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Critical Theory and the Challenge of Globalization

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abstract: In recent years the concept of globalization migrated successfully from the discourse of the mass media into the realm of social theory and political philosophy. But this migration does not only evince the changes of economic, political and social realities, it also expresses the need to revise our theoretical toolboxes. Theory itself becomes the target of this scrutiny. Do we really need political and social theories, once the illusion of a well-organized social and political world has vanished? The answer to this question leads to critical theory. This article argues that theoretical reflection is important in order to establish a normative frame, which is indispensable in a situation of major political and social transformation. But also that a critical theory of globalization has to learn from the mistakes committed in the past. It has to accept more willingly the consequences of the awareness of plurality and accept the challenge to eliminate its Eurocentrism.

keywords: contingency ♦ critical theory ♦ Eurocentrism ♦ globalization ♦ modernity

Introduction

Current political and social discourses share a common orientation. They all revolve around the concept that became the buzzword of the 1990s (Waters, 1996), and which will probably maintain or even reinforce this privileged position in the present decade: globalization.

The current consciousness of globalization could be understood as a radicalization of the dichotomizing or disjunctive logic of modernity. However, and this might be even more important, it also entails an awareness of the fact that there is no conceptual – or philosophical-normative

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– solution at hand, nor is there any international movement or political force guided by an ideological universalism which would move the world in a desirable direction. In other words, while the theoretical-practical ambitions of modernity have been the construction of a social-political *cosmos* (Toulmin, 1990) with the groundwork laid out by a theoretical project, current social and political experiences lead to the discrediting of both. Little credibility exists for the possibility of the constitution of such a material cosmos of social relations, or for the possibility that such order may be planned and normatively oriented by some kind of overarching grand theory.

This leaves us the challenge to rethink political and social theory today. What could be the task of social and political theory after the ambitions of a grand theory have failed once and forever? How should theorizing develop and in which forms?

Critical theory has always been concerned with similar problems. It might even be possible to compare the historical situation in which critical theory emerged with our current situation, for, in both cases, a certain awareness of a global crisis seems to be crucial for the consciousness of the time. In what follows we consider whether critical theory offers a possible way of coping with the challenges that globalization presents to our conventional forms of political and social theory, and under what conditions it might be able to do so. A central idea is that in order for it to be effective as a critical theory of globalization it has to reorient its critique of the ideology of capitalism to a critique of the ideology of European culture. Consequently, it has to overcome its own Eurocentrism.

First, we consider what might be called the ‘metatheoretical objectives’ of critical theory. Taking these objectives seriously, an immanent critique of critical theory should highlight the problem of Eurocentrism. Finally, there is an attempt to show that a critical theory of globalization can only work if it assesses our contemporary modernity as a highly contingent and plural reality.

The Metatheoretical Objectives of Critical Theory

In using the concept ‘metatheory’ here, it is necessary to explain in greater detail what is meant by it. Metatheory can be understood in a double sense: on the one hand, it refers to reflections that are primarily concerned with problems of the self-understanding of theory and, in a more general way, of science. Metatheory in this sense is linked to the self-reflection of theory. The same is true with critical theory, for it ‘is a self-reflection of traditional theory, not its substitution by another model’ (Türcke and Bolte, 1997: 39).

On the other hand, metatheory in the sense of critical theory also refers

to a theoretical endeavour, which seeks foundations in the 'pre-scientific' realm of social praxis. According to Horkheimer, these two goals are intrinsically interwoven:

Science lacks the self-reflection to recognize the reasons which make it wanting to reach the moon but not ensure the wellbeing of the human race. In order to be authentic science it would have to be critical to itself and to the society that produces it. (Horkheimer, 1972a: 163)

These two metatheoretical orientations allow critical theory to break away from the two major strands of 'traditional' ways of theorizing: its metaphysical (or idealistic) strand, as well as its positivistic strand. Critical theory looks for an orientation in that which has not yet become reality, but which is already inscribed in the existing social reality. Critical theory has thus a strong normative commitment, other than positivistic social science and idealism, concerned not only with the two Kantian questions 'What can I know?' and 'What should I do?', but also with the question 'What can I hope for?' (Marcuse, 1968: 114).

Methodologically, these metatheoretical considerations do not mean that philosophy and empirical science have to be abandoned altogether. On the contrary, the metatheoretical ideas of critical theory can only be realized by a strong programmatic link between social science and philosophy. This is what Max Horkheimer had in mind when he established the interdisciplinary orientation of the Institute for Social Research (see Horkheimer, 1972b). On the one hand, empirical social research is indispensable for monitoring the pathologies of the given society, as well as grasping the possibilities and tendencies for overcoming them. On the other hand, philosophy not only constitutes the programmatic or metatheoretical frame in which the concrete social research develops, but it also provides the tools for critical interpretation of the given realities.

The Eurocentrism of Critical Theory

Despite these metatheoretical objectives, one of the major problems of the legacy of the Frankfurt School was that it lacked a solid grounding in social realities. Following generations of critical theorists have systematically analysed this problem and have detected its roots in a combination of functionalism and philosophy of history (Habermas, 1988; Honneth, 1995a; see also Dubiel, 1992: 23–84). It seems, as they suggest, that just as a decision was made to favour functionalism and philosophy of history, it could have also been made to favour alternative conceptual models. In this way, most other problems which are evident in the theoretical propositions of the early Frankfurt School are understood as consequences of these theoretical decisions and are treated as secondary.

Against this common assessment, which implicitly reaffirms belief in the autonomous subject who at least makes theoretical decisions independently, I argue that Horkheimer and Adorno are in fact caught up in Eurocentrism which is evinced precisely in philosophy of history and functionalism, and that a critical theory, especially with the awareness of our global social conditions, has to try to overcome these discursive frameworks which are constitutive for the narrative reproduction of the European identity. Accordingly, we should not understand the problem of Eurocentrism in critical theory as a marginal aspect for an evaluation of this strand of thought. Rather, Eurocentrism in critical theory should be conceived as a crucial impediment, not only with regard to a possible theory of globalization, but also to the intention of converting the metatheoretical objectives into a satisfying critical theory which still might be able to say something about our current social realities. To put it more bluntly: a convincing revision of critical theory has to get to grips with its inherent Eurocentrism in order to resolve its conceptual insufficiencies. We should briefly analyse the Eurocentric *world-view* of the early Frankfurt School. Then it will be possible to proceed to consider alternatives. But first it is necessary to explain what is meant by Eurocentrism.

What Does Eurocentrism Mean?

It is important to try to answer this question because, despite the proliferating use of this term, systematic definitions are still rare. Eurocentrism is mostly understood as a more or less conscious affirmation of European values and virtues. Thus, a certain self-critical attitude towards one's own European culture seems to be the remedy to overcome Eurocentrism. In this sense, critical theory would be one of the first requirements in the fight against Eurocentrism. However, this conspiracy-approach to Eurocentrism is not able to grasp the 'deep structure' of the problem. As a matter of fact, the blind affirmation of European values and virtues has provoked consistent criticism throughout the 20th century. This criticism, however, has not eradicated Eurocentrism. On the contrary, oftentimes anti-Eurocentrism turned out to be equally Eurocentric. How can we account for this paradoxical situation? It might be helpful to introduce first of all a distinction between two dimensions of Eurocentrism.

The first one can be called the 'psychological dimension', comprising investigation into the psychological profile of a Eurocentric individual. For some individuals it might be more difficult than for others to overcome their Eurocentrism (or any other kind of attachment to a certain culture). Especially, as research on intercultural communication has discovered there are indeed variations concerning the possibilities and limits of cultural adjustment which depend on personal, that is psychological factors. It is not necessary to go further into this point, but based on the

biographical material available from the time the Frankfurt Scholars spent in the USA, it seems clear that the intercultural capacities of Horkheimer, and especially Adorno, were not very strongly developed. Their works represent a potent example of the rejection of any kind of positive affirmation of the culture they encountered in the USA (especially Adorno, 1969).

The fact that Adorno understood his life as a 'damaged' one (Adorno, 1969: 174) can be linked to his forced emigration. According to the work of Charles Taylor, an individual's intact personality structure does not only depend on its capacity to build an identity, but identity-building is linked to moral orientation and finally to cultural values. Accordingly, one might expect that a morally sensitive person like Adorno suffered from an identity crisis as he had been forced to live in a different cultural environment.

This takes me to the second dimension, the cultural dimension of Eurocentrism, which nevertheless interacts with the former, as previously indicated. However, according to Samir Amin, Eurocentrism should be understood *first of all* as a 'culturalism' (Amin, 1989; see also Kozlarek, 2000). At this point, we leave the realm of anthropological invariables. As Amin argues, to understand Eurocentrism as culturalism we are not concerned with the human need for self-assurance. Rather, we would have to enquire about the cultural particularities of Eurocentrism and not about its universal functions. In other words, to understand Eurocentrism as culturalism, means to understand it as a particular way of constructing a particular *European* identity.

How can we describe this particular European identity? According to Charles Taylor or Alessandro Ferrara, modern European identity is marked first of all by the recognition of plurality and difference. One of its major claims is thus that of authenticity (Taylor, 1992; Ferrara, 1995). But the awareness of plurality and difference is only one side of the coin. The other side is that plurality and difference were usually understood as preliminary conditions, which in the future would have to be replaced by a new unity. Europe's self-proclaimed task was that of the theoretical-practical construction of this unity or, to quote Stephen Toulmin once again: Europe's self-declared task has always been the building of a *cosmopolis* (Toulmin, 1990).

It is precisely this 'universal' ambition which allows Europe to interpret itself as the centre of the world (see also Lambropoulos, 1993). In other words, one of the implicit objectives of European culture is to reproduce its 'centrality': that is, its supposed 'superiority' over other cultures and civilizations. This is true for all its forms of expression, be it in the arts (see Said, 1993), sciences, philosophy or social sciences (see Wallerstein, 1997). In order to accomplish this self-reproducing task, European

culture has invented a series of mechanisms which, although often not overtly, serve the purpose of a particular culture. This is the case of 'Eurocentric universalism', which is also the first aspect of Eurocentrism I would like to highlight. As Bernhard Waldenfels explains:

Eurocentrism reveals itself after close examination as a special kind of centricism, which does not mean that analogous forms of centration would be impossible for other cultures. Under the most sophisticated of its defenders eurocentrism is not only a kind of homemade ethnocentrism in which the own of the own tribe, of the own nation is opposed with absolute preference against the strange or the other. . . . As a whole eurocentrism lives from the expectation that the own reveals itself little by little as the whole and the general. (Waldenfels, 1997: 135)

Eurocentric universalism can thus be understood as one of the ideological pillars of a practical economic, political and social project of the construction of a world society under European control. Today's 'globalization', as a consequence of this project that started some 500 years ago with the brutal conquest of the 'New World', should be seen within this context. There is no natural, historical or other universal principle which led to the construction of the interconnected world as we know it today. Rather, there was a moment in history, which provided the essential ingredients, concentrated in Europe, to build this global structure, as well as its legitimizing ideologies, which are still not fully deconstructed.

In order to justify universal validity claims, a second Eurocentric mechanism was important: philosophy of history. Philosophy of history is a metanarrative of modernity which unifies what might be geographically different under the umbrella of time. This function reveals itself in what might be called the 'cosmological myth' (Kozlarek, 2000: 126–32): in an analogy referring to the movement of the sun, 'the cosmological myth' explains the 'movement' of history as a westbound one. According to this ideological invention everything east of Europe can only be outmoded, while everything west of it still remains in the twilight of the undetermined, open not only to any kind of adventurism but also to the unfulfilled European expectations and hopes. America appears to be the 'natural' continuation of what started in Europe. In this sense, the 'New World' became the geographical materialization of 'Utopia'. Ever since Hegel, the 'cosmological myth' was disguised as a kind of natural history of Reason.

The Eurocentric World-View of the Frankfurt School

Perhaps this self-questioning of Europe was not so highly developed when critical theory was brought into being about 70 years ago. Although situated between two world wars, the idea of the cultural leadership of Europe was still widely accepted. There was a clear awareness of global

interconnectedness, but for many it was just as clear that Europe was the undisputed force behind this construction and that it deserved its leading position as the most 'advanced' or 'civilized' culture. It was commonly assumed that the European tradition provided the means to overcome its 'crisis' (Husserl, 1936).

Critical theory was probably a little more sceptical, criticizing precisely the Husserlian continuation of the identity-thinking which promotes the modern dream of a reconciling unity. 'Negativity' and 'non-identity' are the answers to this kind of positive thinking. However, if one searches in the writings of the Frankfurt School for evidence of the legacy of Eurocentrism, one will find it. The recently published first number of *Hannoversche Schriften* (1999), a forum which promotes discussions concerning the revision and actualization of critical theory, was dedicated to the relationship between the Frankfurt School and America. While the attitude of Horkheimer and, especially, Adorno, towards their American exile is often criticized as a lack of understanding and even an unwillingness to accept the different culture (including the intellectual and scientific culture), the editors of *Hannoversche Schriften*, Detlev Claussen, Oskar Negt and Michael Werz, invert the argument: some of the substantial ideas of critical theory, they argue, would be inexplicable, had they not been developed under the impression of the 'American experience'. This may be true in a very general sense (Schmid Noerr, 1997: 116–52). As Bernhard Waldenfels explains, one might even argue that Eurocentrism is always the 'answer'; that is, a *reaction* to the experience of the 'other' (Waldenfels, 1997: 131–44). But, according to Waldenfels, this does not necessarily suspend Eurocentrism.

It is interesting to analyse the arguments of one of the texts of *Hannoversche Schriften* in detail: according to Detlev Claussen's article, one of the central consequences of the 'American experience' of the Frankfurt School could be summarized in Herbert Marcuse's famous phrase that there is no 'outside of capitalism'. According to Claussen, what Marcuse intended to express with these words is that capitalism has its variations, that it is not limited to 'bourgeois society' (Claussen, 1999: 31), but that it still brings about a unified world, which was always at the back of any modern mind.

In the USA, capitalism demonstrates its versatility; however, it is not so much the American *variation* of capitalism which was of interest for the Frankfurt scholars, but the supposed fact that despite the differences it represents the same.

The advanced American industrial society is not separated by an ocean from the European development of society towards a totalitarianism; rather, it is precisely *one* world which is simultaneously-unsimultaneously connected. (Claussen, 1999: 39)

Indeed, the idea of the 'one world' was preconceived by critical theorists before they came to the USA. It was not the direct contact with American reality which produced this idea. Already in Germany the scholars of the Frankfurt School thought that the contemporary 'crisis' was in fact a global phenomenon (Horkheimer, 1932). Critical theory's point of departure was a social totality which embraced the whole world (see Breuer, 1995: 75). Against other theories of modernity, critical theory did not regret the non-existence of unity. Unity is not the normative aim. However, the Frankfurt School presupposed the existence of such unity in the form of an all-encompassing, all-pervading totalitarian system.

According to Axel Honneth, in the 1930s it was precisely the link between political economy and the premises of philosophy of history which led critical theory into a situation where it became impossible to realize their metatheoretical ambitions in terms of a division of labour between social science and philosophy. In the 1940s this quest became ever more illusory. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1990), the weight of philosophy of history reduced critical theory to a kind of anthropological civilization theory in which Horkheimer and Adorno tried to delineate the development of human interaction with nature along an evolutionary line. Just as philosophy of history demanded, capitalism and the social pathologies which developed from it were now understood in terms of natural consequences of human evolution.

Related to this is the impossibility of closing the gap between theory and praxis. Critical theory was no longer able to articulate a theory of normativity, which would draw its inspiration directly from social realities, once social action was irreversibly reduced to instrumental action.

But instead of explaining these theoretical problems as mere conceptual flaws – that is, as unfortunate *conceptual decisions* – one might conceive them in terms of a false assessment of the contemporary world. To put it in a nutshell: the *world-view* – that is, the understanding critical theorists had of the world – was extremely Eurocentric, subjected to the Eurocentric ideology of modern culture. Had Adorno and Horkheimer understood that their object of criticism, Western philosophy, was not the ideology of a certain *time*, independent of cultural and geographical variations, and had they understood that the ideology of modernity was always the ideology of a particular 'western' or European culture, they might have looked elsewhere (for instance in the USA¹) for alternatives.

Towards Non-Eurocentric Alternatives

To pose the question of alternatives raises the question of whether alternatives really existed or not. In other words, could it be true that the world in the 1930s and the 1940s was actually moving towards an irreversibly unified system? In the contemporary globalization debate, one might find

many voices which would affirm this assessment without hesitation. For them the question is not whether such a unifying system exists or not, but how to evaluate it. The question directed to the Frankfurt School could be: What's so bad about an unifying 'world system'? I do not wish to answer these questions here, although one might easily argue that the realities were and are not so 'one-dimensional' as critical theorists in the 1930s and 1940s or the system-theorists of today think. What I am more interested in is the possibility of theoretical alternatives. But it seems clear that a non-functionalist theory which does not understand the fate of the world directed by the natural historical process can only stem from a different perception of the world, or, to be more precise, from an assessment that realizes the geographical and cultural differences existing in this world.

This more pluralistic *world-view* could indeed develop from the experience of emigration. Exile could have been a chance to reduce the distortions of the Eurocentric prism glass. Unfortunately, this did not happen with the protagonists of the early Frankfurt School. This does not mean that the exile did not have any positive influences on critical theory (see Schmid Noerr, 1997: 116–52). What is, however, disturbing is that at least those who belonged to the so-called 'inner circle' of the Frankfurt School did not question their *world-view* after emigration.²

Honneth is right when he suggests that alternatives did actually develop within the so-called 'outer circle' of the Institute for Social Research (Benjamin, the late Fromm, Kirchheimer and Neumann). According to Honneth, the separation between the 'inner' and 'outer circle' of the Institute for Social Research goes beyond the mere institutional situation, touching in fact the way in which critical social theory was realized. This is not to say that the differences are so radical as to transcend the metatheoretical core ideas of critical theory as well. Rather, it becomes clear that there are different ways in which the 'metatheoretical objectives' of critical theory might be realized. Honneth presents an interesting thesis:

In what follows I want to attempt . . . a systematic reconstruction of critical theory by supplementing the existing results with a further thesis, which is that the social-theoretical means whereby Horkheimer's goal might have been successfully realized were present solely in the works of those authors who held a more peripheral position in the Institute for Social Research. (Honneth, 1995a: 62)

According to Honneth, while the inner circle never left the burden of Marxist functionalism behind, the outer circle started to generate ideas which are more oriented towards an anti-functionalist and intersubjective action paradigm (Honneth, 1995a: 77). Although, based on hindsight, this

is definitely a correct interpretation, it does not satisfactorily explain why Benjamin, Kirchheimer, Neumann and Fromm made these decisions. Honneth himself has to admit that his interpretation refers to what is only 'implicitly' present in those authors (Honneth, 1995a: 78). He agrees that they did not develop an explicit anti-functionalist framework from which they would launch an alternative theoretical project. But if this is so, the anti-functionalist tendency of the outer circle scholars remains first of all an intuition. And one could argue that this intuition may be related to the experience which these scholars – with the exception of Benjamin – gained after they left Germany.

In his writings on scientific emigration during the Nazi era, Alfons Söllner explains just how significant the intercultural experience of the US exile had been, especially for Kirchheimer and Neumann. Differently from Horkheimer and Adorno, Söllner (1996) claims that the two left-wing disciples of Carl Schmitt modified the way in which they conceived of social science. He describes a process of 'scientific acculturation' which explains the openness towards empirical research without falling into the trap of a blind, pre-critical positivism. But it also explains the differentiated and complex *world-view* both researchers developed. According to Söllner, it is safe to say that the 'American experience' of Kirchheimer and Neumann left an important impression. It challenged the Eurocentric *world-view* and facilitated an awareness of the pluralism of the contemporary world, despite certain global coincidences. This awareness is not only anti-functionalist, it is also, if not primarily, a step towards an anti-Eurocentric comprehension of the actual contingency of the world.

Fromm, who is also mentioned by Honneth as one of those scholars who started to develop alternative ideas within the metatheoretical framework of critical theory, is another example that supports this argument. He first belonged to the inner circle of the Frankfurt Institute and started to distance himself precisely after his arrival in the USA, where he immediately absorbed important influences from the group of psychologists around Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. These were the influences which, according to Honneth, helped Fromm to overcome the functionalism of critical theory. But what seems to be more basic to this theoretic turn is the willingness to accept unconventional ideas, a tendency which Fromm continued later when he experimented with Zen Buddhism (see Fromm and Suzuki, 1960).

The Quest for a Critical Theory of Globalization

As this brief assessment shows, possible alternatives to the reproduction of a Eurocentric *world-view* do not contradict the metatheoretical objectives of critical theory. On the contrary, they take the critique of 'traditional

theory' (Horkheimer) one step further. According to Honneth, they paved the way for Habermas's major objection against the Frankfurt School, which might be summarized as a turn from an institutionalist view to an interaction-paradigm. This is not only consequential with respect to the post-metaphysical transformation of German idealism, but it also permits a less prejudiced view of social and political processes. At the same time, it distances itself from the concept. Instead of reducing social and political realities to certain analytical or normative concepts, an interaction-paradigm would allow critical theory to understand the processes which constitute social and political realities as well as the normative orientations which are inscribed in them. But more important in our context is the shift of perspective which this transformation allows; instead of assessing reality from the perspective of certain concepts, which themselves have a particular, mostly Eurocentric history, the transformation towards an interaction-paradigm opens the view from the perspective of the social actors. In this manner, there is a much better understanding of the contingency of social and political realities. In other words, the turn towards an interaction-paradigm of critical theory is not only a consequent move in order to convert the metatheoretical objectives into a satisfying critical social theory, it also helps to reduce the Eurocentric distortions, hence, opening the way for the realization of a critical theory of globalization.

However, contemporary attempts to update critical theory seem to fall back into the trap of conceptual reductionism, which had already been severely criticized by Horkheimer and Adorno as simply serving the purpose of unity-building. 'Justice' (Forst, 1994), 'equality' (Menke, 2000), 'tolerance' (Forst, 2000) or 'toleration' (Walzer, 1997), 'recognition' (Honneth, 1996) and 'authenticity' (Ferrara, 1995), are probably the most prominent examples. Despite their differences, all these examples share the conviction of the necessity to find the right normative concept that is able to regulate political and social processes of our contemporary societies.

This situation leaves us with two possibilities: the first one would be that the project of critical theory has to be abandoned once and forever. Perhaps a theory wanting to make a normative claim has to be universal, meaning that it has to articulate itself focused on certain universal concepts. However, this would not only be the end of critical theory, but also of the hope for a pluralistic, non-Eurocentric theory.

The other possibility is that we might have to rethink our theoretical ambitions. Instead of philosophically constructing normative validity claims, which express themselves in universal concepts, one might precisely follow the intuition of critical theory and ask where these concepts come from, and what their sociocultural functions were and are. Instead

of easily accepting the European as the universal, it should be recognized that Wallerstein is surely correct when he recently argued:

There is a premise here that is not really hidden, but was for a long time undebated. The premise is that whatever is the novelty for which Europe is held responsible in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, this novelty is a good thing, one of which Europe should be proud, one of which the rest of the world should be envious, or at least appreciative. (Wallerstein, 1997: 95)

Unfortunately, very few proposals of contemporary critical theory follow Wallerstein's example. Instead, they reaffirm European modernity as the standard. This becomes clear in Habermas: the world again appears, at least normatively, as the possible *cosmopolis*, that is, a conflict-resistant unity of reconciliation. Wolfgang Welsch explains: 'Habermas recognizes the plurality of reason but he tries to cure it one more time in the sense of the traditional commitment to unity' (Welsch, 1996: 139).

Honneth perceives this problem in Habermas. In his theory of recognition he makes a strong case for an anti-functionalist theory and a more modest kind of universalism which understands itself as a 'grammar of social struggles', open to a social scientific gaze which analyses the pre-scientific conditions of social realities in which normative horizons are already inscribed. This way normativity is not imposed by any kind of substantial set of ethical ideas or rational principles, rather, it is understood as constituting itself within the social processes. The task of theory, therefore, is to recognize the normativity social actors are producing or reaffirming within the social praxis. This sounds like a proposition which facilitates making theory more sensitive to the contingency of concrete social processes without fitting it into any kind of a priori frame. But at the bottom of Honneth's construction remains a hidden trap to Eurocentrism.

This Eurocentric threat is related to Honneth's normative ideas about modernity. As Habermas (Habermas, 1989: 16; see also Habermas, 1998: 198), he understands modernity in terms of an awareness of a certain crisis of normative expectations. That does not mean that modernity is understood as a value-free or even utilitarian enterprise. Rather, it should be understood that normativity has to be developed from within the social processes (Habermas, 1989: 16; 1998; Honneth, 1996). The values to which the social actors commit, or should commit, are no longer externally imposed but socially constructed. The individual subject enters onto the battlefield of receiving social recognition (*Wertschätzung*) conscious that the battle may modify the values.

This idea is related to the idea of a normatively autonomous modernity. In other words, the model is extracted directly from European history as Honneth's following reconstruction shows: in premodern societies

... social validity [was] still anchored in the unlimited religious or metaphysical power to persuade and therefore represented, in this sense, a metasocial reference to cultural self-understanding. But once this cognitive limitation was broadly surpassed, with the help of philosophy, once ethical obligations were discovered as the results of lifeworldly decision processes, the daily understanding of the character of the social order of values had to change as well: stripped of its transcendent foundations of evidence it is no longer possible to see it as an objective system of reference in which the imperatives of conduct inform, simultaneously, about the specific grades of social esteem. . . . Only now, the subject, as a biographical, individualized factor, enters the battle field of social esteem. (Honneth, 1995b: 267–8)

Even contemporary attempts to revise critical theory are not sufficiently critical for a critical theory of globalization. They can still be strongly tied to a particular modern experience limited to Europe and a few similar societies. Of course, one might argue that it is not the task of Honneth or Habermas to develop a theory which corresponds to the realities of all the different societies of the world.³ But a current critical theory has to answer to the global condition, and, at the same time, without repeating the fallacies of the false universalism, it cannot enclose itself in a new kind of localism or regionalism. This seems like a difficult task. But it is possible, by trying to realize the metatheoretical objectives of critical theory, for they do not necessarily lead to the construction of one all-encompassing theoretical system, but to a theoretical attitude of openness for the contingency of concrete social realities and consequently the contingency of normative orientations. I think that Craig Calhoun found a convincing way of expressing what this means:

... we cannot expect theoretical cumulation to result in the development of the *single*, completely adequate theory. The field of sociological theory necessarily – and indeed happily – will remain a field of dialogue among multiple theories, each offering aspects of truth and none of them commanding truth entirely. This means also that theory needs to be seen crucially through its role in the process of interpretation, and that its empirical content is often best deployed not as universal truth or law-like generalizations but as analogies, contrasts, and comparisons. (Calhoun, 1995: 8)

It seems convincing, as it does to Calhoun, that critical theory is well suited for such a task. But it has still a long way to go, in order to concretize it. 'Analogies, contrasts, and comparisons' are keywords for the comprehension of our global condition. But it obviously needs the consciousness of contingency to start with. As long as I think that my reality is basically everybody's reality, that my modernity is everybody's modernity, I remain unable to see analogies and contrasts, and I am consequently incapable of comparing. But this also means that a critical theory of globalization can only work as a multifocal project in which the experiences of different

modernities find a place of articulation. Such a multifocal project of critical theory does not yet exist. There are debates about the revision of critical theory going on in Europe and the USA. But these debates are virtually unaware of the existing debates in other parts of the world. At least, in Latin America a number of theoretical propositions to assess our current world from a Latin American perspective could be labelled as critical theory, and they might enrich the debates in Europe and elsewhere. Therefore, the first challenge to be faced by any attempt at developing a critical theory of globalization has to be to draw up an inventory of critical theories, accounting for differences as well as coincidences. This seems like a difficult task, which might suspend the articulation of *the* critical theory of globalization perhaps forever. But it is also the only possibility to eradicate the menace of the Eurocentric *world-view*.

Notes

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1. This suggestion has been made by Hans Joas (1993).
2. Perhaps Adorno shows a rather critical attitude towards his German culture in his broadcast contribution, 'What is German?' But that does not mean that he would really see an alternative in the American culture.
3. In fact, Helmut Dubiel would argue such a thesis. Especially with respect to his own work, he emphasizes that it follows the imperatives of the German situation (Dubiel, 2000: 129–52).

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