

## Critique Today: Critical Theory, Social Hope, and Global Power

In one of the final texts written before this death, an essay devoted to Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?", Michel Foucault defined the ethos of modernity as a "permanent critique of ourselves".<sup>1</sup> By this Foucault meant a critical social ontology, an attitude of critical experimentation with the established limits of knowledge and social practice. Such a model of critique, Foucault argued, must be understood as an ethos, a "historico-practical test of the limits we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings".<sup>2</sup> The later Foucault's qualified affiliation with the critical Enlightenment tradition can be fruitfully compared with the model of philosophical and social critique developed within the critical theory tradition. According to latter, a critical theory of society not only diagnoses the pathologies of modernity, reflecting upon the experience of injustice motivating social movements, but also attempts to offer a positive alternative to prevailing forms of social domination and political injustice. The challenge for critical theory today, as Axel Honneth remarks, concerns "the question of how we are to obtain the conceptual framework for an analysis which is capable both of coming to grips with the structure of social domination as well as with identifying the social resources for its practical transformation".<sup>3</sup> Such a model of critique implies a diagnosis of the present, an unmasking of the operations of power, an exposure of the disturbing proximity between instrumental rationality and social domination. Not only for Foucault and Adorno, but for Honneth as well, as Jean-Philippe Deranty argues in his paper, the point of a critique of rationality is to expose the subtle complicity between reason, power, and "the infliction of violence upon the human body".<sup>4</sup>

These aims, of course, are very demanding, particularly in light of recent historical and political events. The profound upheavals in global politics in recent years, and burgeoning discussions of the "ethical turn" in contemporary social philosophy, prompt a number of questions explored in the following collection of essays. What is the status of philosophical and social critique today? What forms of critical dialogue are possible between French post-structuralist and critical theory traditions? How can philosophy today most effectively submit our social-historical actuality—our "today"—to critique? The essays collected together in this volume address these and other questions by engaging in a philosophical confrontation with different aspects of our contemporary social and historical actuality. They are all contributions to the ongoing critical reflection on the history and the legacy, the defects and the possibilities, of the variegated currents of the critical Enlightenment project. At the same time, all of the essays included here are informed by an acute sense of the challenges facing critical theory and social philosophy today. They respond to this challenge not by retreating from the possibility of a critical theory of society, nor by finding refuge in ethics as a substitute for social and political philosophy, but by fostering a productive engagement with different philosophical traditions in order to contribute to a "critical ontology of ourselves".

*Critique Today* is an attempt to reflect upon and explore these issues, to show the pertinence of a transfigured conception of philosophical and social critique for confronting some of the historical events and forms of social experience that demand our philosophical reflection. A number of themes recur throughout these essays: the ongoing

dialogue between critical theory and post-structuralism, the productive appropriation of German and French traditions of thought, the relationship between philosophy and social theory, and the prospects for a critical engagement with modernity in light of global political transformations. The latter theme is explored in Genevieve Lloyd's opening paper, which examines the fascinating Derrida/Habermas debate over terrorism, the Enlightenment, and globalisation from the perspective of the secularisation of the historical theme of providence. Particular issues are explored in depth, often with fortuitous resonances between different essays: the importance of social hope for critical theory (the papers by Nicholas Smith, Craig Browne, and Shane O'Neill); critical engagements with Habermas' social and political philosophy (John Grumley, Pauline Johnson, and Emmanuel Renault); explorations of Hegelian theories of subjectivity and Honneth's theory of recognition in connection with recent French philosophy (Simon Lumsden, Paul Redding, Jean-Philippe Deranty); critical interpretations of Foucaultian and Agambenian analyses of biopower and rights (Robert Sinnerbrink and Paul Patton). Taken together, these essays provide a rich cross-section of the dynamic convergences and divergences in recent social philosophy. They reflect some of the vibrant interest in critical theory outside of the more traditional locations of Germany, England, and the United States, notably in Australia, Ireland, and France. In this respect they contribute a welcome perspective on the increasingly cosmopolitan debates within critical social philosophy.

### **Nick section Critique, September 11, and hope**

According to a familiar model, critique involves the determination of rational standards of evaluation and the application of those standards to given modes of thought and practice. The main task for social philosophy, on this view, is first to clarify and justify the standards by which societies ought to be criticised, and then to apply these principles to the basic institutions of society. In this way, the validity or otherwise of a particular institution, or a basic social structure, can be subject to 'critique'. For instance, institutionalised discrimination on the basis of race, gender or religious identity can be 'critiqued' for falling short of a principle of equal freedom (or equal dignity) justified by philosophical analysis. To give another example, a basic social structure that gives rise to massive economic inequalities can be 'critiqued' by appeal to a philosophically well-grounded principle of just distribution.<sup>5</sup> In both these cases, the meaning of the object of critique – social discrimination and economic inequality – is relatively uncontroversial: one needn't be a philosopher or a social theorist to understand it. For the sake of this mode of critique at least, the empirical meaning of the object -- say, sexism, racism, and poverty -- is clear, though of course the details and extent of its occurrence are a matter for empirical investigation. What 'critique' brings to empirical social science, on this model, is a reflexively redeemable norm (or series of norms) against which the validity of a given social practice can be assessed.

Several of the articles that follow work within this framework for critique and make important contributions to its development. But the volume begins with an essay by Genevieve Lloyd that articulates an alternative (though not necessarily competing) conception of the tasks of critique. According to this conception, critique aims not so much at the justification and application of norms, nor even the diagnosis of social

pathologies. Rather, as Lloyd makes clear, it takes its departure from the occurrence of a particular historical event whose very meaning is in question. And there are certain events whose meaning is so problematic, Lloyd contends, that they seem to go beyond the limits of intelligibility. These are events in which the 'impossible' happens; and in happening, they can force observers to reconsider their most basic assumptions about themselves and the world. The terrible events of November 1, 1755, the day of the Lisbon earthquake, provoked such philosophical reflection, as did the discovery of the unspeakable horrors of 'Auschwitz'.<sup>6</sup> According to Lloyd, 'September 11' signifies an event of comparable unintelligibility, in so far as it too elicits a 'mind-numbing incomprehension' which throws into question fundamental, for the most part unnoticed features of our self-interpretive scheme. Drawing on Habermas's and Derrida's reflections on the philosophical significance of September 11, Lloyd connects these features to central themes of Enlightenment thought, especially its notions of providence and cosmopolitanism.

While Lloyd deals sympathetically with Habermas's interpretation of the symbolic content of September 11, she suggests that Derrida's response is more finely attuned to the singularity of the event and the challenge it presents to philosophy. For this challenge, as Lloyd reads Derrida, amounts to nothing less than a 'total' and 'ongoing' threat to 'the world', though in a peculiarly Derridean sense that Lloyd strives to clarify. In addition to the empirical trauma of the people directly affected, September 11 is said to signify a kind of metaphysical trauma, a sudden realisation of the obsolescence of deeply entrenched concepts, ideals, and interpretive norms. It is as if the world not only changed that day, but in accordance with the logic of 'autoimmunity', it brought about its self-destruction *as* a world. As Lloyd observes, Derrida's point here is hard to summarise, and we must be careful to distinguish the philosophical content of Derrida's talk of world-disintegration from the apocalyptic political rhetoric used to justify unrestricted war on some 'threat without limit'. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the philosophical meaning of September 11 sketched here will trouble some readers. Given previous hijackings, and earlier attempts to destroy the World Trade Centre, why call the event of September 11 'impossible' or 'incomprehensible' at all? Are 'Lisbon' and 'Auschwitz' really appropriate points of comparison? If the event genuinely did reveal the vulnerability of our 'world', *whose* world exactly are we talking about? And if the event forces us to rethink further the Enlightenment ideals of cosmopolitanism and perpetual peace, shouldn't we at once be asking how good will between nations can be reconciled with a global economic system that makes man wolf to man? What has changed to refute Ernst Bloch's observation, made nearly fifty years ago, that 'capitalist peace is a paradox which spreads fear more than ever and which enjoins nations to defend the cause of peace at the utmost'?<sup>7</sup>

If Lloyd's essay concludes on a pessimistic note, perhaps it is because the loss of Providence which September 11 symbolises is also a loss of a ground of social hope. As she points out, Kant could draw on the idea of Providence to sustain his hopes for a future cosmopolitan world society. We still have the hopes, and we still tacitly rely on the idea of Providence to shore them up. If we no longer have that idea to lean on, what else can support the hopes for cosmopolitanism and other aspects of the Enlightenment ideal? This is the central question raised in Nicholas Smith's essay. As Smith points out, the idea of Providence is by no means the only resource we have for grounding radical social

hope, and narratives of progress, which at some level are crucial for sustaining social hope, may be 'providential' in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, Smith accepts that we are going through a 'crisis of hope' which is connected to the 'crisis of narratives' of which Lyotard famously spoke.<sup>8</sup> A symptom of this crisis, Smith suggests, is an emerging discourse of 'ungroundable' hope. Smith discusses Rorty's views in this context, but a rationally unjustifiable hope of futurity has also been articulated in Derrida's writings, as Lloyd points out. While the idea of ungroundable hope, or hope for the 'impossible', clearly resonates with many critical theorists and philosophers today, Smith insists that it does not supplant the need to justify social hope philosophically.

Craig Browne's paper contains a wide-ranging discussion of the recent revival of interest in the category of hope amongst philosophers and critical social theorists. He is, however, ambivalent about the worth of this development. On the one hand, Browne suspects that the 'theological background' to the category of hope undermines its theoretical value, a view he takes to be supported by Castoriadis's work. In claiming this Browne departs from Smith, who maintains that hope and theology are only contingently – if, for us, powerfully -- connected. On the other hand, Browne argues that the widespread thematisation of hope in theory as well as in everyday life tells us something important about the current state of capitalist society. Drawing here on Ulrich Beck's analysis of the 'risk society', Browne suggests that the perception that social and economic development is out of control, or at least no longer amenable to conscious, rational steering and assessment, leaves a slack which can be taken up, however adequately, by hope. Browne also draws attention to the paradoxical processes of inclusion and exclusion whereby capitalist development promises abundance for all, thus generating hope, whilst indefinitely postponing the delivery. The changing significance of hope in what Browne calls the 'capitalist imaginary' is certainly a matter that deserves much further investigation.

Another theme in Browne's paper is the utopian dimension of Habermas's critical theory. While Browne observes that Habermas's reorienting of critique around the intersubjective procedures of democratic will formation retains utopian elements, he seems to agree with critics who regard Habermas's discourse-theoretic approach as too limited in its conception of the radical democratic project.<sup>9</sup> But as Pauline Johnson brings out clearly in her essay, Habermas faces a real dilemma here. For in Habermas's view, critique must be capable of expressing utopian aspirations for an emancipated future while at the same time undertaking reasonable, rationally justified analyses of present possibilities: without the latter, Johnson points out, critical theory would lose its engaged character, that is, its confrontation with actuality. It is only with this (hardly avoidable) dilemma between radicalism and reasonableness in view, Johnson argues, that we can appreciate the motivations behind Habermas's conception of the tasks and methods of critical theory. While this interpretive strategy enables Johnson to present a strong defence of Habermas's method, she also suggests that the utopian vocation of critique may generate productive tensions with reasonableness that Habermas has not quite been ready to countenance.

[German critical theory section]

The question of “critique today” obviously invites reflections upon the current state of Critical Theory understood in the narrower sense of the “Frankfurt School” project of a post-Hegelian and/or post-Marxist critical theory of society. A significant number of contributions in this volume deal with the question of how this particular theoretical project might be pursued today, what specific conceptual, political and methodological challenges it faces and what potentialities it still harbours. To a great extent this question of “Critical Theory today” remains the question of the interpretation of Jürgen Habermas’s work. Five contributions in this book explore this question, presenting an impressive sample of the possible theoretical positions that the current research within the tradition of Critical Theory may take. These positions vary from exegetical defence (Pauline Johnson), immanent development as a response to social and political challenges (Shane O’Neill), immanent critique from a historical perspective (John Grumley), and immanent critique leading to alternative frameworks (Emmanuel Renault and Jean-Philippe Deranty’s developments of Axel Honneth’s post-Habermasian theory of recognition). Another central question emerges within these debates: it is less the interpretation and use of Marx today that is the issue, even though some articles clearly show post-Marxist concerns, but rather the interpretation and use of Hegel. In this respect, Paul Redding’s ground-breaking article on the unsuspected Hegelian features of Bourdieu’s critical sociology provides a powerful defence of a specifically *Hegelian* critical theory, a strong alternative to all the streams in contemporary critical theory that only retain indirect links to the great idealist. In brief, the question of the interpretation of Hegel today seems to be one of the pressing philosophical issues of our time. The centrality of Hegel’s thought for the question of Critique Today is even more pressing since Hegel was a central figure not only for German, but also for French critical philosophy, as Simon Lumsden’s article reminds us.

These questions are all confronted in the chapters that follow. In his article “Hegel, Habermas, and the Spirit of Critical Theory”, Australian critical theorist John Grumley revisits some of the key aspects of Habermas’s complex relationship with Hegel. Such a focus on Habermas’ work, as just noted, opens a fruitful perspective on the broader question of critique today. This becomes clear if we consider how Habermas’ critique of Hegel’s absolute idealism, his partial acceptance of the Hegelian critique of Kantian morality, and Hegel’s comprehensive theory of modern institutions, present some of the key ideas and arguments in discussions concerned with the philosophical critique of the present and the related critique of philosophy. Habermas’ critique of Hegel’s idealism, a critique that has not changed in its core since Habermas’ earliest writings, addresses much of what is at stake in defining the problematic status of philosophy within a consistent critical approach to the modern world. Grumley reminds us of Habermas’ scepticism towards intersubjectivistic Hegel interpretations, the dominant current of Hegel interpretation in the English-speaking world. Such interpretations, Habermas claims, tend to overlook the textual implausibility of a deflationary reading of Hegel’s absolute spirit and underplay its subsequent methodological implausibility for contemporary concerns.<sup>10</sup> Grumley suggests that Habermas borrows from Hegel the recognition that political theory must show how normative principles correspond effectively to ethical and institutional practices that engage individual subjectivities. However, Grumley also shows the other side of the Hegelian coin. As a result of his leanings towards a Hegelian solution to the ethical

problem, Habermas also shares Hegel's tendency towards a "reconciliation with reality". Grumley thus questions the capacity of Habermas' latest thinking to provide the proper normative and conceptual tools for a thorough critical theory of the present. After evoking some of the main critiques to have emphasised the blunting of the critical dimension in Habermas, Grumley writes in conclusion that "a critical theory needs more than historical and institutional points of reference like those that issue from Habermas' Hegelian reading of immanence: it needs to grasp these values in the context of the concrete constraints and alternatives making for their practical exercise". (p. ?).

With his article entitled "Critical Theory, Democratic Justice and Globalization", political theorist Shane O'Neill offers an important contribution to the debate that is currently waged within contemporary Critical Theory about the analytical tools that are required to accurately describe contemporary forms of injustice, and the political implications of this critique.<sup>11</sup> O'Neill places his proposal firmly within the Habermasian framework developed in *Between Facts and Norms*.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, he argues that the realisation of justice is "best understood in republican terms, as the realization of a democratic form of life in which free and equal citizens engage one another in the collective task of autonomous self-governance." (...) However, rather than a discussion that remains at the general, normative, or at the institutional level, O'Neill insists on the social preconditions for the realization of any such democratic form of life: "an egalitarian social structure is a precondition for the inclusion of all citizens as effective participants in the democratic process" (...). Since inequality affects individuals inasmuch as they belong to particular groups or classes, and since the latter mediate institutionally demands for equality, one of the most pressing tasks for contemporary critical theory is to develop a coherent analytical and normative concept of the social group. The first part of the article proposes such a conceptual analysis of "structurally structured social groups", dealing particularly with the potential pitfalls of essentialism and individual oppression. This model allows O'Neill to take a critical stance upon current post-Habermasian models (mainly Fraser, Young, and Honneth) and to highlight their unnecessary restriction of the analytical focus in their study of social inequality. The shift in focus that occurs in the last part of the article opens a necessary, but as yet little explored avenue for research within Habermasian critical theory. O'Neill shows that any discussion about institutional reform at the level of the Nation-State must be framed within a broader discussion that takes into account the global aspects of social injustice and of struggles against it. O'Neill defends the thesis that the imperative of a necessary formation of a global public sphere should not lead to the conclusion that struggles at the national level are now outdated. This is because nation-states remain important political mediations in the fight against global injustice and because global struggles run the risk of entrenching local forms of injustice if they consistently bypass the national level. In fact, as O'Neill argues, both dimensions should be combined. True democratization, with the challenge to social inequality that goes with it, is called for both within and amongst nation-states, and relies upon both global and international movements.

Whereas O'Neill still argues from within the Habermasian framework, Emmanuel Renault's article, "Radical democracy and abolitionist concept of justice. A critique of Habermas' theory of justice", is a thorough challenge to that framework itself. This article is the first text written in English by this prolific young French critical theorist and provides a good insight into his ground-breaking work.<sup>13</sup> Renault's point of departure is

informed by the objections raised by Axel Honneth against Habermas' discourse theory of law and democracy. As Honneth has argued, the experience of social injustice is not limited to the experience of a contradiction between a social situation and abstract legal or moral principles; more often than not it is rather the experience of the narrowness or inadequacy of such principles. Secondly the demand that claims of justice be expressed in the universal grammar of practical reason runs the risk of misrepresenting or even ignoring the specificity of real, lived injustices.<sup>14</sup> Institutionalised normative language can be just as stifling as it can be liberating. Renault systematises the critical perspective thus opened and focuses on the experience of injustice to develop a thorough critique of the Habermasian model, and through it, more generally, of liberal theories of justice.<sup>15</sup> Against the commonly shared assumption that political theory is the search for the universal principles allowing a normative definition of justice, Renault suggests that justice is in fact an "abolitionist" concept,<sup>16</sup> that "its meaning is not defined by an abstract reference to equality, or to universality, but by the necessity to transform unjust social situations." (...) As a consequence, political theory must focus its analytical efforts on the experience which is the "logical and practical context of justice" (...), the experience of injustice. Renault describes this experience as "relational", that is always linked to a specific social situation, "qualitative", that is lived as being unbearable in a particular way, and "dynamic", as potentially triggering a practical reaction against the injuries it causes. We can retain the properly political dimension of justice, Renault argues—that is to say, the critical and transformative dimensions that are entailed in the notion understood in an abolitionist sense—only if these three dimensions are not sacrificed in the search for universal principles that are required for the purpose of rational justification. In contrast, Habermas's theory of democracy, with its emphasis on the universalisability of claims within public deliberations, produces a "decontextualisation" of justice from the experience where it is grounded. This leads, like Rawls' theory of justice, to the very kind of abstract definition of the political that it purports to avoid. Linked with this decontextualisation is Habermas's apparent relativisation of social rights against formal and political rights, a conceptual move that is also characteristic of liberalism. For individuals suffering from degraded conditions of existence, however, it is clear that social rights are not relative to anything else. In a social situation that is unbearable for the individuals involved, the qualitative, relational and dynamic aspects of the experience define a critical perspective upon the discourses of justification. This is why Renault argues for the specific cognitive and practical potential harboured in the experience of injustice. Moreover, Habermas' reduction of politics to deliberations within the public sphere does not sufficiently acknowledge the structural exclusion of some forms of injustice, often the most severe, from the public debate. The disconnection of current theories of justice from the context in which justice becomes a real, lived problem thus leads Renault to conclude that theories of justice should be transformed into the theory of the experience of injustice. Renault's article therefore advocates a radical departure from Habermas and suggests a new, alternative model of social and political theory grounded in the phenomenology of injustice and contemporary social movements. As noted, however, this new model has its roots in Habermas if only because it takes its key inspiration from Axel Honneth's immanent critique of discourse theory.

The potential and limitations of Honneth's model are analysed in the contribution by Jean-Philippe Deranty, "The loss of nature in Axel Honneth's social philosophy.

Rereading Mead with Merleau-Ponty". Deranty's critical perspective on Honneth's theory of recognition highlights a problem that is often found in contemporary German critical theory, including Habermas, namely the lack of a full normative account of nature, and more specifically the lack of a proper consideration of non-human beings. Applying to Honneth his own method of immanent critical reconstruction, Deranty shows that the "loss of nature" was not necessarily a consequence of Honneth's initial project as it was formulated in his first two books.<sup>17</sup> This project aimed to overcome the abstractions perceived in Habermas' model by returning to the tradition of German philosophical anthropology (Feuerbach, Gehlen, Plessner and Heller) and to the writings of American pragmatist, George Herbert Mead. With the help of arguments borrowed from these authors, Honneth wanted to develop a formal anthropology of "practical intersubjectivity": that is, to study the minimal anthropological, in other words biological, preconditions of human action (hence "practical") with the fundamental premiss, gained from Feuerbach, Mead and of course Habermas, that such preconditions are intersubjective in essence. The rationale for such a programme of research was mainly gained from Honneth's immanent critique of the theory of communicative action. In it he had shown that the restriction of the domain of normativity to linguistic practice was the source of major abstractions in Habermas' social and political theory. A more "embodied" version of the intersubjectivistic turn was needed. Honneth therefore saw the need to reframe the theory of social action, to elaborate a new theory of praxis, by grounding it in anthropological considerations whose leading motto was the "humanisation of nature", meaning the shaping of both outer and inner nature through social action. After retracing this journey, Deranty has no difficulty showing that the mature model of the ethics of recognition has abandoned this motto and leaves no room, conceptually and normatively, for any being or entity other than socialised human beings. In the third part of his contribution, Deranty suggests that a pursuit of Honneth's initial project would correct the abstractions found in Honneth's model of interaction that result from his interpersonalist account of intersubjectivity. The central reference for such a continuation, Deranty argues, should be Merleau-Ponty, since his work can be read precisely as a successful attempt to develop an embodied theory of praxis, one which analyses in great detail the full scale of human interactions with nature, symbolic objects and non-human beings.<sup>18</sup> Like Renault, but with a different emphasis, Deranty therefore advocates an informed return of critical theory to its historical-materialist origins.

With the contribution from renowned Hegel scholar Paul Redding, "Pierre Bourdieu: From Neo-Kantian to Hegelian Critical Social Theory", the focus shifts from the tradition of German, post-Hegelian critical theory to the equally rich tradition of French social theory, with its multi-faceted, complex relationship to Hegel. Redding argues against the commonplace readings of Pierre Bourdieu's structuralist and post-structuralist works as anti-Hegelian. Instead, in a fascinating analysis, he wants to highlight deep similarities between Bourdieu's and Hegel's understanding of the logic of social integration and the origin and nature of social theory. The first such similarity for Redding is to be found the parallel that can be drawn between, on the one hand, Bourdieu's logic of practice and Hegel's theory of "immediate thought". The mediating term between both, which makes the comparison meaningful, is Kant's crucial distinction between immediate representations in space and time (intuitions), and universal categories enabling any experience whatsoever (concepts). Bourdieu's logic of practice,

Redding argues, can be reconstructed as a critique of the neo-Kantian elimination (that can be traced in Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss) of Kant's careful distinction between intuition and concept. Against the intellectualisation of the spatial and temporal embodiment of categorical systems, Bourdieu "attempted to reinterpret the type of binaristic grammar to which both Durkheim and Lévi-Strauss had appealed by showing its generation from responses of the body's *dispositional habitus* to the practical demands of a socially codified everyday existence". (...) Redding shows that Hegel had arrived to a similar model of immediate thought from a different path, one however that also departed from Kant. Hegel's critique of the intuition-concept dichotomy led him to reinterpret Kant's distinction as being one between two types of categorical systems, the logic of being, producing binary oppositions, and the logic of essence, characteristic of reflective thought. The similarity with Bourdieu becomes palpable, when Redding shows how Hegel linked these two types of categorical systems to separate spheres of social life: "immediate thought" describes the type of categories through which family life is structured and, for Hegel already, habitually rather than reflectively reproduced, whilst "reflective thought" is the type of categorical system that individuals are required to adopt in social life outside the family. Redding argues that these two modes of action-orienting categorical systems are similar to Bourdieu's theory of social integration, with the passage of the individual from a habitual mode of socialisation, to the objectifying field of general social life. The second parallel between Bourdieu and Hegel is a consequence of the first and appears when the two logics of social integration are rephrased in historical terms. The first socialisation within the family, leading to the acquisition of specific dispositions, can be interpreted as the remainder within post-traditional societies of the type of social integration along binary, body-centred categories prevalent in pre-modern societies, while reflective, objectivistic thinking emerges only within societies that have broken with mythopoetic thought. Thus Redding is able to compare Bourdieu's genealogical account of the *skhole*, the leisurely activity severed from habitual life which, on the ground of its apartness from social necessity, can first aim at objective knowledge, with Hegel's parallel theory about the emergence of modern social sciences within the modern bourgeois-capitalist society. For both authors, the first historical figure of objectivistic, reflective thought was of course to be found in Greek philosophy, but both believe also that it could be realised only with the actual separation of the spheres of social life and their corresponding types of action-guiding categorical systems. And for both thinkers also, there is a structural danger attached to reflective thought in that it always tends to forget the historical context of its emergence and to hypostasise the whole of the social, forgetting the limited validity of its truth claims. For Bourdieu, of course, Hegel represented a canonical example of an intellectualist approach that represses its historical and social contingency and projects its theoreticist prejudice upon its object domain, with the social categories informing social action being transformed into the thought categories of a cosmic self thinking and realising itself through history. Redding, however, as a prominent advocate of the very type of post-Kantian, intersubjectivistic reading of Hegel that we saw rejected by Habermas,<sup>19</sup> proposes a different conclusion. If a deflationary view of Spirit is adopted and it is interpreted as the gradual emergence of a "complex of recognitively mediated conditions adequate to human freedom", (...) what remains is Hegel's attempt to mediate between "immediate" and reflexive forms of ethical life and of thought, the exact same type of

dialectic which Bourdieu used to describe the space where his reflexive sociology was to be rooted. With this masterfully presented thesis, Redding gives a vivid illustration of what a *Hegelian* critical theory looks like. At the same time, he also defines a particularly robust Hegelian critical perspective upon the great tradition of Durkheimian and post-Durkheimian sociology. Given the central importance of Durkheim for the theoretical endeavours of the last century, not just for German but also for French critical theory, one can see how fruitful an application of such critical Hegelian perspective could be.

#### The French-German Connection: Negativity, Biopower, Rights

Manfred Frank once remarked that the important dialogue between German and French philosophical traditions still remained a task for the future.<sup>20</sup> The essays in the final section of *Critique Today* make a significant contribution to fostering this dialogue, and to opening up new perspectives for thinking critically about reason, power, and rights. While there are many convergences between the perspectives developed here and other papers in the volume (Simon Lumsden's critical reading of Nancy's Hegel, for example, resonating with Paul Redding's discussion of the Hegelian background to Pierre Bourdieu's sociology) there are also important differences in critical orientation (for example, Robert Sinnerbrink's critique of Foucault's account of biopower contrasting with Paul Patton's defence of an 'externalist' reading of Foucault on rights). Taken together they provide a rich sample of the productive differences informing debates in critical social philosophy today.

Simon Lumsden's essay, "Reason and the Restlessness of the Speculative," continues the dialogue between neo-Hegelian theories of intersubjectivity and the post-structuralist critique of reason. Long vilified by post-structuralists as the paradigmatic thinker of totalising metaphysics, Hegel has recently returned to prominence within recent French philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Lumsden takes up this return to the "French Hegel," presenting an illuminating discussion of Nancy's provocative interpretation of Hegel in light of the influential Anglophone "non-metaphysical" reading of Hegel. Lumsden contrasts Nancy's approach with the tendency among other post-structuralists to demonise Hegelian thought for exemplifying the identitarian subsumption of difference and alterity.<sup>22</sup> Nancy, by contrast, takes seriously Hegelian speculative thought, above all the power of the negative—the disruptive, open, and restless aspect of thought—that Nancy presents as the power of speculative thought's own self-transformation. Indeed, this self-transformative power of negativity, Nancy argues, is what ultimately shapes all the more familiar Hegelian themes such as Spirit, dialectic, and speculative reason. Lumsden explores the self-surpassing character of Hegel's conception of thought, bringing this into relation with Nancy's interpretation of the negative and his discussion of the notion of sense (*sens*) as the unthematisable background condition of intelligibility.

For all his invocation of the Heideggerian rhetoric, Nancy should be regarded, according to Lumsden, as rejecting the crudely "metaphysical" reading of Hegel that was largely responsible for Hegel's negative reputation as a totalising thinker of identity. Indeed, Lumsden shows how Nancy's "non-metaphysical" reading complements recent Anglophone approaches to Hegel (Pippin, Pinkard, Redding) as a radical post-Kantian thinker concerned with the immanent development of rational cognitive, moral, and

social norms. Nancy, along with other “non-metaphysical” readers of Hegel, rejects the “myth of the given” and finds a way of overcoming the concept-intuition in thinking spirit as a self-transforming power of negativity. Despite Nancy’s emphasis on the self-transformative power of the negative, Lumsden concludes with a criticism of Nancy’s neglect of any developed account of the “self-correcting” character of reason, or indeed any developed explication of the Hegelian conception of freedom. In order for subjectivity to be possible, particularly in the sense of self-determining autonomy, the power of negativity must also be a power of constructive unity. As Lumsden points out, the negative moment of Hegelian thought, which Nancy emphasises, must be complemented by the positive moment: freedom is not only the power of the negative but also the power of autonomous reason as the capacity of freely assuming, and also transforming, historically articulated social norms and practices.

Peter Schmiedgen continues the dialogue between French philosophy and the German tradition with his exploration of the relationship between Levinasian and Arendtian approaches to intersubjectivity and the constitution of public space. Levinas’ phenomenological reflections on dwelling, labour, and ethical alterity, Schmiedgen claims, can be supplemented by Arendt’s more developed theorisation of labour, work, and political action. Simon Critchley’s defence of the *political* significance of Levinas notwithstanding, the Levinasian ethical critique of the sphere of politics can be ameliorated by interpreting it within an Arendtian framework of human plurality. Schmiedgen’s essay thus examines the contrast between the pluralist “polytheism” of Arendtian political intersubjectivity and the “monotheism” of Levinasian ethical intersubjectivity, its foregrounding of the singular encounter with the face of the Other. Arendtian political pluralism coupled with Levinasian ethical singularity, Schmiedgen concludes, provide a useful framework for approaching questions of public space, cultural difference, and democratic community.

The question of “Critique Today” also implies a historical reflection on the manner in which certain concepts have come to prominence in recent social and political philosophy. Robert Sinnerbrink’s “From *Machenschaft* to Biopolitics” thus presents a genealogical critique of the concepts of biopower and biopolitics, commencing with Heidegger’s reflections on “machination” [*Machenschaft*], analysing Foucault’s account of biopower exercised over the biological life of the population, and concluding with Agamben’s conception of bare life and the camp as paradigmatic of the biopolitical character of modernity. Sinnerbrink examines the prefiguration of Foucault’s conception of biopower in Heidegger’s discussion of machination or *Machenschaft* in his Nietzsche lectures of the mid- to late-1930s.<sup>23</sup> For Heidegger, the concept of “machination” describes the manner in which beings are disclosed in modernity as representable and manipulable resources. Not only living beings but also human beings are reduced to resources to be managed, optimised, enhanced, and produced. This theme is then transformed, in an “ontic,” socio-historical direction, through Foucault’s reflections on biopower as the social power exercised upon the biological life of populations. Foucault’s critical analyses of biopower, however, soon gave way to his later interest in neo-liberalism as a form of governmental rationality oriented towards the efficient social management of populations. This turn towards analysing neo-liberalism as a prevailing

biopower regime, Sinnerbrink argues, provides the backdrop for the later Foucault's much vaunted "ethical turn" in the early 1980s.

Finally, Sinnerbrink shows how Agamben's work on the biopolitical foundations of modernity articulates a middle way between the Heidegger's ontologically grounded conception of machination and Foucault's historically particularist genealogy of biopower. Indeed, Agamben presents biopolitics—the originary breach between naked biological life (*zoe*) and organised social life (*bios*)—as the metaphysical foundation of Western political rationality in its historical unfolding from the Greeks to Auschwitz. The nihilism of liberal-democratic regimes, for Agamben, is evinced by the increasing significance of biopolitical figures (such as the refugee, overcomatose patient, and 'enemy combatant'). Sinnerbrink's critique of the concepts of biopower and biopolitics in Foucault and Agamben underlines the tension they evince between ontological and ontic dimensions: a 'short-circuiting' of universalist and particularist dimensions resulting in a loss of specificity at the level of concrete social and political analysis. Sinnerbrink thus questions Foucault's exploration of the ethical possibilities of self-formation within neo-liberalism, and Agamben's messianic overcoming of biopolitical nihilism through a utopian community to come, for their adequacy as political responses to contemporary biopower regimes.

The significance of a renewed Foucaultian sense of critique is elaborated in Paul Patton's "Foucault, Critique, Rights," an important contribution to the understanding of Foucault's recently published (2004) lectures on biopolitics and liberalism. Patton's study defends Foucault against the charge that his later work provides no normative foundation for social critique, presenting a compelling and original account of Foucault's historicist and naturalistic approach to rights. Patton goes on to argue that the later Foucault's call for a non-sovereign, anti-disciplinary form of right is compatible with externalist theories of rights discussed in recent Anglophone political philosophy.<sup>24</sup> According to the latter, the normative force and justification of rights resides in historically specific forms of social practice and institutional arrangements rather than in any putative universal property or essential feature of human beings. Patton adopts this contemporary argument to explicate and defend the Nietzschean-Foucaultian view that rights are historically specific, grounded in social power relations, with their normative force being dependent upon historically available beliefs, norms, and discourses (using indigenous rights in Australia as an historical example). Following Nietzsche's genealogical account of the origin of rights and duties, Foucault argues that rights can be understood in terms of power relations, and perceived power relations, between individual and collective agents. Power itself must be viewed not simply as repressive but as productive, as the capacity to act in certain ways, to exercise strategic action upon the actions of others. On this view, rights are acknowledgements of capacities of power that are sanctioned and preserved for pragmatic reasons within a given social context. Such rights are historically variable, open to social and political contestation, and subject to historical transformation given shifts in regimes of power. Patton thereby argues that a Foucaultian account of rights as recognised degrees of power provides a way of navigating between the extremes of an ahistorical foundationalism that dehistoricises the conditions for the effective exercise of rights, and an ahistorical historicism that deprives rights of their normative force.

From this Foucaultian perspective, the normative force of rights can be derived only from historically available discourses of right. These discourses took two different forms historically: the revolutionary path of the American Declaration of Independence, Rousseau, and the French revolutionaries, grounded in the universal rights of man; and the path of radical liberalism, grounded in a complex utilitarian calculus of individual and collective interests. Such historical discourses of right (roughly, revolutionary-universalist versus utilitarian and liberalist theories of radical interests) remain active and available forms of political legitimation and contestation. Foucault's call for a non-sovereign, anti-disciplinary conception of right is thus grounded in a descriptive account of the rights already operating within modern societies, and in a normative claim that these rights "can provide an effective counterweight to disciplinary power". Drawing on Foucault's 1978-79 lectures on liberalism as a form of governmental rationality, Patton argues in conclusion that the normative bases of the critique of disciplinary power "must come from the liberal tradition of governmental reason" that Foucault analysed in his final years. Here we find the clues for understanding Foucault's call for a non-sovereign, anti-disciplinary form of right that would provide a way of challenging established forms of political right. In this way, Foucault's conception of critique as challenging the limits of what it is possible to say and do within a given milieu and experimenting with going beyond those limits might provide, one presumes, an effective counterpoint to the prevailing hegemony of global neo-liberalism.

#### Concluding remarks

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<sup>1</sup> M. Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Ethics. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984*, ed. P. Rabinow, London, Penguin, 1997, p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> A. Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. C. W. Wright, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995, p. xiii.

<sup>4</sup> Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social*, p.122.

<sup>5</sup> See Fraser, Justice Interruptus...

<sup>6</sup> See Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought*...

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Vol. 2, (1959, 1986) trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, Cambridge MA, MIT Press, p. 897.

<sup>8</sup> Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*...

<sup>9</sup> See eg. Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia*...

<sup>10</sup> See J. Habermas, "From Kant to Hegel and back again: the move towards detranscendentalisation", in *Truth and Justification*, MIT, Cambridge MA, 2003, p.175-210.

<sup>11</sup>

<sup>12</sup>

<sup>13</sup> *Experience de l'injustice, Marx et l'idée de critique.*

<sup>14</sup>

<sup>15</sup>

<sup>16</sup> He borrows the term from Michael Walzer's *Spheres of justice*.

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<sup>17</sup> *Social action and human nature* and *The critique of power*.

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<sup>20</sup> M. Frank, What is Neostructuralism?

<sup>21</sup> See J-L.Nancy, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bon Mots)*, trans. C. Surprenant, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2001; Nancy, *Hegel: The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. J. Smith and S. Miller, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2002. See also C. Malabou, ???

<sup>22</sup> Deleuze's remark in *Difference and Repetition* is exemplary: "all of these signs [?] can be taken as symptoms of a generalised anti-Hegelianism", p.?

<sup>23</sup> This discussion also anticipates Heidegger's better-known account of technological modernity as the age of en-framing or *Ge-stell*, the reduction of beings, including human beings, to a totality of available resources. See Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, ...

<sup>24</sup> See ???