Philosophical-Political Profiles

JÜRGEN HABERMAS

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Toward a Rational Society

Theory and Practice

Legitimation Crisis

Knowledge and Human Interests

Communication and the Evolution of Society

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Translator's Introduction

Philosophy rests on the texts it criticizes. They are brought to it by the tradition they embody, and it is in dealing with them that the conduct of philosophy becomes commensurable with tradition. This justifies the move from philosophy to exegesis, which exalts neither the interpretation nor the symbol into an absolute but seeks the truth where thinking secularizes the irretrievable archetype of sacred texts.
T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*

This epigraph might serve as a motto for philosophical practice on the European continent, though there is a tendency in some quarters to exalt interpretations or symbols into absolutes. In any case, it does capture the characteristic approach to traditional texts of the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists. As will be clear to any reader of this collection, it is hardly less true for Jürgen Habermas. Criticism, as distinct from commentary, is his stock in trade; thus, his aim as a writer stands in sharp contrast to the various forms of text fetishism that are fashionable in academic circles today. Habermas is less concerned with reconstructing what the author intended to say to the original audience or using the text as a pretext for his own play. Rather, he seeks to grasp the subject matter and to judge the correctness and evaluate the worth of the author's views thereon. His outstanding quality as a writer is his critical sensibility.

Because of Habermas's penchant for using texts in order to get beyond them to their subject matter, the essays in which he critically assesses other thinkers are also a record of his own intellectual life.

Clear cases in point would be Habermas's two *Literaturberichte* dealing with the philosophical literature on Marx and Marxism (1957) and the literature on certain issues in the logic of the social sciences (1967). In these lengthy essays, characteristics of the intellectual journal are in evidence: a direct confrontation with the leading representatives of a wide range of concerns, orientations, and interests; a forthright coming to grips with the central issues of a topic via the authors or approaches treated; and a marked selectivity in relation to the issues under discussion. Thus, in his later foreword to the Suhrkamp edition of *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, Habermas admonishes the reader that what is at stake in the essay is not so much "results" as a "process of self-understanding."[1] In other words, he is using the works under review to take soundings and get his bearings in relation to the overall objective of his own work. Consequently, however striking one might find Habermas's critical assessments of the authors and issues he discusses, the real point is his exploratory and provisional articulation of what would in time come to be part of his own position on the subject.

Habermas's unflinching orientation toward the subject matter, which he demonstrates so skillfully in the genre of the *Literaturbericht*, is matched in the essays in this volume. Whatever authors Habermas happens to be discussing, his overriding concern is always to see how they relate to his interest in emancipatory social theory. Intentionally or not, these essays, no less than the works that fall officially under the genre *Literaturbericht*, present us with what might be called polished fragments from an intellectual journal.

Connected with Habermas's relentless concern for the subject matter is another overriding tendency: He is less concerned with textual interpretation, in the sense of doing full justice to the author's meaning insofar as this is amenable to philological expertise, than with judging the correctness and evaluating the worth of the author's meaning. That is, he is less worried about making a case for the accuracy of his interpretation of an author's meaning than about stating just what he thinks is to be taken seriously in that author's work. Habermas's great popularity—which so contrasts with the inherent complexity and difficulty of both his manner of thought and the objects of his concern—is due in no small measure to the way he goes beyond the interpretation that understands to the further interpretation that discriminates. We sense that Habermas is really encountering the authors

he writes about; that he wants to appreciate the values they represent as well as to criticize their defects. We sense that he is willing to allow himself to be challenged by their words and deeds to the degree that they strike him as in line with the reality of the subject matter in which he is interested.

Habermas's concern to see where he stands and to find out how to change his standpoint is quite clear in his exchanges with Hans-Georg Gadamer.[2] Habermas makes no bones about what he takes to be the limitations of hermeneutic philosophy in relation to the demands placed on critical reflection by domination and distortion. But neither his discussion of Wilhelm Dilthey in *Knowledge and Human Interests* or his independently worked out communication theory would have taken the shape they did if he had not also learned a great deal from Gadamer. Again, and what may be more significant in regard to his intellectual biography, Habermas is critical of Hegelian philosophy for having, as it were, speculatively tamed the French Revolution.[3] Yet it is quite evident in Habermas's critiques of instrumental reason, his emphasis on social interaction,[4] and his theory of social evolution that Hegel has been a sort of role model for his thinking.[5] These instances show how Habermas is usually transformed by his critical encounters. However, he also transforms what he learns from them into what he needs. He is not content just to present a dialectical illumination of alternative understandings or convictions; he takes sides and uses whatever he can from an author to articulate his own horizon.

The earliest of the thirteen essays collected here stem from the 1950s. In the preface to the first German edition, Habermas characterized them as the product of a quite bourgeois mode of philosophical journalism. Indeed, with the exception of the introductory essay, all of the writings gathered here are "occasional"—that is, they were elicited by occasions honoring older but contemporary philosophers or by the publication of significant philosophical works. Moreover, these studies document an epoch in philosophy that Habermas believes is coming to an end; the age in which thought is so incarnated in single great figures that one has to encounter the thinkers in coming to terms with their ideas. These early essays register the impressions these figures made on a much younger man who would eventually promote a transition from the old type of philosophy, which was concretized in great individual teachers, to a new style conceived of as intrinsically interdisciplinary and collaborative.

For anyone daunted by the theory-laden density of Habermas's *Legitimation Crisis* or his *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, the highly personal tone and texture of the essays collected here will offer a special attraction. Habermas has had contact with most of the thinkers discussed, either in lecture halls or seminar rooms or as a junior colleague. However, no matter how personal the tone of the essays, they are unmarred by sentimentality or elegy. Habermas always does more than just assess a thinker's influence and situate him in the context of the history of ideas; he praises him by showing us what he has learned from encountering him. Consequently, besides being an opportunity to see great thinkers and writers through the prism of one of the most penetrating minds of the succeeding generation, these essays provide a chance to see Habermas, provoked by them, constantly working out his own problematic and assembling the elements of his own theoretical framework. To be sure, the essays collected here make up a relatively small portion of Habermas's literary output between 1958 and 1979,[6] yet the major stages of his intellectual development are in evidence here. The earliest essays come from a period when Habermas was heavily influenced by Karl Löwith's rendition of the Young Hegelian movement,[7] and so the idea of philosophy as a socially transformative project already holds sway. Then there are essays from the time when Habermas had become a critical theorist much more in the tradition of the Frankfurt School. Finally, there are more-than-embryonic manifestations of his most recent shift toward communication theory.[8]

There is surely no author discussed in this collection with whom Habermas has less sympathy than Martin Heidegger,[9] who epitomizes the style of philosophy Habermas considers passé. As its title suggests, the essay on Heidegger departs less from substantive issues within Heidegger's oeuvre than from its great influence. That influence extends beyond academic philosophy and ranges from such scientists as Heisenberg and Weizsäcker to lay professionals in diverse fields, such as the well-known circle of favorites in Hamburg. Habermas takes care to distinguish the more authentic followers among Heidegger's disciples (for example, Oskar Becker and Eugen Fink) from the less authentic, and when he does come to confront Heidegger's thought he features the notion of the dialectic of correspondence [*Entsprechung*] culled from one of the more reliable and less misleading commentators, Walter

Schulz. Habermas criticizes the remoteness of that figure of thought from concrete suffering and displacement. He faults Heidegger's overall fundamental ontology for this as well. Nor does Habermas deem such remoteness innocent; indeed, his association of Heidegger's style of thought with Ernst Jünger, Gottfried Benn, and Carl Schmitt makes the suggestion of guilt by association unmistakable.

Habermas recognizes that Heidegger's two-phased revolt against the once-dominant Neo-Kantian style of philosophy, first in a blend of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology with Dilthey's historical mindedness and then in the so-called turning [*Kehre*], involved a radicalization of the antitechnocratic orientation common in post–World War I cultural criticism—an orientation with which Habermas is in profound sympathy. But Habermas senses that this unique chance to become liberated from the biases of Neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy was not redeemed by Heidegger, in whose work critique seems to succumb to myth in the pejorative sense. He notes quite pointedly how Heidegger had grappled unsuccessfully with the problematic that has vexed the other major figures of continental philosophy since Kant, himself included: the relationship between *a priori* conditions of possibility and the concrete history of social evolution.

Habermas clearly has a good deal more in common with Karl Jaspers, a fellow student of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, than with Heidegger. They share such traits as wide and voracious reading and a certain expertise in extraphilosophical fields (psychology in Jaspers's case, social science in Habermas's). Each has a profound admiration for the achievement of Max Weber. But it is perhaps the idea of truth as intrinsically communicative that forges the deepest link between them. Habermas's discussion of Jaspers's philosophy of symbol (which was derived by combining Kant's third critique with ideas taken from Schelling) and its limitations, as well as his summary of Jaspers's overall philosophical project (existentialism as a form of Neo-Kantianism), is the more telling for having been written from a standpoint of basic sympathy. Indeed, if one were to transpose the privileged locus of intersubjective conversation from Jaspers's "metaphysical republic of scholars" into the concreteness of the dialectic of world history one might get a glimmer of the *raison d'être* of Habermas's own social philosophy.

Something like the same dynamic of sympathetic affinity and trenchant critique is at work in the essays on Ernst Bloch and Karl

Löwith. These essays are more ambitious in scope than the ones already mentioned, or perhaps Habermas just feels more at home with these men. His dissertation on Schelling had prepared him to recognize the Schellingian nature of Bloch's Marxism. Furthermore, in his discussion of Bloch we encounter a motif that will recur again and again in the rest of the collection: the subterranean impulses that came to German thought from the Kabbalah, and the strain of Jewish messianism transmitted from the Kabbalah through Jacob Böhme and Schelling to Karl Marx.

Habermas obviously resonates with Bloch's Schellingian Marxism; he could make his own the motto he proposes for Bloch: "Reason cannot bloom without hope, hope cannot speak without reason, both in a Marxian unity—all other science has no future, all other future no science." Habermas, who realizes the challenge of the Nietzschean *amor fati*, shares Bloch's optimistic utopianism. However, he cannot bring himself to accept Bloch's leap "past any sociological-historical investigation of objective possibilities promoted dialectically by the social process," and he is far from agreeing with Bloch's appeal to a *natura naturans* as a world soul or "universal substratum within the world process itself," even though he acknowledges the salutary effects of Bloch's "melancholy of fulfillment." He does appreciate Bloch's way of bringing out the difference between the arrival of material prosperity and the advent of utopia. For Habermas, though, Bloch's materialism "remains speculative" and his dialectic of the enlightenment "passes beyond dialectic to the doctrine of potency." No, even such a Schellingian version of Left Hegelianism cannot meet the demands of a critical theory.

Habermas's discussion of his teacher Karl Löwith is similar in vein to his critique of Bloch. Löwith was not less dismayed by Heidegger's attitudes toward the errant dispensations of being than Habermas was. Indeed, it was Löwith who introduced Habermas to the "revolutionary break in the thought of the nineteenth century," when philosophy had "taken up its own inexorable interest into reflection itself, utterly renounced its classical claim, and completely withdrawn from ontology into critique."

As I have already suggested, Habermas saw in the isolated character of Heideggerian *Ursprungsphilosophie* a key to its vulnerability to the delusion emanating from National Socialism, and so he has been motivated to pursue philosophy not as a theory of being but as a critique

that tries to carry forward the impulse of the Left Hegelians. Löwith—who had seen through the Heideggerian miscarriage and analyzed the movement from Hegel to the Left Hegelians with what Habermas calls "a clarity that left nothing to be desired"—headed in just the opposite direction from Habermas. For Löwith, philosophy has to keep theory and practice distinct and uphold the primacy of the former. Prescinding from whatever is fleeting, relative, and contingent, Löwith nonetheless deploys an unusually subtle historical consciousness, but he set his sights all the more insistently on *physis* (the cosmos as natural in the sense of the ancient Greeks). His great mentor, Heidegger, unintentionally demonstrated to him the pernicious effects of substituting historicism, pragmatism, and existentialism for philosophy as *theoria* in the classic sense.

Habermas's delineation of Löwith's position lets him express his own concerns and his own suspicion about "the absolute relevance of what is most relative, temporary, and contingent." He cannot help wondering "whether the self-understanding of human beings does not pertain *essentially* to that which they *are*; whether what people think of themselves is not determinative of the way they comport themselves." And so, in contrast with Löwith, he asks

> Is not the nature of the human necessarily mediated by the second nature that is spelled out in the historically generated forms of his labor; in the historically developed and acquired rules of cooperative living, of commanding and obeying; in the historically discovered ways of experiencing, making sense, and gaining mastery which have been fixed in language and fostered or repressed, or lost; and which therefore have been embodied in the images that diverse societies have had of themselves? We find ourselves in a situation in which the conditions for survival have become so exorbitant, in the course of being incompatible with the forms of life that have taken on the bewitching appearance of quasi-naturalness by persisting for millennia. In such a situation of analytically debatable alternatives between mortal dangers and changes in just such nature like forms of life, historical experience of the plasticity of human nature should not get shoved under the cover of the taboos supplied by a doctrine of invariants.

Both Löwith and Ernst Bloch were more or less secularized, culturally assimilated Jews. In one of the most beautiful essays in this volume, Habermas uses the invitation to contribute to a radio series on Germans

and Jews as an occasion to meditate on the "abysmal and yet fertile relationship of the Jews with the Germans." Artfully interweaving quotations from diverse sources, he ranges through a series of great Jewish philosophers since the time of the "emancipation." The affinity of Lutheran Christians for Kantian philosophy is well known; Kant has long provided a favorite haven for the mind of the secularized Protestant. The line that stretches from Marcus Herz and Salomon Maimon to the greatest thinker of Marburg Neo-Kantianism, Hermann Cohen, demonstrates that, in their "free attitude of rational criticism and cosmopolitan humanity," many cultivated Jews have been no less attracted to Kant.

Those familiar with Gershom Scholem's famous essay "Jews and Germans"[10] will appreciate the sensitivity, honesty, and delicacy with which Habermas treats the issues surrounding Jewish emancipation and assimilation and the differing reactions to the plight of being Jewish in German society. Habermas illuminates the many hues of this spectrum by giving us portraits of thinkers with an explicitly religious orientation (Frans Rosenzweig and Martin Buber), of a thinker consciously mediating between Judaism and enlightened German culture (Cohen), of secularized Jews (Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel), and of persons as difficult to categorize as Walter Benjamin and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The essay is full of suggestive aperçus, as when Habermas speculates about the link between the Jew's need for role playing in German society and the German-Jewish penchant for sensitive aesthetic reflection, "from Rosenkranz and Simmel . . . by way of Benjamin and Lukács, down to Adorno." Finally, it is clear that, to whatever extent Habermas is disposed to receive what Peter Berger has called "signals of transcendence," they are likely to have been transmitted to him by Jews.

If Löwith had exposed Habermas to the Left Hegelian maneuver of doing philosophy as critique, his mentor Theodor Adorno introduced him to the dialectic of the enlightenment and the correlative critique of instrumental reason, which were to become for him a heuristic device for a critique of modernity. As Adorno put it in *Negative Dialectics*,

> That reason is something different from nature and yet a moment within it—this is its prehistory, which has become part of its immanent determination. As the psychic force branching out for the purposes of self-preservation, it is natural; however, once it has been split off

and contrasted with nature it also becomes the other of nature. Reason, cutting nature down to size in an ephemeral way, is identical and nonidentical with nature, dialectical in accord with its own concept. Yet the more unrestrainedly reason is made into an absolute over against nature within that dialectic and becomes oblivious to itself in this, the more it regresses, as self-affirmation gone wild, into nature; only as nature's reflection would it be supernature.

The essay on Adorno, probably the most intimately personal one in this book, was written at a time when student activists had been attacking Adorno for not being Marxist enough and for being irretrievably bourgeois. Habermas warns against foresaking "the right that the untrue bourgeois subjectivity still retains in the process of disappearing in relation to its false negation." He points out how Adorno revived Hegel's dialectic of the universal and the particular in his own way to evoke the contours of a "life together in communication that is free from coercion": "The reconciled state would not annex the alien with a philosophical imperialism, but would find its happiness in the fact that the alien remained distinct and remote within the preserved proximity, beyond being either heterogeneous or one's own." At the same time, Habermas is critical of the totalizing tendency in Adorno's conception of the dialectic of the enlightenment, which he says keeps Adorno from moderating the ideal of reconciliation, with all its theological overtones, into an ideal of human autonomy and responsibility.

If the essay on Adorno is the most personal in tone, the one on Arnold Gehlen takes the laurels for the most waspish. Though Gehlen is not yet very well known in the United States, this social anthropologist and follower of Max Scheler is one of the most highly esteemed theorists in Germany. In the essay devoted to him we find one of the best and clearest elaborations of the sort of reflection that moved Habermas in the direction of a theory of communicative competence. The waspish tone enters as Habermas underlines the irony in the relation between Gehlen's theory of anthropological ethics and the extremely antihumanitarian stances he takes in his social and cultural criticism: "Venerable proverbs about life and theoretically interesting assumptions are mixed in with the typical stock in trade of an out-of-step intellectual of the Right who is no longer up to the biographical aporias of his role." The implications of Gehlen's hypothesis of four distinct, biologically rooted ethical programs become all too clear when

he applies them to empirical trends—for example, in his thesis that "humanitarianism," as an ethical derivative of the ethos properly rooted in the family, has in recent times been driving out the (institutional) "ethos of the state." For Gehlen this trend represents a foolhardy and dangerous overexpansion of the family ethos into domains where it is not appropriate.

Habermas first subjects Gehlen's explanatory distinctions to internal critique, then goes on to lay out his own conception of the development of moral consciousness. With the help of Emile Durkheim, George Herbert Mead, and, above all, Jean Piaget, Habermas conceives this evolution in terms of the progressive internalization and universalization of value systems. The core (but not the *terminus ad quem*) of this development is Kant's rather "disembodied" ethics. As Habermas sees it, self-legislation with neither heterogeneous motives nor external sanctions is "the central notion of European Enlightenment." On this view, Kantian morality dissolves the need for global interpretations of nature and society (in local myths or high religions) that legitimate authoritarian controls, even though Kant himself did not get completely beyond ontology. Kant's "intelligible ego," the still-ontologized subject of a completely universal and internalized morality, is isolated from communication with the multiplicity of concrete subjects. Hence, according to Habermas, it is unable to reconcile the universality of norms with the individuality of single persons. Moving beyond Kant, Habermas argues that this can be achieved by "mediation through discourse, that is, through a public process of formation of will that is bound to the principle of unrestricted communication and consensus free from domination." In this way, "the structure of possible speech, the form of the intersubjectivity of possible agreement, becomes . . . the *single* principle of morality." The individual maxim subjected to the test of the categorical imperative is thereby "socialized" into a norm subjected to scrutiny within an unrestricted discussion free from coercion.

The various aspects of the relationship between art and politics taken up in the essay on Herbert Marcuse remain as timely today as when they were written, in 1973. According to Habermas, in *Counterrevolution and Revolt* Marcuse undertook to articulate a "categorial shift in political activity." From Hobbes to Marx, the technicization of politics had concentrated on the power to satisfy material needs. The successes of modern societies in this dimension, however, have tended to unleash "the 'transcending,' nonmaterial needs, which late capitalism cannot

satisfy." Marcuse assessed the potential of art for expressing these nonmaterial needs in a way that negates the repressiveness of organized capitalism variously in the course of his career, but at the later stages he saw art as inextricably linked to the human capacity to distinguish "between true and false, good and evil, beautiful and ugly, present and future." In the essay on Marcuse, Habermas uses Marcuse's sometimes contradictory theses to raise the problem of how autonomously distinct a medium art is or should be in relation to revolutionary practice overall, and to articulate "the meshing of various processes of dedifferentiation" of hitherto distinct realms. He is clearly sympathetic with Marcuse's "arguments for a new political praxis that integrates sensuality, fantasy, and desire" and with his "radically new interpretation of needs."

The essay on Hannah Arendt[11] demonstrates the great affinity that exists between her thought and Habermas's. There is in Arendt the classical distinction between purposive rational action (*poiesis*) and technical expertise (*techne*), on the one hand, and intersubjectivity engendered by discourse (*praxis*) and practical enlightenment (*phronesis*) on the other; there is the open texture of the discriminating judgment of Kant's third critique, which she transposes into the political sphere; and there is the centrality of consensus formation through free communication. All these features of Arendt's thought have been taken up in modified form by Habermas. In this particular essay, he sets forth her concept of power as the "capacity to agree in uncoerced communication on some community action" and uses it as a springboard to introduce further distinctions into the notion.

Habermas begins by setting Arendt's idea of power in relief against those of Weber's action theory and Parsons's systems theory, in both of which "successful outcome" rather than "agreement" is what counts. For Arendt, "the basic phenomenon is not the instrumentalizing of another's will for one's own purposes but the formation of a common will in communication aimed at agreement." The latter depends on "that peculiarly coercion-free force with which insights prevail." Its sole criterion is the "rational validity immanent within speech," which Habermas, when he wrote this piece, already differentiated into the truth of statements, the rightness of norms, and the truthfulness of expressions. The three-dimensional framework of Kant's critical project is obvious.

Arendt, in dissociating her notion of power from the conception of purposive rational action in Weber, stakes out the domain of communicative action, which has become central to Habermas's most recent thought. With deceptive boldness, Arendt tries to transform the basic presuppositions of liberal political theory. For Hobbes and Locke, power in the form of oppression is the most basic political phenomenon; in the state of nature as war we are its prey, whereas in the state of civil or political society this power is moderated or qualified by consent. Arendt calls the former kind of power (that unmediated through consent) *violence*; she restricts the use of the term *power* to whatever is mediated by reasonable consent. Apparently taking her bearings from an ancient Greek reading of the American experiment, she begins with legitimation, since natural equality is based (for her) not in the virtual ability of each to kill the other (as was true for Hobbes) but on "the rational claim immanent in speech." The latter is actualized, on her view, in the "public sphere," about which Habermas, too, has written extensively.[12]

In the course of a brief yet breathtaking summary and illustration of Arendt's main theses on power Habermas tells us that she made "the image she painted of the Greek polis" into "the essence of the political," and that she uses this construct in a somewhat Procrustean fashion to analyze the phenomena connected with depoliticization within modern bourgeois society and the modern state. This leads him to a reformulation of the concept of power that does not relegate to "violence" all forms of legitimate political strategic action, remove politics from its economic and social conditions, or make politics incapable of dealing with structural violence.

In regard to strategic action (or "the capacity to keep other individuals from perceiving their interests"), Habermas points out that its use in modern democracies has been both *de facto* and *de jure* when it comes to the acquisition and assertion of power, if not its engendering. But to come adequately to terms even with the engendering of power, Arendt's heuristic in terms of action theory needs to be integrated with ideas from systems theory, since power is engendered within structures that are not reducible to the intentions of the agents who are involved. Once the specifically structural aspect of violence is clearly recognized, one can go on to unmask the "unnoticed yet effective barriers to communication" erected by ideologies, which thus assume the power that, according to Arendt, should emerge from "an opinion

upon which many are in public agreement." Here we approach the core of Habermas's disagreement with Arendt. For her, the arrival at a public consensus cannot be rational in the strict sense, because it is practical and not theoretical. At best, it can be "representative" thought. Accordingly, power is confined "to the force of mutual promise or contract." In contrast, Habermas argues that through tests of the validity of norms in relation to generalizable needs *cognitive* claims can be redeemed in the realm of practice, and that in this way a standard is reached for "discriminating illusionary and nonillusionary convictions." For Arendt, then, the communicative theory of action devolves into a form of natural-right theory, whereas for Habermas communication theory issues in a critique of ideology.

Habermas's obvious antipathy to Heidegger does not lead him to simply write him off. How far he is from doing so may be seen in his speech of praise for Hans-Georg Gadamer, delivered on the occasion of the latter's reception of the Hegel Prize and entitled "Urbanizing the Heideggerian Province."[13] The conceit of a contrast between the virtue of urbanity and the vice of provincialism sets the tone for Habermas's terse summation of the contributions of a philosopher who has participated with him in one of the most celebrated debates of recent years.

Habermas sees Gadamer, the father of what has come to be known as philosophical hermeneutics, as having accomplished a translation into terms accessible to the contemporary academic discussion of the rather arcane and rough-hewn reorientation of thought achieved by Martin Heidegger. He has tried "bridging three chasms that have opened up between ourselves and the philosophy of the Greeks: . . . the breaks brought about in the nineteenth century by historicism, in the seventeenth century by physics, and at the start of modernity by the transition to the modern apprehension of the world." His painstaking elaboration in terms of the philologically retrievable tradition of Heidegger's meditation "about the Being which is not supposed to be the being of a circumscribable entity" has yielded real dividends for contemporary science and scholarship: "It demonstrates . . . that hermeneutics has contributed precisely to the self-enlightenment of methodological thinking, to the liberalizing of the understanding of science, and even to the differentiation of the practice of research." Beyond this, it "furthers the enlightenment concerning the depth structures lying at the base of the life world" by "highlight[ing] the

linguistic intersubjectivity that unites all communicatively socialized individuals from the outset." These forms of enlightenment are in complete consonance with Habermas's own aims, but Habermas does not let us forget that "the Enlightenment, the universalist eighteenth century" is more important to his reconstruction of the humanist tradition than it has been to Gadamer's. This essay demonstrates how open the conversation between Gadamer and Habermas remains.

Anyone who reads Habermas's eightieth-birthday tribute to Gershom Scholem[14] will not be surprised that Habermas was chosen to represent the Federal Republic of Germany at the graveside ceremonies in Israel after Scholem's death. The depth of feeling that Habermas manifests in this essay is, I believe, not due just to the fateful relationship between Germans and Jews discussed so stunningly in Scholem's famous 1966 article on the subject. It has more to do with Habermas's long-standing empathy with German-Jewish thinkers, with his indebtedness to Scholem for uncovering the roots of Schelling and Marx in the Kabbalah, and with his interest in Scholem's account of how one strain of Jewish thought sought to overcome historicism by means of mystical exegesis.

The poignancy of Habermas's response to Scholem's discussion of Germans and Jews is matched only by the boldness with which he sketches the implications of Scholem's portrayal of the transformation within the mystical tradition of the Jewish notions of revelation, tradition, and teaching. Habermas's approach here is based on maintaining the centrality of the subject matter of the authoritative text for all philological procedure. For one who, like Scholem, does not claim "an immediate, intuitive access to the divine life process," the only access to the ineffable subject matter of the authoritative texts of Jewish revelation, tradition, and teaching is, as Habermas explains, "a theory of the object." The "object" in this case includes the entire complex of relationships among God, the revealing subject; the authoritative Torah; the human transmission of meaning, both in the original formation of the Torah and in the forms of commentary; and, finally, the human realization of meaning in relation to the eschaton. Habermas develops this theory of the object with respect to issues in epistemology and the philosophy of history.

The keystone of the mystical interpretation of the way these elements are related to one another is the doctrine of the self-contraction of God in the act of continuing creation. The effective-historical upshot of this doctrine has been threefold: the materialist doctrine of nature,

the revolutionary theory of history, and the nihilism of the post-revolutionary movement. The first, which is supposed to have begun with God's self-diremption in creation and continued throughout the course of natural and historical evolution, formed the underpinning for Schelling's speculations in *Ages of the World* and for Hegel's *Logic.* The second, in which God's self-banishment transforms the messianic task of redemption into a purely human one, emerges in secular fashion in Marx and the succeeding tradition, with the interpretation "no revolutionizing of nature without a revolutionizing of society." The nihilistic trend has its origin in God's creative act of descent into darkness and is transmogrified into a doctrine of redemption through sin. This doctrine has borne fruit not only in religious practices throughout the centuries but also in secular forms ranging from authentic nihilism to modern-day terrorism.

Having noted that Judaism has been in the forefront of involvement with the "universalist values of emancipatory movements, bourgeois as well as socialist," Habermas evidently finds congenial Scholem's interpretation of Judaism as "a moral concern, a historical project that cannot be defined once and for all"; as "a spiritual enterprise that lives out of religious sources." It is clear, moreover, that Habermas does not fully credit Scholem's characterization of himself as a mere historian living with the question of whether Judaism can survive the secularization of its religious sources. He obviously overhears something more when, in a reply to a question about the significance kabbalistic thought might have for contemporary Judaism, Scholem responds: "God will appear as non-God. All the divine and symbolic things can also appear in the garb of atheistic mysticism."

Walter Benjamin might well be a candidate for the title of an atheistic mystic in our day. Habermas's essay[15] on this friend of Adorno and associate of the Frankfurt School, sometime friend of Brecht, and enigmatic friend of Scholem may well be the richest piece in this collection; it is surely the most difficult. It stands as a watershed in the burgeoning literature on Benjamin. However, it is also a radical coming to terms on Habermas's part with a thinker who may represent the most serious challenge to his emancipatory enterprise.

Benjamin's thought is notoriously elusive, almost evanescent. Its characteristic oscillation between Marxist materialism and Jewish religious motifs is hard enough to follow without the changing valences he assigned to art and surrealist thought at different times. And though

Benjamin was quite sensitive to the abuses of Marxism and Judaism in their inauthentic forms of positivism and magic, respectively, he tended to fall into them himself at times. The tension in his work between the two (as Scholem would have it, opposed) orientations, and the intermix of their debased forms, make his thought almost impossible to systematize, let alone appropriate. Habermas takes his cue from the image in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" of the theological dwarf and the Marxist puppet of historical materialism. Benjamin, he argues, tried to enlist historical materialism in the services of a theology of history.

After laying out the main classifications of the literature on Benjamin, Habermas begins his account by concentrating on various aspects of Benjamin's philosophy of art, brilliantly setting Benjamin's ideas against the similar yet perhaps less profound ideas of Marcuse and Adorno. Here we meet such notions as 'aura,' 'secular illumination,' and 'dialectical images.' Not the least virtue of Habermas's rendition is the way he registers Benjamin's own ambivalence toward the phenomenon of aura, according as it is ritualized or deritualized.

One constant feature of Benjamin's thought is the experience correlative to what in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" he calls the *Jetztzeit* [now time]: an experience of time that breaks up the continuity of homogeneous time or of time as a raceway of instants. Habermas points out the centrality of Benjamin's theory of experience as unspoiled and unmutilated—"of people living close to nature, madmen, seers, and artists"—and of his project of a criticism that rescues, that "transpose[s] the beautiful into the medium of the true, by which transposition 'truth is not an unveiling which annihilates the mystery, but a revelation and a manifestation that does it justice.' " Experience in this sense enters upon "a field of surprising correspondences, between animate and inanimate nature . . . wherein things, too, encounter us in the structure of vulnerable intersubjectivity." "In such structures," Habermas continues, "the essence that appears escapes the grasp after immediacy without any distance at all; the proximity of the other refracted in the distance is the signature of a possible fulfillment and a mutual happiness." Habermas observes that for Benjamin such experience is like religious or mystical experience. However, the intent of Benjamin's "rescuing critique" is to render an experience that had been solitary and esoteric into one that is public and universal.

Habermas discusses how Benjamin's theory of experience is moored in a mimetic theory of language whose crucial aspect is a semantic potential in the light of which humans can interpret their needs and make the world accessible to experience. The primordial mimesis consists in the imaginal representation of "natural correspondences," which serve without exception to "stimulate and awaken the mimetic capacity in the human being that responds to them in human beings." This original expressive stratum of language constitutes a potential out of which human historical self-interpretation is nourished. Like the "Jews who were prohibited from investigating the future" and "instructed in remembrance," rescuing critics would dig retrospectively until they penetrated the taproot of this semantic potential by "grasp[ing] the constellation [their] own era has formed with a definite earlier one." Thus, rescuing critique establishes a conception of the present as "the time of the now," which is "shot through with chips of messianic time." Benjamin believed that this procedure would benefit from the use of historical materialism as a heuristic device.

Habermas appreciates how historical materialism kept Benjamin from reducing politics to show in a merely surrealist fashion, and the way the messianic strain in his thought engendered a "prophylactic doubt" that kept his dialectical theory of progress from reducing utopia to prosperity and so short-circuiting the revolutionary content of universal freedom and happiness into a regime of meaninglessness. Here, however, on the threshold of Nietzsche's "last man," Habermas does not think Benjamin's semantic materialism—his synthesis of historical materialism and theology—is successful. Its standard is too 'Manichaean,' too totalizing, to take proper account of partial emancipations under secular auspices "in the products of legality, if not even in the formal structures of morality."

Habermas has provided a remarkable statement of Benjamin's challenge. The course of modern history has increased the dimensions of catastrophe and heightened a certain eschatological consciousness; it has left us in the situation of crisis portrayed in Benjamin's philosophical-historical thesis on *Angelus Novus*. We can discern from Habermas's essay "Does Philosophy Still Have a Purpose?" that he wants to confront the contemporary crisis of modernity, as did Weber, Heidegger, Adorno, Horkheimer, and others, by reraising the question of rationality. He understands in all its subtlety the changed constellation of philosophy since Hegel's death—as regards the unity of philosophy