

Review of: "Footnotes to History: Márkus's Critique of Habermas's Debate with the Budapest School in the Philosophical Discourses of Modernity"

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The paper deals with the debate, characteristic of Marxist social theorising in the 1970s and early 80's, conducted between Jürgen Habermas, the most renowned representative of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, and György Markus (to lesser extent Agnes Heller), associated with the so-called Budapest School – both schools of thought generally labelled as variants of Western Marxism, understood here as re-interpretations of the foundations of Marxist social science and social philosophy. The problem which the author addresses concerns, in Habermas's reading (1985, 95–99), the two answers, those of a philosophy of reflection and of a philosophy of praxis, offered by Western Marxists to the dilemmas of a positivist and objectivist understanding of Marxism. The first solution, applied by the young Georg Lukács and the Frankfurt School, consists of taking up, with the help of Hegel, Max Weber's analysis of rationalisation as the core developmental logic of the Western civilisation. The second one, associated by Habermas with the Budapest School, leans, with the help of the later Lukács's social ontology, on the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. For Habermas, the major difference between these two variations on the Marxist theme of practical philosophy, with the problem of reification or alienation at its centre, lies in that the former line of thought has a substantive concept of rationality whereas the latter one does not. To fill this gap – that is, first, to avoid the philosophy of consciousness (reflection) of the former but preserve the concept of rationality and, second, to preserve from the philosophy of praxis the idea of action but define it in non-productive terms – Habermas (1981) himself proposes a theory of communicative action. The author, however, thinks that the focus of Habermas's basic intuition is misplaced. Instead, he sides with the philosophy of praxis, or *Produktionsparadigm*, as Habermas calls it, as represented by Markus (and Heller in the 1970s).

In order to show that Habermas is wrong and Markus right, the author first paraphrases Habermas's standpoint (Section 1) and then deals with Markus's answer to Habermas (Section 2). As I have, given the short time-span for collecting material for my review, been unable to consult the interview given by Markus to the journal *Active; Reactive* in 1993, which forms the basis of Markus's answer as analysed by the author, I shall limit my comments on what the author says about Habermas. While I think that the author should be acknowledged for drawing our attention to the comparatively neglected tradition of the Budapest School, I maintain that the paper would benefit from considering, in view of a revision, the following four types of suggestions, some of which obviously are caused by the brevity of the paper.

1) *Imprecision*. Section 1 summarises almost verbatim Habermas's main points. The reader, without consulting the original text, is, however, left unaware of this, as the author cites Habermas very sparingly. I think that the author should

state more clearly where he is just rendering, directly or indirectly, Habermas's ideas and where he adds something to them. This would increase the reader's ability to assess him- or herself the merits and dismerits of Habermas's standpoint.

2) *Error*. On page 3, the author cites Habermas saying that "no one today could deny that the quality of life in society has [been] improved by increas[ing] the social complexity of social systems". The idea in the original is the opposite: "Heute wird niemand mehr behaupten wollen, dass sich die Qualität des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens mit wachsender Komplexität gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens verbessern müsse" (Habermas 1985, 102). Either the English translation upon which the author bases his summary is incorrect and he is not to blame, or he has misread his notes.

3) *Conflicts of interpretation*. My first suggestion has to do with the academic norm of attributing authorship to whom it may belong, and the second one with matters of fact. Conflicts of interpretation are of another kind. They concern the way we read texts and the questions we pose to them. Hence, they are dependent on the *Weltanschauung* or philosophical outlook of the reader – and this means that conflicting interpretations of the same texts are of necessity made. I sympathise with both the Frankfurt School and the Budapest School. That is why I would frame the conflict between Habermas and Markus in an other way. For Markus (1980, esp. 96–103), the duality or problem underlying Western Marxism resides not, not primarily at least, in the difference between a philosophy of reflection and that of a philosophy of praxis, but in that between Marxism as a positive science capable of describing social realities, on one hand, and as a means of guiding emancipatory collective action, on the other hand. If this connection is severed, and Markus thinks that is the case with Habermas's theory of communicative action which substitutes mankind for the working-class as the "addressee" of the theory, then the basic premise of Marxism is abandoned. Hence, the severe tenor of Markus's answer to Habermas.

4) *"In-between" problems*. There is considerable leeway between what are definitely facts and what are matters of opinion or consequences from the adopted viewpoint. As instances of this category I would like to give a couple of examples. a) The author contrasts Markus with Habermas by describing the former's mode of reasoning as presenting "cutting edge modern social science" (the abstract) and "meet[ing] current standards of modern scientificity" (p. 5). However, no definition of the standards is provided, nor does the author support the claim by any detailed examination of cases in which they are applied. Anyway, the assertion is remarkable, for two reasons. First, it has been Habermas's aim from the very beginning of his encounter with what doing social research in the 20th century means to marry the ancient tradition of political philosophy with the modern one of empirically substantiated social study (it is to be remembered that *Sozialforschung* is the term that originally identified the specificity of the Frankfurt School or Critical Theory). To my knowledge, which admittedly is very limited, Markus has announced no such intention nor practiced it. Second, the author endorses without any qualification Markus's claim that "Habermas reduces the whole of historical development to the sole axis of instrumental rationality and to the evolution over nature" (p. 4). This, too, sounds counterintuitive, as Habermas's (see, e.g. 1968, 36–59) contribution to historical materialism, in his own estimate in any case, has been the effort to bypass the *Produktionsparadigm* both in its narrow (economism; cf. representatives of The Second International) and in its wide sense (seeing the constitution of all the objectifications of the human world, and not only those produced by labour in its instrumental sense, as brought forth by a similar praxis – the latter proposition being the premise of the

Budapest School).

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