AXEL HONNETH

13 A social pathology of reason: on the intellectual legacy of Critical Theory

With the turn of the new century, Critical Theory appears to have become an intellectual artifact. This superficial dividing point alone seems to increase the intellectual gap separating us from the theoretical beginnings of the Frankfurt School. Just as the names of authors who were for its founders vividly present suddenly sound from afar, so too the theoretical challenges from which the members of the school had won their insights threaten to fall into oblivion. Today a younger generation carries on the work of social criticism without having much more than a nostalgic memory of the heroic years of western Marxism. Indeed, already over thirty years have passed since the writings of Marcuse and Horkheimer were last read as contemporary works. There is an atmosphere of the outdated and antiquated, of the irretrievably lost, that surrounds the grand historical-philosophical ideas of Critical Theory, ideas for which there no longer seems to be any kind of resonance within the experience of the accelerating present. The deep chasm that separates us from our predecessors must be comparable to that which separated the first generation of the telephone and movie theatre from the last representatives of German idealism. The same vexed astonishment with which a Benjamin or a Kracauer may have observed a photo of the late Schelling must today come over a young student who, on her computer, stumbles across a photo of the young Horkheimer posing in a bourgeois Wilhelmian interior.

Critical Theory, whose intellectual horizon was decisively formed in the appropriation of European intellectual history from Hegel to Freud, still relies on the possibility of viewing history with reason as its *Leitfaden*. But there may be no other aspect of Critical Theory more foreign to today's generation, which has grown up conscious of

cultural plurality and of the end of "Grand Narratives," than social criticism founded upon this sort of philosophy of history. The idea of a historically effective reason, which all the representatives of the Frankfurt School from Horkheimer to Habermas firmly endorsed, becomes incomprehensible if one can no longer recognize the unity of a single rationality in the diversity of established convictions. And the more far-reaching idea that the progress of reason is blocked or interrupted by the capitalist organization of society will only trigger astonishment, since capitalism can no longer be seen as a unified system of social rationality. Thirty-five years ago, starting from the idea of an "emancipatory interest," Habermas attempted to ground the idea of emancipation from domination and oppression in the history of the species, but today he concedes that "such a form of argumentation belongs 'unambiguously' to the past."[1]

The political changes of the last several decades have not been without their influence on the status of social criticism. The consciousness of a plurality of cultures and the experience of a variety of different social emancipation movements have significantly lowered expectations of what criticism ought to be, and be capable of. Generally speaking, there is prevalent today a liberal conception of justice that utilizes criteria for the normative identification of social injustice without the desire to explicate further the institutional framework for the injustice as embedding it within a particular type of society. Where such a procedure is felt to be insufficient, appeals are made to models of social criticism that are constructed in the spirit of Michel Foucault's genealogical method or in the style of Michael Walzer's critical hermeneutics.[2] In all of these cases, however, criticism is no longer understood as a reflective form of rationality that is supposed to be anchored in the historical process itself. Critical Theory on the other hand – and in a way that may be unique to it – insists on a mediation of theory and history in a concept of socially effective rationality. That is, the historical past should be understood from a practical point of view, as a process of development whose pathological deformation by capitalism may be overcome only by initiating a process of enlightenment among those involved. It is this working model of the intertwining of theory and history that grounds the unity of Critical Theory despite its variety of voices. Whether in its positive form with the early Horkheimer, Marcuse, or Habermas, or in its negative form with Adorno or Benjamin, one

finds the same idea forming the background of each of the different projects – namely, that social relationships distort the historical process of development in a way that one can only practically remedy. Designating the legacy of Critical Theory for the new century would necessarily involve recovering from the idea of a social pathology of reason an explosive charge that can still be touched off today. Against the tendency to reduce social criticism to a project of normative, situational, or local opinion, one must clarify the context in which social criticism stands side by side with the demands of a historically evolved reason. In what follows I want to take a first step in that direction. First, I shall detail the ethical core contained in the idea in Critical Theory of a socially deficient rationality. Second, I shall outline how capitalism can be understood as a cause of such a deformation of social rationality. Third and last, I shall establish the connection to praxis seen in the goal of overcoming social suffering caused by deficient rationality. Each of these three stages involves finding a new language that can make clear in present terms what Critical Theory intended in the past. Still, I will often have to content myself merely with suggesting lines of thought that would have to be pursued to bring the arguments of earlier Critical Theory up to date.

I

Even though it is difficult to discover a systematic unity in the many forms of Critical Theory, taking its social-theoretical negativism as our point of departure will serve us well in establishing a first point of common interest.[3] Both the members of the inner circle, as well as those on the periphery, of the Institute for Social Research[4] perceive the societal situation upon which they want to have an effect as being in a state of social negativity. Moreover, there is widespread agreement that the concept of negativity should not be restricted in a narrow way to offences committed against principles of social justice, but rather should be extended more broadly to violations of the conditions for a good or successful life.[5] All the expressions the members of the circle use to characterize the given state of society arise from a social-theoretical vocabulary grounded in the basic distinction between "pathological" and "intact, non-pathological" relations. Horkheimer first speaks of the "irrational organization" of

society (*CT* 188–243; *HGS* IV, 162–216), Adorno later of the "administered world" (*P* 17–34; *AGS* X.1: 11–30), Marcuse uses such concepts as "one-dimensional society" and "repressive tolerance" (*MS* VII: 136–66), and Habermas, finally, uses the formula of the "colonization of the social life-world" (*TCA* II, ch. 8). Such formulations always normatively presuppose an "intact" state of social relations in which all the members are provided with an opportunity for successful self-actualization. But what is specifically meant by this terminology is not sufficiently explained by merely contrasting it with the language of social injustice in moral philosophy. Rather, the distinctiveness of the expressions only becomes manifest when the obscure connection taken to exist between social pathology and defective rationality comes to light. All the authors mentioned above assume that the cause of the negative state of society is to be found in a deficit in social rationality. They maintain an internal connection between pathological relationships and the condition of social rationality, which explains their interest in the historical process of the actualization of reason. Any attempt to make the tradition of Critical Theory fruitful again for the present must thus begin with the task of bringing this conceptual connection up to date.

The thesis that social pathologies are to be understood as a result of deficient rationality is ultimately indebted to the political philosophy of Hegel. He begins his *Philosophy of Right* with the supposition that a vast number of tendencies towards a loss of meaning were manifesting themselves in his time, and that these tendencies could be explained only by the insufficient appropriation of an "objectively" already possible reason.[6] Behind Hegel's diagnosis of his time lies a comprehensive conception of reason in which he establishes a connection between historical progress and ethics. Reason unfolds in the historical process by recreating universal "ethical" institutions at every stage. And, by taking these institutions into account, individuals are able to design their lives according to socially acknowledged aims and thus to experience life as meaningful. Whoever does not let such objective ends of reason influence her life, on the other hand, will suffer from the consequences of "indeterminacy" and will develop symptoms of disorientation. If one transports this ethical insight into the framework of the social processes of an entire society, Hegel's diagnosis, which is basic to his *Philosophy of Right*, emerges in outline form. Hegel saw in his own society the outbreak of those

dominant systems of thought and ideologies which, by preventing subjects from perceiving an ethical life that was already established, gave rise to widespread symptoms of a loss of meaning. He was convinced that social pathologies were to be understood as the result of the inability of society to properly express the rational potential already inherent in its institutions, practices, and everyday routines.

When this view of Hegel's is detached from the particular context in which it is embedded, it amounts to the general thesis that every successful form of society is possible only through the maintenance of its most highly developed standard of rationality, because it is only each instance of the rational universal that can provide the members of society with the orientation according to which they can meaningfully direct their lives. And this fundamental conviction must still be at work when, despite their different approaches, critical theorists all claim that it is a lack of social rationality which causes the pathology of capitalist society. Without this ethical assumption, already implicit in Hegel, one cannot justify establishing such a connection. The members of society must agree that leading a successful, undistorted life together is only possible if they all orient themselves according to principles or institutions that they can understand as rational ends for self-actualization. Any deviation from the ideal outlined here must lead to a social pathology insofar as subjects are recognizably suffering from a loss of universal, communal ends.

Nevertheless, this ethical core of the initial hypothesis, common to the various projects of Critical Theory, remains for the most part overlaid by anthropological premises. The rational universal that is supposed to vouchsafe an "intact" form of social life is understood as the potential for an invariant mode of human activity. Horkheimer's thought contains such an element in his conception of work, according to which human mastery over nature is directed "immanently" towards the goal of a social condition in which individual contributions transparently and mutually complement one another (*CT* 213ff.; *HGS* IV, 186ff.). One might say with Marx, then, that the emergence of social pathology depends upon the actual organization of society falling short of the standards of rationality that are already embodied in the forces of production. In the case of Marcuse, the authority of a rational universal shifts increasingly in his later writings to the sphere of an aesthetic praxis that appears as the medium of social integration in which subjects can satisfy their social needs in

noncoerced cooperation (*L passim*; *EC* 20–49). Here, then, the social pathology sets in at that moment in which the organization of society begins to suppress the rational potential that is at home in the power of the imagination anchored in the life-world. Finally, Habermas secures the Hegelian idea of a rational universal by means of the concept of communicative agreement, whose idealizing presuppositions are supposed to meet the concern that the potential of discursive rationality regain universal acceptance at every stage of social development. We can speak therefore of a social pathology as soon as the symbolic reproduction of society is no longer subjected to those standards of rationality that are inherent in the most highly developed form of linguistic agreement (*Verständigung*) (*TCA* II, ch. 6.1).[7] In all of these approaches to Critical Theory, the same Hegelian idea – namely, that a rational universal is always required for the possibility of fulfilled self-actualization within society – is continually incorporated, only in different characterizations of the original human praxis of action. Just as with Horkheimer's concept of human work or with Marcuse's idea of an aesthetic life, Habermas's concept of communicative agreement serves above all the aim of fixing the form of reason whose developed shape provides the medium for a rational and satisfying integration of society. It is with reference to such an authority of rational praxis that Critical Theorists can analyze society according to a theory of reason *qua* diagnosis of social pathologies. Deviations from the ideal that was to be achieved with the social actualization of the rational universal can be described as social pathologies, since they must accompany a regrettable loss of prospects for intersubjective self-actualization.

In the path of intellectual development from Horkheimer to Habermas, the idea of a rational universal changed of course, not only in regard to its content but also in regard to its methodological form. While Horkheimer combines with his concept of work the notion of a rational potential that is to serve subjects directly as a goal of cooperative self-actualization in a "community of free human beings" (*CT* 217; *HGS* IV, 191), Habermas understands the idea of communicative agreement no longer as a rational goal but rather only as a rational form of a successful mode of socialization. In Habermas, the idea that only a fully realized rationality guarantees a successful community of members of society is radically proceduralized, insofar as the rationality that gives rise to action oriented towards agreement

is now supposed to ensure only the conditions for, and no longer the fulfillment of, autonomous self-actualization.[8] Yet this formulation cannot obscure the fact that an ethical idea is hiding beneath anthropological ways of speaking about an original mode of human action. The concept of communicative action, whose rationality imposes on human beings an invariant constraint, still contains indirectly the idea of a successful social life that one finds directly in Horkheimer's concept of work and in Marcuse's concept of aesthetic praxis. The representatives of Critical Theory hold, with Hegel, the conviction that the self-actualization of the individual is only successful when it is interwoven in its aims – by means of generally accepted principles or ends – with the self-actualization of all the other members of society. Indeed, one might even claim that the idea of a rational universal contains the concept of a common good upon which the members of society must have rationally agreed in order to be able to relate their individual freedoms to one another cooperatively. The different models of practice that Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Habermas offer are all representatives of that one thought, according to which the socialization of human beings can be successful only under conditions of cooperative freedom. However the particulars of the anthropological ideas may be sorted out, they ultimately stand for an ethical idea that places the utmost value on a form of common praxis in which subjects can achieve cooperative self-actualization.[9]

Even the work that appears to have been farthest from Critical Theory's fundamental ethical ideas reflects this basic first premise. In his *Minima Moralia* Adorno vehemently denies any possibility of a universal moral theory by arguing that the "damages" of social life have already led to such fragmentation of individual conduct that orientation in terms of comprehensive principles is generally no longer possible. Instead, his "reflections" are supposed to show only in aphoristic, isolated cases which ethical and intellectual virtues remain that might resist instrumental demands by stubborn insistence upon nonpurposive activity. But the standards by which Adorno measures the harm done to the form of societal interaction betray his retention of the ideal of a cooperative self-actualization in which the freedom of the individual makes possible that of others. In various places in the text he explains even the historical genesis of social damage by direct reference to the loss of a "good universal" (*MM* 31–2, 35–7; *AGS* IV, 33–4, 38–41). Moreover, Adorno

takes as basic a concept of praxis that, following Hegel's example, ties ethical principles to the presupposition of rationality. The question of a successful form of socialization only arises where there are established common modes of action that individuals can accept as rational goals of self-actualization. The fact that Adorno at the same time has in mind, above all, the model of "nonpurposive" or "disinterested" communication – for which he takes unselfish, unalloyed giving or love as his paradigmatic examples (*MM* 31–2, 35, 42–3, 172; *AGS* IV, 33–4, 38, 46–7, 193–4)[10] – follows from the quasi-aesthetic premise he shares with Marcuse: the forms of mutual action that are best suited for self-actualization are those in which human nature achieves noncoerced expression by fulfilling sensuous needs through interplay with others.

The idea of the rational universal of cooperative self-actualization that all the members of the Frankfurt School fundamentally share is as critical of liberalism as it is of any intellectual tradition today that one might call "communitarian." While a certain approximation to liberal doctrines can be found in the recent work of Habermas because of the increasing weight he gives to the legal autonomy of individuals, he does not go so far as to say that there are no differences between the social-ontological premises of liberalism and those of Critical Theory. Instead, he continues to hold the conviction (as did Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno) that the actualization of individual freedom is tied to the assumption of a common praxis that is more than just the result of a coordination of individual interests. All the concepts of a rational praxis that find application in Critical Theory are tailored according to their intended use to actions whose implementation requires a higher degree of intersubjective agreement than liberalism allows. In order to be able to cooperate on an equal basis, to interact aesthetically, or to reach agreements in a noncoerced manner, a shared conviction is required that each of these activities is of an importance which justifies, if necessary, the neglect of individual interests. To this extent, Critical Theory presupposes a normative ideal of society that is incompatible with the individualistic premises of the liberal tradition. Orientation in terms of the idea of cooperative self-actualization includes instead the notion that subjects are not able to achieve a successful social life as long as they have not recognized the common core of value judgments that lies behind their respective individual interests. The idea of a

"community of free human beings" that Horkheimer already formulates in his essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" (*CT* 217; *HGS* IV, 191) also forms the normative *leitmotif* of Critical Theory, where the concept of community is strictly avoided because of its ideological misuse.

Were one to press this line of thought further, one could easily get the impression that the normative concern of Critical Theory coincides with that of "communitarianism."[11] But just as it differs from liberalism in its orientation to a "universal" of self-actualization, Critical Theory differs from communitarianism in terms of the link between this universal and reason. No Critical Theorist has ever abandoned the Hegelian idea that cooperative praxis, along with the values attendant to it, must possess a rational character. Indeed, it is precisely the point of Critical Theory to see individual self-actualization as tied to the assumption that there is a common praxis, one that can only be the result of an actualization of reason. Far from understanding the tie to comprehensive values as an end in itself, the Critical Theorist views the establishing of a cooperative context as fulfilling the function of increasing social rationality. Otherwise it would not be clear why the identified forms of praxis in each case should always be the result of a social rationalization, or why the negative state of the present must always be an expression of deficient rationality. In contrast to communitarianism, Critical Theory subjects universality – which should be both embodied by and realized through social cooperation – to the standards of rational justification. While there may be various conceptions of reason in Critical Theory from Horkheimer to Habermas, they all ultimately come to the same idea, namely, that the turn to a liberating praxis of cooperation should not result from affective bonds or from feelings of membership or agreement, but rather from rational insight.

The tradition of Critical Theory thus differs from both liberalism and communitarianism by virtue of a particular kind of ethical perfectionism. To be sure, unlike the liberal tradition, Critical Theory holds that the normative goal of society should consist in making self-actualization mutually possible. But, at the same time, it understands its recommendation of this goal to be the well-grounded result of a certain analysis of the human process of development. As is already the case with Hegel, it seems that the boundaries between description, on the one hand, and prescription

and normative grounding, on the other, are blurred here as well. The explanation of the circumstances that have blocked or skewed the process of the actualization of reason should have in and of itself the rational force to convince subjects to create a social praxis of cooperation. The perfection of society that all the members of Critical Theory have in mind must be, according to their common view, the result of enlightenment through analysis. The explanatory interpretation that they offer to this end, however, is no longer written in the language of Hegel's philosophy of spirit. Rather, there is a general consensus that a definitive "sociologizing" of the categorial frame of reference is a precondition for such an analysis. The second defining feature of Critical Theory, then, consists in the attempt to explain sociologically the pathological deformation of reason. And this deserves as much of a place in the legacy of Critical Theory for today as is rightly accorded to the idea of cooperative self-actualization.

II

There is a growing tendency today for social criticism to be practiced in a form that is without a component of sociological explanation. This development arises from the fact that it is considered for the most part sufficient to expose certain injustices in society on the basis of well-founded values or norms. The question of why those affected do not themselves problematize or attack such moral evils is no longer seen as falling within the purview of social criticism as such. The division that has been established as a result is undermined, however, as soon as a causal connection is produced between the existence of social injustices and the absence of any public reaction. Social injustice would then be seen as possessing, among other things, the property of causing directly and on its own the silence or apathy that is expressed by the absence of public reaction.

A supposition of this kind serves as the basis for most of the approaches of Critical Theory. However strongly influenced by Marx they may be in their particulars, almost all of the approaches to Critical Theory share a central premise operative in his analysis of capitalism concerning this one point: the social circumstances that constitute the pathology of capitalist societies have the peculiar structural feature of disguising precisely those states of affairs that would otherwise provide particularly urgent grounds for public

criticism. Just as one can find the assumption sketched above in Marx's account of "fetishism" or in his theory of "reification,"[12] it is present in Critical Theory in concepts such as "false consciousness," "one-dimensionality," or "positivism" (see generally *DE*, *O*, introduction to *PDGS* and *TRS* 81–121). Such concepts are means for characterizing a system of convictions and practices that has the paradoxical quality of distracting one's attention from the very social conditions that structurally produce that system. For the kind of social criticism that Critical Theory practices, this observation leads to a broadening of the tasks that must be carried out. In contrast to the approaches that have achieved dominance today, Critical Theory must couple the critique of social injustice with an explanation of the processes that obscure that injustice, for only when one can convince the addressees by means of such an explanatory analysis that they can be deceived about the real character of their social conditions, can the wrongfulness of those conditions be publicly demonstrated with some prospect of acceptance. Because a relationship of cause and effect is assumed to obtain between social injustice and the absence of any negative reaction to it, normative criticism in Critical Theory has to be complemented by an element of historical explanation. A historical process of the deformation of reason must causally explain the failure of a rational universal, a failure that constitutes the social pathology of the present. This explanation must at the same time make intelligible the dethematization of social injustices in public discussion.

Within Critical Theory, there has always been agreement that the historical process of a deformation of reason can be explained only within a sociological framework. Although the ethical intuition behind the whole undertaking ultimately sustains itself on the Hegelian idea of a rational universal, its proponents are at the same time so much the heirs of classical sociological thinkers that they are no longer able to draw upon the idealist concept of reason when explaining deviations from that universality. Instead, the processes of deformation that have contributed to a lack of social rationality – to the establishment of a "particular rationality" (*P* 24; *AGS* x.1, 17) – come to be analyzed within a categorial framework, which emerges from Horkheimer to Habermas, in which there is a theoretical synthesis of Marx and Max Weber. Marx had indeed already stood the Hegelian concept of reason "right side up again"

when he tied the expansion of justified knowledge to the completion of a social praxis, in virtue of which subjects might step-by-step improve the conditions of their material reproduction. It would no longer be the internal compulsion of spirit but rather the external challenges of nature that would lead to a learning process consisting in a science of experience that justifies talk of the actualization of reason. But Marx's anthropological epistemology was insufficient for the Critical Theorists to give a truly sociological explanation of the historical process that Hegel had described in his philosophy as the self-unfolding of spirit. Only by taking up key concepts in Weber – whose early reception was often influenced by an unconventional Lukácsian reading[13] – is the picture first made complete, at least insofar as the connection between any praxis-bound learning process and social institutionalization is significantly clarified. In blending together Weber and Marx, the members of the Frankfurt School arrive at the shared conviction that the potential of human reason unfolds in a historical learning process in which rational solutions to problems are inextricably bound up with conflicts regarding the monopolization of knowledge. Subjects respond to the objective challenges that are posed at every stage – both by nature and by social organization – by constantly improving their knowledge of action; yet this knowledge is so deeply embedded in social conflicts over power and domination that it achieves a lasting form in institutions often only to the exclusion of certain other groups. For Critical Theory it thus remains beyond doubt that one must understand the Hegelian actualization of reason as conflictual – that is, as a multilayered learning process in which knowledge that can be generalized is only gradually won by improved solutions to problems and against the opposing groups in power.

Of course, this fundamental idea in the history of Critical Theory has also been subjected to constant revision. Initially, Horkheimer relates this conflictual learning process only to the working over of nature, making it difficult to imagine how rational improvements are also supposed to have taken place in the organization of social life (*CT* 188–243; *HGS* IV, 162–216).[14] Adorno widens the spectrum, in the wake of Weber's sociology of music, by recognizing a rationalization in the arrangement of artistic material, one that serves the goal of extending calculative sovereignty into aesthetic praxis (*SF* 1–14; *AGS* XVI, 9–23). In the work of Marcuse one can find

indications that would seem to justify assuming a collective learning process, with corresponding setbacks resulting from formations of power, even in the acquisition of internal nature (*EC* 117–26). Habermas is the first to achieve a systematic breakdown of the various learning processes, an analysis he grounds on the variety of ways in which human beings relate to the world through linguistic praxis. He is convinced that we can expect human rational potential to develop along at least two paths: one directed towards an increase in knowledge of the objective world, the other towards a more just solution to interactive conflicts (*TRS* 81–121; *TCA* II, ch. 6). But the gain in differentiation comes at the cost of no longer being able to consider historical growth in rationality together with those social conflicts that, following Weber's sociology of domination, were more clearly present to early critical theorists. In Habermas's work we find a gulf between (a) the dimension that, for instance, Bourdieu investigates in the processes of the cultural formation of monopolies,[15] and (b) rational learning processes – a gulf whose presence is fundamentally inconsistent with the original concerns of the Critical tradition. Nevertheless, because Critical Theory requires a postidealist version of the thesis that Hegel outlined in his conception of the actualization of reason, it cannot forego the degree of differentiation that Habermas's conception of rationality exemplifies. In order to be able to see the ways in which socially institutionalized knowledge has rationalized itself – that is, how it has exhibited an increasing degree of reflexivity in the overcoming of social problems – one must distinguish just as many aspects of rationality as there are socially perceivable challenges involved in the reproduction of societies, which reproduction is dependent upon agreement. In contrast to Habermas's approach, which carries out such a differentiation on the basis of the structural particularities of human language, there may be a superior conception that ties the aspects of social rationalization (in an internal realist sense) more closely to the ability of socially established values to disclose problems. In that case invariant values of linguistic communication would not reveal the direction in which the rationalization of social knowledge is to proceed. Rather, the historically produced values present in social spheres of significance would play this role. Furthermore, the concept of reason with which Critical Theory attempts to grasp the increases in rationality in human history is subject to the pressure of

incorporating foreign and new, and particularly non-European, points of view. For this reason it is not surprising that the concept of social rationality must also take on an ever wider and more differentiated meaning in order to be able to take into account the multifaceted nature of learning processes. In any case, it is a postidealist version of the Hegelian notion of the actualization of reason that now provides the necessary background for the idea that may well form the fundamental core of the entire Critical Theory tradition from Horkheimer to Habermas. According to that tradition, the process of social rationalization through the societal structure unique to capitalism has become interrupted or distorted in a way that makes pathologies that accompany the loss of a rational universal unavoidable.

One finds the key to this thesis, in which all the elements treated separately up until now are brought together, in a concept of capitalism energized by a theory of rationality. It is not difficult to see that Critical Theory has achieved such a concept less through a reception of Marx's works than through the impetus provided by the early theory of Lukács. With *History and Class Consciousness* it is first possible to glimpse in the institutional reality of modern capitalism an organizational form of society that is structurally tied to a certain, limited state of rationality. For Lukács, who was by his own admission significantly influenced by Weber and Georg Simmel, the characteristic feature of this form of rationality consists in the fact that its subjects are forced into a type of practice that makes them "spectators without influence,"[16] divorced from their needs and intentions. The mechanized production of parts and the exchange of goods demand a form of perception in which all other human beings appear to be thinglike, unfeeling entities, such that social interaction is bereft of any attention to those qualities that are valuable in themselves. If we were to describe the result of Lukács's analysis in a terminology closer to contemporary ideas, we might say that a certain form of praxis which is dominant in capitalism compels indifference towards those aspects of other human beings that are valuable. Instead of relating to one another with mutual recognition, subjects perceive themselves as objects that are identified only according to the interests of each.[17] In any case, it is this diagnosis of Lukács that provides Critical Theory with a categorial framework within which it is possible to speak of an interruption or distortion of the process of the actualization of reason. With the historical learning

process taken as basic, the structural forces of society that Lukács reveals in modern capitalism present themselves as obstacles to a socially latent rationality that is on the threshold of the modern age. The organizational form of social relations in capitalism prevents the application to practical life of those rational principles which, as far as our cognitive potential is concerned, are already at hand.

Of course, we must again qualify this explanatory scheme according to the various presuppositions regarding the manner and course of the historical process of rationalization that are at work in each case of Critical Theory. In Horkheimer, for example, one finds the thesis that the capitalist organization of production brings with it an opposition of individual interests that hinders "application of the whole spiritual and physical means of dominating nature" (*CT* 213; *HGS* IV, 187). Horkheimer later broadens his reflections in concert with Adorno, via the somewhat implausible hypothesis that there is an emotional rationality inherent in the form of interaction between nineteenth-century bourgeois families whose potential could not be brought into play because of increasing tension introduced by competition and monopolization (*CT* 47–128; *HGS* III, 336–417).[18] The work of Adorno, in particular his *Minima Moralia*, is full of such speculations that inevitably take the form of a diagnosis of the growing impossibility of a type of love which, in the family, was able to reconcile individual and general interests without coercion. The social privileging of rationally purposive, utilitarian attitudes in capitalism prevents the development of a nonlegalistic form of a rational universal that is inherent in the structure of private relationships in the form of mutual affection and forgiveness (*MM* 30–2, 167–9, 172; *AGS* IV, 32–3, 188–90, 193–4). Marcuse, roughly taking Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* as his guide, describes the process of increasing aesthetic sensibility as ending with modern capitalism – a form of society that he, like Lukács (though also with an air of Heidegger), depicts as a complex of generalized knowledge at one's disposal (*EC* 117–26).[19] Finally, in Habermas we find the idea that one cannot separate the potential of communicative rationality from capitalist conditions because the imperative of economic exploitation penetrates even the sphere of the social. Even though the family and the political public have long since emancipated themselves from their traditional bases of legitimization, the principles of rational communication cannot gain

acceptance in those settings because they are increasingly infiltrated by the mechanisms of systematic management (*TCA* II, ch. 8). However different these attempts at an explanation may be, the basic scheme of a critique of capitalism underlying each of them remains the same. Critical Theorists, not unlike Lukács (though in a more sophisticated manner and without the excessive historical emphasis on the proletariat), perceive capitalism as a social form of organization in which practices and ways of thinking prevail that prevent the social utilization of a rationality already made possible by history. And this historical obstruction presents at the same time a moral or ethical challenge because it precludes the possibility of orienting oneself in terms of a rational universal, the impetus to which could only come from a fully realized rationality. Whether the concept of capitalism, grounded in a theory of rationality and underlying the interpretation of history outlined here, can once again be recovered today is certainly an open question. The possibilities for organizing the activity of a capitalist economy seem too multifarious, as well as too mixed up in other nonrationally purposive patterns of social activity, to reduce the attitudes of the actors involved to a single pattern of instrumental rationality. Newer studies also suggest, however, that in capitalist societies those attitudes or orientations most rewarded with social success are those whose fixation on individual advantages demands merely strategic associations with oneself and other subjects.[20] As a result, we cannot exclude the possibility of still interpreting capitalism as the institutional result of a cultural lifestyle or of a product of social imagination[21] in which a certain type of restricted, "reifying" rationality is the dominant praxis.

But the commonalities within Critical Theory transcend this point. Its central representatives share not only the same formal scheme of diagnosing capitalism as a set of social relations of blocked or distorted rationality but also the same idea about the proper method of therapy. The forces that contribute to the overcoming of the social pathology are supposed to stem from precisely that reason whose actualization is impeded by the form of organization present in capitalist society. Just as was the case with the other elements of the theory, a classical figure of modern thought plays a formative role here too: Freud has the same significance for the central content of Critical Theory as do Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Lukács. It is from his psychoanalytic theory that Critical Theory takes the

thought that social pathologies must always express themselves in a type of suffering that keeps alive the interest in the emancipatory power of reason.

III

Today, even the question of how one might practically overcome injustice no longer generally falls within the domain of social criticism. With the exception of approaches modeled upon Foucault that take transformation of the individual's relation to herself as a condition of criticism,[22] the question concerning the relationship between theory and praxis remains closed off from contemporary consideration. Explanation of the causes that may be responsible for obscuring social injustice are thought to belong just as little to the business of criticism as do perspectival characterizations of the conversion of knowledge into praxis. One such perspective calls for a social-psychological theory of the subject that will explain why individuals who themselves are conditioned by a particular way of thinking and praxis should be further responsive to the rational content of the theory. It must explain whence the subjective forces can come that – in spite of all the delusion, one-dimensionality, and fragmentation – would still offer a chance for conversion of knowledge into praxis. However heterogeneous the field of social criticism may be today, one feature of it is typical: there is scarcely any approach that understands such a characterization to be part of its proper task. The question concerning the motivational state of the subjects that must be the focus of attention here is instead largely passed over because one no longer expects reflection on the conditions of conversion into praxis to be a part of critique.

Nevertheless, Critical Theory from its beginnings has been so greatly indebted to the tradition of left Hegelianism that it considers the initiation of a critical praxis that can contribute to the overcoming of social pathology to be an essential part of its task (*PD* ch. 3).[23] Even where skepticism regarding the possibility of practical enlightenment prevails among its authors (see, e.g. *CM* 289–94; *AGS* x.2: 794–9), the drama surrounding the question of enlightenment arises merely out of the assumed necessity of an internal connection between theory and praxis. Critical Theory, however, no longer understands the determination of this mediation as a task

that one might undertake by philosophical reflection alone. Instead of appealing to a speculative philosophy of history, which for a Marx or a Lukács was wholly self-evident, Critical Theory relies on the new instrument of empirical social research for information about the critical readiness of the public.[24] The result of this methodological reorientation, which constitutes a further distinctive feature of Critical Theory, is a sobering assessment of the state of consciousness of the proletariat. Contrary to what is assumed in the Marxist wing of left Hegelianism, the working class does not automatically develop a revolutionary readiness to convert the critical content of theory into society-changing praxis as a result of the consummation of the mechanized production of parts.[25] The idea that Critical Theory could provide the continuity between theory and praxis by merely appealing to a certain predetermined addressee is thus abandoned, and the considerations that take its place all come down to the expectation that the conversion into praxis will be effected by precisely that rationality which the social pathology has distorted but not wholly dispossessed. In place of the proletariat, whose social situation had previously been considered the guarantor of responsiveness to the critical content of the theory, a submerged rational capacity must resurface for which all subjects in principle have the same motivational aptitude.

Admittedly, this kind of change in perspective demands an additional line of thought, for, at first glance, it is not at all clear why the motivation of critical praxis should be expected from the same rationality that according to the theory is highly deformed. In other words, how can Critical Theorists trust that they will find a necessary degree of rational readiness for the conversion into praxis if the socially practiced rationality turns out indeed to be pathologically disrupted or distorted? The answer to this question falls within an area of Critical Theory that is established on a continuum between psychoanalysis and moral psychology. Its continual task is to uncover the motivational roots that sustain the readiness for moral cognition in individual subjects despite any rational impediment. Here it is helpful to distinguish between two steps of the argument, even if Critical Theorists have not always drawn a clear distinction between them. From the fact that a deficit in social rationality leads to symptoms of a social pathology, one first infers that subjects suffer from the state of society. No individual can avoid seeing herself

as being impeded by the consequences of a deformation of reason (or being so described) because, with the loss of a rational universal, the chances of a successful self-actualization that depends on mutual cooperation are also diminished. Critical Theory undoubtedly takes Freudian psychoanalysis as its methodological model for the way in which it establishes a connection between defective rationality and individual suffering. Certainly a similar connection is already to be found in Hegel's critique of romanticism, which cannot have been without influence on the Frankfurt School; yet the impetus for bringing the category of "suffering" into connection with the very pathologies of social rationality probably finds its origin in the Freudian idea that each neurotic illness arises from an impeding of the rational ego and must lead to an individual case of stress from suffering. The methodological application of this fundamental idea of psychoanalysis to the field of social analysis is not just a theoretical move that Habermas has contributed to Critical Theory (*KHI* ch. 12). In his early essays, Horkheimer already describes social irrationality in concepts modeled on Freud's theory, insofar as they measure the degree of social pathology by the strength of the effect of the forces foreign to the ego (*BPSS* 111–28; *KT* 9–30). And everywhere Adorno speaks of individual or social suffering, one can hear overtones of the Freudian supposition that subjects must suffer under the neurotic restriction of their genuinely rational capacities. Thus one reads in *Negative Dialectics* that every suffering possesses an "inward-turning form of reflection": "the moment of the flesh proclaims the knowledge that suffering ought not be, that things should be different" (*ND* 203; *AGS* VI, 203). The deployment of this concept of suffering – which surfaces here as an instance of the experience of the interplay between spiritual and physical forces – has unfortunately remained up until now largely unexplored within the reception of Critical Theory.[26] A more precise analysis would probably show that, as with Freud, suffering expresses the feeling of not being able to endure the "loss of ego (capacities)" (*AGS* VIII, 437). From Horkheimer to Habermas, Critical Theory has been guided by the idea that the pathology of social rationality leads to cases of impedance that frequently manifest themselves in the painful experience of the loss of rational capacities. In the end, this idea comes down to the strong and frankly anthropological thesis that human subjects cannot be indifferent about the restriction of their rational

capacities. Because their self-actualization is tied to the presupposition of a cooperative rational activity, they cannot avoid suffering psychologically under its deformation. This insight – that there must be an internal connection between psychological intactness and undistorted rationality – is perhaps the strongest impetus that Freud provides for Critical Theory; every investigation that is now conducted (though with improved methods) supports it.

But it is only by taking a second step, which Critical Theory does only rather implicitly, that one can extract from this thesis a means by which the severed relations to praxis can be intellectually restored. And it is once again Freud who provides the decisive suggestion: the stress from suffering presses towards a cure by means of exactly the same rational powers whose function the pathology impedes. An assumption about what in general is to count as a self-evident condition for admission into psychoanalytic treatment also accompanies this suggestion – namely, that the individual who subjectively suffers from a neurotic illness also wants to be free from that suffering. In Critical Theory, it is not always clear whether the stress from suffering that strives towards its cure pertains only to subjective experience or also to an "objective" event. While Adorno, who speaks of suffering as a "subjective impulse," seems to have the first alternative in mind, Horkheimer frequently uses formulations in which social suffering is treated as a magnitude of feeling that is objectively attributable. In the case of Habermas, there is sufficient evidence, particularly in his *Theory of Communicative Action*, to suggest the "subjective" alternative, and one can find both alternatives at work in Marcuse.[27]

In any case, Critical Theory presupposes that this subjectively experienced or objectively attributable suffering among members of society must lead to that same desire for healing and for liberation from social evils that the analyzer must impute to her patients. Moreover, in each case the interest in one's own recovery is supposed to be documented by the readiness to reactivate, against any resistance, those rational powers that the individual or social pathology has deformed. All the thinkers belonging to the inner circle of Critical Theory expect in their addressees a latent interest in rational explanation or interpretation, since only winning back an integral rationality can satisfy the desire for liberation from suffering. It is this risky assumption that permits a different connection of

theory to praxis from the one that the Marxist tradition provides. The Critical Theorists share with their audience neither a space of common objectives nor one of political projects, but rather a space of potentially common reasons that holds the pathological present open to the possibility of transformation through rational insight. Here, as well, one must consider the differences of opinion that prevail between the individual members of the School. One can best assess them by seeing which social-psychological or anthropological assumptions substantiate the thesis that an individual responsiveness to rational arguments remains possible within any deformation of social life. Turning to Horkheimer on this point, we find the idea that the memory of emotional security from early childhood sustains the interest in overcoming that form of rationality committed to merely instrumental disposition. It remains unclear, however, how such a psychological drive is supposed to be directed at the same time towards attaining an "intact," nonreduced rational power. If we assemble Adorno's scattered reflections on the topic, there is something to be said for seeing in the "mimetic sense" (*mimetisches Gespür*) more than just an impulse to assimilate (to) the threatening object. We should also see in it the inexhaustible remnant of a desire to grasp the other intellectually in a way which leaves the other its singular existence.[28] We can find such characterizations in Marcuse, as is well known, in a theory that involves erotic impulses of a life-drive whose aesthetic actualization requires a "conscious effort of free rationality" (*EC* 204). It has been frequently asked of this project, however, whether it sufficiently guarantees an expanded concept of social rationality.[29] Finally, Habermas had originally assumed in his version of an anthropology of knowledge of the human species an "emancipatory interest" that focuses on the experience of a discourse praxis that is structurally present in a state of noncoercion and equality (*KHI* ch. 3). This early conception has since given way to a theory of discourse that no longer makes anthropological claims, yet retains an assumption that the praxis of argumentative discourse always allows the individual to be responsive to better reasons (*TJ* 277–92). All of these reflections present answers to the question of what the experiences, practices, or needs are that allow an interest in full rational realization to continue to exist in human beings despite the deformation or skewing of social rationality. Only so long as the theory can count upon such a rational impulse for its grounding will

it be able to relate itself reflexively to a potential praxis in which the explanation it offers is implemented with a view to the liberation from suffering. Critical Theory will only be able to continue in the form in which it has developed from Horkheimer to Habermas if it does not forsake the proof of such interests. Without a realistic concept of "emancipatory interest" that puts at its center the idea of an indestructible core of rational responsiveness on the part of subjects, this Critical project will have no future.

With this last thought, the development of the motifs that constitute the core content of the legacy of Critical Theory has reached a matter-of-fact conclusion. The sequence of systematic ideas developed above forms a unity from which no individual component can be omitted without consequences. So long as we do not abandon the aim of understanding Critical Theory as a form of reflection belonging to an historically effective reason, it will not be easy to give up the normative motif of a rational universal, the idea of a social pathology of reason, and the concept of emancipatory interest. Yet it is also apparent that none of these three components of thought can still be maintained today in the theoretical form in which the members of the Frankfurt School originally developed it. All require conceptual reformulation and the mediation of the present state of our knowledge if they are still to fulfill the function that was once intended for them. That said, the field of tasks is outlined – tasks which are now left to the heirs of Critical Theory in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

This chapter was translated from the German by James Hebbeler.

1. Jürgen Habermas, "Nach Dreißig Jahren: Bemerkungen zu *Erkenntnis und Interesse*," in *Das Interesse der Vernunft*, ed. S. Müller-Doohm (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), p. 12.
2. For an exemplary work of social criticism in Foucault's sense, see James Tully, "Political Philosophy as Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30 (2002): 533–55. On Michael Walzer, see his Tanner Lectures, published as *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987). I have attempted to develop a criticism of this model of social criticism in my "Idiosynkrasie als Erkenntnismittel.

Gesellschaftskritik im Zeitalter des normalisierten Intellektuellen," in *Der kritische Blick*, ed. U. J. Wenzel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002), pp. 61–79.

3. On the concept of "negativity," and above all on the distinction between content-centered and methodological negativism, see Michael Theunissen, *Das Selbst auf dem Grund der Verzweiflung: Kierkegaards negativistische Methode* (Berlin: Hain, 1999) and his "Negativität bei Adorno," in *Adorno-Konferenz 1983*, ed. L. von Friedeburg and J. Habermas (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), pp. 41–65.
4. On the distinction between the center and the periphery of Critical Theory, see my "Critical Theory," in *Social Theory Today*, ed. A. Giddens and J. Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 347–82.
5. On this distinction, see my "Pathologien des Sozialen. Tradition und Aktualität der Sozialphilosophie," in *Das Andere der Gerechtigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), pp. 11–87.
6. See my *Leiden an Unbestimmtheit. Eine Reaktualisierung der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001); Michael Theunissen, *Selbstverwirklichung und Allgemeinheit. Zur Kritik des gegenwärtigen Bewusstseins* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1982).
7. See also Maeve Cook, *Language and Reason: A Study of Habermas's Pragmatics* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), especially ch. 5.
8. The aim of proceduralizing the Hegelian idea of a rational universal is especially clear in Habermas, "On Social Identity," *Telos* 19 (1974): 91–103.
9. It is this ethical perspective that I think presents a certain point of contact between Critical Theory and American pragmatism. As the reactions to pragmatism of the first generation essentially range from skepticism to outright disapproval, it is all the more astonishing that it is only with Habermas that a productive reception of pragmatism sets in. On the history of its reception, see Hans Joas, "An Underestimated Alternative: America and the Limits of 'Critical Theory,'" in *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), pp. 79–93.
10. On this motif, see Martin Steel, "Adornos kontemplative Ethik. Philosophie. Eine Kolumne," *Merkur* 638 (2002): 512ff.
11. On communitarianism, see generally *Kommunitarianismus. Eine Debatte über die moralischen Grundlagen moderner Gesellschaften*, ed. A. Honneth (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1993).
12. Marx, *Capital I*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. R. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 319–29. For an excellent analysis, see Georg Lohmann, *Indifferenz und Gesellschaft. Eine kritische*

Auseinandersetzung mit Marx (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 1991), especially ch. 5.

13. Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in his *History and Class Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 83–221. On the significance of the Lukácsian analysis of reification for early Critical Theory, see *TCA* I, ch. 6.
14. See my *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), ch. 1.
15. See Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *La Reproduction: éléments d'une théorie du système d'enseignement* (Paris: Minuit, 1970).
16. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 90–1.
17. See my "Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition,'" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplement (2001): 111–26.
18. Horkheimer develops the same motif with unmistakable religious undertones in his "Die verwaltete Welt kennt keine Liebe, Gespräch mit Janko Muselin," in *HGS* VII, 358–67.
19. See also Johànn Arnason, *Von Marcuse zu Marx* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), especially ch. 5.
20. See, for example, Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), pp. 196ff.
21. Of significance in this connection are Wilhelm Hennis, *Max Webers Fragestellung* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1987) and Cornelius Castoriadis, *Gesellschaft als imaginäre Institution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984). For a more recent study, see Luc Boltanski and Eva Chiapello, *Le Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).
22. Exemplary in this connection is Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), chs. 2–4.
23. See also Karl Löwith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche: The Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Thought*, trans. D. Green (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pt. 1, ch. 2.
24. See Erich Fromm, *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, trans. B. Weinberger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
25. See Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. B. Gregg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), pt. A, ch. 5.
26. For an exception to this generalization, see Josef Früchtl, *Mimesis. Konstellation eines Zentralbegriffs bei Adorno* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1986), ch. 3.2.

27. See, for example, the reflections on Marx in Habermas, *TCA* II, ch. 8. Habermas wavers here, however, between a life-world use and a merely functional use of the idea of a social pathology.
28. See Früchtl, *Mimesis*, ch. 5.3.
29. See *Gespräche mit Herbert Marcuse*, ed. J. Habermas, S. Bovenschen, *et al.* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).