

CHAPTER 1

Dialectic of Difference: Enlightenment and Its Other

Enlightenment, whether considered as an historical process or a philosophical concept, has sparked a great deal of debate in contemporary social theory. Numerous events have occurred in the twentieth century—the rise of Nazism, the war that didn't end all wars, the development and deployment of nuclear weapons, the flagrant exploitation of "Third World" nations, and the rise and fall of "communism" just to name a few—that have prompted questions as to whether the objectives stated by Kant in 1784 have been, or are being realized:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere Aude!* "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment.

The all-important question for social theorists is whether the atrocities of the current century are a sign of immaturity or a function of the very maturation process that Kant so enthusiastically lauds. If the former is true, and further enlightenment is the solution, then enlightenment must be a basic tenet of any social theory. If the latter is the case, then social theory must cut against the grain that has been constituted by "enlightened" thought.

The poles that I have characterized, although construed a bit too simplistically, represent, in a sense, the theoretical presuppositions of two prominent schools of social thought: critical theory and poststructuralism. Critical theorists feel that the project of enlightenment must be continued by reconceptualizing it in a manner that is compatible with existing social and political conditions. Poststructuralists, in contrast, are less willing to accept the traditional concept of enlightenment in any form. Oddly enough, both schools are committed, in one way or another, to working through this problem by rethinking the Kantian critical project.

The publication in 1982 of the notes that were to be the third and

final volume of Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*¹ issued in a post-structuralist wave of scholarship on Kant's "political philosophy." This work focuses not so much on his more explicitly political writings, but rather on the third Critique. The neo-neo-Kantianism to which Arendt's Lectures gave rise developed what could be referred to as the politics of judgment.² In these fragments, Arendt attempts to dismiss Kant's "less than serious" dabblings in philosophical journalism in order to ferret out the political philosophy that he never quite wrote. She bases her analysis primarily on the notion of judgment developed in the third volume of the critical trilogy. This focus locates Kant's political philosophy in a rather paradoxical way. It would be hard to imagine a thinker more distinctively modern than Kant; yet the politics of judgment that Arendt gives impetus to in her lectures has taken on a surprisingly postmodern character.³ The expression of this is most notably found in the writings of Jean-François Lyotard.

The main alternative to the postmodern Kant that the neo-neo-Kantians have manufactured is the more conventional Kantianism developed by thinkers such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. Their attempts to write Kant's "fourth Critique" concentrate on the second increment of the critical trilogy. In doing so they remain firmly within the modernist tradition that Kant, in a sense, initiated. While my sympathies lie with the ethical content of this more likely approach to a Kantian political philosophy, there is a tendency, in my estimation, to ignore important structural changes that challenge some of modernism's most cherished principles. This is most clearly evident in Habermas's work. In his efforts to revive the ethical-political content of the modernist tradition, he tends to dismiss the "realities" of the postmodern condition. While I am not willing to fully embrace either the descriptive or normative dimensions of postmodernism, I do think that it is necessary—both philosophically and politically—to query with seriousness its threat to the tradition of enlightenment thought. In doing so, I will take up several of Kant's writings that Arendt, citing Schopenhauer favorably, claims do not seem to be "the work of this great man, but the product of an ordinary common man" (Arendt 1982, 8). My aim is to trace a line from Kant to Habermas that explores the territory between nostalgic modernism and cynical postmodernism.

The pivotal work in my analysis will be Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This remarkable book provides, in a number of ways, a context for the debate between the modernists and postmodernists on the question of enlightenment. I will explore this further by taking into consideration Michel Foucault's reflections on the question of enlightenment. My argument will be that Foucault is not opposed to enlightenment per se, but rather to a specifically

modern, humanist conception of enlightenment that lends itself to a particular type of immaturity. This situates Foucault as one of those key figures whose work lies between the modern/postmodern dichotomy. From there I will proceed to argue that Habermas's most recent assessment of late modern society comes to conclusions that are not incommensurate with Foucault's views. My aim in doing so is to provide a framework for discussions in subsequent chapters that will show that while late modern (advanced-capitalist or postindustrial) societies are in concrete terms not postmodern, a theory of enlightenment that is sensitive to the conditions of late modernity must take into consideration countermodern critiques. In doing so I will attempt to thematize the basic issues that are relevant to a politics of enlightenment appropriate to the aftermath of modernity.

THE POLITICS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: PHASE 1

In this section I will discuss three of Kant's essays that raise important issues concerning the conditions for a politics of enlightenment.⁴ These writings inform the conception that I will develop later. Kant attacked the question of enlightenment most directly in his famous essay "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?"⁵ In this short, but pithy, treatise, he develops a compelling case for the significant role that autonomy must play in a theory of enlightenment. Stating Kant's thesis once again:

Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance. (41)

While on the surface this might appear to be a radically individualistic view of autonomy, a closer look shows that Kant has a subtle understanding of the conditions that must obtain in order for autonomy to be a viable possibility. He thematizes this in terms of a strong principle of freedom—a freedom that takes shape in the context of changes occurring in both the political structures and the moral fabric of an emerging modernity. "But that the public should enlighten itself is more likely; indeed, if it is only allowed freedom, enlightenment is almost inevitable."

We see in Kant's thinking the development of a dialectical conception of enlightenment. On the one hand, autonomy or self-determination requires a substantive, concrete form of freedom. One can surmise that for Kant this involves secular authority, market economies, republican forms of government, and a separation between state and civil society. On the other hand, in order to see clearly what is required to bring about

a substantive form of freedom, subjects must already be autonomous. From an ahistorical point of view it would appear as though Kant's initial theory of enlightenment turns into a dilemma. But from the perspective of developing forms of life, the dilemma takes shape as a field of genuine social and political possibilities. These possibilities, which are dependent upon necessary a priori conditions, find their conditions of sufficiency within a newly emerging realm of political discourse.

However, insofar as this part of the machine also regards himself as a member of the community as a whole, or even of the world community, and as a consequence addresses the public in the role of a scholar, in the proper sense of that term, he can most certainly argue, without thereby harming the affairs for which as a passive member he is partly responsible. (42)

As such, the dialectic of enlightenment is located within the public sphere of bourgeois society.⁶

Kant further historicizes his position by pointing out how one of the sure signs of enlightenment is the realization that enlightenment is not a state to achieve, but rather a process to participate in. This highlights the importance that he attributes to public debate as a vehicle for generating enlightenment. A vibrant public sphere seems, for Kant, to be the most important structural constituent of the dialectic of enlightenment: at the social and political level it provides for a critical transformation of impediments to substantive freedom; at the individual level it provides a forum in which personal integrity and mutual respect can be fostered. Together these two aspects of the public sphere enable a strong sense of solidarity as well as a contextualized model of autonomy.

The theory of enlightenment developed thus far is principally conceptual. While I have focused upon Kant's appreciation of the historical embeddedness of the possibility for enlightenment, as a theory of enlightenment these contingencies are underdeveloped. In order to see more clearly the philosophy of history that is in the backdrop of this conceptual schema, it is useful to turn to Kant's sketch in "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent."⁷ Here he develops a series of theses that serve to illustrate the telos of enlightenment. Kant introduces this essay by bringing into play the noumenal/phenomenal distinction that is so important to his epistemology and moral philosophy. In this context he frames it in terms of the course of history in relation to the autonomous subject. Humans don't plot out a desirable course for history and then construct a plan of action that will lead to the determined objective. Rather, the natural process of history, in conjunction with the determinate aims of discrete communities of actors, moves in the direction of fulfilling enlightenment ideals.

The spark for this process is conflict and antagonism, followed by progressive resolution; it is fueled by the transcendent rationality to which Kant continuously appeals. Institutionally this process is objectified in political and social structures that are repeatedly transformed as they outlive their usefulness. Morally it builds toward a concept of right that facilitates the flourishing of human freedom. The ultimate logic of this, Kant suggests, leads us to a concept of internationalism based on shared values and preserved by a system of universal law. In other words, history moves toward a cosmopolitan state premised on general conditions of toleration and cooperation. Hence, Kant provides a philosophy of history that serves as the normative-empirical foundation for a strongly emancipatory theory of enlightenment.

The utopian aspirations of this theory are reflected on more freely in "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch."⁸ In this essay Kant develops a set of principles that focus on the maintenance of peace between sovereign nations. Based on the preceding discussion, as well as comments to that effect in Kant's essay, it can be inferred that he sees the ultimate condition of enlightenment to be harmonious coexistence on a global scale. Before discussing several of the key tenets of perpetual peace, it is important to note that the more conservative side of Kant is also on display in this essay. He is suspicious of unlimited democratization; assumes a very Hobbesian theory of human nature—one that doesn't do service to his own rich conception of the dialectical relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal constitutives of human being; and he assumes, too, that coercion is necessary if politics and morality are to be squared.⁹ In spite of this, Kant summarizes several of the most important features of his theory of enlightenment in a provocative manner. The ones that will concern me here deal with the relationship between universal morality and contingent political institutions.

Kant sets up the discussion of perpetual peace by opposing his views to the "pragmatics" of political functionaries and their disdain for the visionary aspirations of theorists. This situates the ideal of peaceful coexistence in terms of the dialectic of enlightenment by pitting forces of conservancy against the radical possibilities that contest the established common sense. The former reduces humane existence to the determinations of the phenomenal realm; the latter recognizes the need for noumenal transcendence, made concrete in the political sphere, in order for conditions of enlightenment to be secured.

The state of peace must therefore be established, for the suspension of hostilities does not provide the security of peace, and unless this security is pledged by one neighbor to another (which can happen only in a state of lawfulness), the latter, from whom such security has been requested, can treat the former as an enemy. (111)

Kant's point is that the impulses of self-preservation will not suffice to sustain conditions of peace. Perpetual peace requires the rule of law. This appeal to the transcendental-universal aspect of his moral theory illustrates the way in which the ethical abstraction embodied in the categorical imperative can be brought to bear in an institutional context. While the specific status of the relationship between noumenal ideals and phenomenal practices remains underdeveloped, it is clear that he sees this *possibility* as necessary for formulating a politics of enlightenment.

Kant attempts to specify more precisely the institutional form that this would need to take. His two key points pertain to the establishment of republican governments at the national level and some type of international confederation of nations. The first of these doesn't demonstrate a great deal of political imagination; the second, however, points to important limitations of the nation-state at the outset of its development. In order to achieve peace at all, there must be a network of relations established between all political entities. This addition marks an important development over the Hobbesianism of his view of the social contract. Relations between nations would have to be grounded in the concrete political expression of the categorical imperative.

In summary I would like to stress the following points: First, for Kant it seems possible for one to uphold moral principles outside of the context of an enlightened society. In fact, the possibility for moral self-determination must precede the setting up of just institutions. What is crucial for Kant's dialectic of enlightenment is that the possibility for moral self-determination begins to converge with the development of modern political institutions. Second, a concrete form of autonomy is needed in order for this convergence to take place. In other words, the transcendental moral subject must find her/his place in the phenomenal world. Kant situates the possibility for this in terms of a philosophy of history that has as its end the achievement of enlightened societal structures and relations. Finally, this end can only be fulfilled within intersubjective networks that are sustained in order to generate solidarity. Kant's appeal to the public sphere and the importance of internationalism specifies this need. While I recognize that my interpretation of Kant is contestable,¹⁰ I want to emphasize that if the radical side of Kant is ferreted out, his views on enlightenment offer a wealth of resources.

THE POLITICS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: PHASE 2

My argument thus far has been that Kant, in a sense, develops a notion of a dialectic of enlightenment that is relevant to my present concerns.

His analysis, however, is weak on a number of scores. The most flagrant of these is his naivete concerning political economy. For Kant, the economy played no role in the normative structure of society. His focus is almost exclusively on civil society and the state. Critical theorists after Kant, however, became increasingly aware of the contradictions between an enlightened society and the capitalist mode of production. Hegel, for example, saw that the logic of capitalism entails a state of perpetual unrest in that expansionism and fierce competition leads to warfare. And of course Marx's contribution to this scarcely needs to be mentioned. Where both Hegel and Marx uncritically followed Kant concerned his teleological view of history. As Kenneth Baynes puts it,

Kant's predictions about the course of historical and political events have not fared any better than Marx's. Nature has produced neither just political orders nor a condition of international perpetual peace. If Kant's teleological conception of history is unjustified, what consequences does this have for his assumptions about the unity of practical philosophy?¹¹

It is this question that prompts the next phase of the politics of enlightenment.

When Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (DE),¹² they were overwhelmed with the phenomenal events that seemed to undermine the viability of a politics based on rationally grounded transcendental morality: the aforementioned developments that have marred the record of twentieth century "enlightened" societies. The way that one interprets these events will largely determine how one is disposed toward the question of enlightenment. If the Enlightenment leads directly to these atrocities, then critique must mitigate against Enlightenment norms; if, on the contrary, these events are radical deviations from the norms of the Enlightenment, then critique should attempt to defend the validity of these norms and consider ways in which they can be brought to bear on existing social and political conditions. This is the set of problems that Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to analyze. I will now address their interpretation of the dialectic of enlightenment.

While critics of the Enlightenment can be found at nearly every juncture of its development, it is Horkheimer and Adorno's critique that is most pertinent to the concerns of this book. They state the following thesis: "myth is already enlightenment; and enlightenment reverts to mythology" (DE, xvi). It is this proposition that prompted them to radically reformulate the project of critical theory.¹³ An important catalyst for this reformulation was their observation that the process of social organization, driven by the development and intensification of rational-

ity, so effectively subdues nature that humanity, being a natural entity, falls victim to its own progress. This is exemplified by the impulses of the Enlightenment:

For the Enlightenment, whatever does not conform to the rule of computation and utility is suspect. So long as it can develop undisturbed by any outward repression, there is no holding it. In the process, it treats its own ideas of human rights exactly as it does the older universals. Every spiritual resistance it encounters serves merely to increase its strength. (DE, 6)

Enlightenment turns against the original intention of rationally emancipating individuals from mythological worldviews. By failing to reflect critically upon its own historical development, the Enlightenment becomes encased in a mythological fortress that protects it from the harsh truth of its own reality: that it creates a technological despotism that deprives individuals of their personal identity, linkage to nature, and spirituality.

In defense of these claims Horkheimer and Adorno provide a comprehensive critique of the entire tradition of Western rationality.¹⁴ From the outset, enlightenment, under any name, has simply articulated the presiding myth via the language of rationality.¹⁵ As such, there are notable similarities between mythological and enlightened thought. Both, to a certain extent, attempt to provide a unified picture of reality; they share the objective of mastering nature; and each structures itself on the basis of power hierarchies. Mythology and enlightenment are both motivated by a deep fear of the unknown, driving each to the conclusion that mysterious elements of reality must be subdued through explanation. It was a specific type of explanation—scientific—that gave rise to the historical Enlightenment. Horkheimer and Adorno indicate a number of consequences that fall from this. The most important of these pertain to modes of communication and social organization (DE, 8–18).

Modes of communication are dependent upon forms of discursive language. In mythological discourse the language is symbolic: the signifier and signified are united in the symbol. Or, to put this in another way, processes of reference are perceived to create a unified whole. This unity translates into social unity, for the meaning and truth objectified in language plays an important role in corporate ritual practices that are repeatedly used to create a sense of communal cohesion. As distinctions between literal and figural discourse came to be drawn, the former, without recognition of fictional residue, was deemed the language of truth. This began in ancient Greek philosophy and reached its pinnacle in enlightened positivism. The theme that is common to all phases of this history is a compulsion to assert humanity's superiority over nature.

Consequently, discursive development reflects a desire to describe, understand, and ultimately dominate nature. Hence, the signifier ceases to provide social coherence by representing a shared truth and meaning. Rather than symbolizing the horizontally organized communality of humanity and environment, it becomes a manipulative implement that serves the compulsion to vertically administrate social and natural reality (DE, 17–18).¹⁶

As I mentioned, Horkheimer and Adorno contend that the discourses of rationalistic philosophy, and later of enlightened science, retain a number of characteristics typically associated with their mythical antecedents. The most significant remnants are the power associated with linguistic mastery, the use of technical vocabulary to systematize and totalize, and the development of linguistic apparatuses that facilitate the hierarchical ordering of subject matter. Whereas in prerational societies the priest, as the possessor of symbolic meaning, was the most powerful member, now the scientist, whose discourse is laced with facts and figures, reigns. While operating under the guise of neutrality, the ideology of scientific rationality permeates all spheres of social existence. This is achieved, the authors claim, through the proliferation and dissemination of scientific language.

Language itself gave what was asserted, the conditions of domination, the universality that they had assumed as the means of intercourse of a bourgeois society. The metaphysical emphasis, and sanction by means of ideas and norms, were no more than hypostatization of the rigidity and exclusiveness which concepts were generally compelled to assume wherever language united the community of rulers with the giving of orders. As mere means of reinforcing the social power of language, ideas became all the more superfluous as this power grew, and the language of science prepared the way for their ultimate desuetude. (DE, 22)

To summarize, Horkheimer and Adorno claim the following: mythical discourse precedes and influences metaphysical discourse, which precedes and influences scientific discourse. While passionately seeking to purge itself of all mythical and metaphysical characteristics, enlightened science fails to reflect on its own discursive evolution. As such, the remnants that I mentioned above translate into a new social mythology involving an unqualified faith in reason, an uncritical acceptance of market relations, and an overenthusiastic reception of full-scale capitalism (DE, 20–23).¹⁷

Horkheimer and Adorno go on to claim that the mythological foundation of enlightened modern society is a dogmatic aversion for theory. Thinkers in the Enlightenment tradition are, in a sense, antithinkers. They no longer feel compelled to theorize about the good or the nature

of reality. Now it is simply the matter of learning the laws of nature and mathematics and applying them to the matters at hand. This procedure, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is conducted under the jurisdiction of a totalizing presupposition: that all of the natural order can be systematically understood and exploited for the “good” of humanity. As a result of rigid adherence to this presupposition, negative consequences go undetected. “What appears to be the triumph of subjective rationality, the subjection of all reality to logical formalism, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given” (DE, 26).

While the repercussions of this mind-set for philosophy and science are significant, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, the influences on the way that everyday life is conducted are devastating. The same rigorous schemes of classification and ordering used to characterize natural phenomena are implemented in manufacturing facilities and social institutions. Individuals become cogs in the capitalist machinery. Conventions of expediency are enforced with such proficiency that behavioral norms are rarely questioned. This is accomplished by carefully monitoring and maintaining individual components of the collective unit, ensuring its smooth operation. The basic truth undergirding the modern facade of individuality and freedom is that power rules. This, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, is the dark mythical undercurrent of enlightenment (DE, 28–29).

The preceding analysis raises serious questions about the idea of a politics of enlightenment. Kant’s dream of modern progress seems to have turned into a postmodern nightmare. Yet I would contend that the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* don’t depart from Kant’s most basic ideals. They challenge the teleological view of progress by positing an alternative interpretation to the idealist metanarrative.¹⁸ Likewise they root themselves in, and expand upon, the classical critique of political economy.¹⁹ Finally, they argue convincingly that *the* most important feature of Kant’s optimism concerning the prospect of an enlightened society—that being the potential for human autonomy—is virtually impossible within the parameters of his analysis. This, however, does not amount to the dismissal of Kant’s ideals. In fact, they repeatedly appeal to principles such as self-determination, the need for public discourse, and the basis for this that can only be provided for within the context of a vital community. While Horkheimer and Adorno are hesitant to frame this positively in terms of a politics of enlightenment, their negative appeal to these values clearly situates them within Kant’s set of questions.

All the same, the main essay of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* leaves the reader somewhat confused as to whether Western rationality and enlightenment are inherently bad or simply misdirected. An Ador-

noesque pessimism certainly prevails, giving the impression that reason and enlightenment are fraught with deep conceptual problems that translate into authoritarianism and domination. Nevertheless, the critique pursued is of existing *forms* of rationality and a specifically modern *form* of enlightenment. While the seeds of these forms are traced, in almost Heideggerian fashion, back to the golden days of ancient Greece, the concrete examples are all linked to a distinctly modern conception of science, as well as the modern mode of production. Unlike Heidegger, however, the authors don't clearly dismiss rationality and enlightenment in general. There is at the very least a restless ambiguity in the text.²⁰ This is intensified in light of the different attitudes expressed in the two excursuses that follow. Given that the excursuses were independently authored, it can be inferred that the tension is explicable in terms of differences between the individual views of Horkheimer and Adorno. I will proceed under the assumption that this is the case.²¹

THE POLITICS OF ENLIGHTENMENT: PHASE 3

As I mentioned above, during the course of this analysis a model for critical-theoretical studies of society is formulated. This model can be developed in two directions that are relevant to the question of a politics of enlightenment. These two directions are delimited by the excursuses that follow the main essay in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The first, authored by Adorno, views enlightened thought to be inherently *suspect*. The second, authored by Horkheimer, indicates that it is not enlightenment as such, but rather its perversion, that is the source of modernity's rationality-related problems. In this section I will argue that Foucault develops Adorno's thesis while Habermas elaborates Horkheimer's.²²

In the first excursus the author (Adorno) initiates his interrogation of Western rationality with the stunning claim that Homer's Odysseus is the prototypical bourgeois individual. He proceeds by offering an interpretation of *The Odyssey* which contends that Odysseus's experiences initiated a continuous history of instrumental rationality that reaches full fruition in the Enlightenment.²³ This unaltered model for rational cognition is established by the cunning acts of the epic voyager. Odysseus faces a number of mythical-natural obstacles during his trek. The strategy that he develops for overcoming these impediments employs a submissive yet manipulative form of rationality. Nature is not confronted in a face-to-face struggle; it is outmaneuvered and subdued from behind (DE, 58–60).

Adorno characterizes Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens as the paradigm for all succeeding implementations of instrumental rationality:

It is impossible to hear the Sirens and not succumb to them; therefore he does not try to defy their power. Defiance and infatuation are one and the same thing, and whoever defies them is thereby lost to the myth against which he sets himself. Cunning, however, is defiance in rational form. (DE, 58–59)

Odysseus gains the upper hand, but not without consequence. In order to overcome the order of nature, he submits to self-imposed bondage (by strapping himself to the mast of the ship). For Adorno, this represents the inevitable paradox of instrumental reason. In order to win, one has to lose. It also provides a model for the type of human behavior that flourishes under the capitalistic economic structures of enlightened modern society. In order to get ahead, one has to submit to self-sacrifice and must be willing to sacrifice anyone that stands in the way. Adorno concludes that Western rationality is inherently plagued with this “negative dialectic.” The historical Enlightenment simply intensifies the irrationality that has always infected reason, producing the above-mentioned social consequences (DE, 55–60).²⁴

Habermas makes the point that this critique of enlightened thought is so comprehensive that it ultimately denies its own critical foundation. From the very beginning, Adorno claims, Western reason is tainted with the sinister paradox faced by Odysseus. Likewise, the possibility that rationality has any positive critical content is dismissed. Yet, to use Habermas’s phrase, he retains a “residual faith in a de-ranged reason” (1987b, 186). As such, his analysis, like the tradition he criticizes, is rooted in a paradox: it uses the tools of Western rationality while denying that they can have any positive application. While I don’t entirely endorse Habermas’s assessment of Adorno, the general dilemma that he identifies needs to be contended with. If social theory is to take seriously Adorno’s critique while still maintaining—at least theoretically—its relationship to the ideal of collective emancipation, this problem needs to be addressed. I think that Foucault offers insight into how this might be accomplished.²⁵ While not a direct understudy of Adorno’s, Foucault’s entire corpus of work represents a concern with the questions raised in the first excursus of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²⁶ As such, he can legitimately be characterized as picking up where Adorno left off.²⁷

In “What Is Enlightenment?” (hereafter WE) (1984), Foucault takes up the question addressed by Kant in the latter part of the eighteenth century and, in a sense, by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. He suggests that the question as to the inherent goodness or baseness of the Enlightenment is irrelevant. By focusing on the conceptual point that tormented Adorno, and the question as to whether enlightenment contains an “essential kernel of rationality,” theory will be “blackmailed” by the Enlightenment (subdued by the dialectic

tic of liberation and domination). The essential theoretical project is to identify the boundaries that are established by the Enlightenment attitude and to determine the points at which these limits are susceptible to pressure. "The point, in brief, is to transform the critique constituted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression" (WE, 42–45).

It is naive, in Foucault's judgment, to think that a totalistic analysis of the repercussions of rationality on social existence (such as that conducted by Adorno) is even possible. Social theory should focus on grasping points at which change is urgently needed and attempt to determine tactics that are capable of achieving the desired alteration. Such a strategy would dispense with Adorno's sweeping generalizations while retaining the analytic acuity that enabled him to identify specific instances that confirm his hypothesis. Foucault describes this project as being genealogical in design and archaeological in method. "It is not seeking to make possible a metaphysics that has finally become a science; it is seeking to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom" (WE, 46). As such, the problematic element of Adorno's critique (its totalistic dimension) can be eliminated without sacrificing the critical wealth of his analysis (WE, 45–47).²⁸

In the second excursus of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer suggests that the undistorted "kernel of rationality" that Adorno seems to think is nonexistent and that Foucault is unconcerned with might be worth pursuing. While concentrating on the negative dimensions of Western reason, as manifest in enlightenment morality, Horkheimer implies that this isn't the necessary end of reason.

Horkheimer clearly rejects instrumental reason. Rationality of this sort, he claims, is in line with the Kantian conception of enlightenment and reason.²⁹ The task of reason here is to systematize and put things in their proper order. This will ensure that humanity reaches maturity and preserves itself as a species. Horkheimer agrees with Adorno that this organizational fetish is the most dangerous product of the Enlightenment, but suggests that critique should be directed specifically at rationality and enlightenment as conceived within capitalistic socioeconomic structures. It is the combination of a specific type of reason and a specific mode of production that causes the devastating consequences associated with the historical Enlightenment. It doesn't necessarily follow from this that reason is inherently distorted. It is paradoxical, rather than predictable, that the Enlightenment should result in its own antithesis. This, for Horkheimer, occurred due to a fatal practical flaw: Enlightenment thought failed to fully incorporate the need for internal criticism. One can infer from this that Horkheimer would accept an adequate concept of enlightenment. By indicating that reason has assumed a perverse

form, he leaves open the possibility that a more reflective rationality might be the answer to the problem created by its irrational opposite (DE, 85–93).

This is precisely the position held by Habermas. His well-known approach is to develop a normative theory of action that is based on distortion free rational discourse. He situates this project vis-à-vis the dialectic of enlightenment in “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment.”³⁰ Habermas attacks Horkheimer and Adorno for overgeneralizing and oversimplifying the dialectic of rationality. By excluding from their analysis all but the most positivistic of sciences, neglecting the important role of reason in formulating standards of morality and justice during the modern epoch, and declaring that all contemporary art is simple entertainment, the fruitful contributions that the Enlightenment has made are ignored. In response, Habermas contends that the development of science has been driven by a rich internal dynamic, that enlightened conceptions of justice and morality tend toward universality, and that the visions of avant-garde art have emancipatory possibilities. Habermas does not praise these qualities at the expense of the important critical insights provided by Horkheimer and Adorno. Rather, he takes their insights to be indicative of the need to rigorously apply critique to Enlightenment thought and social practices. In doing so, the normative content of modernity that remains undefiled by purposive rationality can be extracted and developed, continuing the dialectic of enlightenment.

Habermas concludes by claiming that theory must accept the fact that myth and enlightenment are to a certain extent entangled. This does not mean, however, that social criticism should turn against rationality. Rather, it should accept, for pragmatic purposes, the presuppositions of rational discourse, allowing the efficacy of the better argument to shape social-political reality. “Only a discourse which admits this everlasting impurity can perhaps escape from myth, thus freeing itself, as it were, from the entwinement of myth and Enlightenment” (Habermas, 1982).

At the programmatic level, Habermas and Foucault come down on the same foot. Both consider the aim of a politics of enlightenment to be that of generating critical insights that move in the direction of discourses of emancipation. At other levels, however, they are quite different. While Foucault sees little merit in what has taken place as a result of the historical Enlightenment, Habermas praises its contributions to truth, freedom, and justice (the normative foundations of modernity). They differ significantly at the level of strategy as well; Foucault suggests the need for transgression, while Habermas seeks progression in the form of establishing a continuum with pure Enlightenment ideals. While both see the need for a notion of enlightenment, Habermas’s is unequiv-

ocally modern whereas Foucault moves in a postmodern direction. It is this direction that I will attempt to come to grip with in the pages that follow. Habermas's claim that there are unambiguously positive products of the modern Enlightenment strikes me as being mistaken. The concepts of truth, freedom, and justice to which he appeals are far more bound up in the capitalist economy of modernity than he cares to recognize. These are claims that I will develop in subsequent chapters. I will attempt to show that Habermas's own analysis of advanced capitalism in many ways confirms my position. It provides, in a sense, the prelude to a theory of the politics of enlightenment that moves beyond the normative structures of an unenlightened modernity.

While the normative appeal of Habermas's communicative resolution to the impasse presented by the dialectic of enlightenment is strong, the force of Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis causes one to question its viability. Furthermore, Habermas's most comprehensive assessment of the late-modern condition is even bleaker. He describes a scenario in which systems driven by money and power have come to permeate all spheres of human life. The following passage sums up his analysis:

The legal-administrative means of translating social-welfare programs into action are not some passive, as it were, propertyless medium. They are connected, rather, with a praxis that involves isolation of facts, normalization, and surveillance, the reifying and subjectivating violence of which Foucault has traced right down into the most delicate capillary tributaries of everyday communication. The deformations of a lifeworld that is regulated, fragmented, monitored, and looked after is surely more subtle than the palpable forces of material exploitation and impoverishment; but internalized social conflicts that have shifted from the corporeal to the psychic are not therefore less destructive.³¹

In other words, a domineering modern system has chopped the modern lifeworld into bits and pieces, severely limiting the possibility for a politics of enlightenment. In spite of this, Habermas continues to insist, albeit in more localized form, that the appropriate strategy in light of this predicament is to form collectives of solidified consciousness that can establish patterns of communicative action within specifically politicized spheres. The aim is to "sensitize the self-steering mechanisms of the state and the economy to the goal-oriented outcomes of radical democratic will formation" (PDM, 368). If Habermas's own characterization of advanced capitalist society is taken seriously, however, then it would seem that the system is already beyond the point that it can be sensitized through reform movements.

In this final phase of the politics of enlightenment we seem to have come full circle. On the one hand we have the noumenal factors that make it possible to theorize about ideal discourse; on the other we have

the rational utility maximizers of advanced modern society who would make Kant's race of devils quake in their boots. While Habermas's attempt to mediate this discrepancy involves "building up restraining barriers for the exchange between system and lifeworld and of building in sensors for the exchange between lifeworld and system" (PDM, 364), I would argue that the more appropriate strategy is to break down or dismantle the structural barriers that prohibit the development of "radical democratic" political processes. In other words, if we are to thematize a politics of enlightenment that is appropriate to the aftermath of modernity, we can't simply rehash that which has brought us to the present impasse.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

The analysis that I have developed up to this point is provisional at best. My main objective has been to illustrate the claim that there is more than one way to develop a politics of enlightenment. The approaches suggested by both Habermas and Foucault have their respective merits and problems. I focus on these approaches for two main reasons: First, because Habermas's work is identified almost completely with the project of rehabilitating the idea of enlightenment after Horkheimer and Adorno's critique; this is true to such a degree that the remainder of this book will focus on Habermas. Second, because Foucault alludes to an approach to the question of enlightenment that moves away from the modernist conception that Habermas embraces. As such, he suggests the possibility of developing a theory of enlightenment that is compatible with conditions that I will refer to as the aftermath of modernity. Nevertheless, Foucault merely makes allusions whereas Habermas has a comprehensive theory. In the pages and chapters that follow I will aim at substantiating these allusions by way of a critique of Habermas that takes up the question of enlightenment in a serious fashion. This will require that I draw on a number of sources that may at first glance appear to run contrary to the objective of theorizing a politics of enlightenment.

In order to begin thinking about such a politics I would like to turn to Derrida's essay "The Ends of Man."³² I will argue that the title for this paper could just have easily have been, "What Is Enlightenment?" In doing so I will attempt to show how Derrida's concluding remarks in this essay bear upon the fundamental Enlightenment values that Habermas so relentlessly defends, and to raise questions as to whether these are really the values that are seminal to enlightenment.

I will begin, as does Derrida, with the question of internationalism.

The context in which this paper was presented, an international philosophical colloquium, prompts Derrida to consider the relationship between the political and the philosophical. His claim: "Every philosophical colloquium necessarily has a political significance." Further, he asserts that the international dimensions of this particular colloquium complicates its political significance. Finally, the specific events that were taking place at the time of this writing, "the weeks of the opening of the Vietnam peace talks and of the assassination of Martin Luther King," along with the fact that "the universities of Paris were invaded by the forces of order . . . and then reoccupied by the students in the upheaval," further problematizes the question. What, then, does this have to do with internationalism, and, more importantly, what does internationalism have to do with enlightenment? The first aspect of this question, as Derrida indicates, presupposes the formation of national identities and assumptions about the conditions under which those identities can converge. These assumptions seem to be of an enlightenment bent: Derrida chooses to concentrate on certain democratic presuppositions that depend upon the nexus between a formal category and a practical orientation. This nexus is both the condition that gives rise to the possibility of internationalism—"the colloquium can take place only in a medium, or rather in the representation that all the participants must make of a certain transparent ether, which here would be none other than what is called the universality of philosophical discourse"—and the condition that brings about reaction when things begin to get dangerous—"a declaration of opposition to some official policy is authorized, and authorized by the authorities, also means, precisely to that extent, that the declaration does not upset the given order, is not bothersome."³³ Hence, internationalism is fundamentally communicative, but likewise is confounded both internally and externally by the *limits* of communication.

With respect to the second aspect of the question, the relationship between internationalism and enlightenment, Kant's role becomes more explicit. In order to have enlightenment, we need to achieve perpetual peace, which necessitates the establishment of a world community. Kant is concerned with the role of law in the formation of such a community, but in the backdrop of his conception of law formation is an implicit appeal to the complex principle of democracy. Sorting through some of the loose threads here we can see the following set of conditions converging. Internationalism, as a political or even philosophical objective, presupposes some notion of enlightenment. At the same time it assumes some notion of nationality, which serves as the particular in relation to the international universal. This is mediated by a principle of democracy—constituted at the nexus of form and content, theory and prac-

tice—that is driven by a set of principles that emerged within the context of the historical Enlightenment. The field of enquiry circumscribed by this set of intersections establishes a context within which the question of enlightenment can be raised—by Derrida no less than Habermas.

Returning to those enlightenment values to which Habermas constantly appeals—truth, freedom, and justice—I think it is safe to say two things: (1) Derrida the philosopher doesn't oppose such values, but (2) Derrida as the sort of postmodernist that Habermas characterizes³⁴ him as being, does raise problematic questions about the "value" of these values. These questions revolve around how we "read us"—the way in which we interpret the limits and possibilities of collective social and political action. While I think that it would be wrong to say that Habermas doesn't carefully consider the possibility for social and political action, I also think he does so in a manner that confines these possibilities to a fixed understanding of what the term *enlightenment* can mean. The obvious reason for this is that the conception of enlightenment that rests at the base of his theory of communicative action requires a fairly straightforward understanding of the range of possibilities for human aggregation. Following three points that Derrida makes at the end of "The Ends of Man," I would like to explore a somewhat different reading of collective action than can be accommodated within Habermas's procedural approach.

While Habermas is quite obviously interested in the conditions that must obtain in order for validity claims to be raised and redeemed, the analysis of these conditions forces him into the nebulous structures of the modern lifeworld. He accounts for these as linguistic structures and proceeds to consider the manner in which they lead to the production of meaningful utterances that can be put into play within specific forums of discourse. The relationship, in his analysis, between the lifeworld as the basis for discourse, and particular arenas of discourse, fails to consider any but a fairly conventional notion of enlightenment. This is the point at which Habermas resists reading collective action carefully enough. The appropriation of the linguistic basis of discourse within particular discursive formats is relatively unproblematic for Habermas. In a Derridean formulation, however, this is where semantic stability can be quite radically altered. As Derrida puts it, "it is a question of determining the possibility of meaning of the basis of a 'formal' organization which in itself has no meaning, which does not mean that it is either the non-sense or the anguishing absurdity which haunt metaphysical humanism." My sense is that Habermas's concern with postmodernism is precisely this non-sense that Derrida is quite determined to distance himself from. At the same time he is careful not to retain a safe but implausible anthropology. While I won't attempt to spell out

the full implications of Derrida's views on semantic indeterminacy at this point, I do want to emphasize that they seem to pose important questions concerning the relationship between the semantic mode of production that operates in Habermas's conception of the lifeworld and the value production that operates under conditions regulated by ideal speech. This, as I will discuss in the final chapter, raises challenges that must be addressed within the framework of the theory of communicative action.

By introducing Derrida at this point I have simply intended to show that a serious enquiry into the prospects for enlightenment needs to take into consideration various possible approaches to the basic question of enlightenment. I will be pursuing these possibilities in the following chapters. Habermas may be right that the risk of exploring what lies beyond Enlightenment humanism is too great to consider. He likewise may be right that most of the theorists that "gesture" away from the Kantian project of a politics of enlightenment are risking the loss of enlightenment possibilities. At the same time, however, issues pertaining to culture, gender, and even class continue to play a marginal role in his analysis. For him the basic form of enlightenment has already been determined by the normative developments of modernity. Derrida's counter-Enlightenment respect for alterity seems to be one way of keeping open the teleological question. In doing so it also preserves the question of enlightenment.

My objective in this chapter has been to show that the question of enlightenment cannot be neatly compartmentalized as a subdivision of the debate between modernists and postmodernists. There is no compelling case to be made that a postmodern conception of enlightenment is impossible or even unlikely. I have argued that the common thread that runs through both approaches to the question of enlightenment can be traced back to Kant's writings on the subject in the waning years of the eighteenth century: a time when both the possibility for, and impossibility of, enlightenment was being expressed through new-found freedoms as well as new forms of domination. This tension, which Kant was vaguely aware of, generated the dialectic of enlightenment that was taken up critically by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in the middle of the twentieth century. It is their essays that reintroduce the significance of grappling with the important questions that surround interpretations of the Enlightenment. I have argued, by appealing to the work of Habermas, Foucault, and Derrida, that a number of resources must be brought to bear on the question of enlightenment if a fruitful theoretical model is to be developed.

It is the development of this model that I will pursue in the chapters that remain. The issues introduced in this chapter—such as the mod-

ern/postmodern debate, the state of advanced capitalist societies, and the status of enlightenment norms—will be taken up in further detail. My intent in doing so is to thoroughly rethink the question of enlightenment in such a way that a concept of enlightenment that is relevant to the aftermath of modernity can be articulated.