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EMANCIPATORY SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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Developing as a systematic alternative to positivistically oriented social science, critical theory emerged from the work of the Frankfurt school in the between-wars period and was continued by them during the Second World War, principally in the United States. Under some of its original leadership, the Frankfurt school was reinstated in Frankfurt in the postwar years and continued the development of critical theory there. This work, in turn, has been continued and indeed radically transformed by Jürgen Habermas. Utilizing and synthesizing a considerable array of contemporary developments in social science and philosophy, we have in Habermas's work a subtle and developed, as well as developing, concept of an emancipatory social science. I shall elucidate it, critique it, build on it, and show some of its implications for policymaking.

I begin by noting a series of difficulties that beset a social

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science that attempts to be both scientific and emancipatory. In section II, I then set out the general lines of Habermas's response to these difficulties, including his response to what he takes to be scientistic and ideological assumptions in some of the very ways these difficulties are posed. I also make clear how he conceives his nonscientistic alternative: emancipatory social science. In sections III and IV, I turn to a critique of Habermas's account. I argue that his "universal speech ethic" and his theory of communicative rationality do not provide him with the Archimedean point he requires to give him secure criteria for social evolution or for a universal ethic in accordance with which he could critique social practices and whole social formations. In section V, moving from nay saying to yea saying, I give both a reading of historical materialism and a critique of Habermas's reworking of it. The rationale for this discussion is to indicate how it can give us a basis, without constructing an ethical theory or articulating cross-culturally valid criteria for moral development, for making judgments about social evoltuion that would enable us to transcend a historicist or relativist perspective. In the final section I consider the implications for policymaking of such an emancipatory social theory.

I

If we want both a social science with a human face and a social science having something approximating a tolerable rigor and a responsibility to empirical constraints, we will quickly be led to reflect (1) on how the relationships between social research and policymaking should be conceived, (2) on the moral responsibilities of social scientists to society as a whole, and (3) on the kind of overall rationale there could be for the development of social policies by the social sciences.

Social scientists have not infrequently overestimated the

intellectual power and the predictive reliability of social science research.[1] But be that as it may, it is also true that, rightly or wrongly, our societies are becoming increasingly dependent on social science research. However, we should not forget how problematical much social science research is. Neither social science's claims to knowledge nor its methodologies are secure. Even the very idea of what, if much of anything, a social science could come to is deeply contested. Indeed, it may in reality be something—like true art or genuine democracy—that is *essentially* contested. The concept of objectivity is itself multiply ambiguous and the status of objectivity claims in the social sciences is unclear—as is, even more obviously, the extent of objectivity in the social sciences. We do not have agreement about the nature of social science, or indeed science generally, or about its relationship to society.

A picture emerges here that is very natural and which, in some important respects, critical theorists such as Habermas want very much to resist.[2] Social science, this picture has it, where it is genuinely and rigorously scientific, must be normatively neutral. To be objective, it must be based on value-free research and remain utterly nonpartisan and neutral on policy issues. Such an account must be free of ideological bias and underlying ideological assumptions, though there is little stress, in such accounts, that one of its crucial functions is to engage in a critique of ideology. Such a neutralist account of society, it is claimed, will give us a genuinely scientific account of society, one that will be superior to any single participant's knowledge or understanding of society.

[1]Derek Allen, *Abandoning Method* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1973); and Charles Lindblom and David K. Cohen, *Usable Knowledge* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

[2]Jürgen Habermas, *Erkenntnis und Interesse* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968). Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by Jeremy S. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

With such a conception of social science—a conception Habermas would surely consider thoroughly scientistic—it is natural to adopt what, until recently, has been the standard model of scientific methodology for social research. We should quantify wherever possible and develop sophisticated statistical approaches. We need ideologically decontaminated, testable knowledge with a high degree of predictive reliability. The goal of social science research should be the discovery and the systematic display of regularities (probabilistic laws) that show, where societies are viewed both synchronically and diachronically, the structure of society and its underlying mechanisms. From lawlike statements of these regularities, together with statements of initial conditions, we need, for social science to progress, to be able to derive predictions or retrodictions concerning tolerably specific bits of social behavior and social action. But most fundamentally we need to be able to discover, and not just ideologically invent, these underlying regularities. Most fundamentally we want to know who we are, how we got to be that way, and who we are likely to become.

Faced with such a conception of the nature of social science and the goals of scientific research, we confront a whole series of problems concerning the relationship between "ethics and public policy." The relationship between social research and policy formation becomes very problematical indeed. Some of these difficulties, when they are thought through, raise serious problems for that tolerably mainline conception of social science.

Probably the most obvious one turns on the place of values in such an account and, given that placement, on what advocacy would legitimately come to. If the above account is on the right track, there could be nothing comparable to an "immanent morality of law" for social science. Rightness and wrongness, goodness and badness are rigidly excluded from

social science domains. *Qua* social scientists we can, of course, study what people *believe* to be right or wrong, desirable and undesirable, and there can be various explanatory accounts, as distinct from justificatory accounts, of why people have the moral beliefs they have and of what role these play in their lives. But by way of justification, defense, or systematic elaboration with an eye to rational reconstruction or use in advocacy, there can be in social science, on this rather standard understanding, no taking account of values or norms. That is taken to mean that, within the domain of a genuine social science, there can be no establishing or disestablishing of the claims to truth or validity of any categorical norms or judgments of intrinsic value.

But there is, as we all know, applied research, and social scientists are not infrequently engaged in the articulation of social policy or at least of scenarios for what is put forth as desirable or rational social policy. Does this mean that the tough-minded scientific view of the matter is that what we have here are social scientists for hire? That we should, where they leave pure theory, view social scientists simply as the *technicians of the social life?* This conjures up the picture of social scientists quite legitimately, as far as their science is concerned, working away at pacification programs for the Americans in Vietnam, stabilizing programs for Saudi Arabia, destabilizing programs for Angola, and constructing plans for the rational regulation of concentration camps. The picture is this: take whatever goals you wish as given, we social scientists can show you the best way to achieve them. But it is not and cannot be our business as social scientists to pass judgment on the goals themselves. Whatever value frameworks social scientists may happen to have, they are not and cannot be part of their scientific framework. Important as they are, they are external to that framework.

This picture, even when it is modified in various ways,

presents a series of problems for anyone other than the purest of the pure social theoreticians. It surely raises issues for those social scientists who see themselves as also having some normative function vis-à-vis policymaking or as providing social critique. Social scientists, if they are not social anthropologists studying distant primitive societies, are usually participants in the society they study; they partake of its aspirations and fears and, in one way or another, suffer its alienations and oppressions. And they, like almost everyone else, have a certain picture of a good society. It sometimes, perhaps typically, is a rather blurred one, as it is for many others as well, but all the same it is a picture they have. And it is natural to be concerned about the relation of that picture of a good society to what they as social scientists know about society. Whatever we want to say about the "is" and the "ought," it is natural to believe that somehow their conception of a good society ought to be more adequate than the plain person's, if they really have a reasonable grasp—a grasp not everyone has—of the way society works.[3] If there is, in any considerable dimension, something like social science expertise, that ought to provide a crucial input into the social scientist's conception of a good society. It ought to help make it the case that social scientists, to the degree that they really have a reasonable mastery of social dynamics, will, *ceteris paribus*, if they are also morally reflective, have a more adequate conception of the good life than someone similarly morally reflective but without such an understanding.

Perhaps an example would clarify what I have in mind here. It is common knowledge (with some it is knowledge by description and with many it is knowledge by acquaintance as well) that much work in industrial societies is deeply al-

[3]Kai Nielsen, "On Deriving an Ought from an Is," *Review of Metaphysics*, 32 (March, 1979), pp. 488–515.

ienating. A reaction of dismay and an overwhelming feeling of the horror of it is not uncommon when the nature of the work done by many people is faced and reflected on concretely. But many will, all the same, also take it, like a fact of nature, as something that is inescapable. However, a social scientist who has worked extensively in these domains should have a conception of what causes and sustains such work relations, what possible alternatives there are to them, how realistic these alternatives are and what their costs are. Such a social scientist should, as well, have some understanding of what, more generally, the alternative ways of organizing society would look like if they were translated into the concrete, and how these alternatives might plausably impede or aid human flourishing. This would shed light on what is the case, what can be the case, and what is desirable. Examples of actual works that exhibit this are Samuel Bowles's and Herbert Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* and Harry Bravermann's *Labour and Monopoly Capitalism*. The discussions of work in America in *The Capitalist System*, edited by Richard C. Edwards and associates, also vividly illustrate what I am talking about.

Such considerations, among others, have led some social scientists to practice and defend social critique as one of the legitimate functions of social inquiry. But, in a way that Frankfurt school theorists have attacked, social scientists with the conception of their discipline that is dominant in their society will have fears that social critique will conflict both with the objectivity of social science and with the canons of what they take to be scientific rationality. The social scientist, it is feared, cannot be both an analyst and a critic. The standards for what is true or false, plausible or implausible, important or unimportant are partially internal to the discipline itself and partially determined by the way the world is, that is, by the empirical facts. They cannot legitimately be determined by

what goals one thinks are desirable or what ends one takes to be emancipatory or as answering to human needs and interests. Such considerations are external to the discipline and are irrelevant to its claims to truth or validity. Whether we are engaged in discipline research, policy research, or advocacy research, the standards of truth and adequacy remain the same and remain (1) internal to the subject and (2) determined by the empirical facts in a way that is not dependent on our conceptions of moral rightness or human appropriateness.

II

Frankfurt school theorists generally, and Habermas in particular—whose work is a continuation, though in a more rigorous manner, of the critical theory distinctive of the Frankfurt school—would regard many of the problems sketched above as pseudo-problems generated by a scientistic understanding of social science.[4] Indeed, the very conception of social science sketched above is a scientistic one, a conception which, far from being nonideological and *wertfrei*, expresses the dominant ideology of our time, an ideology which disguises itself as a scientific and perfectly nonnormative view of the world. (I am not, of course, suggesting that this is something which is done self-consciously by the social agents involved.) When, Habermas would have us understand, we are free from the domination of that ideology, many of these problems will dissolve, along with many of the other problems about the alleged conflicts between the roles of a social scientist as an academic, a discipline researcher and a policy researcher.

To understand Habermas's attack on the ideology of

[4]Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1973).

scientism and what he would take to be a specious scientistic conception of objectivity, where objectivity gets identified with neutrality and freedom from normative commitments, it is essential to understand some of the core elements in Habermas's account.[5]

Habermas's alternative conception of social science and his rejection of scientism is closely linked with his critique of what he calls positivism, a term which he uses, as do Frankfurt school theorists generally, in a very wide but still, I believe, nonarbitrary way.[6] On this account, not only the philosophers usually classified by philosophers in the Anglo–American tradition as positivists are called positivists but, from the vantage point of analytical philosophy, such archcritics of positivism as Popper, Quine, and Armstrong would be classified as positivists.

In spelling out what is involved here it is well to note initially that Habermas believes that there are three irreducible types of knowledge related to three distinct types of interest, none of which are taken to have cognitive superiority over the others and all three of which have essential roles in human life and human understanding.[7] Positivism, on his account,

[5]Noam Chomsky in several of his political writings has shown an acute understanding of the relation between neutrality and objectivity, as has Robert Paul Wolff in his *Ideal of the University* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). See, as well, Alan Montefiore, ed., *Neutrality and Impartiality* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[6]The special use of "positivism" plus the reasonableness of it came out rather clearly in his exchange with Popper and Albert in Theodore W. Adorno, ed., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Incorporated, 1976).

[7]Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Thomas McCarthy's discussion of this is extensive and enlightening. See his *Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978), chaps. 1 and 2. I have tried to say something about this issue in an extremely simple way in my "Some Theses in Search of an Argument: Reflections on Habermas," *National Forum*, 59 (Winter, 1979), pp. 27–32.

acknowledges as legitimate just one of these types of knowledge related to one of the types of interest. But, in effect, by such a cricumscription, positivism takes an imperialistic approach to knowledge in regarding natural scientific knowledge and knowledge based on this model as the sole legitimate form of knowledge.

Positivism is centrally concerned with the control of nature and is officiailly normatively neutral. As such it is widely regarded as the very model for objectivity and rationality. Values or norms, on such an account, are nonscientific and nonobjective. They are choices or preferences, perhaps always universalizable choices or preferences; they are not knowledge claims, something capable of being either true or false, but prescriptions about how to act. As such they are nonrational, rationality itself being construed as instrumental reason—that is, a reason concerned with consistency and with the taking of the most efficient means to achieve whatever ends one happens to have, but the ends themselves are not something which can properly be said to be either rational or irrational. Values or norms are construed as choices, decisions, preferences, or commitments and, as such, must be (1) excluded from scientific domains and (2) regarded as neither rational nor carriers of knowledge or warranted belief.

Positivism is a scientism because it remains imperialistic about knowledge, collapsing all human knowledge into one of its legitimate types, namely natural scientific knowledge, and utterly failing to recognize that there are three different types of human knowledge rooted in three fundamental human interests: (1) our interest in controlling our natural environment (including, of course, our human environment); (2) our interest in communication, that is, understanding each other and acting together in the context of common social traditions; and finally (3) our interest in emancipation, that is, our interest in being free of ideological mystification and

irrational, unjust social constraints. The three types of knowledge, corresponding to these three types of interest, are natural scientific knowledge, social scientific knowledge (a knowledge rooted in our need to understand each other and our social institutions and traditions), and the knowledge of critical reflection.

So-called mainline social science, making what in effect are positivist and scientistic assumptions, identifies knowledge with natural scientific knowledge and the instrumental control of nature; it regards social science where it is non-ideological as the instrumental control of human nature and social institutions. Where there is genuine social science knowledge it is of the same type as natural scientific knowledge, for that, according to positivism, is the only genuine type of knowledge. Such knowledge must be normatively neutral and must, in its methodology, be continuous with the methods of the natural sciences. There cannot be, as Winch and Evans-Pritchard believe, a nonscientific but not anti-scientific type of knowledge on which most of our social scientific knowledge is finally dependent.[8] We must recognize that what science—construed as knowledge of the natural scientific type—cannot tell us humanity cannot know. There can be no knowledge or understanding between human beings that is not of this type and there can be no knowledge of norms or knowledge of a rational foundation of norms. They are matters of subscription and commitment, not of knowledge. But this, Habermas claims, is to define, illegitimately but persuasively, "knowledge" as "scientific knowledge" and to deny conceptual space to other forms of knowledge rooted in other interests by what in effect is a convertionalist's sulk.

[8]Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science* (New York: Humanities Press, 1958); and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Essays in Social Anthropology* (London: Faber & Faber, Ltd., 1962), chaps. 1 and 3.

If we appeal only to our interests in controlling nature, then, of course, there can be no other forms of knowledge; but to do this is to engage in arbitrary stipulation in the interests of a scientistic ideology. Once we recognize that there can be other types of knowledge that are equally legitimate, there is no need to insist that such social science knowledge as we can obtain must always be normatively neutral and free from an emancipatory intent. Social science—or, if you will, social studies or social inquiry—is not a subspecies of natural sicence with the same methodological commitments. But it need not be any of the worse for all of that.

We need to recognize that, in social science, judgments concerning the rationality of social practices and human actions are unavoidable.[9] In trying to understand some stretch of behavior or the function of some social institution or social practice, we have to make for ourselves, as social theorists, judgments of rationality even to classify what we are trying to understand let alone to explain it. Societies, to take an obvious example, have religious belief systems. If we understand them as Freud or Leach does, on the one hand, or as Evans-Pritchard or Robin Horton does, on the other, we will make rather different judgments about their rationality and their role in social life. Here our own understanding about what it is *reasonable* to believe must enter into our own social analysis, and not as an external factor that can be expunged from our analysis and separately appraised. Social science, where it says much of anything that is significant about social life, Habermas argues, cannot be normatively neutral. A *wertfrei* social science is both an unnecessary and an incoherent scientific ideal. Indeed, to make it appear that social science to be genuine science must be *wertfrei* is one of the important

[9]Alasdair MacIntyre, *Against the Self-Images of the Age* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1971), pp. 244–59.

ideological mystifications of scientism.[10] This very posture of moral neutrality is a valuable ideological tool in protecting the *status quo* with its class domination, for, by methodological strictures, social science is prevented from critiquing the goals of a society or the underlying rationale of its social institutions. This Habermas regards as arbitrary and debilitating.

The Frankfurt school, along with Lukacs and Korsch, stresses the need for social theory to develop an overall critical theory which would be sufficiently encompassing to provide an Archimedean point for cultural criticism of whole social orders. Habermas very much shares this viewpoint and has tried to lay the foundations for such a theory. He differs from the Frankfurt school, and from Adorno and Marcuse most particularly, in his belief that such a theory must, eschewing impressionism, be systematic and must take into account work in structuralism, transformational grammar, speech act theory, and developments in contemporary analytical philosophy. At the foundation of Habermas's social theory is a theory of universal pragmatics, communication theory, and a theory of distorted communication which he regards as essential for understanding the diverse forms that ideology can take. He also takes his theory of communicative competence and of socialization as essential for his reworking and reconstruction of historical materialism.[11]

It is Habermas's belief that scientism (crudely, the belief that what science cannot tell us humanity cannot know) is the dominant ideology of our time. With it goes the phenomenon of technocratic consciousness, which so deeply affects

[10]Jürgen Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968). See particularly his discussion of Weber and Marcuse. [The last essay in the translated volume *Toward a Rational Society*, trans. by Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), is particularly relevant.]

[11]Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979).

a large portion of contemporary intelligentsia that they can barely conceive of the possibility of rational argumentation over the ends of life or any fundamental critique of the social institutions actually in place. Such critiquing is viewed by scientistic ideology as the irrational ideological posturing of irresponsible and utopian value-oriented intellectuals. Responsible policy-oriented intellectuals—the Brzezinskis and Kissingers of the world but not the Russells or the Chomskys—will not engage in such ideological posturing.[12]

Habermas attempts to establish that this scientistic attitude results from a confused epistemology which conflates all knowledge with natural scientific knowledge and conflates rationality with instrumental rationality.[13] To be rational, on such an account (as we have remarked), is to be consistent and to take the most efficient means to whatever ends you happen to have; to have knowledge is to know how to control nature, including, of course, human nature. What gets simply ruled out from the beginning, by implicit persuasive definition, is self-reflective knowledge and the very possibility of either the rationality or irrationality of our ends. This ideology, Habermas contends, makes impossible the rational criticism of institutions. There can be no room for it, according to such an ideology, in either philosophy or social science, and it renders invisible the existence of our practical interest in mutual understanding and our emancipatory interest in understanding and facing the forces that dominate us. Previous ideologies have expressed in a distorted form a vision of the good life and a conception of how a rational human being is to live. Scientism is a unique ideology in that it denies the very rationality of any such vision.

[12]Noam Chomsky powerfully and ironically criticizes this way of dividing things up.

[13]Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie und Praxis* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971), and the last essay of *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie."*

However, when scientism is recognized for what it is, social science will no longer be robbed by it. To recognize, firmly and nonevasively, something as an ideology is to free ourselves from its domination. Acknowledging that we have *practical interests* in making collective social activity and dialogue possible, *emancipatory interests* in attaining self-knowledge, and *technical interests* in gaining control over nature, we will come to recognize that an understanding of society goes not just with the type of knowledge generated by technical interests but with other interests as well. *Science* and *scientific*, as Max Black once stressed, are honorific terms with contestable criteria: there is no more reason to give scientism its persuasive definition of *science* than to give it its persuasive definition of *knowledge.*[14] Once this is recognized, advocacy and critique, as well as analysis and hypothesis construction, can be a part of social science, and normative knowledge need not be a Holmesless Watson. Self-reflective inquiry, like technical inquiry, can be a part of social science. Indeed, Habermas contends, just this mode of inquiry is reflected in the practice of psychoanalysis and in the very practice of critical theory itself. Just as there is knowledge of the control of nature, so is there knowledge of human emancipation, of what would constitute an escape from the control of powers both institutional and libidinal that undermine our autonomy and cause suffering, deprivation, and alienation.[15] Inquiry into this is not *wertfrei*, and it carries with it a form of *advocacy* and a conception of the good life and of the sort of institutions and life policies that could make this more than a reified ideal. An inquiry into this is surely neither neutral nor detached, but it can be objective and nonideological for all of that; it is not something, Habermas argues, which is external to social

[14]Max Black, *Problems of Analysis* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1954), pp. 3–23.
[15]Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, chap. 10.

science but is internal to its proper practice and gives it its rationale. It is a principal task of critical theory, and thus of philosophy and social science (two disciplines which should be more closely linked than they typically are), to show how society can and should be altered.

There is, of course, little point in talking about the "should" unless we have an understanding of the "can." Hence the importance of historical materialism and of a critical analysis and, if necessary, a reconstruction of its foundations—for, it is not unreasonable to claim, it alone provides us with a comprehensive theoretical account of the dynamics of social change. However, we need to know not only what kind of changes are possible and likely and what the instruments of those changes are but also which of the historically possible changes are genuinely emancipatory. This requires some nonideological understanding of what a good life and a truly human society would look like.

We live in a time of a very pervasive cynicism about the very possibility of anything like that. If Habermas is correct, this reflects the dominant ideology of our time. But be that as it may, critical theorists have powerfully and plausibly argued that human beings, with their distinctive capacities and interests, can become self-conscious agents capable of self-reflective knowledge; they can become genuinely self-formative beings who affect the formative processes of self and society. Men, as Marx has reminded us, make their own history, but they do not make it just as they will under conditions of their own choosing. But as makers of their own history, as self-formative beings, they must be capable of reflective self-knowledge. Indeed, the self-reflective knowledge of human beings should be one of the principal ends of social inquiry. In that way it should be an emancipatory science. With their distinctive abilities and with this emancipatory knowledge, human beings can attain a historically conditioned autonomy. It is a principal aim of a critical sociology to aid in this human emancipation.

III

The above remarks merely touch the surface of a few facts of Habermas's complex and systematically ramified social theory.[16] In a more developed account of his views there is a range of additional elements which would surely be important to bring into focus. The most important of these is his theory of communication. I have tried to focus on the most central elements relevant to reflections on the functions of social science and on its relations to questions of critique and policymaking. And perhaps here we do have enough in view to help us face from an altered perspective some fundamental issues about the rationale of social theory and some of its implications for policy analysis and human emancipation. We have, that is, enough of Habermas's account before us to see why he would hold that the relationship of theory to policy, in what is sometimes called mainline sociology, is fundamentally misconceived. It is not so much that we must deny, though skepticism here is not without point, that there can be results of social science research which in some circles, and relative to certain ends, are useful. If you want less trouble from the workers in the auto industry, there may very well be some social scientists who can tell you what to do, and if you want to pacify blacks or Indians or disoriented radicals, there are perhaps some social scientists who can tell you what to do. If that is so, these "mainline social scientists" should indeed congratulate themselves on the fact that the social sciences can be highly useful to the policymaker. Critical theorists are not at all concerned to deny that that is an empirical possibility. But critical theorists generally do not see that kind of practical activity as the proper activity of critical social theory, for critical social theory seeks to be an emancipatory social theory. Definitions here will not settle anything, and people can continue to conceive of the goals of social science differ-

[16]McCarthy, pp. 61–125.

ently. But if one has an interest in human liberation, one will take the critical theory model very seriously indeed.

But then there is its execution, and here my ambivalence runs very deep. First off, I should remark that I am utterly in sympathy with what Habermas is trying to do, though I am deeply skeptical about whether it can be pulled off in anything like its present form, and I am only moderately and intermittently hopeful that, in some radically reconstituted way, a critical social theory with an emancipatory rationale can be developed—a theory which would, in important ways, replace or supplant what is now in the mainline view taken to be what philosophy and sociology properly are. In my penultimate section, I shall give, with some misgivings, some reasons for not being so skeptical.[17]

What I shall say first will, however, be negative and skeptical. I will argue that, left over from Habermas's probing twin critique of what he calls positivism and historicism, there are recalcitrant issues concerning social evolution and moral knowledge that put seriously in question the capacity of his critical sociology to delineate the direction of social emancipation or detect the mechanisms by which it can be achieved. It is a core claim of Habermas's social theory and of his account of knowledge that (1) the very ideal of a presuppositionless knowing is an illusion and (2) that fundamental human interests shape the situations of inquiry in which data are collected for these forms of knowledge. The link between knowledge and interests is so tight that knowledge without interests is impossible. Our various criteria for what is to count as knowing are determined by our interests. Yet Habermas also believes that we have objective criteria for the individual moral development of persons and parallel objective criteria, some of them irreducibly moral, for social evolution. He also believes that there is objective transcultural knowledge of right

[17]But the critical theory I shall defend is closer to Marx than it is to Habermas.

and wrong and of the foundations of morality, and that an understanding of what this is is crucial for an understanding of the criteria for social evolution. It is here, I believe, where Habermas's argument is the thinnest and where a form of skepticism has its strongest day. It isn't that we can return to a *wertfrei* sociology but that the objectivity of our moral conceptions and principles is very much more in doubt than Habermas realizes.[18] (Though what this comes to requires a careful reading.) More positively, I shall argue that there are plausible readings of historical materialism, readings which do not require Habermas's reconstruction of it, which give us an important methodological key to how social science can be both emancipatory and, without falling into the ideology of scientism, scientific and (if that is not pleonastic) objective in a reasonable sense of that multiply ambiguous conception. Habermas, as several critics have noted, importantly misreads Marx here, making him more scientistic than he actually is.[19] Both Marx and Habermas have a conception, which they embed in their complex theories, of increasingly maturer forms of corporate social life. Habermas believes that to establish this it is not sufficient to have an account of the development of the productive forces but that we must also have a properly validated theory of the autonomous development of norms. I am not convinced that this is necessary for the articulation

[18]J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1977) and Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). I have tried to convey some sense of the complexity of the issues here in my "Reason and Sentiment: Skeptical Remarks about Reason and the Foundations of Morality," in *Rationality Today*, ed. by Theodore F. Geraets (Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: University of Ottawa Press, 1970), pp. 248–79. See there also my remarks about Habermas, pp. 205–6, and about Apel, pp. 340–46.

[19]Julius Sensat, Jr., *Habermas and Marxism* (Beverly Hills, Calif: Sage Publications, 1979), chap. 6, and his review of *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, *The Philosophical Review*, 89 (January, 1980), pp. 121–4; Roger S. Gottlieb, "The Contemporary Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas," *Ethics*, 91 (January, 1981), pp. 280–95.

and defense of the emancipatory program of critical sociology. Recent work of a rigorously analytical sort on the conceptual foundations of historical materialism is beginning to give us a picture of it which is nonscientistic and yet gives us a non-ideological picture of social evolution to maturer forms of social life. This is all done without the elaboration of "the ethical foundations of Marxism" or articulating, by some transcendental arguments, the objective ground of moral norms. There may or may not be such objective grounds. Weber may be right concerning ultimate standards of the moral life. We may just have a rationally irreconcilable conflict of the "warring gods." It is not evident to me that we even have any very clear understanding of what is at issue here. But I shall argue that we do not need such an account to develop an account of social evolution that would give us a conceptual underpinning for a critical sociology with an emancipatory thrust.

I shall turn first to my negative second-saying. Habermas, like anyone deeply influenced by Hegel and Marx, stresses the importance of a consciousness of history and of situating theories in their historical contexts. However, Habermas believes, in addition, that there is progress not only "in objectivating knowledge" but also "in moral-practical insight."[20] For understandable reasons, or at least understandable causes, there is, in our societies, a not inconsiderable cynicism about this. But Habermas does claim, against scientism, that certain fundamental moral values—the moral values of freedom and justice preeminently—have an objective justification. He regards his account of universal pragmatics as so crucial partly because he believes that there is presupposed at the very basis of communication the unavoidable binding force of such

[20]Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 177.

norms.[21] They are built into our communicative competence and must be presupposed in any ideal speech situation. As Habermas puts it himself,

> In adopting a theoretical attitude, in engaging in discourse—or for that matter in any communicative action whatsoever—we have always (already) made, at least implicitly, certain presuppositions, under which alone consensus is possible: the presupposition, for instance, that true propositions are preferable to false ones, and that right (i.e., justifiable) norms are preferable to wrong ones. For a living being that maintains itself in the structures of ordinary language communication, the validity basis of speech has the binding force of universal and unavoidable—in this sense—transcendental—presuppositions.[22]

We are not free, he goes on to tell us, "to reject the validity claims bound up with the cognitive potential of the human species."[23] It is, he tells us, senseless to reject such ground norms. There are principles of the rightness of actions—principles of justice and freedom—which are logically linked to the very idea of what it is to be reasonable or to act in accordance with reason. And it is senseless, he tells us, "to want to 'decide' for or against reason, for or against the expansion of the potential of reasoned action."[24] A proper understanding of the conditions for undistorted communication also gives us an understanding of how it is that moral claims can be true or false; a proper understanding of universal pragmatics provides us with an objective basis for the moral judgments which result from critical reflection. If we reflect carefully on the presuppositions of human communication, we

[21]Ibid.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Ibid.

will come to recognize that we are committed to norms of justice and freedom. Against positivists, Habermas argues that norms have "an immanent relation to truth."[25] Norms are not just choices, even universalizable choices, but they are guides to action that can be justified. They are defended, along procedural lines, as something which would be adopted in an ideal speech situation. A norm is rational or true if it is what would be adopted in a constraint-free consensus. Ideology, by contrast, is a form of "systematically distorted communication" in which people are kept from understanding their situation and from gaining an understanding of what a rational or valid norm would come to and the conditions for the validity of norms. Indeed, in contemporary scientistic ideologies, ethics is suppressed as a category of life, and people are either kept from recognizing their needs or led to believe that there is no way in which they can be fulfilled given the exigencies of life. All value judgments are thought, by those in the grip of such an ideology, to be merely people's particular biases. People bamboozled by this ideology frequently refer to their considered moral convictions as their biases or prejudices. (This is a common enough cultural occurrence even in academic circles.)

However, Habermas has not shown that intelligent, well-informed, conceptually sophisticated people must adopt such norms of justice and freedom. He has not shown that they, no matter how they are placed, on pain of intellectual mistake or false consciousness, must adopt the norms that would be consensually agreed on in an ideal speech situation—a situation of constraint-free consensus. Intelligent members of the ruling class elites know that, as a matter of fact, they are not in such a situation. Indeed, they are not in anything which even approximates such a situation. They could come to un-

[25]Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), p. 95.

derstand reasonably well the difference between their condition of life now and what their condition of life would be if a constraint-free consensus actually obtained. They might, without any failure of intellect or intellectual mistake, not accept the norms Habermas says are true and rationally required and ask, not without point, what intellectual fault they could be tagged with for not accepting them. It is not evident that they must have made any or that Habermas can show that any failure of intellect or failure of understanding would have to be involved.

Habermas appears at least not to have shown that these norms are rationally required and have been rationally justified. He may have shown that they are *consistent* with reason, but he appears at least not to have shown that they are *required* by reason. Accepting them could very well not be in the interest of this ruling class or dominant elite. It might very well be in their rational interest to develop manipulatively a moral ideology to enforce "irrational"social norms that could not survive in a situation of undistorted communication (for example, Wilson asking Britons to keep the social contract). In class societies there are class interests. Why should it be *irrational* for members of that ruling class to prefer a stable situation of distorted communication that protected their interests? If it is replied that they *ought* not to *want* it, how can this be shown to have anything other than a moralistic force? If they do not, after all, want it, how can they be shown to be, in the very nature of the case, less rational than the person who does? And even *if* we employ a substantive normatively nonneutral conception of rationality in which this cannot be said to be rational, essentially the same question can be put by asking whether such members of the ruling class must make any cognitive mistake in not opting for a situation of undistorted communication. It does not appear, at least, to be the case that they must in all situations be making such a mistake. If this is so, it would appear, at least, that commit-

ment may play a larger role in morality than Habermas allows.

It will not do for Habermas to reply that to argue in such a way betrays an unwitting acceptance of the ideology of scientism, for in the above argument no appeal was made to a noncognitivist metaethic or to any metaethic at all, and no claim was made that self-reflective knowledge was impossible and only scientific knowledge was justified. Neither appeal was made nor assumed and the burden would surely be on Habermas to show that it was somehow presupposed. Rather, I developed an immanent critique and simply pressed Habermas on grounds that it would be natural for him to acknowledge—namely, on an appeal to the fact that we live in class-divided societies with class interests and to an argument which returned, as his did, to human interests and to what rational people would choose. Rational elites could very well have a standing interest in the perpetuation of ideologies, that is, conditions of distorted communication. Indeed, as Roger Gottlieb rightly stresses, one of the clear implications of Habermas's analysis of society is that capitalist societies, such as our own, have, in holding themselves together *as capitalist societies*, benefited—more accurately their ruling classes have benefited—from systematically distorted communication.[26] Undistorted communication with its "universal validity claims (truth, rightness, truthfulness), which participants at least implicitly raise and reciprocally recognize" is dysfunctional for such a society.[27]

IV

Habermas's account here is both complex and none too clear. Perhaps I have missed something in his account or at least in his intent which could lead to a reconstructable interpretation and would take us around such difficulties. One

[26]Gottlieb, "The Contemporary Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas."
[27]Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, p. 118.

sympathetic interpreter (Seyla Ben Habib), in the context of examining McCarthy's systematic and informed account of Habermas, interestingly remarks: "nothing would be more erroneous than to assume that the 'ideal speech situation' alone is to be the ground norm of critical theory."[28] Only theoretical discourse, on Habermas's account, is so guided; "practical discourse, by contrast, is governed by the equally counterfactual norm of 'consensually articulable common needs'" and, in determining what would count as a morally legitimate social order, we need, as well, to add a conception of *generalizable interests*.[29] The norms of the ideal speech situations are the procedural norms that people in something like the original position would use and are norms which could be defended nonideologically and impartially where appeal could not be made to class interests.[30] Such norms, in any event, "cannot provide a *material* specification for the ideals of freedom, justice and equality."[31] In this context, it is important to note McCarthy's explication of what a norm is for Habermas. Norms are "intersubjectively binding reciprocal expectations of behavior which regulate legitimate chances for the satisfaction of needs."[32] They provide, as Ben Habib puts it, "socially sanctioned modes of need satisfaction."[33] These socially sanctioned modes of need satisfaction always carry an implicit *claim* to legitimacy. With such additions, as McCarthy points out, Habermas maintains his distance from a Kantian formalism in ethics.[34] Like Marx, Habermas sees

[28]Seyla Ben Habib, "Critical Notice of Thomas McCarthy's *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*," *Telos* (Summer 1979), p. 179.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid., p. 180; and Thomas McCarthy, pp. 303–10.
[31]Ben Habib, p. 180.
[32]Thomas McCarthy, pp. 311–25.
[33]Ben Habib, p. 180.
[34]But he still appeals to a rather special reading of "universalizability" and it is not evident that he has overcome formalistic difficulties. Thomas McCarthy, pp. 310–33.

needs as changing and expanding. Indeed they are not rooted in a fixed human nature, but what our needs are is, in part, dependent on what, in a given historical situation, is possible and what can be attained as well as on a particular culture's historically conditioned conception of what is good.[35] The stress here is on the claim that the "guiding norm for practical discourse is the ideal of 'consensual need articulation.'"[36] This too is procedural and it understandably avoids following Marx and many Marxists (Fromm and Marcuse, for example) in trying to develop an account of true and false needs.

If this is the way we should understand Habermas, it does not enable us to escape my previous criticism. Suppose the members of an established ruling class in a secure class society acknowledged that there is this tight link between legitimate norms and consensual needs. Still, why do such people fly in the face of reason or make any cognitive mistake if they do not acknowledge that their class should act in accordance with that ideal of need articulation? Why should they want a system of need regulation based on undistorted communication? Indeed, it could be argued (as I did) that they as a class have a need for a system of distorted communication—a moral ideology—answering to their class interests. To the response that that is bourgeois ideology becoming cynical and indeed using people manipulatively, the reply could be: "And what is *irrational* about being cynical and so using people?" At times in our history it has paid off very handsomely indeed for the dominant class.

Moreover, to speak of norms as being intersubjectively binding reciprocal expectations of behavior which regulate legitimate chances for the satisfaction of needs does not get us very far until we have some criteria for "legitimate chances."

[35]Ben Habib, p. 180.
[36]Ibid.

And the remark in descriptive ethics that norms are "socially sanctioned modes of need satisfaction" or that they are "intersubjectively binding" cuts no normative ice unless you have already accepted a given moral system in a given society. But the observer can perfectly appropriately ask: Why accept that system? And a person or group of persons can perfectly well ask: Why accept that socially sanctioned mode of need satisfaction with its distinctive scheduling of needs? Members of a ruling class in a stable class society would, of course, at least accept them as useful ideological devices for mass control, but they need not, on pain of irrationality, accept them as binding norms on which they are themselves committed to act. Moreover, it is a textbook truism, which all the same is true, that the mere fact that a system of rules is socially sanctioned does not make these rules right or something that should be accepted.

I do claim that it is in the class interests of ruling-class holdouts (if that is the right word for them) to maintain distorted communication. Indeed, without it their very existence as *a class* would be in grave doubt. But I do not equate their acting rationally as individuals with their acting in accordance with their individual interests. I no more equate "rationality" with "instrumental rationality" than does Habermas, and to do so would simply beg the question with him. Members of the capitalist class, like everyone else, have emancipatory interests. (I am here, of course, speaking of them as individuals.) But I do question whether their so protecting their class interests can be shown always or perhaps even generally to be in conflict with their emancipatory interests, and I do contend that they need not make any intellectual mistake (any deductive or inductive error) if they continue to opt for propagating a moral ideology (recognized by them to be ideology) which protects their class interests. I believe that many of their human needs, including things like at least some of

Rawls's primary social goods, could for them still be met, as they are situated now, under conditions of capitalist class hegemony. What might be argued, and I remain skeptically hopeful that such an argument might turn out to be sound, is that they could not, where they also saw their situation with considerable clarity, maintain their self-respect while sanctioning such a use of moral ideology to maintain their class interests. But Habermas has done nothing to show that this is so.

Something more can be said, giving some sense to the notion of an objective basis for moral norms, if we drop the Kantian and Hobbesian task of trying to get morality out of rationality and instead try to say something about what taking the moral point of view requires. In elucidating the mode of social critique that would result from an acceptance of Habermas's theory of communicative competence, McCarthy makes it clear that Habermas has shown that a discourse of domination—ideological discourse not meeting the conditions of an ideal speech situation—would make impossible the public articulation of the need interpretations of the dominated class. The norms of such a discourse of domination preclude that, but if, as Baier and Rawls have argued, a formal requirement of the moral point of view is that anything which can even count as a moral norm must be publicly defendable, then the norms of such a discourse of domination could not be moral norms.[37] A class society utilizing such a discourse of domination could have a moral ideology but not a genuine morality. Its norms are incompatible with what it is to take the moral point of view. This approach, though not one taken by Habermas, is perhaps a promising one. The formal con-

[37]Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 191–200; and John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 55, 133, and 167–92.

straint Baier and Rawls put on moral norms is a plausible one; if such a position were adopted and could withstand criticism, it perhaps would provide a way around the difficulties I have pressed against Habermas's account. It would, of course, still be necessary to spell out what it is to take the moral point of view in such a way that moral ideologies and "class moralities" would be excluded, and it would be necessary to provide some answer to the challenge to morality (any morality at all): Why be moral?[38] But here we are on reasonably familiar ground and the task is perhaps not insuperable.

The publicity requirement, if adopted and so utilized, might also help provide us with grounds for making the distinction, one that Habermas is very concerned to make, between a merely *de facto consensus* and a *rational legitimate consensus*. The publicity requirement, as a defining characteristic of the moral point of view, would also be a defining characteristic of a rational consensus. We could not—logically could not—have a *rational* consensus where moral ideologies were in force and some people remained ideologically bamboozled. (To say this is to make what Wittgenstein would call a grammatical remark.) Ben Habib makes a solid point about ideologies in this context when she remarks: "Ideologies are precisely such discourses which pre-empt, reinterpret and misarticulate the needs of dominated groups. The aim of critique is to demystify these frameworks of legitimacy which socialize individuals by providing them with value systems and norms through which to articulate needs."[39] Habermas, with his norms of the ideal speech situation and his understanding of needs, may have gone some of the way toward providing us with a rational underpinning for such a critique

[38]Kai Nielsen, "Rationality and the Moral Sentiments: Some Animadversions on a Theme in *A Theory of Justice*," *Philosophica*, 22 (1978), pp. 167–92.
[39]Ben Habib, p. 181.

so that it can become clear to us that we do not need to be in a situation where we pit ideologies against ideologies—where, that is, we are in Weber's situation of the "warring gods."

However, as Rawls remarks, publicity is a very weak constraint. Even with Habermas's procedural norms of the ideal speech situation, we still may not get, even when they are linked with the above account of needs, a material specification of the ideals of freedom and justice and a conception of a humane social order sufficient to give us objective guides to action or moral criteria for social evolution. The critical reception of Rawls's magisterial account of social justice gives us reasons for not being sanguine. It has been about a decade now since its appearance and—given the extensive, varied, and often careful critical assessment of it—we are by now in a position to draw some important object lessons from it. Almost everyone who has studied Rawls's work regards it as a masterpiece, a contemporary work that belongs with the classical works in moral and social philosophy. It has a powerful but controlled moral vision; it is systematic, careful, and detailed; and, like Sidgwick's work, it shows an acute and sensitive appreciation of both its predecessors and contemporary alternatives. Yet, unlike Sidgwick, it also seeks to establish a distinctive moral methodology, to establish the correctness of certain principles of justice and a conception of a well-ordered society which in large measure is based on them. It seeks to refute its main rivals, utilitarianism, pluralism, and a purely rights-based ethic. The upshot of all the varied critical reception of that book is the recognition that it has succeeded in none of these tasks. Disputes about moral methodology remain as deep as ever and all the major nonskeptical alternatives remain in the field: theories of utilitarianism, pluralism, perfectionism, and even natural rights.

Perhaps the renewed moral skepticism defended by J. L.

Mackie and G. Harman could be faulted by Habermas for sharing in many ways the scientistic assumptions of earlier noncognitive theories, but the alternatives mentioned above, none of which has been excluded by Rawls's account, do not always make scientistic assumptions. Neither those nonskeptical normative ethical accounts nor Rawls's rest on such scientistic or, broadly speaking, positivist assumptions. There may be positivistic residues in the thought of some of the philosophers articulating those moral theories, perhaps even in Rawls's, but they are—or so it seems at least—readily excisable from their theories.

If there is such a stalemate in ethics, there is reason to be skeptical that Habermas's account will succeed where these accounts have been failures. In these domains, Habermas's work is much less developed and sophisticated than the work of Rawls and many of his critics and some of the alternative normative ethical theories that have been constructed. (I have in mind here particularly the work of Kurt Baier and Thomas Nagel.) Habermas might respond that even here it is the implicit metaethics of positivism—taking the term in his wide sense—and its underlying scientistic assumptions that is getting in the way. I think that so to respond is mistaken. The stalemate I spoke of is not the one that bothered people such as Blanshard and Frankena in the decade after World War II, when all three of the then dominant metaethical theories had generally acknowledged weaknesses and yet no alternatives were in sight which overcame those difficulties or reasonably clearly pointed the way to the overall superiority of one theory over the other.[40] Rather the situation now is that: it isn't that we can never know or reasonably believe that certain things

[40]Brand Blanshard, *The Impasse in Ethics—and a Way Out* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1955); and W. K. Frankena, "Moral Philosophy at Mid-Century," *Philosophical Review*, 60 (January, 1951), pp. 44–5.

are right and wrong. There are moral truisms (commonplaces) that are generally acknowledged. The rival nonskeptical moral theories all agree that it is wrong to torture the innocent just for the fun of it, or to break faith with your friends on a whim, or not to regard the keeping of a promise or the telling of the truth as something one, *ceteris paribus*, must do. They also all believe that pleasure is good and pain is awful, though they certainly do not all believe that pleasure is the sole intrinsic good. Moreover, to take a Moorean turn, it is more reasonable to accept these moral truisms than to accept a skeptical theory which would deny them. But the acceptance of these truisms does not get us very far in constructing a normative ethic on which to ground (partially ground) a theory of social evolution. All the major, and often deeply conflicting, nonskeptical moral theories (normative ethical theories) accept these truisms, though they differ profoundly on the weight they give to them and on the place they have in their theories. For a hedonistic utilitarian the importance of the judgments of intrinsic value that pleasure is good and pain is bad will be more important, in his or her scheme of things, than the deontological judgments that promises must be kept and the truth told or that people must be treated as ends and never as means only. The opposite will, of course, be true for the Kantian. Their disagreement is not over whether these various things are good or bad but over their placement and weight.

What is crucial for us to see is that we have no rational consensus as to which of the alternative normative ethical theories are, everything considered, the more adequate or even the least inadequate. We perhaps know some moral truisms to be true, but we do not have a *systematic* knowledge of right and wrong.[41] Habermas either does not realize this

[41]Nielsen, "Reason and Sentiment," pp. 248–79, and "On Needing a Moral Theory," *Metaphilosophy*, (1982).

or does not face it. Minimally, he does nothing to challenge it or to show that a claim like the one I have made above is even overstated. But how, then, can he reasonably claim that we have made progress in "moral-practical insight," a progress giving us an understanding of social evolution to maturer forms of social integration? How can he rightly claim that, independently of the development of the productive forces, we have moral or normative criteria for social evolution?

It is fair enough to remind us that "Habermas remains faithful to the Hegelian ideal of not providing 'blueprints' for social and political reality in the form of *a priori* normative models," but still, how does he provide us with normative criteria for social evolution?[42] These, it would seem, would have to be tolerably abstract and independent of context.[43] Again it is important to remark, as Habermas does, that "every general theory of justice remains peculiarly abstract in relation to historical forms of legitimation" and then go on to ask whether there is "an alternative to this historical injustice of general theories, on the one hand, and the standardlessness of mere historical understanding on the other."[44] But where is his alternative and how does it—or does it—provide criteria for social evolution?

Social theory for Habermas is importantly social critique. He wishes, as Ben Habib has it, to radicalize the method of immanent critique.[45] But Habermas, unlike Rawls or Baier, does not believe that critique can supply universal norms in the form of ethical imperatives, for, as he puts it, "the melodies of ethical socialism have been played through." He can do no more here than can Popper or Weber. His critique is

[42]Ben Habib, p. 181.
[43]Ibid.
[44]Habermas, *Communication and Human Evolution,* p. 205.
[45]Ben Habib, pp. 182–84.

in no position to reveal the universal content of moral norms while critiquing in late capitalism or bureaucratic socialism their distorted, system-serving, particular realization. Habermas himself claims that such a critique requires a philosophical ethics and that a "philosophical ethics . . . is possible today only if we can reconstruct general presuppositions of communication and procedures for justifying norms and values."[46] But whatever may be true about his account of the presuppositions of communication, he has not succeeded in providing us with convincing procedures for justifying moral norms. It may be, as Ben Habib remarks at the end of her penetrating discussion of Habermas, that "it would be an error to interpret Habermas's later work as reviving the melodies of ethical socialism, or to conflate it with the grandiose self-deceptions of theories of justice that claim to speak from 'the standpoint of eternity.' "[47] But Habermas does claim to have given us a (partially) normative theory of social evolution and a procedure for justifying moral norms, yet it remains both unclear what those procedures are or how they can do their justifying work or that we have been given criteria for social evolution.[48]

V

I want to set forth, as an alternative candidate for providing criteria for social evolution, a reading of historical materialism. I believe that Marx's account requires less reconstructing than Habermas believes is required. I want also to put it forth as a method which might provide us with the

[46]Habermas, *Communication and Human Evolution*, pp. 96–7; and Ben Habib, p. 185.
[47]Ben Habib, p. 185; and McCarthy, pp. 310–33.
[48]Ben Habib, p. 187.

foundations for a critical theory of society: a sociological theory which will both advocate and analyze and, if you will, provide an underlying rationale for policymaking.

Habermas believes that scientistic assumptions are embedded in Marx's statement of historical materialism. In thinking about the crucial causal role of the forces of production in producing social change, and indeed in a progressively liberating social change, Marx, Habermas gives us to understand, saw the organization of social life too much as a technical problem, like the technical control over objects and natural processes, and, with these assumptions in place, Marx came mistakenly to believe that to overcome exploitation and oppression is simply a matter of making social production more efficient. The key to this was in the development of the productive forces. But we must distinguish, Habermas believes, between instrumentally rational production and emancipatory social interaction, and we must realize that social production has, as an essential element, a mutual understanding of people and not just a technical control over objects and natural processes. Social evolution has two logically independent elements, Habermas claims—technical rationalization and practical rationalization. They are, in turn, rooted in two fundamental interests. Technical rationalization has to do with society's control over natural processes; practical rationalization has to do, as we have seen, with the justifiability of norms governing human interaction. Marx, Habermas believes, in developing historical materialism, came to characterize the process of social reproduction as production, incorrectly reducing practical rationalization to technical rationalization. By confusing technical rationalization and practical rationalization—rational production and social interaction—Marx, as well as many later Marxists (Lenin and Kautsky), came to have an inadequate understanding of the dynamics of capitalism. They did not understand, and their

theoretical preconceptions inhibited their understanding, how state capitalism can prevent crippling economic crises or how social revolution could not be stage-managed by "experts" from above. But this, as Sensat and Gottlieb have argued, is a misreading of Marx and a misunderstanding of his historical materialism.[49] For him, social production is much more than simply controlling the natural environment. For Marx, practical rationalization is not reduced to technical rationalization, but neither are they, as Habermas believes, logically distinct, with quite different criteria for their development. Rather, on Marx's view, they are two developmental patterns which are inextricably intertwined. They are interdependent aspects of the mode of production. It is crucial in gaining an understanding of historical materialism and social evolution to come to understand how the forces of production can be both fettered and promoted, though not at one and the same time, by the relations of production, and how the fettering impoverishes social life and how promoting it can enhance it.

Marxists, including Marx, believe that the fundamental determinates of social change are in the development of the productive forces and in their clash, as they develop, with the relations of production, relations which first suit them and then, as they further develop, come to fetter them. We human beings are tolerably rational creatures with some understanding of our interests. These interests and our normal, and perhaps rather minimal, rationality lead us to develop our productive capacities. Our productive capacities develop and with that our productive forces develop, until at some point our productive forces will come to clash with the previously well-matched relations of production.

There are two crucial theses involved here, theses which

[49]See the references to Sensat and Gottlieb in footnote 19.

G. A. Cohen calls *the development thesis* and *the primacy thesis.* It is important, in thinking about historical materialism, to consider both of these theses, for the latter requires the truth of the former as a necessary condition for its truth. The *development thesis* is the thesis that the productive forces tend to develop throughout history. The *primacy thesis* is the thesis that the nature of the production relations of a society is explained by the level of development of its productive forces, though to assert this is not to deny, as it might seem at first sight, that production relations themselves develop and bring about changes in productive forces.[50] Causal relations go both ways, but the claim of the primacy thesis is that the dominant causal determination is from the forces of production to the relations of production. The claim is that when there are extensive changes in the productive forces, changes in the production relations will occur. As Cohen puts it, "for any set of production relations, there is an extent of further development of productive forces they embrace which suffices for a change in relations.. . ."[51] This will continue throughout history, because it just is the case that the productive forces tend to develop. But to assert this is just to assume the *developmental thesis.*

It is difficult to know how the *development thesis* could be proved, but it certainly appears, at least for Western societies, to be an unassailable historical datum that the "productive forces tend to develop and, indeed do develop."[52] If in reflecting on societies other than Western ones we are forced to be skeptical about the development of productive forces

[50]G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History, A Defense* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1978).
[51]Ibid., p. 138.
[52]Ibid.

throughout history, this would indeed surely weaken that claim and make us consider whether there are things special about Western societies that trigger this development. We would also, and more importantly, be less certain that such developments must continue indefinitely in the future. However, it surely seems at least to be an empirical truth that societies rarely replace a given set of productive forces by inferior productive forces. Indeed, it did happen for a time after the decline of the Roman Empire, but massively and generally it tends to be the case, perhaps because we are (to a degree) rational and have a sense of our own interests, that we will not replace the productive forces we have in place with inferior ones and that it is because of this that the productive forces tend to develop throughout history. Perhaps we do not know *why* this is so, but *that* this is so seems at least evident enough in Western societies.

The degree of development of the productive forces is, in turn, the measure of a society's capacity to produce. Productive forces are, of course, what is used in production, and production relations are either the relations of ownership of the productive forces or persons or relations presupposing such relations of ownership. *Ownership* here means "effective control." The economic structure of a society is just the entire set of production relations of a society and the modes of production of a society are the distinctive ways a society has of producing. (It is by virtue of these modes that Marxists periodize history.) The superstructure of a society, as distinct from the base (another name for the "economic structure of society"), is the noneconomic institutions of society: its legal system, its morality, its religion, its rituals, its kinship system, and the like. Just as the base (the economic structure of society) has the general character it has because of the character

of the productive forces, so the superstructure has the general character it has because of the character of the base.

What we have here is a claim to the primacy, in speaking of social change, of the productive forces. They are the fundamental determinates of the whole historical process. The productive forces tend to develop throughout history and the level of development of these productive forces explains why it is that we have the productive relations we have during a given era. The productive forces determine the general direction in which the production relations will change, and the production relations, in turn, explain the general character of the noneconomic institutions of society and the general direction of their change.[53] The key to understanding social development is to understand the changes, and the likely direction of future changes, in the development of the modes of production.

It is important to see that the character of the forces of production functionally explains the character of the relations of production. In times of stability, the production relations are of the type they are because they are the sort of relations which are suitable to the use and development of the productive forces at that time. Where we are in an epoch of revolutionary conflict and the relations of production for a time persist in spite of the conflict, the explanation is as follows: the production relations are of the kind they are because they once were suitable to the use and development of the productive forces at an earlier time. In both cases we use functional explanations. (We have here functional explanations without functionalism.[54]) When new relations of pro-

[53]Ibid., p. 136.
[54]Ibid., pp. 158–60.

duction come into being, they do so because they are the sorts of relations which will promote the development of productive forces. The *primacy thesis* requires such an appeal to functional explanations. Relations of production will stably obtain over time only if, and because, they suit the development of the productive forces. The relations are as they are because they suit the development of the forces of production. (Note how teleological all that is, but it is not, for all of that, unempirical.[55])

There need be nothing scientistic about this claim. In trying to understand the wheel of history, it indeed gives considerable weight to technological considerations, to the way labor power and the means of production develop. But even here, at the level of the forces of production, we are also talking about human knowledge and human inventiveness. Moreover, social production—the whole mode of production—involves much more than technical control over objects; it involves a fundamental understanding of how humans are to relate together and the forms that that social cooperation can take.

Such a view does not impugn our rationality or render morality or moral development impossible. Even if we say that a certain human development is inevitable—and I do not suggest that we should talk that way—the "inevitabilities" do not exist *despite* what human beings do but, because of what they, being rational, are bound predictably to do.[56] This gives us an understanding of how people, even in a deterministic world, if such it be, make their own history. We can

[55]Charles Taylor, "Marxism and Empiricism," *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. by Bernard Williams and Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1966), pp. 227–46.

[56]Cohen, p. 147.

see on this account how human actions count. On such an account of historical materialism, an account I believe was Marx's account, we can see how there is an extensive coincidence between the development of the productive forces and the growth of human faculties.[57] With an ever greater control of nature, as the productive forces develop, there is an ever greater amassing of social wealth, an enhancement of human rationality, and more and more leisure for more and more people within the societies where that wealth obtains, with a consequent development of the capacities for reflection and esthetic appreciation and an expansion, for more and more people, to an ever greater degree, of their capacities to act autonomously. Imperialism puts temporary wrinkles on this, but over the long haul there is this enhancement of human powers. With the development of the forces of production, our mastery over nature and, potentially, over our own lives is enormously expanded. We are in a very different position than the Athapascan Indians. If the core notion of human liberty is conscious self-direction and the opening of ever wider possibilities for choice; the development of the productive forces enhances that. It increases, at least poten-

[57]In addition to the masterful general statement of historical materialism in Cohen's book, important related accounts occur in William H. Shaw, *Marx's Theory of History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1978); John G. Gurley, *Challengers to Capitalism: Marx, Lenin and Mao* (San Francisco, Calif.: San Francisco Book Company, 1976); and John McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978). Cohen's and Shaw's account has been powerfully but sympathetically criticized by Henry Laycock, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 10 (June, 1980), pp. 335–56. Even if Laycock's acute criticisms are sustainable, they will not, I think provide a ground for altering the use I made in my text of Cohen's arguments. Similar things should be said for Richard Miller's powerful probing of Cohen's theses in his "Productive Forces and the Forces of Change," *The Philosophical Review*, 90 (January, 1981), pp. 91–117.

tially, our control over our own lives and adds to the richness and potential for variation in our lives. As the productive forces develop—and it is not unreasonable to believe that over history they do—we are less and less yoked to the realm of necessity.[58] There is there a firmly materialist but not reductionist or morally insensitive conception of freedom from human bondage. With this, we by degree achieve greater and greater moral autonomy and make, again by degrees, more tangible the realization, for more and more people, of the good of self-respect.

This relatively unreconstructed historical materialism thus provides the basis for an emancipatory social theory and a social science which can, in good conscience, advocate and make policy as well as analyze and critique. Even without Habermas's complicated picture of moral development and his transcendental grounding of norms, we have, on a perfectly materialistic basis, sufficient key to moral progress and human emancipation reasonably to ground a critical social theory with an emancipatory thrust.

VI

If a policymaker in a Western capitalist society were to accept such an account of emancipatory social theory so buttressed by historical materialism, how, if at all, would it affect her or his approach to policymaking? One response—a response I mean entirely seriously—is that he or she might very well give up all efforts at policymaking in such societies and in some way or another go over to the extraparliamentary opposition, as many intellectuals have done in the past. (The ways in which this can be done are varied.) The rationale

[58]When we consider only Western history, it is plain that these productive forces do so develop.

would be this: only after such societies have been radically transformed in a far more humane direction is there much point in worrying about policymaking. The question is the gaining of state power and not that of trying to tinker with the system within the existing parameters of power. (This is not, of course, to say that policymaking would not be a worthwhile activity in a different kind of society.)

This response is a natural response, but it is perhaps not utterly inescapable. We do not have to be committed to piecemeal social engineering to recognize that there are evils to be overcome, including injustices to be rectified or at least ameliorated. Something (though often not very much) can be done about some of these ills in almost any society, and one way of doing something about them is by institutional action or (more rarely) inaction. There plainly is work here for policymakers. Their scope may often be modest and their room for maneuver slight. But if they have a tolerably clear conception of what they are to aim at and some reasonable grasp of the empirical facts, it is seldom the case that nothing can be done.

It is also well to have a sense of the relevance of context when questions are raised about the poliymaker's role. (Remember we are asking what this role would be assuming the work were informed by critical theory.) In what Western capitalist society is the policymaker seeking to work? Sweden and Iceland are not the United States and South Africa. Moreover, it very much depends on what his or her own role in the society is. But suppose he or she is middle aged, a social scientist, and has been a policymaker for some years; suppose further he or she becomes convinced that some such form of critical social theory as I have outlined is roughly correct. What then is this person to do? Again it depends on how close he is to power, the possibilities for change within the existing state apparatus, and the like. To be reasonably placed in the

central planning office of Zimbabwe is a challenge; Chile is something else again. And the United States is not Sweden.

However, suppose we pose the question, in terms of their position in the state apparatus, of statistically standard policymakers in the United States in 1982. If they go on in that role at all (and it seems to me they should seriously question whether they should), they should, I think, approach their work with considerable wariness and cynicism. (Given the elected and appointed officials they are responsible to, how could they do anything progressive without engaging in some form of trickery?) Most fundamentally, for a critical theorist turned policymaker or a policymaker convinced by critical theory, there would be a difference in attitude from that of a conservative or welfare-state liberal in the approach to policymaking. He or she would not view the future to be achieved as merely some improved, possibly a little more efficient and a little less inhumane, version of the present or be wedded to structural–functionalist assumptions, nor would he or she expect societies, with the continued development of the productive forces, to change, and in certain epochs fundamentally and radically change, and indeed develop in a generally liberating direction. Our policymaker would not have the cultural pessimism of a Freud. Moreover, he or she would have a conception of the general direction those changes would take and, with a recognition that there is causal interaction between base and superstructure, between the economic and political–legal realm, would seek to develop social policies that would help unfetter the production relations in the society. (A recognition of the primacy of the economic does not commit one to economism.) This would consist most fundamentally in struggling to bring into being policies that would weaken capitalist-class hegemony over the society. Central in such an endeavor would be (1) the articulation of policies that would further movement in the direction of workers' control over their places of work and (2) policies that would move in

the direction of achieving democratic rather than business control of the mass media and indeed over the whole consciousness industry. Policymaking, informed by the commitments of critical theory, would also be directed toward achieving free and universally accessible higher education, health care, day-care centers, facilities for the elderly, legal aid, and the like. In fine, policies would be articulated whose probable effect would be to weaken class divisions—and thus undermine the hegemony of the capitalist class—and sexual and racial inequalities. The underlying rationale of policymaking, consonant with the emancipatory ends of critical theory and with devices that would accelerate the development of productive forces instrumental to those ends, would be the articulation of policies which would work to *equalize power within the society* and in this absolutely central way democratize society and make possible the existence of the public sphere that Habermas, like J. S. Mill, takes to be essential for a truly human society.[59]

There should be very deep pessimism about whether policymakers in bureaucratic structures, even if they had such ends, could do much to further them. Liberation is not likely to come from such sources. After all, we must not forget who their masters are. But at least such policies as are formed should not impede such class struggles and further strengthen the repressive, deeply ideologized, elite control of capitalist society.[60] A critical social science informed by historical materialism would sensitize us in this direction and would provide the policymaker with intellectual support for such a cluster of commitments and such attitudes in policymaking.[61]

[59]Jürgen Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Neuwied, West Germany: Luchterhand Verlag, 1962). See also Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," *New German Critique*, 3 (1974), pp. 49–55.

[60]For a window on how it works, see Noam Chomsky, "Resurgent America," *Our Generation*, 14 (Summer, 1981), pp. 11–22.

[61]I should like to thank Bruce Jennings, Elisabeth Nielsen, and Daniel Callahan for comments on early versions of this essay.