his discussion of the *DOE*, he does so never to criticize it directly *qua* philosophy of history; rather, he draws a comparison that disqualifies it (in this case, Adorno's proximity to Heidegger). He does praise Adorno for his consistency in dwelling within the aporias to which his philosophical commitments lead, but he clearly thinks that the journey from the *DOE* to Adorno's aesthetic philosophy was a misstep for critical theory. Here, again, Habermas doesn't criticize the *DOE* for its philosophy of history pure

[89] Ibid., 380-1
[90] Ibid., 385

and simple, but rather he points out where it lead and what, on his account, critical theory had to give up as a result.

Habermas characterizes *Negative Dialectics* and Adorno's aesthetic philosophy as a theoretical cul-de-sac for critical theory. He gives this overview of his predecessors and their inheritance of Weber's rationalization thesis (and his criticisms of them) in order to set up an alternate path from Weber that circumvents what he sees as the dead-end of critical theory. He purports to show not just how Lukacs, Horkheimer and Adorno fail but also why this failure is the consequence of a particular philosophical paradigm. "The program of early critical theory," he writes, "floundered not on this or that contingent circumstance, but from the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness."[91] He argues that the philosophy of consciousness, or subject philosophy,[92] set critical theory down the road to nowhere.

So far, I have distinguished his criticism of Lukacs from his criticism of the *DOE* by noting that he focuses explicitly on the philosophy of history in the former case, while he focuses on the philosophy of the subject in the latter (and indeed, he places much more emphasis on the philosophy of the subject throughout the *TCA*). Yet, elsewhere in the *TCA* he vascillates between claiming, as above, that critical theory as such failed on account of its adhesion to the philosophy of consciousness and saying that the first generation of critical theorists failed in their aspirations because they relied on the philosophy of history to ground their norms. This suggests that there is a link between the philosophy of history and the philosophy of consciousness for Habermas.

[91] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 386
[92] He uses the two interchangeably.

Habermas himself does not make the connection between the philosophy of the subject and the philosophy of history directly, but this link may be extrapolated from his remarks in "The Tasks of a Critical Theory of Society," the concluding essay in the *TCA*. In this passage, in which he discusses once again how critical theory could not make good on the promises of interdisciplinary cooperation and empirical research made at the founding of the *Institut*, he foregrounds the importance of the philosophy of history and not, as he does earlier, the philosophy of consciousness. Here, as before, he says that Lukacs' appropriation of Weber's rationalization thesis lead critical theory to start from a position in which only a Marxist philosophy of history could give them the normative grounds for ideology critique. Starting with Lukacs, critical theorists understood reification as total, and, as Habermas puts it, "without a *theory* of history there could be no immanent critique that applied to the manifestations of objective spirit and distinguished what things and human beings could be from what they actually were."[93] In other words, the philosophy of history gave critical theory both epistemic and normative criteria for ideology critique. Where Lukacs fits into this picture is clear from his earlier discussion in the *TCA*: an account of the philosophy of history allows him to both identify the distortion of subjects under the sway of commodity fetishism and its corresponding mode of thought (normative criteria) as well as a way of this condition can be recognized and overcome dialectically (epistemic criteria). Of course, as Habermas claims earlier, this leads to positing the proletariat as a macrosubject and claims too much for philosophical thought. Here, the connection between the philosophy of history and the philosophy of the subject is clear: in the

[93] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 382

case of Lukacs, the philosophy of history leads to positing a macrosubject of history who can recognize the process of history and reconcile theoretical and practical reason.

Habermas goes on to say that Adorno and Horkeimer realiz that this was a problem, or, put another way, they recognize what he calls "the fragility of the Marxist philosophy of history."[94] They abandon the dialectical fantasies of the Lukacsian macrosubject of history and instead recognize that, in the absence of this kind of hope, disaster reigns triumphant. Still within the paradigm of the philosophy of history, Habermas notes that they "scaled down [their] program . . . . [to] pseudonormative propositions concerning objective teleology in history."[47] Without the macrosubject of history, Adorno and Horkeimer only saw subjects distorted by a totally administered society, in which the triumph of instrumental reason, now conceived as identifying thought itself, is very nearly total. Since the *DOE* still relies upon the philosophy of history for its norms but rejects Lukacs' macrosubject of history, the epistemic criteria that allows distortion to be recognized is provided by a philosophy of history that relies on a lost origin—or, as he puts it earlier in the *TCA*, an "original relation of spirit and nature."[95] This same philosophy of history, however, does not offer a way forward for subjects and leaves them trapped in a totally administered society. So while it is true that when he first discusses the *DOE* he ties its aporias to the limitations of the philosophy of consciousness, read in light of his final remarks on critical theory, ultimately the problems with the philosophy of the subject are inextricably linked to his assessment the bankruptcy of the philosophy of history.

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[94] Ibid
[47] Ibid.
[95] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 380

While he emphasizes the futility of pursuing critical theory within the framework of the philosophy of consciousness more heavily than he does the philosophy of history, ultimately his worries about the problem of historicity as such underlies his rejection of subject philosophy. Habermas fears that in the absence of a universal, trans-historical model of rationality, a subject is held hostage to the contingencies of history; in other words, it remains powerless to withstand (or, perhaps, even recognize) ideology. In Habermas' mind, subject philosophy either leaves the subject at the mercy of history or, alternately, resorts to an appeal to some macrosubject of history such that the entirety of the historical process may be grasped from a particular subject position within history (in other words, regresses into bad metaphysics). Communicative action, Habermas believes, escapes the problem posed by historicity by opening a space of contestation through the implicit pragmatic requirements underlying communicative action oriented to reaching understanding. This fundamental motivation that propels the construction of the *TCA*'s theoretical edifice accounts for why Habermas himself slips between claiming that the philosophy of history and the philosophy of the subject are to blame for the failures of first-generation critical theory. The fact that he himself never foregrounds this problematic accounts for why history is seldom mentioned as a central motivating factor discussions about the shift in critical theory that came later.

Part 4: Habermas Revisiting The Dialectic of Enlightenment

The *TCA* is not Habermas' last word on the *DOE*. He revisited the work of his former mentors in 1985 with the publication of *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, a compilation of both lectures and some previously published essays[96] that address "the challenge

[96] The chapter that I shall be dealing with in this section, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno" is a revised version of an article that appeared three years earlier in *The New*

from the neostructuralist critique of reason."[97] In this book, Habermas is defending the rational potential in modernity against its "irrationalist" critics (particularly French thinkers such as Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault) by giving his own account of the process of modernization and by situating those thinkers within this discourse of modernity. He dedicates a chapter to revisiting the *DOE*, and in this essay he takes a different approach to criticizing Horkheimer and Adorno than he does in the *TCA.*

He opens his essay, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno" by locating the *DOE* in the counterenlightenment tradition alongside the "dark" writers of the bourgeoisie, such as Schopenhauer, de Sade, and Nietzsche. Nietzsche is the key figure in this essay, as Habermas draws parallels between both the Nietzschean orientation and the post-structuralist thinkers whose "moods and attitudes . . . that are confusingly like those of Horkheimer and Adorno."[98] In the context of the *PDM*'s larger project, the essay is meant to forestall what he viewed as the neostructuralist evacuation of the rational achievements of modernity. Here, with this larger context in mind, he delves a bit more deeply into the substance of his disagreement with Horkheimer and Adorno.

In "The Entwinement" essay, he frames his analysis by noting wryly that, "the reader who resists being overwhelmed by [the *DOE*'s] rhetoric" inevitably senses that their analysis is

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German Critique titled "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-Reading Dialectic of Enlightenment." The basic contours of the argument in both versions of the essay are the same, so I will just focus on the version that appears in the *PDM*. On a side note, however, it is interesting that in the earlier version of the essay, Habermas criticizes the *DOE* for its pessimism (following, perhaps, Honneth's example in "Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas' Critique of Adorno"), while the version in the *PDM* omits the word.

[97] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), xix

[98] Ibid., 106

based on "abstractions and simplifications."[99] The substance of this objection is that they have a simplistic and abstract view of modernity. According to Habermas, in Horkheimer and Adorno's attempt to ground their critique, they fail to recognize the rational potential that emerges from the differentiation of value-spheres produced through modernity.[100] On Habermas' interpretation of modernization, modernity dissolves traditional forms of life, depriving them of their apparent "naturalness," leading not only to disorientation and crises characteristic of modernization but also to the preconditions for communicative rationality. Read in conjunction with his discussion of Weber's rationalization thesis in the *TCA*, it is clear that he is alluding to the way the first generation of Critical Theorists interpreted Max Weber. He reprises his claims in the *TCA* that the *DOE* "does not direct our thought to the path that is nearest at hand" insofar as it disregards the inner logics and universal validity that emerge within the differentiation of value-spheres that comes with modernity.[101] The lion's share of the essay, however, is dedicated to answering the question of *how* they came to miss the liberatory potential of modernity.

This time, Habermas locates the error in the misguided attempt to radicalize ideology critique by turning critique against reason itself. On Habermas' account, the Enlightenment paves the way for ideology critique insofar as the Enlightenment consists of the differentiation of basic concepts (e.g., the differentiation of self from environment, of nature from culture) and a concomitant demythologization of the world that separates it into different spheres, each with its own forms of validity. The external world is split into the objective world, where the criteria for validity is truth, and the social world, in which the criteria for validity is normative rightness. By

[99] Ibid., 110
[100] Ibid., 112-3
[101] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 382

contrast, claims about the inner world of experience, separated for the first time in modernity from the external world, are deemed valid or invalid based on their authenticity. Each sphere has its own form of validity and follows its own logic.[102]

Ideology critique, in this account, takes the products of the Enlightenment—theories—as its object, exposing those that depend upon something other than reason for their justification. For Habermas, theories may be vulnerable to ideology critique for a few reasons, their dependence upon a concealed "mixture of power and validity" being only one of them. A theory also may be exposed for "presupposing a demythologized understanding of the world . . . [and being] still ensnared by myth" or entailing a category mistake.[103] Ideology critique renders Enlightenment self-reflexive for the first time, since it takes the basic founding principles of the Enlightenment (the differentiation of spheres of validity and demythologization) and uses them to determine whether the theories that emerge from the process of Enlightenment may be weighed in the balance and found wanting.

The trouble arises, for Habermas, when ideology critique reaches its second level of self-reflexivity, when "doubt reaches out to include reason, whose standards ideology critique had found already given in bourgeois ideals and had simply taken at their word."[104] In other words, the reflexivity of Enlightenment thinking cannibalizes itself when critique moves independently of the values that had both circumscribed its use and given it a normative standard for criticism. Horkheimer and Adorno, according to Habermas, take ideology critique to this second level, undoing the real work that can be done at its first order of reflexivity.

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[102] Habermas, *PDM*, 114-116
[103] Ibid., 116
[104] Ibid.

So what motivates them to go a step too far in their critique, such that it becomes not just unmoored from the Enlightenment principles that brought critique into being in the first place, but also turns on these very ideals? Habermas explains this move in part by looking to the contingent historical circumstances that lead them down this road as well as by claiming that, following Nietzsche, they "[draw] their criteria for cultural criticism from a basic experience of aesthetic modernity that has now been *rendered independent*."[105] I will return to this first point shortly, but for the time being I will focus on Habermas' claim that, like Nietzsche, Adorno and Horkheimer respond to the experiences that come with the aesthetic dimension of modernity and turn to a genealogy that collapses reason into simply a manifestation of power (in the case of the *DOE*, power as instrumental reason).

For Habermas, aesthetic modernity emerges when modernity decouples art from the practical and the useful and develops a set of values that is particular to it, namely authenticity. For the first time, this allows the decentered subject, liberated from the demands of traditional worldviews and rendered into an abstract ego, to reject normative and practical judgments and instead enthrone taste as the ultimate system of value. For Habermas, Nietzsche is the first thinker to fully articulate aesthetic modernism, and Adorno and Horkheimer, despite remaining Enlightenment thinkers, take after Nietzsche nearly beat for beat in the *DOE*. Like Nietzsche, they present a natural history in which every triumph over outer nature is marked by a violent repression of inner nature. They also follow Nietzsche in their account of knowledge and

[105] Ibid., 121

morality: behind the pretenses to universality and objective truth "lurk the imperatives of self preservation and domination."[106]

So, for Habermas, both *The Genealogy of Morals* and the *DOE* are instances of second order reflexivity in critique, or, as he puts it, "critique disburdened of the mortgages of enlightened thought."[107] Engaging in second-order critique means that one can no longer appeal to what is true or false, and so Nietzsche, once his genealogy has done the work of unmasking, turns to a theory of power, to a neo-mythic world-view in which all struggles in the world are struggles between arcane forces. Adorno and Horkheimer do not take this step; instead they abandon all attempts to overcome what Habermas sees as the performative contradiction in second-level ideology critique. At the end of the essay, Habermas repeats his remarks in the *TCA* about Adorno and Horkheimer's skepticism towards reason as well as his belief that critical theory has no business accepting such resignation unless there is absolutely no other viable alternative.[108] While he reaches the same conclusion as he does in the *TCA*, i.e. that the path Adorno and Horkheimer take in the *DOE* is unviable, in the *PDM* he draws on the parallels between their thought and that of Nietzsche's in order to show that, in a way, their thought is based on a kind of category mistake. Both they and Nietzsche are prompted by the experiences of aesthetic modernity that modernization made possible to apply the logic of art that has been rendered independent to the separate domains of morality and truth.

While Habermas' discussion of the *DOE* in the *PDM* shares some commonalities with that in the *TCA* (such as the impasse of critical theory in the wake of Adorno and Horkheimer's

[106] Ibid., 121-122
[107] Ibid., 126
[108] Ibid., 127-130

totalizing critique of reason), in the *PDM* he performs a first-order ideology critique of the *DOE*. Rather than merely stating that their position has become untenable and leaving it at that, he tries to show that their account of reason entails a category mistake, that they adopt the position they do on account of historically contingent (and, in this sense, extra-philosophical) reasons, and that they have, in essence, regressed into mythology. The category mistake they make is the aforementioned conflation of the feeling of aesthetic detachment with the total abandonment of reason altogether, an error they share with Nietzsche. According to Habermas, they make this category mistake in part because of their "simplified" view of modernity, a view Habermas diagnoses as a symptom of their disaffection in the wake of German fascism and the rise of Stalinism in the USSR.[109] He writes,

> "Against this background [of Stalinism and Fascism] it becomes intelligible how the impression could indeed get established in the darkest years of the Second World war that the last sparks of reason were being extinguished from this reality and had left the ruins of a civilization in collapse without any hope. The idea of a natural history, which the young Adorno had taken from Benjamin, seemed to have been realized in an unforeseen manner. In the moment of its most extreme acceleration, history congealed into nature and faded into the Golgotha of a hope become unrecognizable."[110]

In this passage, Habermas psychologizes Adorno and Horkheimer's position in the *DOE*. In showing that the plausibility of their account in the *DOE* may be attributed to the particularity of their historical circumstances, Habermas, true to the spirit of his own vision of Enlightenment ideals, tries to show that their movement to second-order ideology critique not only nullifies the foundation of critique itself but is also motivated by biographical circumstances that rendered them vulnerable to the appeal of earlier ideas of "natural history" and to the temptation to extend critique beyond its limit. Finally, true to his own vision of ideology critique, he claims that the

[109] Ibid., 116-117
[110] Ibid., 117

DOE, in addition to being predicated on a category mistake and motivated by extra-rational historical circumstances, is a regression into undialectical ontological thinking and, ultimately, into myth. He ends the essay by suggesting that the *DOE* is an attempt by the authors to purify reason of all empirical admixtures and that the failure of their totalizing critique may be attributed to Horkheimer and Adorno's desire to unmask illusion once and for all, to what Habermas implies is a covert Platonic impulse lurking as the unacknowledged systematic motivation behind their project. "Only a discourse," Habermas concludes in the final sentence of the essay, "that admits [that convictions are formed and confirmed in a medium that is not 'pure'] might break the spell of mythic thinking."[111] In this essay, Habermas adds to his analysis in the *TCA* and models first-level ideology critique by showing why he believes *DOE* fails to move forward.

Concluding Remarks

While the fact that the publication of the *TCA* was a watershed moment for critical theory is widely acknowledged, the centrality of the problem of the philosophy of history is seldom seen as the deciding factor marking the split between the first and succeeding generations of critical theory. Whether because Habermas himself does not necessarily foreground the philosophy of history in the *TCA* or because in the mid- to late- twentieth century the philosophy of history came to be seen as an embarrassment, the philosophy of history has effectively disappeared from the conversation in critical theory.

Why is this a problem? If bringing the philosophy of history into an account of critical theory runs the risk of delegitimizing this kind of work in the present philosophical climate,

[111] Ibid., 130

would it not be better for the subject to remain buried so critical theory can move forward? The answer to this question hinges on whether or not critical theory, which perennially grapples with how to find both epistemic and normative justification for critique, can in fact give an account of reason that successfully avoids an implicit philosophy of history.

Chapter 3
The Philosophy of History in *The Theory of Communicative Action*

Introduction

The split between the first generation and the second generation of the Frankfurt school happened on the fault lines of the philosophy of history. At the heart of Habermas' criticism of Horkheimer and Adorno is the concern that they have given up on reason prematurely as a consequence of their negative philosophy of history, and that this adhesion to the philosophy of history, with its attendant commitment to the philosophy of the subject, dooms Critical Theory to retreat into contemplation or impotent gestures towards the non-identical and mimesis. Habermas believes that he can circumvent these aporias by eschewing the philosophy of history and avoiding, as he lays out in the *PDM*, the useless and self-undermining trap of second-order reflexivity.

The "linguistic turn" of Critical Theory, inaugurated by the *TCA*, could perhaps be provocatively renamed the "ahistorical turn," since abandoning the philosophy of history was the decisive factor undergirding Habermas' re-imagining of the scope and purpose of critical theory (and, arguably, its most underacknowledged legacy). Of course, calling Habermas' philosophy "ahistorical" is bound to raise some skepticism. After all, merely rejecting the philosophy of history does not necessarily entail ahistoricism. Is it not precisely the epistemic problem of the "view from nowhere" that many believe render the philosophy of history untenable, since it requires a step outside of history, outside of the limits imposed by being a temporally limited knower? Is this problem not the very reason Habermas takes as his starting point a chastened philosophy that recognizes its own limitations? Furthermore, saying that Habermas' intervention

marks an "ahistorical turn" in Critical Theory seems to be, on the face of it, absurd, given that his account of modernity is a centerpiece of his philosophical oeuvre and that, as we shall see later in this chapter, he considers himself to be an historical materialist.

Insofar as "ahistorical" is taken to mean a philosophical position that appeals to metaphysical ideas of reason to ground its claims, Habermas is clearly not an ahistorical thinker. However, insofar as his goal is to find an account of reason that does not depend on history for its normative power, he is definitively ahistorical in his approach. In the concluding remarks of the *TCA*, "The Tasks of a Critical Theory," he writes that "the theory of communicative action . . . proceeds reconstructively, that is, unhistorically."[112] Minimally, he takes himself to be methodologically ahistorical, and, in this sense, it would be apt to call his philosophy critical theory's ahistorical turn. Habermas believes that he is able to find normative ground in the presuppositions that lie in the structures of communication itself, and it is in this sense that his method of uncovering these norms is "reconstructive." He begins with the pragmatic conditions of speech and uses these to generate his account of normativity. This account of normativity is the basis for his vision of the aims and scope of Critical Theory as well as the foundation for his account of historical development. By starting with the universal pragmatics of speech, he believes he is able to recuperate an account of history that avoids the philosophy of history. This account of history comes complete with "rationally reconstructable" stages of development, has parallels with the ontogenetic development of communicative subjects, and offers a universal metric for interpreting social development. All of these attributes, which are hallmarks of traditional philosophies of history, are granted by this "reconstructive" and "ahistorical"

[112] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 383

procedure.

In much the same way that the importance of the philosophy of history as a motivator for Habermas' departure from some of the tenants of earlier Critical Theory is often either overlooked or downplayed, Habermas' account of social evolution has received less attention than other dimensions of his thought.[113] While there are probably other factors that have contributed to this oversight, I believe there are two primary interrelated reasons that this is the case: how his theory is usually interpreted and the vicissitudes of scholarly fashion. First, his writings on social evolution and historical development are generally thought to be relatively unimportant to his theory as a whole. For the most part, his philosophical work is thought to stand or fall with the position he sets forth in the *TCA* on communicative action, while his writings on social evolution are seen as not fundamental to his philosophical project. As such, Habermas' model of social evolution is seen for the most part as tangential to his other work and may be disregarded without undermining the persuasive heft of his thought as a whole—probably without much philosophical loss. Second, the bulk of his writing on social evolution came out in the mid-70s, prior to the publication of the *TCA*. His essays on historical materialism, universal pragmatics, and social evolution (later collected as a book in English as *Communication and the Evolution of Society*), came out of his debate with Niklas Luhmann in the late 1960s,[114] and interest in this particular topic seems to have faded with that chapter in academic history. Thus for reasons both philosophical and extra-philosophical, Habermas' theory

[113] A point that David Owens makes in the introduction to his 2002 book *Between Reason and History: Habermas and the Idea of Progress* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), although more recent works (in addition to Owen's work) have addressed his account of social evolution (usually critically – see Amy Allen's *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* [New York: Columbia UP, 2016]).

[114] Michael Schmid, "Habermas' Theory of Social Evolution" in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, eds. John B. Thompson and David Held (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1982), 162

of social evolution, not unlike the speculative philosophy of history itself in the mid-20th century, has more or less faded into the background in the secondary literature.

Given that the *TCA* is the result of his attempt to avoid the problems that arise when norms are grounded in a philosophy of history, his account of historical development and the function this account has (if any) in his theory of rationality as a whole are important for understanding the trajectory of Habermas' philosophy generally. Having removed the philosophy of history from his account and taken his "ahistorical turn," what becomes of history? What role does Habermas' theory of social evolution play in the larger context of his thought? How does he manage to construct an account of social evolution that, at least superficially, shares so many attributes with traditional philosophies of history without this account being itself a philosophy of history? Finally, can his model of critical theory stand without his account of history, as is so often assumed (even if only implicitly)?

Apart from the interest these questions may hold for scholars of Habermas or intellectual historians of the Frankfurt School, what is at stake in these questions is, ultimately, the status of the philosophy of history and the possibility of normative justification. If Habermas' account of rationality and his model of critical theory do not depend on his account of social evolution and if his account of rationality and his model of critical theory are adequate to the emancipatory aims of critical theory, Habermas has succeeded in demonstrating that there is a way around the philosophy of history for critical theory. If, on the other hand, his account does not fulfill the emancipatory promise of critical theory or if his account of social evolution is a philosophy of history in spite of his insistence that it is not, his failure to escape the philosophy of history may suggest something about the inextricable entanglement of the idea of reason and the philosophy

of history.

Given the importance of these questions for the present and future of critical theory, his theory of social evolution warrants a closer look. To that end, the first section of this chapter will give an account of his view of history, and the second part of the chapter will determine the relationship between history and norms. Finally, we will look at whether or not Habermas does actually have a philosophy of history and, if he does, what this means for his project, a question that will be tackled in Chapters 4 and 5.

Part 1: The Reconstructive Method

At the heart of Habermas' ahistorical turn is the idea that the proper way to ground his account of rationality is by means of reconstruction. This is evident in his methodology in the *TCA*, where he takes the procedures of rational argumentation within existing discourse communities as his starting point and derives his account of justification by "reconstructing the formal-pragmatic presuppositions and conditions of an explicitly rational behavior."[115] Metaphysical worldviews have become untenable, as have ideas of reason that allow the philosopher to grasp the whole, so Habermas sets philosophy on the ostensibly more modest path of reconstructing the formal-pragmatic underpinnings of argumentative procedure.

The method of rational reconstruction provides the foundation not only for his account of communicative action but also for his account of social evolution. The *TCA* reconstructs the rules of argumentation and traces its origin in occidental modernity; the essays collected in *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (*CES* from now on), published six years before the *TCA*, gives an account of the procedure of rational reconstruction itself as well as a

[115] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 2

reconstruction of historical materialism from which Habermas derives his model of social evolution. Since his theory of social evolution and his theory of rationality are grounded in rational reconstruction, it is worth looking at what, precisely, rational reconstruction is, what its proper objects are, and what kind of knowledge can be attained through this procedure.

CES lays out rational reconstruction as the method proper to what Habermas calls "universal pragmatics." Beginning with the presupposition that "action aimed at reaching understanding [is] . . . fundamental," universal pragmatics attempts to rationally reconstruct the conditions that make this kind of action possible.[116] Habermas defines reconstructive sciences like universal pragmatics in contradistinction to empirical analytical sciences. Empirical-analytical sciences deal with objects that are accessible to immediate perception and aims to provide a description of observable reality; reconstructive sciences, on the other hand, deal with "symbolically prestructured reality" and aim to explicate the rules implicit in communication and the generation of meaning.[117] In other words, rational reconstruction looks at the "generative structures underlying the production of symbolic formations" in order to bring the pretheoretical knowledge of competent speakers, their implicit "rule consciousness," to light.[118] Empirical-analytic sciences are subject to revision with the appearance of new information and, as such, are always provisional. Since universal pragmatics as a reconstructive science takes the intuitive foreknowledge of competent speakers as its starting point, it cannot contravene this knowledge. Rather, by unearthing the implicit rule-consciousness that governs speech, universal pragmatics explicates these rules to generate an account of universal capabilities of competent speakers.

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[116] Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 1
[117] Ibid., 8-12
[118] Ibid., 13-14

Habermas writes,

> When the pretheoretical knowledge to be reconstructed expresses a universal capability, a general cognitive, linguistic or interactive competence (or subcompetence), then what begins as an explication of meaning aims at reconstruction of species competences.[119]

Ultimately, universal pragmatics employs rational reconstruction in order to uncover what it is that makes humans as a species capable of engaging in action oriented to reaching understanding.

Rational reconstruction allows Habermas to identify the capacities that are required to make a competent speaker and to attribute universality to these capabilities. While the reconstructive approach of universal pragmatics resembles the method of Kantian transcendentalism, Habermas stresses that while pretheoretical knowledge is a priori knowledge for competent subjects, it does not follow that these underlying structures may be deduced for all possible experience or that there is a transcendental structure of subjectivity. The rational reconstruction in this case is taken to be necessary and universal hypothetically; it may be revised in light of new experiences and is, in any case, generated with the understanding that there are, as Habermas puts it, "contingent boundary conditions" that have shaped the development of competent human speakers.[120]

Part 2: Reconstruction, Ontogenesis and Phylogenesis

Having reconstructively established this idea of "species competences," Habermas uses this account as the starting point for a reconstruction of both the ontogenetic developmental stages of individual speakers (personality systems) as well as the phylogenetic development of social systems. On the ontogenetic level, Habermas takes the competent adult human speaker as

[119] Ibid., 14
[120] Ibid., 21-22

being the end-product of a maturation process. While the weak universalism and essentialism of his account to some extent resemble Chomsky's claim that there is a universal grammar, Habermas believes that Chomsky goes too far when he asserts that this universal grammatical structure directly reflects an innate cognitive structure. Instead, Habermas posits that the competences of adult speakers is the end result of a learning process "that may follow a rationally reconstructable pattern."[121] In his discussions of developmental psychology and the ontogenesis of mature speakers, Habermas departs from the earlier Frankfurt School's reliance Freudian depth psychology[122] and turns instead to Piaget's and Kohlberg's structuralist model of personality development and ego psychology.[123] He maintains that he deploys concepts from psychology nonontologically insofar as he proceeds reconstructively; in other words, since his analysis does not require that he posit preexisting forces that exist within the individual psyche or any other strongly essentialist idea of human nature, he does not lapse into what he calls "a false positivity."[124]

So what does Habermas' reconstructivist approach to uncovering this developmental logic entail? Habermas maintains that the ego development of personality systems (and, as we shall see, societies as well) are the product of a learning process, and the stages of this learning process may be reconstructed by looking at the "structures of possible communicative action . . . . coordinat[ed] with . . . the cognitive abilities (or competences) the child must acquire in order to

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[121] Ibid., 20

[122] While Habermas (as, of course, do ego psychologists) certainly still does employ some Freudian ideas, he distances himself from depth psychology. Freud's account of *Triebtheorie* in Habermas either doesn't appear at all or, in the case of *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), is reimagined such that the drives are understood as a byproduct of distorted communication—which is as much to say, not really drives at all.

[123] Habermas, *CES*, 72-73

[124] Ibid., 72-73

be able to move at the respective level of his social environment."[125] In other words, if communicative action is taken to be the most fundamental form of action, the underlying structure of communicative action can allow for a reconstruction of kinds of capacities speakers must acquire in order to become competent subjects. This approach allows Habermas to avoid the strong essentialism of Chomsky, since reconstruction proceeds by looking at the structures of communicative action and competences from an action-theoretical rather than an anthropological/neurological point of view.

In much the same way that Habermas reimagines ego psychology within the reconstructive science of universal pragmatics such that he is able to map a pattern of development without appealing to innate drives or deep psychic structures, on the phylogenetic level Habermas reconstructs historical materialism in the Marxist tradition such that he need not posit a macrosubject of history. In Habermas' view, historical materialism is in need of a reconstructive approach not only to purge it of the lingering inheritance of the philosophy of history that "sometimes came rather unreflectively into play" in Marx's thought, but also to fill both normative and theoretical gaps in traditional historical materialism. Normatively, the immanent critique of bourgeois norms no longer suffices for social criticism, as these norms have ceased to have a binding force; therefore, a philosophical ethics and historical materialism must turn to the structural underpinnings of communicative action for normative justification. Theoretically, Marxist theory has only accounted for sociocultural learning in terms of technological mastery of nature (productive forces); Habermas proposes that a reconstructed historical materialism would integrate moral learning in the form of social integration through

[125] Ibid., 82

communicative action.[126]

By augmenting the account of rationality (which in traditional Marxism only encompasses instrumental and technological advancement) with the normative element of social integration through communicative action, Habermas proposes a reconstruction of the stages socio-cultural learning that are required to produce a mature society in the same way that he proposes to provide an account of the learning process that produces communicatively competent subjects on the ontogenetic level. Furthermore, he suggests that his reconstruction shows that personality structures and social systems have the same structures insofar as "social systems may be viewed as networks of communicative actions [and] personality systems can be regarded under the ability to speak and act."[127] Viewed through the lens of communicative action, his reconstruction of the developmental stages of personality systems and the evolutionary stages of social systems have homologous structures.

Habermas, doubtlessly aware of how close this neoevolutionary and structuralist account of historical development comes to sounding like a return to recapitulation theory ("*Die Phylogenese ist die mechanische Ursache cler Ontogenese*" of Haeckel[128]—a theory that makes its appearance in 19th-century philosophies of history), stresses that while social systems and personality systems have homologous structures, there are important points of difference that must be kept in mind. For example, adult individuals in a modern society (i.e. a society in which law has reached the universalistic stage) may not, on an individual level, have reached the corresponding stage of cognitive development, and personality systems and social systems have

[126] Ibid., 96-98
[127] Ibid., 98
[128] Ernst Haeckel, *Anthropogenie; oder, Entwickelungsgeschichte des Menschen ... Keimes- und Stammes-geschichte* (Leipzig, W. Engelmann, 1874)

"quite different imperatives."[129] These caveats are meant to emphasize the fact that these homologous structures emerge not from laws of metaphysical necessity that govern both the evolution of the species and the development of individual subjects. Thus, ontogenetic and phylogenetic isomorphism may be sketched out on the basis of their shared conditions of "linguistically established intersubjectivity."[130]

To this end, Habermas draws from both psychoanalysis and Piaget's developmental psychology to identify four primary stages that must occur in the development of the mature personality system: "symbiotic," "egocentric," "sociocentric-objectivistic," and "universalistic."[131] With each stage of development, starting with the symbiotic stage in which there is no concept of self or other, the ego develops and learns through a series of differentiations until finally the ego becomes reflective, able to question the validity-claims and both demand and provide justification for norms. While he stresses that the similarities he draws out are but tenuous, Habermas gives two examples of ways in which ontogenesis and phylogenesis have homologous structures: the decentration of worldviews and ego demarcations. In the former case, he draws parallels between early mythic worldviews, in which inner subjectivity and outer reality as well as nature and society are regarded as woven together (in other words have not yet differentiated from one another), and the egocentric stage of development, in which the child only experiences the world as an extension of and relative to its own ego. Then, like the child who enters the sociocentric-objectivistic stage, societies that evolve only do so through "a break in mythological thought,"[132] a process by which a naïve

[129] Habermas, *CES*, 102-3
[130] Ibid., 98
[131] Ibid., 100
[132] Ibid., 104-5

mythological worldview is organized into universals that confront individuals within the society as absolute (corresponding to the "conventional stage" of cognitive development). Finally, as modernization and rationalization further differentiate the spheres of objectivity, normativity (both moral and legal), and personal identity, worldviews lose their absolute status and norms become subject to procedural argumentation and rational justification in much the same way that the fully developed person leaves behind the absolutism of adolescence and becomes reflective.[133]

Habermas is careful to hedge his bets when he makes these claims about the connections between ontogenesis and species history. "These fleeting allusions," he stresses, "are only meant to render plausible the heuristic fruitfulness of the conjecture that there are homologies between the structures of the ego and of world-views."[134]

Part 3: The Developmental Model of Social Evolution

Habermas makes it very clear that the specific homologies he sketches out in *CES* are to be taken as merely preliminary excurses into what he hopes will become a more fully realized research program. While he takes them to be plausible and, as he would say, heuristically fruitful, he maintains that his historical materialism does not stand or fall depending on whether or not he is correct concerning specific stages. I will turn to the question of whether this developmental account of social evolution is still operative throughout his later philosophy later in this chapter; for now, I will to take a closer look at what Habermas takes to be his central contribution to Marxist historical materialism: communicative action. As has been shown, Habermas' reconstructive historical materialism begins by investigating what is required for

[133] Ibid., 105-106
[134] Ibid.,

linguistically established intersubjectivity both on the level of individual speakers and on the social level of institutionalization. Habermas' historical materialism, by uncovering these preconditions for communicative action, supplements Marx's account of the development of productive forces with an added dimension: normative structures. Normative structures, according to Habermas, have their own internal history and "do not simply follow the path of development of reproductive processes and do not simply respond to system problems."[135] Thus, sociocultural learning takes place along two axes: on the one hand, purposive-rational action in the form of technological development, and on the other, communicative action in the form of particular modes of social integration.

In this way, Habermas rejects the orthodox model of Marxism that holds that the economic base determines the shape of higher spheres, such as the political and the social. This means that the relationship between economic base and cultural/social superstructure is no longer a direct causal relationship, since "social integration" is co-fundamental to social evolution on Habermas' account. According to his theory of social evolution, sociocultural learning (progressive change) comes about as a result of the relationship between normative structures and productive forces. Any particular stage of historical development in a society is determined by two elements: its mode of production and its relations of production or, put another way, its system for interacting with outer nature and its system for organizing internal social relations. Crises occur when, as Habermas puts it, "disturbances of the reproductive process of a society . . . overload [its] adaptive capacity," whereupon the society must re-organize its system of social integration.[136] What enables a society to successfully transform, however, is endogenous socio-

[135] Ibid., 118
[136] Ibid., 122

cultural learning that remains latent until times of interruption and crisis require the re-organization of social integration, which then in turn opens up the scope of possibilities for rationalization;[137] modes of production "can . . . be understood as a problem-generating mechanism that *triggers but does not bring about*" sociocultural change.[138] For Habermas, a historical materialism that takes only modes of production to be the motor of history cannot account for how it is that societies are able to overcome the material problems they encounter; therefore, to account for social transformation, both technological evolution and moral-practical evolution must be fundamental.[139]

Part 4: Directionality and Progress in Social Evolution

So Habermas' historical materialism relies upon a reconstructive method, whereby he offers both a tentative account of social evolution as the development of homologous ontogenetic and phylogenetic structures in individual speakers and societies respectively as well as a revision of orthodox historical materialism that makes the development of moral-practical consciousness irreducible to material transformation. Borrowing from developmental ego psychology and systems theory, Habermas posits that historical change occurs through the interactions between socio-cultural learning processes that are triggered by contingent historical factors. While what triggers this change is historically arbitrary, social evolution itself has directionality and

[137] Ibid., 122 and 145-6
[138] Ibid., 145; emphasis Habermas'
[139] Ibid., 148. Habermas' historical materialism draws upon both functionalist systems theory and neoevolutionism in order to account for social change. While Habermas acknowledges that the two have traditionally been understood to be in opposition to one another, historical materialism requires both. Structuralism can be used to explain how it is that problems exceed a society's capacity for problem-solving and can engender a crisis, and the latter is needed in order to account for how a society can evolve to such an extent that it can come up with new forms of social integration to solve these problems. Structuralist explainations are required to interpret the contingent and varied nature of actual crises, while neoevolutionism gives a directionality to social change and describes distinct "stages" of sociocultural learning that are universal.

historical materialism preserves, Habermas insists, a notion of historical progress.

As historical materialists, Habermas avers, "we are maintaining [the existence of] developmental stages both for productive forces and for the forms of social integration,"[140] and as historical materialists who view history as an evolutionary process, we are committed to the notion that history is a process that tends to progress towards higher levels of development; it is, as he puts it, "highly selective and directional."[141] Progress along the two axes of socio-cultural learning is "measured against two universal validity claims we also use to measure the progress of empirical knowledge and of moral-practical insight, namely, the truth of propositions and the rightness of norms."[142] Here Habermas strikes a strange balance: on the one hand, he does not want to commit to metaphysical or religious teleology when he talks about social evolution having a direction, and a the same time he recognizes that social evolution lacks the built-in normative orientation that biological evolution is thought to have (i.e., towards survival and reproduction, with "health" standing as a norm that measures the organism's capacity to achieve these ends).[143] He believes he gets around this normative problem by denying that it arises at all, since whenever we engage in rational discourse, we are always already—inescapably, universally—presupposing the norms of communication comprised by the validity basis of speech. The quasi-transcendentalist foundation of the norms of communicative action allow Habermas to insist that it is inconsistent and self-undermining—indeed a performative contradiction—to object to his notion of progress, or, as he puts it, "to 'decide' for or against . . .

[140] Ibid., 163
[141] Ibid., 172
[142] Ibid., 142
[143] Ibid., 175-6

the expansion of the potential of reasoned action."[144] Viewed in light of the validity basis of speech, the requirements of communicative action itself, the direction of human evolution towards increasing rationalization (accounted for via his developmental model of social evolution as described above) is not an candidate for either being accepted or rejected, since it itself is the very thing that makes deliberation and rational decision-making possible.

Ostensibly, Habermas' commitment to a formalist-pragmatic model of reason and rationality permits him to avoid what he sees as the speculative trap of the anthropological/genealogical/substantive idea of reason that plagued his forbearers in the Frankfurt School and allows him to posit a notion of progress that is more modest and, at the same time, impossible to refute since it is based not in subjectivity or lived experience but in the rules for rational discourse that are presupposed in intersubjective communication. Thus, in a way, he need not really address the question of whether or not one stage of historical development is better for the individuals living in it than another insofar as it is less exploitative or oppressive. In spite of this, he does touch on this question in *CES*.

For Habermas, when a society matures from one stage of evolutionary development to the next, it does so as a response to a problem that the given social organization cannot solve. However, although any given stage emerges as a consequence of a particular problem and more developed societies have greater potential for rationalization than earlier social forms, each new stage carries with it new, different problems that may seem worse than earlier stages. For example, Habermas specifically notes that "the exploitation and oppression *necessarily* practiced in political class societies has to be considered retrogressive in comparison with the less

[144] Ibid., 177

significant social inequalities *permitted* by the kinship system." In some sense the oppression endemic to the early emergence of the state is worse since it, as he says, it is endemic to that social form as such rather than merely contingent upon the practices of societies formed around kinship ties. However, the political class system has a latent potential for rationalization that the kinship system simply does not have, such that "class societies are structurally unable to satisfy the need for legitimation that they themselves generate."[145] So the new form of oppression that comes about as a result of the emergence of political class in the course of history is anything but retrogressive, since it only appears as problem in light of the new need for legitimation that it itself produces, a need for legitimation that marks an expanded potential for rationalization in this next phase of social evolution.

Crucially, directionality in social evolution tends toward higher levels of social organization. New principles of social organization emerge as solutions to problem-conditions in earlier stages of development, expanding the range of possibilities for rationalization and creating, as he puts it, "new problem situations." Indeed, every new stage of social evolution opens up, as Habermas himself admits, the possibility for worse exploitation in later stages than earlier, but the oppression in earlier stages of social evolution only appear as lesser relative to the new needs that appear in light of different forms of social organization.[146] "At every stage of development," he writes, "the social evolutionary learning process itself generates new resources, which mean [sic] new dimensions of scarcity and thus new historical needs."

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[145] Ibid., 163

[146] While, as noted before, he does acknowledge that to a certain extent there might be a substantive worsening of oppression in later stages than earlier, he indirectly cautions against the danger of romanticizing earlier periods of history out of frustration with the historical present, denying that the degree of exploitation is a good metric for progress, since, as he puts it, "it is possible to differentiate according to bodily harm . . . personal injury, and finally spiritual desperation" (Habermas, *CES,* 164)

Exploitation is too crude a term to do justice to the fact that problem situations are substantially different in each stage of sociocultural evolution. [147] Every form of social organization is a response to a given particular problem situation, and different problem situations give rise to different possibilities for suffering, since suffering is "the negative of a new need."[148]

Thus, historical progress can be traced through changes in the problem situations with which each form of social organization struggles, marked in each case by the experience of scarcity of a particular resource. A social organization based on the family is at a stage where the primary problem is "demarcating society form external nature." On the Habermasian model of history, this corresponds to the stage in which a society holds a mythological worldview and has not yet distinguished between the social and the natural worlds, and human beings are effectively powerless in the face of natural catastrophe. In this early stage of social evolution, Habermas writes that "power over nature came into consciousness as a scarce resource." With the rise of a collective political order, the problem situation becomes the "self-regulation of the social system" in which "legal security came into consciousness as a scarce resource." Here, the need for an impartial basis for ensuring fairness that comes from the emergence of a collective political order generates the problem of self-regulation of the social system. The solution to the problem situation of a collective political order and the answer to the new historical need for legal security it generates is found in what Habermas calls "the automization of the economy" during the modern period, which gave rise to the "problem of a self-regulated exchange of the social system with external nature" and the new consciousness of value as a scarce resource. [149]

[147] Ibid., 165
[148] Ibid., 164-5
[149] Ibid., 165

Part 5: The Evolution of Society and Its Future

Habermas' discussion culminates in some curiously couched and tentatively speculative remarks about the future, in spite of writing extensively about the impossibility of prognostication when it comes to the reconstructive sciences (to which his theory of history belongs).[150] As cautious as Habermas is, when giving an account of history that preserves both the notion that history is directional and that there is such a thing as historical progress, Habermas does make some very qualified claims about possible futures on this basis. The dialectic of emerging needs and problem situations that Habermas identifies as the pattern of social progress follows a certain trajectory: initially, the defining struggle is to decouple human society from nature, which is accomplished through the disenchantment of the world and the gradual dissolution of mythological thought. This in turn gives way to the struggle of self-regulating the social system, which is superseded by the struggle of regulating the exchange between social system and external nature. Finally, Habermas speculates that future societies, having instituted social welfare states and democracy as solutions to the pervious historical problem situations and "characterized by a primacy of the scientific and educational systems," might produce "the problem of a self-regulated exchange of society with internal nature." In other words, once the interpretation of needs has been "accomplished discursively," it is possible that ennui and widespread social dissipation might make motivation and meaning appear as scarce resources in the same way that power over nature, legal security, and value appeared and were satisfied in succeeding previous historical stages. In the absence of needs that are immediately based in either physical danger, legal vulnerability, or the scarcity of external

[150] See Jürgen Habermas "History and Evolution," Telos 39 (March 1979): 5-44 doi: 10.3817/0379039005

resources[151] (in other words, with the social and natural environment), inner nature becomes the next logical location for the emergence of an evolutionarily new problem situation. In this case, Habermas suggests, motivation formation and the creation of subjective meaning might become self-reflective such that:

> Perhaps a new institutional core would then take shape around a new organizational principle, an institutional core in which there merge elements of public education, social welfare, liberalized punishment, and therapy for mental illness.[152]

Of course, Habermas is cautious, since while his theory of social evolution is directional, he still has principled reasons to avoid claiming anything that would smack too heavily of traditional philosophies of history, such as predictions about the next historical stage of development or (heaven forbid) the end of history itself. Nevertheless, historical development (which, remember, comes about through crises that exceed the reproductive capacity of a given mode of given mode of social organization) has a pattern that can be traced through the creation of new needs, from basic survival to value acquisition, and looking ahead to postmodern societies the only domain that remains a possible source for the generation of new problem-situations or needs is inner nature.

Habermas is quick to add that he only mentions this possible direction in spite of "there exist[ing] clues at best" for this new direction in the present moment in order to acknowledge that there exists the possibility of oppression that, as he puts it, "could outlive even the economic form of class domination," in which administrative social control operates on the level of

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[151] While there are important discontinuities, the appearance of new needs in history on Habermas' account resembles Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Both begin with needs that stem from material external circumstances (physiological subsistence in Maslow, power over nature in Habermas), proceeding to needs that must be satisfied through social recognition (esteem in Maslow, legal recognition in Habermas) up to the realization of meaning for the individual (self-actualization for Maslow, inner nature for Habermas). See A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (Harper, New York: New York, 1954).

[152] Ibid., 166

motivation formation. Nevertheless, he shies away from suggesting that this kind of domination would arise *inevitably* since, he demurs, this "is . . . a question that cannot be decided in advance (despite the confident judgment of revivified pessimistic anthropologies)."[153] Here it is impossible to miss the indirect dig at Adorno and Horkeimer,[154] but this passage is interesting for other reasons as well. This qualified speculation about the future of social democracies, which are, on Habermas' reading of history, the most historically advanced of all social forms, is indicative of the way Habermas wishes to position his model of social evolution relative to the philosophy of history, showing what he wishes to preserve and what he wishes to avoid.

First of all, he is emphasizing that his model of historical materialism and social evolution is different from an orthodox Marxist philosophy of history, since he recognizes the possibility for domination which is not based on economic exploitation and is therefore not committed to a philosophy of history that ends with the end of private property. Secondly, these remarks are also an implicit commentary on Adorno and Horkeimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: his description of domination that works at the "sociopsychological" level of motivational control echoes the *DOE*'s description of the social deformation in their analysis of the culture industry. [155] Unlike the motivation formation and systematic deception described in the culture industry essay, however, this domination is brought about "through the social administration of the welfare state" and not through the culture industry; furthermore, it is merely the potential *future* site of an historical problem situation. The self regulated exchange of society with inner nature is not, for Habermas, a present historical problem. So, in a way,

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[153] Habermas, *CES*, 166

[154] Habermas derides Adorno's philosophy as "pessimistic" elsewhere as well. See "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno."

[155] Interestingly enough, it almost echoes Foucault's analysis of knowledge and power as well.

Habermas is reframing the phenomenon the *DOE* describes in the culture industry essay and displacing it into a possible future. Here, "possible" is a key term; he disavows that this new and different form of domination would be a *necessary* historical side effect of the social administration of future societies and, if it does come about, whether it would "*necessarily* give rise to a vicious cycle between expanded participation and increasing social control" is, Habermas insists, "a question that cannot be decided in advance."[156] Social control of this nature is decoupled from reason and is not historically inevitable.

With these brief remarks, Habermas signals that he is aware of the potential for a form of domination that goes beyond the discursive problem of interpreting needs and identifying places where communication is distorted by the steering mechanisms of power, but this is not a phenomenon he believes is a problem in the historical present and is not an historical inevitability. Social evolution, which proceeds via the creation of new historical needs, does suggest a possible future, but not by any means a necessary one. Thus, one might infer, it is not a problem with which Critical Theory need not concern itself in the present.[157] Furthermore, since the stages of social evolution are only described reconstructively and the stages are, at least in principle, revisable in light of new experience, remarks about future problem situations remain speculative.

It is worth noting even if just in passing that speculate Habermas does, and after his discussion of social control he goes so far as proposing that social evolution read through the

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[156] Habermas, *CES* 166

[157] Indeed, it is doubtful that Habermas' chastened model of critical theory would be equipped to address this form of domination at all—or that it would even be within the purview of its proper function to do so in the first place. Of course, as it is articulated in *CES*, this entire question remains in the realm of a possible future and therefore on Habermas' account does not require an answer. Nevertheless it is telling that his model of social evolution suggests a possible—perhaps probable—future form of domination that critical theory as he envisions it might well be powerless to address. I return to this point in greater depth in chapter 5.

dialectic of needs and problem situations might—*might*—be cyclical:

> . . . if this bold schema is plausible, it follows that the logical space for evolutionarily new problem domains is exhausted with the reflexive turn of motive formation and the structural scarcity of meaning; the end of the *first* run-through could mean a return, at a new level, to problems of demarcation—namely, to the discovery of the internal limits which the socialization process runs up against—and to *the outbreak of new contingencies at the limits of social individuation.*

It is difficult to know what to make of these remarks. Of course, it is clear that as he outlines historical progress in terms of the creation of new needs and has described history as the gradual differentiation of value spheres, and once this differentiation has exhausted itself the cycle of social evolution may recur, returning to the problem of separating self and other on a higher developmental level. While it is difficult to read these remarks without the specter of Hegel rearing its ugly head, it is important to stress that when Habermas prognosticates, he does so only with qualifications and disavowals.

Concluding Remarks

Having given an overview of Habermas' account of historical materialism after the ahistorical turn in his philosophy, the question arises: is this a philosophy of history? In the first chapter, I proposed that the speculative philosophy of history ought to be understood as an account of reason's relationship to history. By this definition, clearly his writings on social evolution do present a philosophy of history; however, to declare that his revision of historical materialism is therefore a philosophy of history would be like shooting an arrow then painting a target around it. Even setting this revised definition aside, the fact remains that during the 70s, Habermas was committed to (or at the very least, willing to entertain) elements that are traditionally considered hallmarks of a philosophy of history. Through a neoevolutionary account of historical progress coupled with structuralism, his normative supplement to Marx's theory of production is meant to give a comprehensive account of how societies evolve from lower to

higher forms. The historical stages he outlines are linear and progressive; while he is clear that there is no *internal* necessity that galvanizes social evolution, if social evolution does occur, it occurs in a legible, uniform pattern. In much the same way that an individual subject must go through each stage of development in order to become a communicatively competent subject (e.g., one cannot go from the directly from the egocentric to the universalistic stages), society has particular forms that it must pass through to reach the highest form of development, and sociocultural learning everywhere has the same basic shape. Even though he arrives at this model through a reconstructive method that ensures that he stops shy of hanging his system on a metaphysical peg or speaking from the standpoint of absolute knowledge, he outlines *laws* of history, even if he does not name them as such. They may not be laws that dictate that every society must necessarily evolve, but they are laws that dictate that *if* social evolution takes place, it leads toward increasing rationalization and the differentiation of value spheres. Even if some of his proposals, such as the homologies between personality systems and social systems and the potentially cyclical character of problem domains, are presented as heuristic, hypothetical, and revisable,[158] the idea that social evolution is directional and progressive remains axiomatic.

Of course the objection may arise that even if he does have a philosophy of history (or something very like it) in the 70s, this was a transitional period in Habermas' thought. While he may share many of the same concerns and broad themes with the *TCA*, his views on both the philosophy of history and historical materialism were changing. Tom Rockmore, whose book

[158] While Habermas stresses that this account of social evolution is subject to revision in the presence of contravening empirical evidence, given that he begins his reconstruction from rules that are functionally a priori for communicative subjects (even if not transcendentally so), I confess that I am at a loss as to how his account could be empirically falsifiable. Unlike Popper, I do not think that this is necessarily a problem, but it is a feature of his theory that Habermas himself touts.

Habermas on Historical Materialism traces the development of Habermas' fraught relationship with Marx and Marxism, argues that the essays in the *CES* belong to one of four phases in Habermas' thought. This phase, according to Rockmore, is the last gasp of Habermas' theoretical interest in revising historical materialism and comes to a close with the publication of the *TCA*, by which time Habermas "intend[s] to justify his rejection of historical materialism." Rockmore claims from the *TCA* onward, Habermas believes that he can accomplish the emancipatory aims of historical materialism without salvaging any of the its tenets.[159]

In fact, the essays on social evolution and historical materialism mark a minor departure from the position he takes only a few years earlier in *Theory and Practice* (*TP* from now on), which dedicates a chapter to a sustained engagement with Marx. In this chapter, he traces the philosophy of history from Vico through the 19th century, and the general gist of his criticism follows lines that are echoed in the *TCA* in his rejection of metaphysics and subject-based philosophy.[160] At the end of this discussion, however, he makes a few remarks which suggest that, when he wrote *TP*, he had a slightly different understanding of the possibilities for the philosophy of history. "The unity of the world is one of the presuppositions for the philosophy of

[159] Tom Rockmore, *Habermas on Historical Materialism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989), 95-96

[160] One of the problems with the philosophy of history, according to Habermas in *TP*, is that it's fundamental tenants articulated by Vico present an epistemological problem. The philosophy of history is an inheritance from Christian eschatology, where history is the story of alienation and redemption underwritten by divine Providence. The philosophy of history, Habermas notes, adopts the idea of the unity of history from theology rather places humans rather than God as the author of human history. Humans make history, and for this reason history can be known. This raises an epistemological problem, since humans lack divine knowledge. If humans are the authors of history and this authorship allows humans to have knowledge of the historical process, the only kind of knowledge that can be attained is retrospective knowledge. The difficulty after this for the philosophy of history, according to Habermas, is that if there is to be an idea of progress, a retrospective view of history becomes untenable since without the guarantee of providence in history there is nothing to ground the idea that history moves towards a better state of affairs rather than a worse. Kant tackles this problem by relying on the idea of providence as a heuristic, while Hegel makes the progress of history dialectical and Marx makes labor the motor of history (Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1973], 245-249).

history," he claims, "that history can be made, the other."[161] Habermas historicizes these presuppositions, noting that these things only became true with European modernity and the Enlightenment. He objects not to the philosophy of history as such, but to the way in which the philosophy of history retrospectively identifies tendencies that only emerge during the Enlightenment with history as a whole. In historicizing the philosophy of history from Vico to Marx, his objective is not to dismiss it entirely. In fact, he claims that "the immanent presuppositions of the philosophy of history have not by any means become invalid; on the contrary, it is only today that they have become true." He cautions against the "counterideologies, which allege that the way the philosophy of history poses the question is now outdated" [162] and ends the chapter by enumerating what a materialist philosophy of history should bear in mind going forward.

Thomas McCarthy quotes *TP* when he describes Habermas' theory in his introduction to *CES* as "an empirical philosophy of history with practical (political) intent,"[163] but in the texts collected in *CES*, Habermas never refers to his own project as a philosophy of history. The term "philosophy of history" is only used pejoratively in the *CES* to describe a quasi-theological hangover from 19th century metaphysics that must be eliminated in order to have a truly viable historical materialism. This, of course, may seem like a trivial semantic shift from *TP* to *CES*, since there is substantial continuity between the two books and the essays in *CES* build on the groundwork laid in *TP*. However, if, as I have argued, the philosophy of history is the underlying factor that motivated Habermas' pivot from the first generation of critical theory, this shift is

[161] Habermas, *TP*, 250
[162] Ibid., 251
[163] Ibid., and Habermas, *CES*, ix. McCarthy also outlines this "empirical philosophy of history with practical intent" in great detail in his book *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), 127-271

suggestive.

It is clear that the essays on historical materialism collected in the *CES* was written during a crucial transitional period for Habermas' thought and that this transition decidedly moved away from the question of the philosophy of history as an explicit locus of philosophical concern. He never returns to the ideas he outlines in the *CES*, which, for many commentators such as Rockmore, suggests that they are absent in his later philosophy, abandoned along with his interest in historical materialism.[164] It is my contention, however, that the *CES* not only comprises a philosophy of history, but that it is an invisible girder that supports the normative structure of his later thought. One crucial "cognitive gain" Habermas attributes to his theory of communication, as he explains in a 1981 interview with Honneth, Knödler-Bunte and Widmann, is "that the normative contents of human social life can be introduced in an unsuspicious way by means of a communication theory, without the need to smuggle them in secretly by way of a philosophy of history."[165] In the next chapter, I will make the case that he never really rids himself of the philosophy of history and his attempt to escape from this problem by abandoning the philosophy of history fails.

[164] See Rockmore 90-110

[165] Jürgen Habermas, *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (New York: Verso, 1982), 113

Chapter 4
The Hidden Philosophy of History and Critical Theory's New Tasks

Introduction

I have made the case that the philosophy of history is the decisive factor that galvanized Habermas' split from the first generation of critical theorists and that after Habermas, the philosophy of history has fallen by the wayside among subsequent generations of critical theorists. Habermas' account of communicative action is, as I have argued, his attempt to construct a normative theory that remains adequate to the aims of critical theory without relying on the philosophy of history. As we have seen, however, the break in his thought marked by the publication of the *TCA* came after a period in the late '60s to the early '70s during which he penned the essays collected in *CES*, outlining what can be read as a philosophy of history in all but name.

What role does the schema outlined in *CES* play in his later thought? Much rides on this question. If, as I have claimed, *CES* ought to be understood as a philosophy of history and his later work depends on it in order to lend normative force to his account of reason, then Habermas has not, in fact, escaped the snare of the philosophy of history in spite of his efforts to avoid it. The first section of this chapter will make the case that even though Habermas famously never returns to his work on social evolution, his theory of communicative action is conceptually dependent upon it. Thus, as I have suggested, his work during and after the *TCA* has a shadow philosophy of history. It is not my contention that his philosophy ought to be dismissed on the ground that it is dependent on a philosophy of history. Instead, Habermas' failure to excise the philosophy of history points to the need to identify how the philosophy of history shapes his

vision of critical theory up to the present day. This examination highlights the way that the philosophy of history, though unacknowledged, determines the horizon of possibilities for critique and the task of philosophy. So in the second half of the chapter, I will explore how this unacknowledged philosophy of history shapes Habermas' version of critical theory.

Part 1: The CES and Habermas' Critical Project

As I have suggested at the end of the last chapter, most scholars of Habermas and critical theory tend to view *CES* and his theory of social evolution as inessential to his later work on universal pragmatics and even the *TCA*. As such, there has been a glaring absence of scholarly attention to this chapter in his thought. When his theory of social evolution is discussed explicitly, it is either framed as an artifact from an earlier version of Habermas' philosophy which has long since been jettisoned or as an oddity that may be considered in isolation from the rest of his work (and discarded).[166]

One exception is David Owen's *Between Reason and History: Habermas and the Idea of Progress*, which is the first book to not only tackle Habermas' theory of social evolution directly, but also to reject the usual interpretation that his work on revising historical materialism is incidental to the rest of Habermas' thought. He claims that not only did Habermas never repudiate the theoretical framework outlined in *CES*, but that "Habermas's theory of social evolution . . . is an integral part of his critical theory."[167] Owen notes that while Habermas has never revisited the subject of social evolution since the *TCA*, neither has he repudiated it—and

[166] See, for example, Michael Schmid's "Habermas' Theory of Social Evolution" (in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, Eds. Thompson & Held [Boston: MIT Press, 1982], 162-180), in which he argues that a social developmental model is an untenable "theoretical fiction" (180). While he demurs from looking at the place Habermas' theory of social evolution occupies relative to the rest of his *oeuvre* (162), he implies that the theory of social evolution is separable from the rest of Habermas' philosophy, if only because the article positions itself as a corrective to Habermas' project rather than a wholesale rejection of it.

[167] David Owen, *Between Reason and History: Habermas and the Idea of Progress* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 7

Habermas' late works are marked by "a careful attention to the historical context out of which his theorizing derives."[168] In other words, according to Owen, Habermas' silence on the subject of social evolution simply suggests that he has turned his philosophical attention elsewhere, not that a theory of social evolution has been left by the wayside. As we shall see, Owen is right: the theory of social evolution is operative in Habermas' philosophy up to the present day—indeed, that it more-or-less invisibly performs an essential function in his thought.

Owen divides Habermas' critical social theory into two dimensions: the synchronic and the diachronic. The synchronic dimension of his philosophy (and the one that has received the most attention and, Owen notes, has been mistaken for Habermas' theory entire) is his theory of communicative action, which gives an account of the pragmatic presuppositions of communication and the *a priori* knowledge of competent speakers. The normative idea of the ideal speech situation belongs to this horizontal, synchronic dimension; the synchronic dimension is the linguistic turn in Habermas' philosophy, and it looks only at the historical present via the implicit rules of communication. The diachronic dimension of Habermas' social theory, on the other hand, gives an account of how the structures described in the synchronic dimension of the theory emerge out of an historical process, how societies evolve over time. [169]

Owens argues that the synchronic dimension of Habermas' thought requires the theory of social evolution in the diachronic dimension for his theory to be normatively sufficient. The synchronic dimension can only provide the formal conditions under which speech free of coercion is possible, the rules for discourse and undistorted communication. When validity claims are made and contested by competent speakers, the speakers give and exchange reasons.

[168] Ibid., 71-72
[169] Ibid., 32

Reasons are considered good when they are accepted as such by the interlocutors, which means that they are entirely dependent upon the social and historical context of the speakers themselves. This raises a problem: on what basis should these "good reasons" be accepted, apart from the brute fact that they are accepted as good by a given social order at a particular point in time? It is worth quoting Owen at length on this point, since his analysis gets to the heart of why the formalist/linguistics approach to critical theory fails to satisfy the requirements of critical theory without an account of historical progress:

> The theory of communicative action informs us what the formal conditions of a rational claims are, but it does not say anything about the sorts of contents (that is, reasons) that are acceptable in rational argumentation in a given context. Some reasons are unacceptable, not because they violate the formal conditions of discourse, but because they are simply implausible in the given discursive situation. One might ask, Why should the standards of good reasons peculiar to modern forms of consciousness be taken as the normative standard for us moderns? What makes good reasons in the modern era superior (if indeed they are) to the good reasons of the premodern era?[170]

In other words, Owen argues that outlining the implicit norms in communication and reconstructing the rules for undistorted communication is insufficient without an account of sociocultural evolution that explains why some reasons ought to count as good reasons and why others do not. Simply policing the performance of speech-acts in communicative contexts to ensure that all speakers follow the formal rules of discourse free of coercion does not provide the means to normatively evaluate the reasons that are offered in support of validity claims. Unassisted, a theory that only has something to say about the formal conditions for rational speech must remain agnostic about why it is that speakers do accept certain reasons as good reasons. Owen believes, as do I, that this is not enough to qualify as a critical theory in the truest sense of the term.

Here Owen puts his finger on what has been and remains a thorny problem for critical

[170] Ibid., 51

theory, one that he believes is resolved by recognizing the role that the idea of progress and an account of sociocultural evolution plays in Habermas' thought. On the one hand, critical theories putatively reject transcendental normative grounds of justification and thus cannot appeal to transhistorical, universal values to justify their normative claims. On the other hand, a theory must have a sufficient foothold to recognize and diagnose social pathologies in the present social order. Put simply, to what can a critical theorist appeal when criticizing the social order without either grounding their claims transcendentally or reproducing the social pathologies by citing norms that are simply given in the historical present? Owen points out that without the diachronic dimension of Habermas' theory, he simply cannot say anything about why it is that some reasons are better than others. The rules of discourse by themselves cannot dictate whether or not the content of a given discourse is rational, and therefore, by themselves, they are insufficient for the aims of critical theory. When we make a regulative speech act, we appeal to norms. But how can a norm itself be validated? It cannot be simply that every norm is a valid norm simply because it is a norm; otherwise, the brute fact that a norm is widely accepted would be the sole basis for its validity, one could never question a norm, and changes in norms would simply be historical accidents. Habermas' theory of social evolution is, according to Owen, a solution to this problem.

Owen points out that his theory of social evolution tells the story of how societies learn, progressing towards a universalist form of normative justification via a process of modernization.[171] The modernization process entails the differentiation of the three spheres of

[171] Habermas is careful to distinguish between a universalist *form* of justification and a universalist substance to norms. As he says explicitly in "Discourse Ethics," he provides an intersubjective linguistic modification of Kant's moral philosophy, such that norms are tested to determine whether all affected would approve "as participants in practical discourse," such that a norm's claim to universality is tested through discursive

validity wherein claims are subject to different modes of validation in communicative contexts. Unlike claims to empirical truth, for example, claims to normative rightness are uniquely related to the structure of communication itself. There is, according to Habermas, a mutually dependent relationship between language and the social world. Since normative claims refer to the social world and not the objective world as assertoric claims do, there is an intrinsic link between social reality and normative validity claims. Here is where the evolutionary developmental aspect of his theory is crucial: with the differentiation of spheres in Occidental modernity, the a-rational acceptance of tradition and religion no longer suffice to justify norms, so norms must be legitimated. Habermas notes in "Discourse Ethics,"

> Enduring acceptance of a norm also depends on whether, in a given context of tradition, reasons for obedience can be mobilized, reasons that suffice to make the corresponding validity claim at least appear justified in the eyes of those concerned. Applied to modern societies, this means there is no mass loyalty without legitimacy.[172]

Norms counted as good reasons in modernity are qualitatively different than those that are accepted in societies that have not undergone the learning process of modernity. The rational superiority of modern society to earlier epochs hinges on the way that modernized societies have undergone a social evolution and reached a condition that mirrors the postconventional stage in moral development, wherein norms can be interrogated and reasons must be given. So, in principle, every norm that is accepted in modern society has undergone a process of legitimation and can, in principle, be subjected to argumentation in communicative contexts.

What Owen recognizes and so many other readers of Habermas have missed is the connection between the problem of normative justification in critical theory and his theory of

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argumentation. The universalization principle ("U") becomes a rule of argumentation (Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholson [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991], 64-66).

[172] Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, 58-9

social evolution. Insofar as he argues that Habermas' philosophy relies upon his so-called "diachronic" dimension for normative justification—what I have argued should be understood as a philosophy of history—he is correct.[173] Setting these competing interpretations of Habermas' silence on his own philosophy of history aside, Owen remains largely contented with a Habermasian version of critical theory (with some amendments,[174] of course). Once the normative power of the diachronic dimension in his thought is recognized as an indispensable aspect of his theory, Owen thinks that Habermas has solved the problem of normative justification in a way that threads the needle between absolutism and relativism while remaining true to the aim and scope of critical theory.

Not everyone who agrees with Owen's claim that Habermas' theory of social evolution normatively undergirds his philosophical system shares his view that Habermas' solution to the problem is satisfactory. In *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Amy Allen uses Owen's analysis of the relationship between the diachronic and

[173] Naturally, Owen does not believe that Habermas' theory of social evolution and account of progressive social development is a philosophy of history. He goes to great pains in the first few pages of *Between Reason and History* to insist that there is a substantial difference between Habermas' ideas on history and a proper philosophy of history. "While Habermas' theory of social evolution is not a universal history," he writes, "neither is it a speculative philosophy of history, which seeks to identify the universal and necessary determinants and form of world history" (Owen 4). For Owen, the distinction hinges on two things: first, Habermas preserves the independence of the moral-practical and cognitive-technical spheres of development, which means that they are not causally connected to one another and therefore cannot be used to construct a philosophy of history a la Marx; second, within the logic of development each society takes its own unique, contingent path upward through it, which means that it cannot be a philosophy of history (Owen 4-5). I have already outlined in the previous chapter why I think that his theory of history in the 70s is a philosophy of history, so I will not address his points at length here.

[174] Owen praises Habermas for preserving an idea of progress, but he criticizes him for his "curiously thin" analysis of the aesthetic reason, a deficiency which, he hints, could be amended (Owen 185). I am inclined to think that this thinness isn't "curious" at all; it is a direct consequence of Habermas' view of reason. Nicholas Kompridis claims in *Between Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future*, that Habermas is committed to "unit[ing] at the formal level the unity of reason forever lost at the substantive level" (106 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006)). In other words, the failure of his theory to address questions of "individual happiness and satisfaction," as Owen puts (6), is inextricably bound up with the formalist and procedural form of reason Habermas appeals to and the correspondingly modest role that philosophy can play in critique.

synchronic dimensions of Habermas' thought for her more critical assessment of the Habermasian project. Specifically, she takes him to task for preserving what she calls "arguably [the] most controversial core" of the philosophy of history: the idea of historical progress.[175] Like Owen, Allen does not believe that Habermas has a philosophy of history, although only in a qualified sense. She acknowledges that Habermas has rid himself of most of the "trappings of traditional philosophy of history," which for her is means "a theory of history that presumes a metaphysical, teleological, and necessary progression of a unified historical subject."[176] She does not identify his continued commitment to the idea of historical progress and social evolution as a philosophy of history per se, but she does think it is a core component of traditional philosophies of history and that it provides metanormative justification for his discourse ethics and theory of communicative action. After making the case that his theory of modernity is indispensable for his account of normativity, she enumerates the ways that this dependence commits Habermas to a functionally Eurocentric view of premodern and non-European cultures.

Allen calls for decolonizing critical theory and argues that decolonization requires abandoning a certain view of progress that has been used by critical theory to ground normative judgements. While she is critical of the Enlightenment inheritance of the idea of progress in the philosophy of history, she is the rare contemporary critical theorist who does not share the field's instinctive aversion to the term "philosophy of history" (she proposes a "distinctive alternative methodology for the philosophy of history" that borrows from both Adorno and Foucault).[177] She is the first critical theorist to both recognize the metanormative work that the idea of modernity

[175] Allen, 49
[176] Ibid., 38
[177] Allen, 166

does in Habermas and to connect this dependence on a particular philosophy of history to recurrent problems for Habermas' critical theory more generally. However, she remains an anomaly among critical theorists in her willingness to advocate for a reconsideration of the philosophy of history, and the intent of her book is to give critical theory decolonized basis for normativity. As such, while I agree with her analysis of Habermas and consider her revisitation of the philosophy of history through the lens of post and decolonial theory essential, there is more to be learned by examining the relationship between Habermas' shadow philosophy of history and his philosophy.

Part 2: The Role of Philosophy

As I argued in the second chapter, Habermas' goal in reorienting critical theory was to eliminate the philosophy of history as its normative foundation. Insofar as subsequent critical theorists have mostly followed Habermas in eschewing the philosophy of history entirely or using the term as pejorative short-hand for theories that have not escaped the enchantment of metaphysics, he has materially succeeded. However, as I intimated in the second chapter, this shift can only be justified philosophically if Habermas avoids relying upon a philosophy of history to lend his theory normative force. As I have shown, he has not succeeded on this front. His theory does depend on his theory of social evolution which, ultimately, is a philosophy of history (and, as Allen has argued, one that carries with it an idea of historical progress that he inherits from the Kantian and Hegelian philosophies of history). On this level, Habermas has failed.

Allen and Owen's work set aside, Habermas' rejection of the philosophy of history has, on the whole, been taken as a much-needed course correction for critical theory. If one believes

that the philosophy of history is something that both can and ought to be eradicated, Habermas' failure to excise the philosophy of history from his systematic philosophy may be seen as damning. Contemporary critical theorists, accustomed as they are to reflexively rejecting the philosophy of history, may be inclined to view Habermas' whole philosophical project with suspicion or to immediately turn to salvaging those parts of Habermas' philosophy that may be extricated from his commitment to the philosophy of history. This response, however, misses the point. Rather than accept the Habermasian premise that the philosophy of history must be overcome, Habermas' failure ought to raise doubts about whether or not rejecting the philosophy of history is possible or even desirable in the first place. In other words, the mere fact that Habermas' system, as I have argued, does depend fundamentally upon a philosophy of history, ought not to be seen as a problem in and of itself. Instead, it suggests that we ought to revisit the question of the role that the philosophy of history can and ought to play in critical theory.

Habermas' post-*TCA* philosophy is a model of critical theory that operates with a particular philosophy of history. As such, if critical theory ought to move beyond its instinctive aversion to the philosophy of history into a more intentional and conscious engagement with it, it is worth examining what Habermas proceeded to do with critical theory in subsequent years. On his view, what are the avenues left for philosophy in general, and critical theory in particular? What are the horizons of possibility for critique? The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to examining how Habermas reimagines the tasks of critical theory.

Habermas understands modernization to be the process through which the three validity spheres of science, morality, and art are differentiated. In the process of demythologization that produces the three validity spheres, not only are religious claims to moral and epistemic

authority undermined, philosophy itself comes to recognize its own fundamental limitations. Habermas opens the first volume of the *TCA* by declaring the impossibility of "a philosophical worldview," or, in other words, the belief that reason has the capacity to grasp a substantive totality. Faith in the possibility of totalizing knowledge, he notes, has been undermined not only by the specialized empirical sciences but also by critical self-reflection, which has turned its disenchanting gaze upon the claims of reason and recognized the impossibility of grasping the whole. What is left, Habermas claims, is a post-metaphysical, post-foundationalist theory of rationality founded on a reconstructive method that that looks to the formal conditions of rationality ostensibly without laying claim to any metaphysical necessity. With "occidental modernity"[178] the separation of the validity spheres is a *fait accompli*, and the historical conditions are such that we can recognize the necessary presuppositions of communicative action.

So, once it has been disabused of its metaphysical pretensions, what function can philosophy perform? The *TCA* continues to be the general guiding framework underlying Habermas' subsequent projects, and his insistence that philosophy must abandon the philosophy of history and remain agnostic about substantial ethical questions concerning the good life remain consistent throughout. If the first generation of critical theory's attachment to the philosophy of history lead them towards totalizing critiques and Adornian negativity and philosophy must refrain from positing a determinate picture of a good or undamaged life, the contours and scope of critical theory must shift while retaining its critical bent. In order to understand the tasks Habermas lays out for philosophy in the *TCA*, it is important to examine

[178] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 351

Habermas' diagnosis of social pathologies and how he sets himself apart from the first generation critical theorists.

He splits from both Marxism and from the first generation of critical theorists by rejecting the critique of political economy and abandoning ideology critique. In the *TCA*, he argues that Marx's critique of political economy fails to recognize that the structural differentiation of the lifeworld is an historically advantageous development characteristic of modernization. Therefore, according to Habermas, Marx's critique of political economy, which depends on a class-based analysis of history, a romanticization of the premodern, and the philosophically muddled term "alienation," cannot distinguish between the process of modernity itself and reification.[179] Additionally, the critique of ideology, a mainstay of Marxist analysis and post-Marxist thought, is unnecessary once the three spheres of validity have been properly differentiated through the process of modernization. Thus ideology critique is dismissed as an artifact of the process of disenchantment and secularization that is part of the modernizing process. In fact, the end of ideology is at hand, if not already here:

> From the logic of cultural rationalization we can project the vanishing point toward which cultural modernity is heading; as the rationally differential between the profane realm of action and a definitively disenchanted culture gets leveled out, the latter will lose the properties that make it capable of taking on ideological functions.[180]

In other words, once the modern world is thoroughly rationalized, the dimming halo of totalizing worldviews will inevitably be extinguished. There is no longer any need to critique ideology, since the power of ideology, which depends upon a lingering feeling for the sacred, is well on its way to the dustbin of history.[181] As Habermas puts it, the exercise of the steering mechanisms of

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[179] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 339-343
[180] Ibid., 353
[181] His rejection of ideology critique is of a kind with his rejection of the philosophy of history in the *TCA*. According to Habermas, ideology critique requires a philosophy of history in order to detect the movements of

power and money appear "*in a discernable fashion*,"[182] not under the veil of ideological pretense.

So if Marx, ensnared by the philosophy of history, is wrong about class consciousness and the political economy, and if ideology cannot sustain itself in a demystified modernity, what are the existing social pathologies, and what can be done to address them? Habermas preserves some notion of "reification," but instead of thinking of reification in class-specific terms, he redefines it as distortions that arise when domains of communicatively structured action in the lifeworld are encroached upon by the systems logic of the state and the economy via the steering mechanisms of money and power, which he calls "internal colonization."[183] While he does acknowledge that the demands of the capitalist system and democracy are fundamentally incompatible, since they operate according to different modes of rationality, his primary focus is on the internal colonization that occurs as a result of the expansion of the welfare state.

According to Habermas, in order to mollify class conflicts, the state has needed to provide expanded welfare for its citizens. As a result, class conflicts have been neutralized while at the same time individuals see themselves less and less as citizens and more and more as consumers, clients of the welfare state. The welfare state smuggles systems logic into the heretofore communicatively structured domains of action in the lifeworld. Increasing growth leads to increasing complexity of the state and the economy, which in turn leads to systems logics that "penetrate even deeper into the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld."[184] When the rationalized lifeworld's symbolic reproduction is disturbed and its resources overtaxed by the

objective spirit in history and to identify the gap between human possibility and actuality (Habermas, *TCA* 2, 382).

[182] Ibid., 354

[183] Ibid.,

[184] Ibid., 367

encroachment of systems rationality, this leads to the rise of pathologies in the lifeworld itself on the levels of cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization.[185] Pathologies in the lifeworld are measured not against a substantive idea of well-being, but rather "in relation to the contradictions in which communicatively intermeshed interactions can get caught because deception and self-deception can gain objective power in an everyday practice reliant on the facticity of validity claims."[186] Ideology, with its attendant concepts of false consciousness, class consciousness, and alienation, is replaced by disturbances in symbolic reproduction in the sphere of everyday life.

So what, then, is the task of philosophy? While the *TCA* hints at Habermas' ambitions for cross-disciplinary cooperation, he outlines philosophy's new, post-metaphysical role in greater detail in the 1983 essay "Philosophy as Stand-in and Interpreter." Here, he lays out two possible roles a chastened version of philosophy might play once it has rescinded its claims to act as an arbiter of the sciences. The first, as suggested by the title, is philosophy as stand-in (*Platzhalter*). In this role, philosophy would be a stand-in for, as Habermas puts it, "empirical theories with strong universalist claims"—specifically, the reconstructive sciences that "explain the presumably universal basis of rational experience and judgement, as well as of action and linguistic communication."[187] Here philosophy draws upon its history of transcendental and dialectical modes of justification to furnish fallibilistic claims concerning the universal, drawing from existing material produced by the empirical sciences and relying upon the empirical sciences to verify their accounts. Habermas locates his own philosophical work in the mode of

[185] Ibid., 143
[186] Ibid., 378
[187] Habermas, MCCA, 15-16

philosophy as stand-in and it echoes his tentative claims in the *TCA* about cooperation between philosophy and the sciences.[188]

The second role that philosophy can play, philosophy as interpreter, entails philosophy tackling the problems of mediation that arise with the tendency towards compartmentalization that comes with modernity. As moderns, individuals recognize the separation between the three spheres of rationality: truth, justice, and taste. How can reason, disrempted on the level of justification, "go on being a unity on the level of culture"?[189] Additionally, with the increase in rarified and inaccessible expert cultures, how can these cultures be made to retain their connection to everyday communication in the lifeworld? Habermas thinks that communication in everyday life is both the promising site for regaining the lost unity of reason, where philosophy as interpreter tackles the question of "how [expert cultures] can . . . be joined to the impoverished traditions of the lifeworld . . . without detriment to their regional rationality."[190] In contradistinction to anti-modern reactionaries, who respond to the impoverishment of the lifeworld by attempting to erase the boundaries between the three spheres of validity and returning to the unquestioned authority of a tradition, philosophy can point the way towards a

[188] Here a comparison between "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter" and Habermas' earlier remarks in the 1971 essay "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?" is suggestive. There are commonalities between the two texts insofar as they identify two tasks for philosophy: one, working with the sciences and two, finding ways of understanding the loss of meaning in modernity. However, in 1971 Habermas framed the former task explicitly as a critique of scientism and a means of protecting "democratic planning as the steering mechanism for developed social systems" (*Philosophical-Political Profiles*, Trans. Frederick G. Lawrence [Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983], 16). This mode of doing philosophy would draw from both the empirical content produced by the sciences as well as "from the utopian traditions" (ibid., 16-17). Habermas, of course, remains unsympathetic to scientism throughout all of his work, but it is interesting to see that the word never appears in "Philosophy as Stand-In and Interpreter," nor does he mention the underlying connection between this work and ensuring that democratic planning remains the means through which social activity is directed. What might at first appear to be a relatively benign omission gains significance in light of the way he restricts democratic input into social material reproduction in his later work, particularly *Between Facts and Norms*, which I discuss in the next chapter.

[189] Ibid., 17

[190] Ibid., 19

further fulfillment of the project of modernity via, as he puts it in "Modernity versus Postmodernity," "a relinking of modern cultures that still depends on modern heritages," a "reappropriation of the expert's culture from the standpoint of the lifeworld."[191] The work of reappropriation itself is performed not by philosophers, of course, but philosophy as the guardian of rationality can act as an interpreter for these appropriations, lending epistemic authority to communicatively structured domains of action.[192]

As Habermas makes abundantly clear even in the *TCA*, his vision of what philosophy should be is determined on the one hand by his worry about lapsing into the bad old ways of doing philosophy (marked as they are by the philosophy of history and its concomitant metaphysics) and, on the other hand, a wholesale abandonment of philosophy's connection to objectivity and truth. Looking at Habermas' vision for what philosophy ought to concern itself with going forward, it is striking that its more critical functions are outsourced to social sciences on the one hand (in the case of identifying and diagnosing instances of social pathology) and to "reappropriators of expert culture" on the other. In his quest to preserve the rational accomplishments of modernity and to avoid the pitfalls of the philosophy of history, Habermas rejects critical theory's traditional concern with ideology critique and class analysis. Instead, Habermas carves out a space for an ostensibly detranscendentalized philosophy that nevertheless retains its position as a guardian of rationality. As I will argue in the next chapter, at times his

[191] Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *The New German* Critique 22 (Winter 1981): 12-13

[192] What philosopher as stand-in means in concrete terms is easy to understand, since philosopher as stand in is consonant with his earlier writings on reconstruction and Habermas' own work provides a model of this approach. Philosopher as interpreter, however, is more difficult to imagine in concrete terms. Clearly, Habermas believes that philosophy can bring the succor of expert cultures into the ken of everyday communicative practice, but it's unclear what kind of work would be included in this category. Identifying locations of colonization in conjunction with the social sciences might fall under the umbrella of philosophy as stand-in, but, curiously, colonization goes unmentioned in this essay.

prescriptions are underdeveloped, most notably with regard to things with which critical theory has historically been most concerned: diagnosing social pathologies. To be fair to Habermas, this work becomes in part the responsibility of the social sciences, thus fulfilling both the early promise of interdisciplinary cooperation upon which the Frankfurt School was founded and the claim that philosophy must remain agnostic concerning substantive ethical questions, which are the responsibility of individuals in lifeworld contexts to decide for themselves without the aid of philosophy.

In this chapter, I have presented the case that Habermas' philosophy of history normatively grounds the synchronic dimension of his work and given an overview of Habermas' revision of tasks of philosophy (and, by extension, critical theory). In the next chapter, I will look at how Habermas puts this mode of doing philosophy into practice in *Between Facts and Norms*. I will then conclude that chapter by reflecting on what limitations and problems for critique emerge as a result of Habermas' specific philosophy of history.

Chapter 5
The Philosophy of History in Practice: Habermas' Later Philosophy

Introduction

So far I have established that Habermas not only has a philosophy of history, but that this philosophy of history lends normative force to his theory. In the final section of the last chapter, I sketched the tasks that Habermas envisions for philosophy from the *TCA* onward in its more modest roles of stand-in and interpreter. In this chapter, I ask where this view of the philosophy of history leads him. What avenues are left for critical theory given Habermas' philosophy of history?

My contention is that the philosophy of history circumscribes the boundary conditions for a critical theory. How one understands the historical process and how rationality emerges within this process determines how one approaches one's objects of analysis, the goals of analysis, and where one sees potential sites for struggle and the means by which those sites can be recognized. Habermas himself is aware that the philosophy of history determines the scope of a critical theory, even if he believes he himself is able to escape it. In the *TCA*, he traced what he saw as the critical dead end of the first generation of the Frankfurt School to the philosophy of history in the *DOE* (see chapter 2). He recognized the link and concluded that he would be able to return critical theory to its original mission by eliminating the philosophy of history from his account. Yet, as we have seen, he didn't eliminate the philosophy of history so much as instate a different philosophy of history to provide the normative basis for his critique.

In this chapter, I will analyze Habermas in the same way that Habermas analyzed Adorno's philosophy in the *TCA*. Just as Habermas looked at the shape critical theory assumes

when it depends on the philosophy of history in the *DOE*, I will examine the scope of Habermas' critical project based on the philosophy of history in the *CES*. To that end, I will begin with an examination of his 1996 opus on natural law and democracy, *Between Facts and Norms* (*BFN* from now on), which has been criticized as a betrayal of the more radical bent of the *TCA*. I will demonstrate that if *BFN* is read with an eye to how his philosophy of history determines the shape and scope of his critical project, the conservatism that has been surprising to some critics is a result of his implicit philosophy of history. In the second and third parts of the chapter, I will connect Habermas' view of system and lifeworld to his philosophy of history and examine the role that they play in determining the scope for critique in his philosophy.

Part 1: Between Facts and Norms

BFN was written in part, as Habermas notes in the preface, to push against a trend he observed in legal scholarship at the time towards cynicism, a tendency to consider rational, normative accounts of constitutional democracy hopelessly out of touch with the facticity of institutions. As with much of his writing, he is motivated by opposing those who would give up on the rational accomplishments of modernity. Furthermore, with the fall of the Soviet Union, Western democracies are, as he puts it "the *sole* heir[s] of the moral-practical self-understanding of modernity," but they are at the same time unknowingly endangering the "social solidarity preserved in legal structures,"[193] a resource upon which democratic societies are dependent.[194] *BFN* is Habermas' attempt to bring his theory of communicative action and discourse ethics to

[193] Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), xliii

[194] Habermas' concern about dwindling social solidarity, while present in the *TCA*, becomes more pronounced in later works and has come to be a primary concern. See, for example, "The Lure of Technocracy: A Plea for European Solidarity" in *The Lure of Technocracy*, trans. Ciaran Cronin, 3-38 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), *The Divided West*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), and *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010)

bear on the legal and political structure of constitutional democratic states with an eye to stemming the tide of pessimism concerning the rational legitimacy of democratic institutions; Habermas' task in *BFN* is to use a reconstructive approach to demonstrate the rational legitimacy of constitutional democracies. The titular theme, facts and norms, in part describes a bifurcation in legal and political theory between empirical approaches that expunge all normative content from their account of the law and normative approaches that fail to connect to the self-understanding of real constitutional democratic states. By bringing in his theory of communicative action, Habermas believes that he is able to provide an account of law and politics that is grounded in social reality without sacrificing all normativity. [195]

He lays the foundation for this gargantuan task by describing the function of law and its relationship to communicative action. From an evolutionary perspective, communicative action is essential to the generation and reproduction of social orders, since it is through the coordination of action by means of linguistic communication that individual actors can integrate socially. Communicative action, however, has what Habermas calls a Janus face. On the one hand, by its very nature every speech act performed in a communicative context contains within it a moment of transcendence, since every act of communication oriented towards reaching understanding relies on the taking of yes/no positions on "validity claims whose justification must presuppose the agreement of an ideally expanded audience," "transcend[ing] space and time."[196] Thus, every normative validity claim overshoots its local context and has within it a moment of unconditionality. On the other hand, every speech-act is performed within a local context and depends not on an ideally expanded audience existing in an ahistorical,

[195] Habermas, *BFN*, 6
[196] Ibid., 20

transcendental realm but upon those determinate hearers whose acceptance or rejection of these claims have immediate consequences.[197] This produces an inherent instability to sociation that is constructed from communicative action, since it "operates with permanently endangered counterfactual presuppositions."[198] Communicative action, like legal and political theory, turns out to have its own tension between facts and norms, between facticity and validity.

In premodernity, this inherent instability of sociation via communicative action is mitigated by two [elements] in which facticity and validity are fused: the lifeworld, which serves as the reservoir of unthematized background knowledge (the familiar), and archaic institutions, which enshrine behavioral expectations with the power of the sacred (the authoritarian). These both provide the basis for social cohesion, but with the rise of modernity, the authority of sacred institutions evaporates and the reservoir of shared assumptions in the lifeworld shrinks. This, taken together with the proliferation of spheres for strategic action in increasingly complex modern societies, has caused communicative action to lose its ability to socially integrate modern, post-secular subjects. So in the absence of sacred authority or the social cohesion of a universally shared lifeworld, what can place normative limits on strategic action such that there can be such a thing as a modern society at all?

In rationally organized (read: Western democratic) modern societies, positive law steps in to ensure social stability once systemic complexity overruns communicative action's capacity to provide social integration. Facticity and validity are intertwined in legal validity, since the law operates both through the exercise of power (sanctions against those who violate the law) and validity (the rational core of the law). Of course, a legal order may be maintained illegitimately

[197] Ibid., 17-21
[198] Ibid., 21

through the use of non-rational means of coercion, but a legitimate legal order that serves a socially integrative function contains within itself an intrinsic relationship to democracy. In order to be legitimate, positive law must come about through a process of legislation, representing "the place in the legal system where social integration first occurs."[199] Behaviorally, in everyday life actors are free to take either an objectivating perspective on the law, obeying only out of calculated self-interest, or they may adopt a performative attitude, regarding themselves as a member of an abstract, legal community of free and equal subjects protected under the law. In the context of passing a law, it is required that legislators adopt this performative, decentered attitude, such that the laws that are passed reflect the will of communicatively engaged citizens. Insofar as positive law is democratically expressed will, it is legitimate and institutionalizes social integration such that even if in practice actors orient themselves towards the law strategically, the law is *worthy* of respect and rationally motivated actors can recognize themselves as authors of the law. Positive law derives its legitimacy and its capacity to accomplish social integration from communicative action, and as such it "lives off a solidarity" insofar as it traces its origins to democratically expressed will. By situating the law as stepping in to provide social integration in societies too evolved, too rational and complex to accomplish social integration by means of communicative action, Habermas posits an intrinsic connection between legal validity and a democratic social order.

Having given a quasi-evolutionary reconstructive account of the intrinsic connection between legal validity and democracy, Habermas must explain how existing democratic states, given the high complexity of modern societies and the fact that social subsystems and large

[199] Ibid., 302

organizations have increasingly blocked out official democratic channels, preserve a connection from the lifeworld to democratic will formation to the capacity to enact change in the political and legal administration of state power. In a complex society, of necessity Habermas believes that the routine circulation of power is insular, "follow[ing] established patterns" immune from fresh democratic input. This is how the "core" of the political system operates. The rational legitimacy of this systems-administrative form of governing rests on whether or not this routinized circulation of power can be interrupted or changed by peripheral forces that, unlike the core, are connected to communicatively-structured domains of everyday life. This interruption may only be observed in crisis situations, in which problems can be successfully identified and diagnosed spontaneously by the periphery. [200]

This requires, Habermas notes, a robust public sphere, a communicative structure capable of detecting problems in social integration and forming public opinion, bridging the gap between "personal life experiences" encountered in private lifeworld interactions to the formation of public opinion.[201] However, public opinion does not itself exercise any power directly; instead, it works by putting pressure on powerholders within the political and judiciary system, who are beholden to both the democratically expressed will of the public and to "leav[ing] intact the modes of operation internal to functional system and other highly organized spheres of action."[202] During these times of crisis, a functioning democracy draws from the font of a rationalized, communicatively structured private lifeworld that is able to generate a consensus in civil society that is then expressed within the public sphere. Legitimate democratic systems are

[200] Ibid., 355-8
[201] Ibid., 365
[202] Ibid., 372

operationally insular except in instances of crisis in which the they are open to adjustments that leave intact the stability of the administration of the state and economy.

If *BFN* were read by someone unfamiliar with the Habermasian *oeuvre*, they would likely be surprised to hear him described as a critical theorist. A book on political philosophy and the philosophy of law written by the most famous heir of the Frankfurt School would, one would expect, be more critical of Western constitutional democracies. Instead, *BFN* deploys the concept of communicative action in an affirmative rather than a critical way. As he writes in the preface to the first chapter, the theory of communicative action "already absorbs the tension between facticity and validity . . . . preserv[ing] the link with the classical conception of an internal connection, however mediated, between society and reason."[203] This has led some critics to regard *BFN* as the *Philosophy of Right* to the *TCA*'s *Phenomenology*: a conservative conflation of reason with the existing order and a betrayal of the more liberatory bent of his earlier work.[204] Cook points out that in his reconstruction of the origins of positive law, he stresses that the normative dimensions of his theory are already present "more or less" in existing democratic states and tasks sociologists with "ratify[ing] his decision to portray the real as rational."[205] This decision, according to Cook, collapses the ideal and the real in such a way that the possibility of making a sustained critique of an existing political system all but vanishes. The radical critical potential of the democratic idea of self-determination is blunted by the decision to isolate it from political decision-making, leaving the practices of existing constitutional democracies immune

[203] Ibid., 8
[204] James L. Marsh, "What's Critical about Critical Theory?" in *Perspectives on Habermas*, Ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), 565; Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 123-129
[205] Deborah Cook, *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 125

from criticism. As Cook puts it:

> . . . Western democratic states are said to harbor in their constitutions a rational and normative core which is no longer opposed to—or in tension with—their current practices and institutions. In Habermas' work, communicative reason has become the apotheosis of liberal democracies under the economic conditions that characterize late capitalism.[206]

In other words, by providing a reconstructive account of politics and law that posits existing liberal democracies as being intrinsically connected with the normative idea of reason itself, Habermas is in danger of appearing like an apologist for the given order of existing democracies. His account of what is required for a democracy to be legitimate is simultaneously strikingly minimal in its requirements, enshrining as it does the routinized circulation of power and money as a necessary element of this particular stage of social evolution, and almost naïve, blithely relying upon the possibility of a robust public sphere that is responsive to disturbances in the private sphere.[207]

The position Habermas outlines in *BFN* becomes less surprising when it is read in light of how his philosophy of history is operative in his thought. Relying as he does on a model of history where each stage marks a particular form of development in sociocultural learning, a model that is formally linear[208] and progressive, and a methodology that uses reconstruction to

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[206] Ibid., 128

[207] While I do not consider this to be a philosophically satisfying interpretation, I suspect that, in part, the tenor of *BFN* is symptomatic of the zeitgeist in Europe and the United States during the early 1990s. In a way, Fukuyama's notorious right-Hegelian *The End of History and the Last Man* (published in the same year) is the dark mirror version of the liberal neo-Hegelian *BFN*. In both books, liberal Western democracy is the measure of human progress, and while Habermas, as we have seen, famously shies away from overt prognostication, the way that liberal democracy together with market economies are baked into his evolutionary account of positive law in societies contains a slight echo of the end of history thesis. I am no the only person to note that Fukuyama and Habermas do seem to converge during this decade: James Marsh notes wryly that "like Fukayama and the apologists for the capitalist order, Habermas is haunted by a specter of Marx" (James Marsh, *Unjust Legality: A Critique of Habermas' Philosophy of Law* [New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2001], 2).

[208] While it is true that Habermas does not claim that historical development occurs out of some necessity, and that individual societies may even reverse their progress, he is clear that the stages must occur sequentially. Owen compares this model of development to a staircase—one may go backwards on the staircase, but when progressing everyone ascends along the same path (48).

determine what is necessary for the existing forms of reason to come about, the task when it comes to philosophy of law and political philosophy is to uncover the rational core of the highest existing forms of social organization. If Western democracy sets the curve for sociocultural evolutionary learning processes,[209] then once its intrinsic connection to reason itself is demonstrated and justified as it is in *BFN*, the remaining task is ensuring that these democracies in practice preserve the potential for inroads to be made from the lifeworld to the otherwise normal (and unproblematic) insular functioning of power and money. *BFN* does not mark a departure from his earlier ideas: its aims are consistent with his description of philosophy as stand-in, and its philosophical substance is consonant with the philosophy of history that his work from the *TCA* onward tacitly contains. The *BFN* reflects the unacknowledged but decisive role that the philosophy of history plays in determining the philosophical horizon of Habermas' post-*TCA* projects.

Two elements of Habermas' critical theory appear with particular clarity in *BFN* and are important for understanding what the scope of critique can be when based on Habermas' particular philosophy of history. The first component is the idea of systematic complexity, which

[209] In Habermas' works up through the 90s, he is unequivocal in his position that western constitutional democracies lie at the highest point of social evolution, that European modernity is the pacemaker for modern development as such. He has since become more circumspect and, in "Essays on Faith and Knowledge," an unpublished manuscript that he shared with Amy Allen for her 2015 book *The End of Progress,* he has formulated a response to charges of Eurocentrism by incorporating the emerging model of multiple modernities into his account of modernization. According to Allen, he adopts what she calls a "two-track analysis of modernization," in which modernization occurs via the expansion of functional subsystems across the globe that spread a shared "globalized infrastructure." Viewing this as simply the spread of a Western global hegemony, Habermas argues, obscures the fact that different cultures across the globe respond and adapt to modernization with the help of culturally specific resources; thus, as Allen puts it, "shared infrastructure is compatible with a high degree of cultural hybridity" (Allen 70). The expansion of these functional subsystems carry with them the universal normative content of modernity that historically first developed with the European enlightenment (differentiation of validity spheres, the disenchantment of the world, &c.), but insofar as they are taken up by different cultures it no longer makes sense to say that modernization is still essentially western. This, however, as Allen points out, does little to change the fundamental structure of his account of sociocultural learning and still takes as axiomatic "the developmental superiority of European modernity" (Allen 72).

is directly linked to his own model of modernity and the process of modernization. The second is his concept of the lifeworld, which Habermas needs to presuppose is inherently resistant to encroachment by systems logic for his minimal requirement for democratic legitimacy to be met. These dual concepts, one born from his theory of modernity and the other essential to the viability of his critical project (but, as I will argue, undertheorized and, in a way, placed outside of the boundaries of criticism) show the way Habermas' philosophy of history determines the scope of his critical theory.

Part 2: System Complexity

It is unsurprising that system complexity should be a crucial limiting factor in Habermas' theory of democracy, since system complexity is a core component of Habermas' theory of modernity—i.e., his philosophy of history. In the second volume of the *TCA*, he describes social evolution as a process through which the increasing rationality of the lifeworld is inextricably linked with an increasing scope and complexity of functional subsystems. The more evolved a society is, the more removed the media-steered subsystems are from their foundations in the lifeworld.[210] Thus, advanced societies are divided into domains governed either by functionalist reason (the economy, which is steered by money, and the bureaucratic state, which is steered by power) or communicative action (the private sphere of the family and the public sphere). System complexity, while not a metric of historical progress in and of itself,[211] is linked necessarily with the rationalization of the lifeworld and the development of post-conventional morality. Of course this expansion of system complexity and the concomitant proliferation of domains governed by functionalist reason has its dangers (such as colonization of the lifeworld), but insofar as it is part

[210] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 153-155
[211] Habermas, *CES*, 141-142

of social evolution that leads to the rational accomplishments of modernity, it is necessary.

Commentators have been leery Habermas' use of systems theory in his writings since the publication of the *TCA*. Thomas McCarthy, very shortly after the publication of the second volume, expressed reservations about what he called Habermas' "pact" with systems-theoretical accounts of society, arguing that it cedes too much to systems rationality such that "critical theory is left in an unnecessarily defensive position."[212] He acknowledges that Habermas, unlike systems theorists, is still critical of the shrinking scope of democratic participation in the state, but also that his aim is "not a complete absorption of the system into the lifeworld," since by virtue of their complexity, modern societies require that the economy and systems administration be governed by steering media of money and power.[213] Apart from his broader skepticism concerning how well systems theory describes the operations of institutions, McCarthy worries about whether or not the idea of complexity leads Habermas, in spite of himself, to limit the scope of possible democratic participation too much, thus betraying "the 'utopian' idea of self-conscious self-determination" which, for critical social theory, "must remain a regulative ideal."[214]

Nancy Fraser addresses the troubling status of system complexity in Habermas' philosophy from a different angle several years later in her 1989 book *Unruly Practices*. Her criticism of Habermas foregrounds a feminist critique of, among other things, his claim that the domestic labor of childrearing cannot be handed over to functionalist subsystems, since it

[212] Thomas McCarthy, "Complexity and Democracy: or the Seducements of Systems Theory" in *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's* The Theory of Communicative Action, eds. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 120
[213] Ibid., 127
[214] Ibid., 133

belongs to the realm of symbolic reproduction and thus must be protected from the incursions of either the economy or the state. This, Fraser argues, cloisters off women's domestic labor into the private sphere under the false presupposition that the domestic sphere is a haven of normatively structured communicative action. One of the reasons Habermas introduces such a strict separation between symbolic and material reproduction, Fraser observes, is because he has "elevate[d] system complexity to an overriding consideration with effective veto power over proposed social transformation aimed at overcoming women's subordination."[215] Fraser echoes McCarthy when she observes that the outsized role that Habermas allocates to system complexity imposes limitations on Habermas' normative vision. However, Fraser also thinks that this valorization of system complexity conflicts with his claims that system complexity is not the sole metric of social progress and thus rests on Habermas mishandling his own ideas.

Both McCarthy and Fraser pick up on this thread in Habermas' thought and recognize its potential to severely limit the scope of critique prior to *BFN*. Fraser, at least at the time she wrote *Unruly Practices*, believed that the limitations imposed by systems complexity could be cast aside without abandoning Habermas' framework altogether, especially in the face of limitations that are, as she put it, "at odds with any reasonable standard of justice."[216] In this moment at least, Fraser does not give sufficient weight to the fact that Habermas relies on a reified idea of system complexity such that by its very nature it forecloses possibilities that may very well be demanded by, as she puts it, a reasonable standard of justice. As McCarthy points out, by borrowing his theoretical explanation of functionalist systems from systems theory, Habermas

[215] Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 122
[216] Ibid.

relies upon a model "treat[s] what is social, and potentially the object of human will, as natural, and purely a matter of objectified relations, objects, and events."[217] He observes that Habermas, for his part, believes that he can incorporate the theoretical apparatus borrowed from systems theory without falling into the ideological trap of reifying the idea of systems and ceding too much normative ground. In *BFN* it becomes obvious that McCarthy's reservations about the diminished role that Habermas' model allocates to normative consensus are justified.

In *BFN* the limitations the idea of system complexity place on his normative vision are even more apparent than they are in the *TCA* which, I believe, in part accounts for the surprise of some commentators when they compare the ostensibly more critical *TCA* with the much more circumspect and conservative *BFN*. In *BFN*, Habermas starts from the presupposition that advanced (and therefore complex) democratic societies necessarily see a diminished scope of democratic self-determination, since the subsystems of political administration and the economy ensure the successful material reproductions of society that operate in a way that by their very nature as systems are incompatible with communication oriented toward reaching understanding. This model, much as McCarthy feared, places critical theory (or in this case, democratic input in the operations of democracies) on the back foot from the outset. Or, to put it another way, it paves the way for a minimalism in constituting what makes a democratic constitutional order legitimate. After all, if systems complexity is necessary and a hallmark of social evolutionary progress, and if the aim of the work is to show that existing democratic states are, at least formally, legitimate, then the scope for democratic self-determination must, of necessity, be very narrow. In the end, Habermas is lead to the conclusion that the "state apparatus and economy

[217] McCarthy, "Systems Theory," 136

[are] systematically integrated actions fields that can no longer be transformed democratically from within . . . without damage to their proper systemic logic and their ability to function."[218] The way that functionalist systems materially reproduce a democratic society is removed as an object of criticism from the outset. So long as in times of crisis democracy *can* become operative, the order is legitimate.

Thus Habermas is in the extraordinary position of claiming that the routine circulation of money and power immune from democratic input is unproblematic so long as it can, in principle, be broken in the case of a crisis. In *Unjust Legality: A Critique of Habermas's Law*, James Marsh points out that this amounts to "a subtle weakening of the normative requirements of democracy" that runs throughout *BFN*. [219] The limited scope Habermas sets for democracy is, Marsh observes, directly linked to his allowing the reified idea of systems complexity that is the hallmark of modernity to set the boundaries for democratic intervention in the organization of society. As Marsh puts it, "such claims prepare the way for him to say or intimate that the nature of modern democracy and modern complex societies implies that we cannot do any better."[220] By strictly separating system and lifeworld and justifying the allocation of the state and the economy to functionalist reason by appealing to system complexity, Habermas' philosophy of history leads him down a path that ends in arguing that a society in which democratic intervention is relegated only to crisis situations is legitimate.

In allowing systems complexity to strictly circumscribe the allowable range of democratic self-determination, Habermas removes the systemic functioning of the state and

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[218] Jürgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) 444
[219] Marsh, *Unjust Legality*, 144
[220] Ibid., 145

capital from the domain of normative criticism provided it remains in its own proper place in material reproduction without making incursions into the domains of symbolic social reproduction. I am inclined in principle reject a theory of democracy that infers from a certain model of system complexity that the scope for democratic intervention is necessarily quite small and indirect as ideological, since the organization of material reproduction characteristic of Western capitalism is taken to be beyond the scope of things that can be changed (if not "natural" in a strict sense). That being said, this criticism amounts to simply rejecting Habermas' objective theory of modernity—that is to say, his philosophy of history.

Since the goal of this analysis is to uncover how his philosophy of history determines the parameters of his model of democratic legitimacy in *BFN*, I will conclude this section by highlighting how he comes to treat system complexity stems from the way that his philosophy of history orients his project. The "subtle weakening of the normative requirements of democracy" fundamentally stems not from an uncritical use of social scientific theory (as per Marsh and McCarthy[221]) but from the way his philosophy of history shapes his philosophical analysis.
As I noted at the end of the previous section, the progressive nature of modernity outlined in *CES* commits Habermas to approaching Western liberal democracies with the presupposition that they are, at their core, legitimate. The progressive nature of modernity in turn operates as an implicit guarantee that the diminished scope for democratic self-determination that is part of modernization does not pose a fundamental threat to democratic legitimacy. Habermas' philosophy of history underwrites the "subtle weakening of the normative requirements of democracy."

[221] Marsh, 146; McCarthy, 136

Part 3: Lifeworld

So far in this chapter, we have seen the way the idea of systems complexity that comes out of his theory of social evolution leads to a restricted normative vision of democratic legitimacy in *BFN*. In his mission to preserve the rational accomplishments of modernity, Habermas removes the exercise of state and economic power from the reach of norm-governed communicative action. However, when considering the ways in which his philosophy of history determines the boundaries of his critical theory, I must turn from his idea of system complexity to the other side of what Honneth has called Habermas' "two-tiered" model of social organization: the lifeworld. [222] The lifeworld is the locus of the critical component of Habermas' philosophy after the *TCA*. As was outlined in the last chapter, where critical theory had historically been concerned with diagnosing social pathologies in terms of domination, alienation, ideology, and reification, Habermas is concerned with problems of internal colonization and cultural impoverishment of the lifeworld. What role does the lifeworld play in the critical dimension of his theory? What are the potential and actual forms of social distortion that arise, and how are they to be recognized? What does Habermas' philosophy have to offer as a critical model for diagnosing social pathologies? In what follows, I will first sketch out Habermas' conception of the lifeworld in greater detail, specifically its place within his philosophy of history, before looking at how this concept is deployed both in the *TCA* and *BFN*.

Habermas' concept of the lifeworld is modified from its origin in the phenomenological tradition. While phenomenologists such as Husserl understood the lifeworld to be the horizon of possible experience for conscious subjects, Habermas' conception of the lifeworld is the horizon

[222] Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 278

of "more or less diffuse, always unproblematic, background convictions" that are unthematized but shared by communicating subjects. [223] It is the mass of shared presuppositions that makes coordinating action possible; it determines what validity claims are accepted and what norms are binding. Where systems in their proper sphere ensure the material reproduction of society, the lifeworld is properly the domain of symbolic reproduction. While material reproduction encompasses a society's metabolic relationship with nature and means broadly the same thing for Habermas as it does for Marx, symbolic reproduction is linked to the second axis his philosophy of history brings to historical materialism: social integration. As was described in the previous chapter, social integration (also sometimes called "relations of production") and material production are co-fundamental to socio-evolutionary development. As system and lifeworld are progressively decoupled, the lifeworld emerges as the domain wherein cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization takes place—i.e., symbolic reproduction. Its proper function as the domain of symbolic reproduction, Habermas claims, is a safeguard against colonization. As he puts it in the *TCA*, "Along the front between system and lifeworld, the lifeworld evidently offers stubborn and possibly successful resistance only when the functions of symbolic reproduction are in question."[224]

Habermas' philosophy of history renders the development of productive forces and sociocultural learning independent of one another.[225] While the decoupling of lifeworld and

[223] Habermas, *TCA 1*, 70
[224] Habermas, *TCA* 2, 351
[225] As noted earlier, while both the development of productive forces and socio-cultural learning are required for a society to evolve, they develop independently of one another. To be more precise, endogenous socio-cultural learning remains latent until times of interruption and crisis require the re-organization of social integration, which then in turn opens up the scope of possibilities for rationalization; modes of production "can . . . be understood as a problem-generating mechanism that triggers but does not bring about" sociocultural change (Habermas, *CES*, 145).

system is a function of the increased complexity of productive forces, sociocultural learning produces a progressive rationalization of the lifeworld characteristic of modernity. The lifeworld is rationalized to the degree that it meets four criteria.[226] First, there must be an understanding that the objective, the intersubjective, and the subjective spheres are distinct from one another and each has their own form of validity claims. Second, communicative subjects must have a reflexive relationship to traditional stores of meaning such that they may interpret, assess, and criticize these traditions. Third, the three spheres must have given rise to socially institutionalized cultural subsystems and "specialized forms of argumentation." Fourth and finally, communicative action must be distinguished from strategic action.[227] For Habermas, this account of the rationalized lifeworld allows him to avoid the Adornian trap of equating the rational accomplishments of modernity with reification:

> Horkheimer and Adorno failed to recognize the communicative rationality of the lifeworld that had to development out of the rationalization of worldviews before there could be the development of formally organized domains of action at all. It is only this communicative rationality, reflected in the self-understanding of modernity, that gives an inner logic—and not merely the impotent rage of nature in revolt—to resistance against the colonization of the life world by the inner dynamics of autonomous systems.[228]

Modernity consists not only in the absorption of material reproductive processes into the domain of functionalist systems and sub-systems but also the socio-cultural learning process that finally culminates in a rationalized lifeworld. The rationalized lifeworld intrinsically resists incursions

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[226] It bears repeating that this account of the rationalization of the lifeworld is building upon the foundational philosophy of history he laid out in the 70s and not departing from it. Habermas explains what makes a lifeworld more or less rationalized by contrasting the rationalized lifeworld with the lifeworld within the premodern--mythological worldviews which he says provide "an instructive limit case" (*TCA* 2, 71). This is a little misleading, since mythological worldviews belong to an earlier stage of socio-cultural learning that societies grow out of through the process of modernization. For a more comprehensive criticism of Habermas' use of the distinction between the modern and the premodern, see John P. McCormick's *Weber, Habermas, and the Transformations of the European State* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 45-47 and 64-67.

[227] Habermas, *TCA* 1, 70-72

[228] Ibid., *TCA 2*, 333

from functionalist systems when it comes to symbolic reproduction, thereby solving the difficulty that caused Adorno to look for resistance to reification outside of the domain of the rational.

The lifeworld thus serves a double function. It is perpetually jeopardized both by colonization and by the cultural impoverishment that arises with rationalization, yet at the same time Habermas appeals to the lifeworld itself to identify these problems. In the case of colonization, the lifeworld by its very nature resists encroachment. When functionalist systems creep into domains that ought to be governed by communicative action, pathologies arise, according to Habermas. And yet, when it comes to giving an account of what these social pathologies are, his theory is conspicuously anemic. As Deborah Cook notes in her book *Adorno, Habermas, and the Search for a Rational Society*, in the *TCA* Habermas only provides one concrete example of lifeworld colonization and fails to show "in what precise respects the symbolic reproduction of social integration is distorted." [229] Internal colonization is meant to replace theories of reification that render it coextensive with modern rationalization, and yet he does not provide a thoroughgoing analysis of systematically distorted communication, a point that he himself acknowledged in an interview in 1990. [230]

The thinness of his analysis is a serious problem for his theory if it is to be critical—i.e., one that purports to outline a program for diagnosing social pathologies, since these communicative distortions are what distinguish pathological from non-pathological rationalization. Habermas notes that reification (or internal colonization) only occurs "when the

[229] Cook, *The Search for a Rational Society*, 32
[230] See "Morality, Society and Ethics: An Interview with Torben Hviid Nielsen" (in *Justification and Application*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: MIT, 1993)), 148

lifeworld cannot be withdrawn from the functions in question, when those functions cannot be painlessly transferred to media-steered systems of action, as those of material reproduction sometimes can." [231] He wishes to preserve the idea that modernization and rationalization are not intrinsically pathological and to keep his formalist account of reason clear of any picture of what a good life might be, so he needs an account of what qualifies as an unwarranted incursion of functionalist reason into communicatively structured domains of action. He appeals to pathologies and distortions in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld to make this distinction, but it is precisely this crucial element in his theory that gets short shrift in the *TCA*.

This failure to give a satisfactory account of distortions in the communicatively structured domains in the lifeworld is at least in part symptomatic of the fact that Habermas disburdens philosophy of the task of diagnosing specific pathologies. In the *TCA*, he concludes his analysis of Marx's theory of political economy by noting that whether the rise in functionalist reason spawned by the burgeoning complexity of bureaucratic and monetary systems causes pathological effects when transferred to domains of communicative action becomes an empirical question.[232] Presumably, this task would be performed by social scientists working in cooperation with philosophers, thus, on Habermas' account, fulfilling the early promise of cooperation between scientists and philosophers described in Horkeimer's inaugural address.

Even taking this into account, the question remains: how are social scientists and philosophers to recognize lifeworld pathologies in the absence of a robust theoretical account of their symptoms? Lifeworld pathologies are not explored satisfactorily in the *TCA*, and it doesn't seem to concern Habermas because underlying his belief that the lifeworld is a site of resistance

[231] Habermas, *TCA* Volume II, 375
[232] Ibid., 374

to colonization is the conviction that colonization will be experienced as pain by communicative subjects.[233] The line between the unproblematic progression of rationalization in systematically complex societies and colonization comes down to this presupposition that Habermas never interrogates. It may seem odd that such a theoretically important component of his social theory is filled by such a vague and offhanded assertion that colonization can be identified where it is experienced as "pain." However, read in the larger context of his philosophy of history, with its dual evolutionary account of symbolic and material reproduction, this elision may be properly understood as being of a piece with the dual function of the lifeworld. Having separated the spheres of symbolic and material reproduction and marked the latter as the proper domain of systems rationality, the lifeworld is the sole domain in which problems can arise. At the same time, as we have seen, the lifeworld is posited as being inherently resistant to systems encroachment. Thus, the task of detection is offloaded onto individual communicative subjects, such that their experience of "pain" serves as the confirmation that the total subsumption of symbolic reproduction cannot be accomplished undetected thanks to the nature of the lifeworld itself. And so the dual function of the lifeworld in his theory serves is as both the site of potential distortions and pathologies and the place within which such effects must be detected and mitigated.

This dual function is also evident when Habermas discusses the danger that lifeworld resources may become impoverished with the disappearance of traditional cultures. This phenomenon calls for, as Habermas puts it, an analysis that "would have to examine the

[233] " . . . [T]he lifeworld cannot be withdrawn from the functions in question, when these functions cannot be painlessly transferred to media-steered systems of action, as those of material reproduction sometimes can." (Habermas, *TCA* Volume 2, 375)

conditions for re-coupling a rationalized culture with an everyday communication dependent on vital traditions."[234] This must, however, be performed, as he notes later in "Modernity versus Postmodernity," "from the standpoint of the lifeworld."[235] Once again, the disturbances in the lifeworld that become the focus of Habermas' revised version of critical theory are to be detected and resolved within the province of the lifeworld itself. To use Habermas' terminology, previously critical theory was concerned with the question of to what extent the lifeworld was deformed by social pathologies; for Habermas, that the lifeworld offers inherent resistance to colonization and the resources to replenish itself must be a foundational presupposition if he is to stave off the specter of Adorno's total critique and negativity.[236]In the *TCA* much rests on the presumption that the lifeworld inherently resists the encroachment of systems rationality into the domain of symbolic reproduction and that when colonization does occur, it is experienced as pain by communicative subjects. If the lifeworld is already shot through with systems rationality, if the lifeworld does not inherently resist colonization as Habermas supposes, then philosophy and, by extension, critical theory, has no basis for diagnosing or criticizing the given social order.

The dual function of the lifeworld reappears in *BFN.* As outlined earlier, part of the task in *BFN* is to describe the way the spheres of lifeworld and system intersect within the structure of a legitimate democratic state. According to Habermas, while the majority of state operations can unproblematically be left up to the functionalist systems steered by money and power, the

[234] Ibid., 355-356
[235] Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," 12-13
[236] For a criticism of Habermas' system/lifeworld distinction that makes the case that it fails in its stated goal to overcome reification, see Deborah Cook's article "The Sundered Totality of System and Lifeworld" (*Historical Materialism* 13 no 4 [January 2005]: 55-78 doi:/10.1163/156920605774857594)

legitimacy of that state is ultimately dependent upon the lifeworld. Specifically, it requires a public sphere that is sufficiently responsive to disturbances in the private sphere, is capable of forming public opinion, and is able to break the routine circulation of money and power in times of crisis. The public sphere must serve as a communicative structure that is capable of detecting problems in social integration, bridging the gap between "personal life experiences" encountered in private lifeworld interactions and the formation of public opinion.[237] Furthermore, he notes that "modern law lives off a solidarity concentrated in the value orientations of citizens and ultimately issuing from communicative action and deliberation."[238] In the absence of a robust public sphere and in the absence of this solidarity a democracy loses its legitimacy.

This dependence on legitimately ordered social relations and the lifeworld (and his reliance on lifeworld resources to indicate and ameliorate disturbances that arise in the lifeworld) accounts for an ambiguity between the ideal and the real in *BFN* that some critics[239] have observed. At times, it is clear that he is reconstructing the normative core inherent in the idea of a liberal democracy and leaving whether or not existing democratic states are, in fact, legitimate as an open question. At others, he seems to be aiming to demonstrate how, while imperfect, existing liberal democracies are in fact legitimate. This ambiguity is especially apparent in his treatment of the public sphere. As James Marsh points out, Habermas vacillates in *BFN* between describing an ideal public sphere (i.e., enumerating what is required in principle for a public sphere to respond to disturbances in the lifeworld) and the real public sphere without clearly differentiating the two or wrestling with the question of whether or not the real public sphere empirically does

[237] Ibid., 365
[238] Habermas, *BFN*, 34
[239] See Cook, *The Search for a Rational Society*, 124-7

meet the requirements for legitimacy.[240] Of course, Habermas claims that he is describing what is required for a sufficiently functional public sphere in an falsifiable manner. It would follow, then, that the empirical task of determining if the public sphere is sensitive to lifeworld disturbances and able to influence political powerholders in the political sphere is a job for social scientists, not philosophers.

At the same time, Habermas maintains that the public sphere, regardless of how much mass media may be driven by corporate or state interests, by its very nature can never be completely overrun by strategic actors or lose its inherent connection to communicative action. Habermas remains firm in his conviction that public sphere in liberal democracy "even . . . more or less power ridden" is responsive and efficacious in moments of crisis (which, on his account, means that they are legitimate). While Habermas does acknowledge that "the sociology of mass communication conveys a skeptical impression of the power-ridden, mass-media-dominated public spheres of Western democracies,"[241] he posits that the media and the public sphere are structurally dependent on mass approval.[242] The public sphere cannot be completely distorted, because in the last instance the public sphere relies upon the public. For example, contributions from interest groups that are backed by "an undeclared fusion of money or organizational power" are discredited once the source of their power is revealed. As Habermas puts it, "Public opinion can be manipulated but never plainly bought nor publicly blackmailed."[243] Even though at times he claims to be presenting a normative description of how a legitimate democracy ought to work, he also insists that the public sphere, as overrun by money and power as it may be in reality, will

[240] Marsh, 136-8
[241] Habermas, *BFN*, 373
[242] Ibid., 382
[243] Ibid., 364

always retain its rational core and its ability to respond to problems in the private realm. Even if this only happens during times of crises, the inviolable latent structure of the public sphere ensures that there will always be a locus of resistance to incursions from outside the public sphere that prevents it from being completely corrupted.

In addition to positing a structural reason the public sphere cannot be hopelessly overrun by the interests of money and power, Habermas notes that the public sphere depends additionally on "an energetic civil society."[244] Civil society, which describes overlapping networks of spontaneous associations that emerge independently of the market or the state,[245] first and foremost must be genuinely autonomous[246]—which is to say, protected by constitutionally guaranteed rights in a liberal constitutional democracy. Beyond this, the civil sphere depends on the action orientations of communicative subjects who recognize themselves as citizens engaged in communicative civic discourse. The discursive orientation of citizens are part of what Habermas describes as the self-renewing character of civil society. Thus, the public sphere is dependent in a double sense on the lifeworld.[247] On the one hand, it depends on the lifeworld (public opinion) for its formal legitimacy and thus can never be totally overtaken by steering mechanisms. On the other hand, it depends upon the self-referential, self-renewing character of

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[244] Ibid., 369

[245] In *BFN* it is somewhat unclear if civil society encompasses the private sphere of the family or not. At times, he seems to take the family to be a component of civil society, and at other times he speaks of the two as if they were closely enmeshed but conceptually separable (he speaks of a "tight connection between an autonomous civil society and an integral private sphere" (368)). Civil society seems to be an intermediary layer between the private experiences of citizens and the more visible, less local part of the public sphere, such as the media.

[246] As an aside, it is interesting that Habermas' examples of unwarranted incursions into communicatively structured domains of action are almost always drawn from the example of state incursion rather than the incursion of markets. In the *TCA* Habermas' sole concrete example of lifeworld colonization is the welfare state injecting systems rationality into the private sphere of family life, while in *BFN* the USSR is taken as the paradigmatic example of the state "undermin[ing] the private basis of the public sphere" through state suppression and surveillance. Of course, in the case of the USSR it was historically and culturally the example that would come most readily to mind.

[247] Habermas, *BFN*, 369-371

civil society, which relies upon the (already historically accomplished) rationalized lifeworld and the self-understanding of communicative subjects—on a form of civic solidarity. In *BFN*, Habermas presupposes civic solidarity in sufficiently historically developed liberal democracies, thus guaranteeing the public sphere can serve as a linchpin of democratic legitimacy even when the mass media is factically overrun with money and power.

Marsh's analysis of the shift between the ideal and real (or, as he puts it, strong and weak normativity) in Habermas' account of the public sphere is part of his case that *BFN* is a reformist turn in Habermas' thought that betrays the more radical possibilities for transformation on offer in the *TCA*. What he does not recognize, however, is that this theoretical ambivalence is consonant with the dual function that the lifeworld plays in his philosophy. Just as the *TCA* presupposes a lifeworld that resists systems encroachment, *BFN* posits a model of the public sphere that will always respond in a time of crisis regardless of how compromised it may be in its day to day functioning during times of social equilibrium. At the same time, the public sphere is guaranteed by the self-renewing nature of a civic society and a rationalized lifeworld in liberal societies. Both of these suppositions are produced by Habermas' philosophy of history outlined in the 70s, which underwrites Habermas' conviction that liberal Western democracies, while imperfect, nevertheless contain within themselves a fundamental legitimacy.

I said at the beginning of this section that the lifeworld provides Habermas with the new site for critique, since, as we saw in the last section on system complexity, he has removed the routine function of the state and the economy from the purview of criticism as a consequence of his view of modernity. However, as we have seen, even as the lifeworld is presented as the site in which distortions and impoverishment can arise, in the *TCA* and in *BFN* the lifeworld is also

presupposed to have an inherent resistance to encroachment and a capacity for self-renewal. In the *TCA* Habermas' reliance on the lifeworld manifests itself in his under-theorization of communicative distortion and his underexamined assumption that subjects will experience pain when symbolic reproduction is jeopardized. In *BFN*, the rationalized lifeworld is the bulwark that ensures the public sphere is sufficiently intact to guarantee that liberal constitutional democracies are legitimate.

The scope of Habermas' critical theory is bounded by this dual function that the lifeworld plays in his philosophy. In the *TCA* and *BFN*, Habermas' philosophy of history leads him to offload the tasks of critical theory to the everyday workings of the lifeworld, since the rationalization of the lifeworld occurred historically "without the help of philosophy."[248] Without such stubborn resistance to colonization within the lifeworld itself, Habermas has no tools for identifying or critiquing communicative distortions—or, to use a non-Habermasean term—forms of domination.

Concluding Remarks

In the *TCA*, Habermas rejects the first generation of critical theory's normative basis in the philosophy of history because, on his view, the scope for critique was hobbled by this outmoded philosophical approach. "If one looks back from Adorno's late writings to the intentions that critical theory initially pursued," he muses, "one can weigh the price that the critique of instrumental reason had to pay . . . . by renouncing the goal of theoretical knowledge and thus by renouncing the program of 'interdisciplinary materialism' in whose name the critical theory of society was once launched in the early thirties."[249] Habermas believes that their

[248] Habermas, *TCA 2*, 397
[249] Habermas, *TCA 1*, 385-6

adherence to the philosophy of history caused them to give up too much of the original promise of critical theory. In this chapter, I have examined what Habermas' revised version of critical theory has given up as a result of the specific philosophy of history underwriting it.

Habermas gives over material reproduction to the operations of systems rationality. When combined with the progressivism of his philosophy of history, it leads him to approaching the question of democratic legitimacy from the standpoint that there is already a rational core to existing democratic states. Democracy must, of necessity, be indirect, and provided that the routine circulation of money and power can, in a time of crisis, be broken, this is sufficient to qualify a constitutional democracy as legitimate. To paraphrase Habermas, *BFN* is not more conservative because of this or that contingent circumstance, but from the orientation and constraints that his philosophy of history places on his critical project.

The lifeworld becomes the site where disturbances may arise in the form of cultural impoverishment or colonization while at the same Habermas must suppose that the lifeworld offers an inherent locus of resistance to colonization. The legitimacy of the state is dependent on the self-renewing lifeworld resources of solidarity among individuals. The reason he has to suppose this is because critical theory has no means to recognize or address lifeworld distortions on his account.

For example, Habermas underestimates the potential for the steering mechanisms of money and power to determine the orientation of citizens in *BFN*. As Joseph L. Staats argues in his article, "Habermas and Democratic Theory: The Threat to Democracy of Unchecked Corporate Power," the influence of the mass media on what issues citizens consider to be important is greater than Habermas credits, which allows the corporate media to remake the

lifeworld itself in its own image, ensuring that citizens see themselves as consumers and bringing more spheres of life under the rule of market logic. He asks, "if the corporate sector has corrupted the consciousness of the periphery . . . how then is the public supposed to be conscious that there even is a crisis, much less what that crisis is?"[250]

In the absence of individuals experiencing this colonization as a crisis or, as Habermas would put it in *TCA*, as pain, Habermas' version of critical theory has nothing to offer. Since he has given up on ideology critique and left the work of detecting deformations to the lifeworld itself, Habermas needs to presuppose a lifeworld that is largely intact. As a result, Habermas has left himself with no means of assessing the degree to which the lifeworld has been overrun with, say, the functionalist reason of the market. His critical theory cannot address a lack of solidarity in the lifeworld, problems of motive formation, or forms of social control that deform the modern subject. He has to presuppose that the end of ideology is truly at hand, that the steering mechanisms of power and money operate in a manner that is out in the open. If the renunciation of interdisciplinary cooperation and theoretical knowledge was the price that Horkheimer and Adorno had to pay as a result of their philosophy of history, then the price of Habermas' philosophy of history lies in critical theory's diminished capacity for diagnosing and addressing social pathologies and a willingness to accept a diminished scope for democratic legitimation as the price to pay for modernization.

[250] Joseph L. Staats, "Habermas and Democratic Theory: The Threat to Democracy of Unchecked Corporate Power," *Political Research Quarterly* 57 no 4 (2004): 593

Coda

In this project I have given an overview of the shift in critical theory from the first generation to the second generation of the Frankfurt School marked by the publication of the *TCA*. I have argued that this turn ought to be understood as an attempt to eliminate the philosophy of history as a normative basis for critique. This shift in critical theory has a certain historical parallel with the invention of the special category of "speculative" philosophies of history in analytic philosophy. As I argued in the first chapter, the aversion to the speculative philosophy of history is symptomatic of the ahistorical view of reason presupposed by analytic philosophy. It may seem strange to suggest there is a link between analytic derision of speculative philosophies of history and the attempt to eliminate the philosophy of history as a normative basis in critical theory. After all, unlike analytic philosophy, critical theory does not have an ahistorical model of reason and rationality. Whether undertaking immanent critique, wherein the latent emancipatory potential available to thought in the present historical field is used to show how actual conditions fail to realize this potential, or, is, like Habermas, clarifying the validity basis of speech that is only apparent once modernization has already been accomplished, critical theorists are always careful to avoid positing reason as a static or metaphysical faculty.

Nevertheless, critical theorists on the whole treat "the philosophy of history" as a term of abuse in much the same way that the term "speculative philosophy of history" is in analytic philosophy. In both cases the aversion is pre-reflective. It does not come out of a clear sense of what, exactly, the philosophy of history (or speculative philosophy of history) is or a principled philosophical opposition to the philosophy of history. Rather, it emerges from an unexamined

conviction that the philosophy of history belongs to an earlier stage of thought that has subsequently been overcome. We now know better than to posit a philosophy of history, and if someone does inadvertently posit a philosophy of history, it is a lapse—maybe even a regression.

Habermas is perhaps the last major critical theorist to explicitly and consciously understand his theory as an attempt to replace the philosophy of history as the normative basis for critical theory. I have argued that he fails to do so. Rather than eliminating the philosophy of history as the normative basis for his philosophy, he develops an alternative philosophy of history that undergirds his critical project. Furthermore, this philosophy of history determines the scope and nature of his critique. It determines what he thinks can and cannot be changed, what role critical theory can play, and what critical theory can detect and address. But because he himself believes he has succeeded in eliminating the philosophy of history from his account and because most critical theorists (and philosophers generally) believe we have moved beyond it, the role that the philosophy of history does in his work is hidden from view. When a philosophy of history is unacknowledged, the work that it does in determining the direction of critical theory remains unthematized.

When an unacknowledged philosophy of history does normative work in critical theory, it is deployed uncritically. The lesson that should be drawn from Habermas' unacknowledged reliance on the philosophy of history, I claim, is that critical theory ought to take up the philosophy of history anew, consciously. Otherwise the particular theory of history that a critical theorist is deploying without explicitly acknowledging it as such runs the risk of smuggling in, for example, functionally Eurocentric ideas of progress that, as Allen argues in *The End of Progress*, "form the . . . kernel at the center of [Habermas'] critical theory and constitute a

serious obstacle to the project of decolonizing Habermasian critical theory."[251] Furthermore, as I have argued, the philosophy of history plays a fundamental role in setting the agenda and determining the scope of Habermas' critical theory, leaving him without the means to speak to a lifeworld that has been substantially deformed.

Rather than renewing the project of exorcizing the philosophy of history once and for all from the normative basis of critical theory only to inadvertently rely upon a different philosophy of history that blunts the force of critique or reinscribes a Eurocentric idea of progress, critical theorists ought to reexamine the presupposition that the philosophy of history can be done away with altogether. This means that we must overcome our prereflective aversion to the speculative philosophy of history so we can engage with it critically. If the speculative philosophy of history is unavoidable for critical theory, then it is imperative that critical theorists ask themselves what an alternative speculative philosophy of history might look like that is adequate to the task of orienting a critical project.

[251] Allen, 73

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