

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

Marten Koomen

Potential competing interests: None

This review is in three parts. First is a judgement about the article's academic contribution, second an interpretation of its arguments, third an engagement with its content.

The article makes a sound academic contribution in how it faithfully represents Habermas' position in ways that are new and pithy. Habermas's position, and issues with it, are recognizable throughout the article. While this reviewer is not familiar with Márkus's critique of Habermas, the issues raised by the article in the context of Habermas's interlocutors are sensible and presented in a novel way making a valuable academic contribution.

The article explores, to use terms from Habermas's theory of communicative action, differences among interlocutors over how the objective world – and its instrumental, technical and strategic reasoning, relates to the social world - and its moral-practical and normative reasoning. The crux of the argument explored by the article is that Habermas and Márkus characterise the relationship between the objective and social worlds differently. As a result of this difference, Márkus characterises Habermas position ahistorical compared to Markus's own historical approach because that theory factors language more significantly in the paradigm of production than Habermas's. While the veracity of the various positions is not addressed in this review, the importance of what the article addresses will be.

This reviewer does not consider Habermas's theory ahistorical, and instead finds that in *Communication and The Evolution of Society* Habermas explicitly reconstructs Marxism and its sole concern for objectivating technical reasoning. Habermas's theory simultaneously addresses 'progress in objectivating knowledge and in moral-practical insight' (177). In this way, and in this reviewer's opinion, Habermas's reconstructed theory becomes historical in how it responds to developments in society when addressing validity and legitimacy. However, upon reading the article this reviewer was alerted to Habermas's work in communicative action, particularly in '*Between Facts and Norms*', tends to focus on language and in a way that backgrounds the physical and objective world. Furthermore, and a point made in the article, Habermas' claim to universality through the pragmatic use of language opens his theory to criticisms of reification and ahistoricism. However, in this reviewer's opinion, claims that Habermas's theory reifies is rebutted by Habermas's insistence that the validity and legitimacy of any claim always remains open to the better argument made with respect to one or all of the objective, social and subjective worlds. That is, while universal pragmatics is a species-wide competence how the species describes its knowledge nevertheless evolves and is dynamic.

Finally, this reviewer is somewhat annoyed with the opening sentence of the abstract which locates the content of the

article within the ivory tower of philosophers. This opening belies the practical and contemporary relevance of matters addressed. The article references a range of thinkers appropriately, such as Husserl, Lukács, Marcuse as well as Heidegger - that member of the Nazi party member from whom Habermas distances himself while, like most of western sociology, remaining seminally attached to. While these references are necessary in the context, through these references to the usual suspects the article somewhat succumbs to the criticism of Barthes, Derrida and Foucault observed in the article that these theorists overinvest in signification. However, the article saves itself from being a mere rearrangement of signifiers by pertaining to contemporary issues that are nevertheless not explicitly addressed by it. For example, the inclusion of Austin's speech act theory in Habermas's theory suggests that Habermas may have something to say about the Australian Indigenous Voice (Social World) to parliament, an institutional means through which better arguments from non-western thinkers might be heard in opinion formation and law-making. Australian Indigenous forum for hearing voices (Subjective World) are also explicitly tied to Country (Objective World). On another matter bypassed western sociology, how the article addresses paradigms of production reminded me that the left, and Marxist sociology in general, has never come to terms, or adequately theorised, how the knowledge economy and its production of economic value through linguistic labour usurped Marxism and its production of economic value through physical labour. Nevertheless, the article is located within this failure of contemporary Marxist thought to make it eminently worthwhile.