

## Review Essay

# Critical Theory and Social Justice

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**Honneth, A. (2009). *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*.** Columbia University Press. ISBN 978-0-231-14626-5 (Hardcover)

This book is welcome and needed; I highly recommend it to all those interested in social justice. It offers a sophisticated, exceptionally well-crafted answer to a highly pertinent question: what social scientific criteria are there for making normative judgments about why and how Western civilization should change? To stress “social science” means a commitment to thinking about what is concretely happening in the world and why as opposed to drawing on pre-given axioms as the basis for social criticism (e.g., human rights as an axiom, greater inclusion as an axiom, etc.). Honneth carefully explicates how the normative dimensions of doing Critical Theory (and hence a normative justification for an explanatory science of social totalities) have themselves been developed by the self-reflexive immanent critique of critical thought since Kant. At the same time, theoretical critique provides an ontology for justifying the normative dimension of a research program, which is then extended to the practical goal of arguing for why, and how we should change the world. This is a book then, in which social scientists, whether they identify as “Critical Theorists” or not, will find themselves having to think through the old (but not passé) challenges of the ontological linkage between the “is” and the “ought”; between “fact” and “value”; freedom and determinism; history and politics. In this regard, the book functions as an explication of the metatheoretical commitments (and their supporting arguments) of a Critical Theoretic approach to social justice.

The book is a timely reminder of the pertinence of this kind of theoretical work not least because of the relatively marginal status of Critical Theory in contemporary English speaking social science. Indeed, as Honneth puts it “Critical Theory appears to have become an intellectual artifact” (p. 19). A caveat should be added here: Žižek’s work has had a significant impact on contemporary critical social analysis, much indebted to Critical Theory. However, it is less likely to be classified as such since his main reference point is Lacan, even if he shares a left-Hegelianism with Critical Theory. An important consequence of this marginalization has been the difficulty of generating normative arguments for the task of social science and the

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parallel development of a prevalent form of social criticism “that does without sociological explanation” (p. 29). There has been a marked contemporary tendency to assume that inequality generates undesirable social outcomes without offering a clear justification of what counts as desirable, thus unwittingly endorsing already existing dominant conceptions. In a similar way, it is assumed that more inclusive social institutions are also desirable without, again, the examination of the questions of “include in what?” and crucially, in Nietzschean terms, “for what?” A further assumed criteria for making normative negative assessments of the present concerns the analysis and description of localized types of domination with the implicit proviso that “domination” is undesirable and hence, in as much as we can identify how dominations work, we should resist, challenge and struggle against them but without offering a program of how and why this should be done, or the program of viable and desirable alternative forms of social organization. This, however, is a non sequitur. A fourth type of critical advocacy excavates the criteria by which institutions and social programs claim that they should be judged, showing where they fall short and then suggesting how and why those objectives (or broader, more abstract and general norms active within a society) can be better met by adopting some changes. A main consequence of these approaches though is that they bracket why we should identify dominations (be it in the form of economic exploitation or varieties of exclusion, for example), and struggle for their abolition. An important legacy of Critical Theory is that it has avoided these pitfalls. Since the 1960’s, Critical Theory played a significant role in challenging both positivist and structural-functionalist accounts of theoretical work and accounts of how societies, as totalities, worked. In doing so, it placed the role of reflexivity in all facets of social science and a rejection of the “micro-macro” dichotomy as a false one, firmly on the table. It is important to keep in mind that much of the impetus in the original development of Critical Theory was a concern with the circumstance that when faced with increased misery and exploitation in the 1930s, the masses decided to side with a racialized aristocracy rather than with the oppressed class (Neocleous, 1997, p. 41). Reich put the issue clearly when he posed the question about how the masses come to desire the conditions of their own domination and repression (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1994), surely a pertinent issue today in the current crises facing capitalist societies.

The central aim of the book is to explicate and defend the project of Critical Theory as pertinent to the present and the future. It does so by attending to conceptions of the link between normative claims and explanatory social science as found in Kant, Adorno, Benjamin, Freud, Franz Neumann, Alexander Mitscherlich, and Albrecht Wellmer; as well as providing a compelling critique of Michael Walzer. The task of Critical Theory involves explaining how social conditions impede a rational understanding of the causes of the distortions of reason that in turn undermine the use of reason in democratic will-formation and hence also, to the concrete means for transforming dominations from which stem distortions of reason. Consequently, the possibilities for emancipation from those dominations are blocked. Reason is held to be an inherent capacity of all humans, but defined precisely as the capacity of self-reflection and self-critique that drives people to improve their lives, their conditions, and indeed become freer. Pathologies of reason include capitalism and the pervasiveness of instrumental rationality (i.e., means-ends thinking, in which everything, including human life, becomes only a means to an end, reducing human

subjectivity to mere objectivity). Structural dominations undermine the resources for appealing to reason when advocating for transforming the conditions that impede freedom (and with it, the free use of reason). With a rational appeal for freedom impeded, the legitimacy of emancipatory political projects also takes a blow. Chapter 2 and the Appendix powerfully distill these main features of Critical Theory. Readers interested expressly in social justice will find Chapter 2 (“A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory”) and the Appendix, “Idiosyncrasy as a Tool of Knowledge: Social Criticism in the Age of the Normalized Intellectual,” particularly stimulating. Both clearly explicate the methodological protocols of Critical Theory.

### **Chapter Overview**

The opening chapter is a surprise. While it appears somewhat scholastic, it offers the compelling argument that one finds in Kant the theoretical resources for stating that norms are matters to be struggled over and for, in the practical working out of life. Thus, in contrast to the usual argument that normative judgments are to be deferred to universal criteria (and universalizing procedures), the normative sphere, rather, is understood to be one of pragmatics and hence deferential to the existing state of affairs of having to get on in the world through the use of reason. The promise of the Enlightenment, even in Kant and anticipating Habermas, thus lies in a “conflict-ridden learning process” (p. 18) that compels the progress of practical reason toward increasing freedom, a freedom that is not inevitable, but is fought for. In doing so, Honneth finds a way to recuperate facets of Kant (liberal rationalist par excellence) for Critical Theory.

Chapter 2 offers a succinct explication of the salient features of Critical Theory. Significant here is the emphasis on sociological explanations of the pathologies of reason under capitalism that while blocking the use of reason in emancipatory politics, they do not eradicate it. Hence reason remains a potential that can be drawn upon. The metatheoretical grounds of Critical Theory as pertains to social justice are well expressed as follows:

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 their being accepted. 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 (p. 30).

Meeting the requirements of this task involves the careful empirical study of how the universal capacity to reason is concretely practiced in the modern world and

pathologically deformed by capitalism (p. 24). Crucially, the normative dimension of Critical Theory must also explain the lack of public reaction to injustice, thus blocking emancipatory projects (pp. 20, 29). The source of optimism about social justice is argued to rest in “a space of potentially common reasons that holds the pathological present open to the possibility of transformation through rational insight” (p. 40).

Chapter 3, “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of ‘Critique’ in the Frankfurt School” elaborates on the protocols of holistic social research discussed in Chapter 2. The genealogical proviso provides methodological protection against functionalism when theorizing the constitution of societal totalities. In doing so, Honneth theorizes the place from which meaningful theoretical critique beyond the alternatives of appearing too radical and thus denouncing the present (risking being ignored) or too removed because of the remoteness of the questions and methods of Critical Theory. The solution to this dilemma is stated as follows: “The critique of society can be based on ideals within the given social order that at the same time can justifiably be shown to be the expression of progress in the process of social rationalization” (p. 51). What genealogy does is trace how the initial, intended designs of practices and institutions (“the real context of application of moral norms” p. 52) are later taken up and put to different uses because of societal conditions that make this possible. This is what produces the unintended consequences of effective reason (cf. p. 187).

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with Adorno. Chapter 4 “A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life: A Sketch of Adorno’s Social Theory” provides a corrective to what might be taken as being the overly rationalist, intellectualizing focus of Critical Theory. Adorno’s approach rests in “determining the figures of action and consciousness” (p. 55) such that social life becomes reified and largely incomprehensible rather than something subject to history and reason. Adorno’s main methodological reference point is argued to be a modified Weberianism focused on “a materialist hermeneutic of the capitalist form of life” (p. 59). It draws upon a phenomenology of how cognitive constructs impact bodies, exaggerating its features in theoretical explication, especially as concerns the experience of physical suffering. This is crucial because it runs contrary to the centrality of loving care experienced in infancy (apprehensible through psychoanalysis), the remnant of which “tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different” (p. 69). Indeed, that child development occurs through the imitation of loved ones provides the normative ontological basis for intersubjectively understanding one’s own suffering and the suffering of others, hence opening the door to decentring the pervasive pathological egoism of a world dominated by capitalism and instrumental reason.

Chapter 5, “Performing Justice: Adorno’s Introduction to Negative Dialectics” continues this explication of Adorno, focusing more intently on methodology. Negative dialectics is presented as an alternative to the rationalism of both the Hegelian and Marxian traditions. The aim is not to “rationally penetrate the world” (p. 77) but rather hinges on a phenomenological immersion into a social reality that is always held to exist prior and external to knowers: social reality can never be completely transformed into its corresponding thought object. Hence “identity-thinking” (i.e., Hegelian correspondence truth criteria) is a ruse. Adorno’s technique

provides a further indication of how he modifies Weber's Ideal-Type method in his own conception of developing "models," the adequacy of which can only be developed through the application of a phenomenological immersion that exactly challenges our preconceptions, spurring self-reflection and self-critique. Its aim "is to show exemplarily in particular cases to what extent the conceptual determinations of central ideas of the philosophical tradition do not do justice to the intended state of affairs because they deny their origin" (p. 87). This is shown to be the meaning of Adorno's trope of "doing justice to" social reality. Indeed, the loss of the belief in the sovereignty of one's reason is itself liberating. Striking in this chapter are potential resonances with both Althusser's materialist epistemology (cf. Jameson, 2007, p. 60) and the radical Durkheimian phenomenology of Georges Bataille, both of which are typically taken to be antithetical to Critical Theory.

Chapter 6, "Saving The Sacred With a Philosophy of History: On Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence' is a careful explication of Benjamin's theoretical logic. Crucial here is the aim to find a means of thinking about existence that is not subjected to instrumentality i.e. is "sovereign." With this is associated a strong conception of politics as a radically discontinuous moment in history, "an experience that abruptly interrupts the continuity of social life by making something hitherto unknown appear" (p. 91). In short, Benjamin's optimism is placed in politics. This valorization of politics also required a radicalization of Kantian critique by attending to the dominant standards of an historical epoch. Thus, a philosophy of history is necessary for escaping the trap of doing a critique of values only from within the terms of the set of standards given in the present. In the modern world, law is held to legitimize and facilitate instrumental rationality, backed by the "law-preserving or 'administrative' violence" (p. 112) of the state that cannot find legitimate justification within the terms of law itself. Crucially, law is disarticulated from justice, which for Benjamin is to be based on already existing forms of voluntary altruism and intersubjectivity in social life that potentially fuels popular moral outrage. This is then contrasted with "law-making or executive violence" (p. 108) as found, for instance, in general strikes. For Benjamin, justice can only be achieved beyond law, in sacral revolutionary form that immediately produces justice through the performance of violence against state law that pervades the whole of social life. The chapter also includes a useful discussion of war, violence and their effects on law.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9 are more psychoanalytic in nature, exploring respectively Freud's conception of freedom, Franz Neumann's analysis of how political justice is affected by anxiety, and Alexander Mitscherlich's consideration of the subjective conditions necessary to democracy. At the same time, they also offer the reader more of Honneth's own work, especially as pertains to his understanding of anxiety. Chapter 7 draws attention to the Freudian decentring of rationality, consciousness and ego by repression. The point of psychoanalysis is to show that the ruptures in consciousness can be overcome "through [the ego's] own reflective activity" (p. 127). The loving care that has been experienced in infancy provides a memory of the possibility of non-pathological intersubjectivity, and with it, a desire for it. This remnant provides the fuel for the use of reasoned discourse about blockages and impasses surrounding human fulfillment as a consequence of dominations and anxieties.

Chapter 8 covers Neumann's contribution to theorizing how anxiety impedes democratic engagement. As Honneth states, "it appears to me extremely useful to follow Neumann in trying to understand neurotically intensified mass anxieties as a kind of social pathology that can profoundly interfere with the individual's ability to participate in democratic will-formation. In order to autonomously form an opinion and be able to articulate it publicly, freedom from anxiety is indispensable, since anxiety impairs self-esteem, limits deliberative powers, and allows ego-estranging idol-substitution" (p. 154). In short, the absence of secure intersubjective relationships blocks the formation of subjects able to freely and democratically engage in the public sphere. Chapter 9 on Mitscherlich discusses parallel themes but along more positive lines. The subjective conditions of democracy and tolerance are argued to have an origin in an individual's capacities to deal with what is "other" or "alien" within themselves through a process of articulation. In short, one cannot be truly tolerant of difference without being able to first do so with oneself.

For those interested in possible lines of theoretical compatibility between Critical Theory and poststructuralism, the discussion of Wellmer in Chapter 10 will prove a stimulus. Wellmer's approach stems from his attentiveness to "objective contradictions" (p. 167) accompanied by a Habermas-inspired conception of critical theory "understood as a mode of reflection of the universal claim to maturity inherent in the structures of the human practice of reaching understanding" (pp. 168-9). This in turn displaces the Marxian stress on the critique of political economy onto a theory aiming to find emancipatory potentials in communicative intersubjectivity. At the same time though, Wellmer is far less of a rationalist than Habermas because of his attention to the role played by art and aesthetics. Echoing Adorno and having significant parallels with Bataille and Foucault, Wellmer advocates for an "aesthetic radicalization of the idea of modern freedom" including a "right of freedom to unreason" grounded in "transgressive experience" (p. 174). His work is argued to exemplify the commitment of Critical Theory to democracy, both substantively as "constitutionally guaranteed procedures but also as the embodiment of a whole form of life" (p. 176). In sum, Wellmer's work attends to domains beyond the limits of communicative reason, i.e., "the aesthetic conduct of life and the always unavoidable decisions in politics and law" (p. 176). In doing so, Wellmer envisages a "democratic ethical life" appropriate to the contemporary world, "in which citizens orient themselves to democratic principles from habit and with heart, where they would not be convinced solely through rational arguments" (p. 176). Wellmer's work then is suggestive of further research to be done in the tradition of Critical Theory.

The appendix consists of a sharp and focused critique of Walzer, showing how Critical Theory offers a needed alternative to the version of social criticism advocated by Walzer. In doing so, Honneth provides a comprehensive outline of the central theoretical and methodological tenets of Critical Theory. In my view, this chapter itself justifies reading the book. Crucial here is the role of the intellectual, perhaps best formulated as the difference between the "intellectual/expert" and the "social critic." For Honneth, we live in a world of experts, who as a matter of course find their place in the public sphere in commenting on "day-to-day politics," leading to a circumstance in which the role of this type of "intellectual" becomes normalized (p. 181). The cost though has been a failure to reflect upon, challenge, and question "the cultural or social mechanisms that establish the conditions of acceptance for

position in public debate” (p. 183). Honneth correctly stresses the role that holistic and genealogically oriented explanations must play if single-issue interventions by experts are to be avoided (p. 185). It is at this point that the political (and radical) character of social criticism comes to the fore. The point is not to articulate positions or policy proposals likely to be immediately successful (because they are palatable and premised on the already existing normative consensus in the public sphere). Rather, “social criticism does not aim at rapid success in the democratic exchange of opinions but at the distant effect of gradually growing doubt about whether given models of practice or schemas of needs are in fact appropriate (for us). It is paid in the coin not of momentary argumentative convincingness but in justified reorientation in future processes” (p. 188). Honneth’s explication of the legacy of Critical Theory, thus offers a distillation of what is at stake in this style of theorizing. Does it hold up?

### **Discussion: Marxism, Critical Realism and Foucault**

While the justification for Critical Theory appears to rest in the last instance on the possibility of rational cognition (an appeal to reason), this is in contrast to the Marxian justification as concerns the extent to which real-concrete contradictions undermine the capacity of social formations to reproduce themselves (well evinced in the current crisis of capital accumulation): both investment banker and auto-worker have had their capacities to reproduce themselves (as occupational categories, which if occupied, generate incomes necessary for subsistence) are undone precisely by doing their jobs well, as pertains to performance criteria. In this respect, while a materialist conception of history remains a guiding thread, Marxian political economy does appear rather marginal to the defence of the legacy of Critical Theory. At the same time though, Honneth’s elaboration of the metatheoretical foundations and methodology of Critical Theory provides less a means of broadening what a materialist approach to history must include (although it does this) and more an ontological grounding for a communist norm as, “an ethical idea that places the utmost value on a form of common practice in which subjects can achieve cooperative self-actualization” (p. 26), the possibility of which is a consequence of a universal constitution of human (social) subjectivity, derived from Kant (cf. Sixel, 1995, p. 5). Crucially then, the legacy of Critical Theory is one that challenges the view that normative arguments for radical societal transformation are based on moralism, common ground shared with Marxism (cf. Collier, 2008, pp. 152ff).

The normative justification for a sophisticated, non-reductionist explanatory social science found in Critical Theory also anticipates what has been more recently formulated as “explanatory critique” in Critical Realism (led by Roy Bhaskar). In Bhaskar’s formulation, “inasmuch as we can explain, that is show the (perhaps contingent) necessity for some determinate false consciousness, or perhaps just some determinate consciousness under the determinable false, then the inferences to a negative evaluation of its source(s) and a positive evaluation of action oriented towards their dissolution are *ceteris paribus* mandatory” (Bhaskar, 1989, p.101; cf. Sayer 2007). Honneth’s version of Critical Theory though, does better than Bhaskar on several fronts. First, its sociology is better and actually substantively oriented and governed, rather than being based on arguments for the limited postulates necessary

to doing the philosophical underlabour for emancipatory social science (Bhaskar's aim). Second, the commitment to psychoanalytic conceptions of the constitution of personhood and psychic life, deemed by them the most sophisticated conception of subjective formation available (with which I concur), protects Critical Theory from devolving into the individualism of the Transformation Model of Social Activity, derived from Winch and Giddens (Bhaskar, 1989). Moreover, in demonstrating the variety of methods with which Critical Theory works, drawing from sociology, political economy, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, history and philosophy, Critical Theory has advanced and applied a better developed sense of the need for, and use of, pluralist methods within a unified methodology, in contrast to the restricted focus on the philosophy of social science. That said, Bhaskar's significant critique of the positivist versus humanist debate in the philosophy of science is something that should be taken seriously by Critical Theory not least since Critical Theory unwittingly accepts the positivist account of science, typically leading it to an untenable epistemological conventionalism.

Arguably, the main rival to Critical Theory is Foucault. At the same time, Foucault's work is a kind "Critical Theory" minus its humanist theoretical anthropology, derived from the psychoanalytic critique of Kant's conception of subjectivity and its dependence on rationality, a position from which Foucault explicitly distanced himself (Foucault, 2003c). Even here though, we should be wary of over-stating the case. As Foucault argues, "Thought does exist, both beyond and before systems and edifices of discourse. It is something that is often hidden but always drives everyday behaviors. There is always a little thought occurring even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits" (Foucault, 2003a, p. 172). Thought then, appears to be a universal condition of sociality. Foucault himself identified with Kantian critique (2003b) and Critical Theory and Foucault's work share genealogical sensibilities as concerns unintended consequences, e.g., prisons produce delinquents, not disciplined, productive citizens (Honneth, 2009, p. 48). Both, too, are concerned to analyse actualizations of effective reason. The bone of contention hinges on the question of "emancipate what?" If we take Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis in *The History of Sexuality* (1994) seriously, and by extension, the methodological power of his nominalism, which I think we should, then we cannot assume the existence of a non-social substrate of human existence (i.e., the inherent rationality of human cognitive faculties that makes it possible for us to think, and in thinking, free ourselves from natural and social constraints), that, under conditions of social justice, would allow us to use our reason more freely, precisely in the interest of our freedom from domination. To return to the previous quote, "thought" is a property of institutions (a social domain), not of thinking persons. Indeed, the Foucauldian point is that it is precisely the *savoirs* of the human sciences, and their reliance on small, but pervasive exercises of domination, that has made possible such a conception of human reason and subjectivity. In this regard, the Rousseauan traces in Critical Theory are a major stumbling block since dependent on affect and sympathy as the basic precondition of sociality and ground of normative judgments. This position is untenable in Foucauldian terms, and Durkheimian ones too, given his critique of both Kant's and Rousseau's romanticism, since they are ultimately dependent on a psychologistic assertion about human nature that cannot be substantiated empirically



(i.e., sociologically) (Durkheim, 1964). In Foucauldian terms, the normative criterion of Critical Theory is the product of the material and practical power-knowledge dominance of the human sciences, hence undesirable as a means of escape.

Badiou's work (2001), somewhat differently, also challenges the humanism inherent to Critical Theory because it is tied to the notion of human suffering (cf. Honneth, 2009, pp. 36, 38, 69). For Badiou this ethical turn, especially as evinced in the focus on human rights, is based on the notion that what is deemed "good" means the absence of suffering. However, what he rejects is the premise that humans in this respect need to be viewed as victims "because the status of victim, of suffering beast, of emaciated, dying body, equates man with his animal substructure, it reduces him to the level of a living organism pure and simple" (Badiou, 2001, p. 11) and thus is actually based on an anti-humanism. Thus, it is the humanist progressives' advocacy of human rights that end up denying the human agency that they champion against structuralists and poststructuralist anti-humanists. Whether or not Critical Theory can marshal a reply to this challenge remains to be seen.

Yet, in what may come as a surprise to many, it is precisely on the practical normative front that Foucault and Critical Theory share some ground. This is especially so when it comes to Foucault's displacement of legal-political judgments (an archaism belonging to the diagram of sovereignty and the monarchy) by aesthetic ones as found in his optimism about and endorsement of "arts of existence," meaning the practices in and through which individuals problematize what they are (and are not) and make themselves an object and project of transformation, involving the care of themselves and others (Foucault, 1986, pp. 14-32). Indeed, ethics is a practice constitutive of "the self." The normative rule then, is to "transform yourself" (Foucault, 1996a, p. 130; 1996b), in a manner not beholden to the discourses of reason and the human sciences but in a manner more akin to avant-garde art. Adorno's and Wellmer's positions are compatible with Foucault in this respect.

These alternatives to Critical Theory, strictly speaking, warrant the kind of explication and defence offered by Honneth. I attempt my own distillation of its theoretical logic as concerns the making of normative judgments grounded in explanatory social science. The appeal that is made is to the partial capacity of human reason, not as a static capacity for making ordered, coherent sense of the world and one's place in it, but as a drive, a spontaneous will worked out in everyday activities, to try and confront and resolve those things that cause human misery and suffering: "human subjects cannot be indifferent about the restriction of their rational capacities. Because their self-actualization is tied to the presupposition of cooperative rational activity, they cannot avoid suffering psychologically under its deformation" (p.39). This position, deriving from Kant's critique of empiricism and his specific form of rationalism, remains important. Our immersion in the world does not immediately give us access to the truth of the world. There is an a priori active agency in human beings—the intelligence—that spontaneously organizes and makes sense of the massive welter of stimuli that comes to us from the world as it is in itself, organizing it such that we feel at home in the world we perceive and experience. Reason is thus always active and exists as this activity. It then becomes a matter of what we do with effective reason. Crucially, while perception is already organized sense, this is not the same as "understanding." This was the Enlightenment challenge that Kant advocated: the maturity of the Enlightenment, tied to its project, is to use one's capacity to reason in order to perpetuate and further make reasoned

(as opposed to dogmatic) sense of the world. At the same time, this alone is insufficient to change the world. Thus, Critical Theory is not a rationalism or intellectualism. This is because Critical Theorists fully recognize that material institutional forms and resources must be made available to actualize this potential to reason. Furthermore, while this capacity for reasoning is held to exist in all human subjects, it will not, left to its own devices, spontaneously make sense. We make sense of the world and hence use the capacity to reason only in a substantive way drawing on historically available discursive resources, materials that one may adopt “as is,” or that one may use as raw materials. Hence the importance of the Hegelian form of immanent critique, self-reflection and self-critique: theoretical work and its inherently historical character is an inescapable terrain for making better substantive sense of the world and our place in it. As Habermas stresses, argumentative reason “always allows the individual to be responsive to better reasons” (p. 41). The power of reason in socio-historical conditions (that make it possible for only some to realize their dreams and schemes), is unwittingly affirmed in the circumstance that unintended consequences stem from intentional processes—reason was at work, but in limited, incomplete and often distorted form. Even still, these two conditions, the capacity to reason and forms of democratic organization facilitated by reasoned argument, are insufficient. The third component, providing the impetus for the other two, is love. A romanticism, drawn from Rousseau (as found in Adorno for instance) and developed by recourse to psychoanalysis, refers to a catalyst for the creation of the other two. In this respect, without love, the goal of democracy cannot resonate.

In sum, the case for a Critical Theoretical approach to social justice, as presented by Honneth, goes something like this: the capacity for human reason is a real potential inherent in human beings, in part actualized in the spontaneous perception of the world and the affective (emotional) and corporeal experience of it. A fuller actualization of reason, crucially that of understanding the causes of experience, is possible through the combined effect of the critical inspection of dominant discourses (to explain how and why they are inadequate to understanding the world, plus an explanation of the structure of societies such that they become dominant) and democratic forms of social organization fostered through procedures that require intersubjective understanding governed by reasoned arguments that at once are the practical justification of the results of Critical Theory, while at the same time providing further grounds for realizing the emancipatory promise elaborated and defended by Critical Theory. The impetus of the use of reason finds its constitutive ontological ground in the experience of loving care, generating a hope and a drive for the social conditions of real self-actualization. This fuels the confrontation with what hinders this under the domination of capitalism, instrumental reason and the possibility of the Critical Theoretic explanations of current obstacles and suggestions about means of overcoming these obstacles. Critical Theory, as presented by Honneth, has lost none of its provocativeness. Perhaps it can be summarized as something of a scandal, namely, the future identity of love and political violence: the first is the constitutive impetus for, and ontological ground of, social justice, potentially actualized in law-making political violence, paving the way for the expansion of the first again in democratic social organization.

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