Chapter 1

The Idea of Progress and Critical Social Theory

I n this first chapter I am interested in the significance for critical social theory of the idea of social change that is progressive. The intention is to lay the groundwork for my later examination of Habermas's theory of social evolution, which I will argue is an integral part of his critical theory. In other words, before going into the details of this theory and of its relation to Habermas's conception of critical theory, it will be useful to clarify the general relationship between the concepts of progress and critical theory. Thus, I will take the broad view here of critical theory in order to make a case for the claim that an adequate critical social theory must include an account of progressive social change.

Critical Social Theory

In reviewing the current literature in critical social theory one might wonder just why a critical theorist should be at all interested in a theory of social evolution. For example, in the literature on Habermas, while there is much talk of whether or not a consensus concerning normative claims is possible, and if so, how it might be achieved, and whether such a consensus is even desirable, there is comparatively little discussion of the broader social and historical context of these questions, especially with respect to the specifically modern presuppositions on which they rest. In particular, any concrete consensus, whether real or hypothetical, is already embedded in a sociohistorical context, and it is the particulars of this context that the theory of social evolution is intended to illuminate.

In this section I will situate the theory of social evolution with respect to the theoretically informed practice of social critique. I will attempt this through both historical and formal analyses. In order to establish the historical importance of the theory of social evolution, I first will locate the intrinsic role played by the concept of progress within the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory. My discussion will focus on Max Horkheimer's seminal essay, "Traditional and Critical Theory," which served as an informal manifesto for critical theory.[1] In this historical analysis, I will

attempt to show how the original idea of a critical theory of society entails the need for an account of progress (which is provided by a theory of social evolution). Next, in a formal analysis of the idea of social critique, I will argue that any conception of the practice of social critique that does not give an account of progress is inadequate. In other words, it is essential to the practice of social critique that the social critic operate with a notion of progress. It follows that a nondogmatic, or reflective, social critic will seek to make explicit and clarify that notion of progress.

Max Horkheimer first explicitly formulated the concept of a critical theory of society that became the guiding idea of a group of thinkers collectively known as the "Frankfurt School." Horkheimer became the second director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in 1931.[2] The *Institut* was established in 1923 with the financial resources of Felix Weil, the son of a successful Frankfurt businessman. Weil arranged to finance an institute that would be associated with the University of Frankfurt with the idea of furthering the development of Marxism.[3] He had several goals in mind: to provide the means for the independent theoretical development of Marxism; to increase the scientific respectability of such research; and to develop Marxism as a serious academic discipline. Weil insisted on complete independence in regard to the direction and content of research to be carried out at the *Institut*, and he retained nearly absolute power to appoint the director, who possessed, in turn, near dictatorial powers over the research conducted by the *Institut*. Thus, Horkheimer, throughout his term as director of the *Institut*, from 1931 on, exercised considerable control over the research program of the *Institut's* members. The term "Frankfurt School" is typically identified with the general approach to social inquiry adopted by the diverse group of philosophers, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and economists who were members of the *Institut für Sozialforschung*, although this particular label was first applied to this tradition only in the 1960s, despite the fact that this tradition consisted of anything but a unified, coherent body of theoretical work, or a monolithic approach to social critique.[4]

Following John Rawls's distinction between a *concept* and a particular *conception* of that same concept, I will refer to the general idea of a critical theory of society as the concept of a critical theory of society.[5] The concept of something contains the core features that are shared or presupposed by the various individual conceptions of that thing. The concept of a critical theory of society consists of those features that define what a critical theory of society is in general. Critical theorists may have different and unique conceptions of critical social theory, but they would agree on the features essential to the concept of a critical theory of society itself. The distinction between concept and conception is important in a study of critical social theory since historically there have been many particular conceptions of social critique, both within and without a narrowly conceived critical theory tradition. The work of the Frankfurt School is unified primarily by its "aversion to closed philosophical systems."[6] The "vulgar" forms of Marxism had predicted that revolution was an inevitable result of capitalism, but the expected revolution did not occur. The Frankfurt School theorists attributed this, in part, to the overly scientific development of Marxist theory, which engendered a more

closed system than had been envisioned by the early Marx. Thus, the Frankfurt School attempted to overcome problems stemming from the scientism of vulgar Marxism through a reconsideration of the Hegelian inspirations of the early philosophical Marx.[7] As the theoretical work of the members of the Frankfurt School developed, however, theoretical differences present at the beginning gradually grew wider. The work of the core members, Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, did however converge in the early 1940s on a critique of instrumental reason.

My exposition here will detail only the essential features of the concept of a critical theory of society that Horkheimer conceived as the organizing approach to the social inquiry of the *Institut*. His writings on these issues came at a time when he was most optimistic about the potential of critical social theory. During the period between 1931 and 1937 Horkheimer produced several studies in which he explained and elaborated his understanding of the concept of a critical theory of society and the ways in which he believed that this concept could be put into practice. In his inaugural address as director of the *Institut*, entitled "The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research," Horkheimer sketched what he considered to be the fundamental overarching theoretical approach for the members of the *Institut*.[8] In this, which has been called the *Institut's* "manifesto," he argues that contemporary social philosophy finds itself in a dilemma that derives, on the one hand, from its commitment to methodological individualism, and on the other hand, from the increasing specialization and isolation of its diverse disciplines.[9] It is in the methodological individualism of social philosophy that Horkheimer locates the primary source of its difficulties: "Now, it is precisely in this dilemma of social philosophy—this inability to speak of its object, namely the cultural life of humanity, other than in ideological *[weltanschaulich]*, sectarian, and confessional terms, the inclination to see in the social theories of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Max Scheler differences in articles of faith rather than differences in true, false, or at least problematic theories—it is in this dilemma that we find the difficulty that must be overcome."[10] The difficulties arising from methodological individualism contribute to the gap between social philosophy and the empirical social sciences, which both refuse to cross:

> The relation between philosophical and corresponding specialized scientific disciplines cannot be conceived as though philosophy deals with the really decisive problems—in the process constructing theories beyond the reach of the empirical sciences, its own concepts of reality, and systems comprehending the totality—while on the other side empirical research carries out its long, boring, individual studies that split up into a thousand partial questions, culminating in a chaos of countless enclaves of specialists. This conception—according to which the individual researcher must view philosophy as a perhaps pleasant but scientifically fruitless enterprise (because not subject to experimental control), while philosophers, by contrast, are emancipated from the individual researcher because they think they cannot wait for the latter before announcing their wide-ranging conclusions—is

currently being supplanted by the idea of a continuous, dialectical penetration and development of philosophical theory and specialized scientific praxis.[11]

Horkheimer here finds the solution to the dilemma of social theory in interdisciplinary cooperation between social philosophy, which is able to reflect upon the conditions and limits of social theory and guide empirical research, and the empirical social sciences, which are able to provide the data to either confirm or falsify the general theories. The task for social theorists (including social philosophers), he says, is to "pursue their larger philosophical questions on the basis of the most precise scientific methods, to revise and refine their questions in the course of their substantive work, and to develop new methods without losing sight of the larger context."[12] Horkheimer emphasizes that this concept of social research cannot be fulfilled by the lone researcher, whether philosopher or sociologist. This concept of social theory requires the cooperation of a variety of researchers from the widest possible range of disciplines. Thus, he also urges social theorists to make the very process of social research a more social process, and not a process of individuals in isolated and highly specialized disciplines. Moreover, Horkheimer urges social theorists to focus more on structures of social relations, rather than individual actions of social agents, as the object of their inquiry. Thus, in this essay, Horkheimer first sketches the initial outlines of an idea of critical theory: it is interdisciplinary, empirically grounded, and systematically reflective.

In a programmatic essay from 1937, "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer explicitly attempts, once again, to explain the concept of a critical theory of society.[13] It should be noted that in this essay Horkheimer discusses his ideas concerning critical theory at two levels, which are not always clearly distinguished. At the first, metatheoretical level, he provides an explicit formulation of the concept of a critical theory of society, and at the second theoretical level, he articulates his own particular conception of critical social theory. As I have indicated above, my interest is in his metatheoretical considerations of the essential features of the concept of a critical theory of society. Horkheimer's approach to the concept of critical theory is through the distinction between the notion of a critical theory and the hypothetical-deductive model of theory presupposed in the sciences, which he refers to as "traditional theory." According to Horkheimer, the scientific model of theory can be defined as "the sum-total of propositions about a subject, the propositions being so linked with each other that a few are basic and the rest derive from these."[14] A theory is considered to be more explanatorily adequate the fewer basic propositions it has, and the validity of a theory is evaluated according to its capacity to explain the totality of facts derived from empirical research. If the facts do not match the theory, then the validity of either the theory or the facts must be reexamined. Thus, traditional theories, and the propositions contained by them, have only hypothetical status, since they are always open to experimental falsification.

Horkheimer's understanding of traditional theory in this essay derives from the hypothetical-deductive model, which, as he sees it, structures theory construc-

tion in the natural sciences. Although the conception of scientific theory construction as purely hypothetical-deductive is certainly an oversimplification, especially in light of the various criticisms of this model that had been generated by that time (for example, by Mannheim's sociology of knowledge), I think that this claim is justified, historically speaking, since the hypothetical-deductive model of science remained the dominant conception in such groups as the Vienna Circle. Nevertheless, Horkheimer goes on to argue that the social and the human sciences typically conform to this scientistic model as well: "There can be no doubt, in fact, that the various schools of sociology have an identical conception of theory and that it is the same as theory in the natural sciences."[15] This scientistic theoretical structure is not affected by whether the fundamental propositions of the theory are inferred from empirical facts, or are gotten by selection, intuition, or stipulation, since the hypothetical character of the fundamental propositions is retained, and thus remains open to theoretical revision based on further evidence: "The way that sociology must take in the present state of research is (it is argued) the laborious ascent from the description of social phenomena to detailed comparisons and only then to the formation of general concepts."[16]

Horkheimer goes on to make the Hegelian argument that the basic theoretical propositions are not derived from logical or methodological sources, that is, these basic theoretical propositions are not motivated by strictly logical or methodological reasons. The inference to basic theoretical propositions can be properly understood only within the context of real social processes.[17] What this means is that the criteria of theory choice, that is, whether theory X or theory Y best explains the phenomena under investigation, whether these criteria are either logically or methodologically motivated, are themselves products of social processes. For example, according to Horkheimer the choice of the Copernican heliocentric cosmology over the traditional geocentric cosmology in the seventeenth century exemplifies this thesis since it involved criteria that were inextricably bound to the social processes of the period: "In the seventeenth century, for example, men began to resolve the difficulties into which traditional astronomy had fallen, no longer by supplemental constructions but by adopting the Copernican system in its place. This change was not due to the logical properties alone of the Copernican theory, for example its greater simplicity. If these properties were seen as advantages, this very fact points beyond itself to the fundamental characteristics of social action at the time. That Copernicanism, hardly mentioned in the sixteenth century, should now become a revolutionary force is part of the larger historical process by which mechanistic thinking came to prevail."[18] What appears, in this example, to be a strictly logical criterion—greater simplicity through fewer explanatory propositions—in fact reflects the historical trend of the seventeenth century towards a mechanistic worldview in which simplicity is a virtue. Copernicanism explains cosmological phenomena with relatively simple mathematical formulae, thus increasing the rationality of the explanation over Aristotelian explanations. Moreover, Horkheimer argues that not only does the social context influence theory construction, but the application of the theory to further

empirical observations is also a social process. Empirical confirmation or falsification of a theory is necessarily a social process, since the validity of a theory is determined not by the assertions of one scientist, but by the repeated confirmations of the scientific community.

The consequence of the scientistic understanding of traditional theory is that the "scholar and his science are incorporated into the apparatus of society. . . ."[19] This general unreflexivity of traditional theory (as characterized by Horkheimer) results in it typically being a conservative force in the building and renewing of social bonds, in a phrase, social reproduction. That is, society ensures its own continued existence through the reproduction of its key institutions and structures, and traditional theory typically contributes unreflexively to social reproduction. Since social reproduction is accomplished through social action that is conditioned by institutions and practices, and since scientific inquiry is inherently social, scientific inquiry manifestly contributes to social reproduction. This is not what Horkheimer finds problematic. What he objects to is that the contribution of science to social reproduction remains largely unexamined, due to the general unreflexivity of the traditional conception of theory. Thus, since traditional theory does not reflect on its own inextricable involvement in the reproduction of the social, it participates in the process of social reproduction in a nonrational way. As traditional theory blithely goes about its business under the existing division of intellectual labor it contributes to the continuation, justification, and expansion of the existing categories and conditions of social existence. This leads Horkheimer to characterize traditional theory as (typically) a conservative force in social reproduction.

Moreover, progress in traditional theory is measured according to ever greater accumulation of knowledge, which in turn generates increased technical efficiency of social reproduction. Greater technical efficiency, in either the natural or the social spheres of action, means greater control over the object of knowledge, since only through the achievement of a comprehensive and detailed understanding of objects can we manipulate them in accordance with our needs and desires. Thus, complete domination over both external and internal nature is the telos of traditional theory. However, since theoretical activity is circumscribed by the division of labor within society as a whole, its end, which is the complete domination of its object, is concealed from it: "In this view of theory, therefore, the real social function of science is not made manifest. . . ."[20] Herein lies its greatest fault; traditional theory's unreflexive attitude towards its own function encourages a conservative approach to the increase in knowledge. The traditional conception of theory can now be seen as a single moment in the total process of enlightenment: "To the extent that [traditional theory] conceives of reason as actually determining the course of events in a future society, such a hypostatization of Logos as reality is also a camouflaged utopia. In fact, however, the self-knowledge of present-day man is not a mathematical knowledge of nature which claims to be the eternal Logos, but a critical theory of society as it is, a theory dominated at every turn by a concern for reasonable conditions of life."[21] Traditional theory needs to be re-

placed by a conception of theory that is progressive, and self-reflective concerning its grounding in the social world; this Horkheimer refers to as "critical theory."

The unavoidable social character of scientific inquiry, however, does not invalidate the knowledge it produces. Horkheimer argues that a more adequate theory necessarily will be a social theory and critical; that is, it will be scientific, yet also actively reflective about its own social origins and functions, and about the consequences of this social character. The key flaw of traditional theory is that it absolutizes the positivistic notion of theory such that it appears to be immanent in the very nature of knowledge as such. Once the social function of theory is recognized (and critically engaged), then the validity of the positivist concept of theory is undermined. But this need not result in a loss of confidence in empirical research. On the contrary, empirical knowledge that has been critically engaged by social critique can be considered to be more valid than it is within traditional theory. An important consequence for theorists, though, is that theory construction must remain an open-ended process, such that critical theories possess an irremediably hypothetical status.

Horkheimer argues that an adequate conception of critical theory could not be successfully co-opted by society in the way that traditional theory is co-opted. A critical theory of society takes society as a whole as its object, and doing so involves the recognition that the totality of the world, that is, the objects of science, are themselves a product of social activity: "The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ."[22] For example, we have learned to distinguish and recognize the sounds of grammatically structured propositional speech, just as phonemes developed into distinct units. Moreover, the relationship between these two ways that facts are conditioned is dynamic. The categories of our understanding are historically conditioned, while at the same time the objects of our perception are in part socially constructed. As Horkheimer claims, even facts about the natural world are categorized as natural only by contrast to the category of the social. Horkheimer concludes that the unconscious consequences of individual human action determine (in part) both the subjective moment and the objective moment of perception. A critical theory of society does not want to overthrow the traditional conception of theory, rather it simply wants to expose that conception as overly simplistic and incomplete. Traditional theory is incomplete precisely because it hypostatizes aspects of social life that are only moments in a more complex historical process. Action based on these hypostatized moments, then, cannot fulfill the conditions of rational action, since that action is based on a distorted (ideological) understanding of social reality. A more adequate social theory would still be scientific, but it also would be self-reflective.

According to Horkheimer, the concept of a critical theory of society can be characterized as a sociohistorically informed *critical theory of the present*. The aim of critical social theory is to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the present

social order, such that social action can be oriented in a rational manner. This involves: (1) a theory's reflecting on its own social origins and function in the present order; and (2) aiming for an adequate theory of the social order, without attempting to achieve a closed theoretical system. The purpose of critical social theory is practical, to change present social conditions—and its methods are both philosophical and empirical.

Since the aims of this study are analytical and systematic rather than historical, I will attempt to generalize from Horkheimer's specific discussions to a general concept of critical social theory. The analysis that follows is intended to distill out the essential features of the idea of critical social theory. The essential features that are implied by Horkheimer's early writings are:

1. The objective of a critical social theory is a comprehensive, open history of present social conditions.

2. The purpose of a critical social theory is to rationally orient social action in order to change present social conditions with the intent to reduce unnecessary domination.

3. A critical social theory is critical in the sense that it reflects on the social conditions of its own formation.

4. The methods of a critical social theory involve a dialectical synthesis of philosophical and empirical approaches.

To say that a critical theory of society is a history of the present means that, at the most basic level, it constitutes a historically sensitive explanation of the origins and prior development of the normative structures and institutions of the present social order; that is, it seeks to answer the question, How did the elements of our present society historically develop into their present form? This involves reflecting upon the social conditions and functions of theories and concepts.[23]

Critical social theory attempts to generate a comprehensive explanation of the historical development of the present social order. But it is explicitly open-ended, and so does not constitute a closed theoretical system; also, the unavoidably historical situatedness of critical social theory itself implies at least that it is open and fallible, in the sense that its representations of the history of the present and its normative orientations are always and interminably open to revision based on new evidence, perspectives and arguments. Thus, critical social theories should always be seen as ongoing accomplishments of self-reflective social agents.

The openness of critical theory of society will become especially important in my discussions of both Habermas's unique conception of critical theory and his theory of social evolution. He is often misinterpreted as offering transcendental groundings for his critiques. While this interpretation may be justified with respect to his earlier work—especially *Knowledge and Human Interests*, where he asserts a "quasi-transcendental" grounding for the knowledge-constitutive human interests—it is not justified with respect to his work since the early seventies.[24]

Despite Habermas's propensity to construct systematic theories (including the theory of social evolution), he reminds his readers that these are emphatically programmatic, meaning that they are intended to serve as frameworks for empirical research. Their ultimate justification rests solely on their usefulness in our projects of self-realization and self-determination, and also in their fruitfulness for organizing empirical research.

Further, the open-endedness of critical social theory suggests the practical orientation central to the concept of critical theory. As Horkheimer reminds us, the proper aim of Marxism (of which critical theory is a variation) is "the transformation of specific social conditions, not knowledge of a "totality" or of a total or absolute truth."[25] Critical social theory does not simply desire to describe and explain the present social order; its primary intention is to change social conditions such that the unnecessary domination inherent in those conditions is reduced and eliminated. This practical interest that is a formal property of a critical theory of society is expressed in norms and ideals, which possess a regulative, rather than a constitutive, function. Norms and ideals provide the normative orientation for the critical theory in such a way that they "serve to guide and evaluate thought and action and not to represent realized or realizable states of affairs."[26] Thus, a critical social theory does not necessarily seek to describe a utopia; it seeks to critique the present state of affairs with the aim of improving those conditions.[27]

A critical theory of society is more than just an historical description or explanation of the present. It is a critical theory of the present in the sense that it also consists of a reflection on its own sociohistorical conditions. A critical theory of society explicitly considers and accounts for its own development and its function in the social order. Nevertheless, to avoid a nonrational decisionism, it seeks to rationally ground its claims such that they possess universal (but not necessary) validity.

Finally, critical social theory proceeds through a dialectic interplay between philosophical and empirical methods. Neither alone is sufficient to generate a critical theory of the present. On the one hand, exclusive reliance on philosophical methods leads to speculative metaphysical theories that lack even the possibility of empirical confirmation or falsification. On the other hand, exclusive reliance on empirical methods leads to a fetishization of facts and an unreflective, and hence uncritical, theoretical process that tends more to support the present social order than to change it. A mediation of the speculative tendency of philosophy and the conservative tendency of empirical science is necessary to achieve an adequate theory of the present that is both empirically grounded and critical.

To conclude, where traditional theory (in both the natural and social sciences) aims at improving the functional efficiency of particular subsystems of the current social formation, critical theory takes as its object the current social formation as a whole. It seeks to illuminate the individual's real relationship to society: "Critical thinking is the function neither of the isolated individual nor of a sum-total of individuals. Its subject is rather a definite individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature."[28] The

goal of critical theory is emancipation from ideological representations of these re-
lationships, in contrast to the goal of traditional theory, which is domination (of
both inner and outer nature). To be sure, this does not mean that the critical theo-
rist has nothing to learn from previous thinkers. The critical theorist proceeds
dialectically, seeking to preserve the moment of truth in prior thought, and reject-
ing what is false or ideological, for critical theory's aim is to unmask ideology in
order that the individual, in her real relationships within society, can make fully
conscious decisions.

 Perhaps the most distinctive feature of critical social theory is the attempt to
combine the normative orientation of social philosophy and the empirical orienta-
tion of the social sciences.[29] But critical social theory's attempt to encompass both
descriptive and evaluative approaches generates the problem of the justification of
its normative claims. This problem derives from the attempt to ground the norma-
tive orientation of critical social theory in a rational manner. More specifically, this
problem can be formulated in the following way: How can a critical social theory
ground its normative orientation in such a way that it is intersubjectively justified,
and yet neither foundationalist nor relativist? In what follows, I will argue that by
adopting an historical framework that can distinguish between progressive and re-
gressive social change, critical social theory can rationally ground its normative ori-
entation while avoiding both foundationalism and relativism (I shall discuss the
disadvantages of foundationalism and relativism below). The phrase "progressive
social change" as I use it here refers to directional changes in structures of social re-
lations that increase the degree of, or capacity for, some specified human value or
values. I am not assuming here any particular conception of progress; that is, I do
not specify which value or values are the criteria of progress, only that some con-
ception of progress is warranted. Here my aim is not to justify a particular concep-
tion of progress; I am arguing only that the satisfaction of the systematic claims of
critical social theory requires some theoretical conception of progressive social
change. Moreover, I want to suggest that it is not the case that merely adopting an
historical framework of this type is one way that critical theory can satisfy its own
intentions. I will also argue that for a conception of critical social theory to ade-
quately satisfy its intentions, it must adopt an historical framework that gives an ac-
count of progressive social change. To be sure, the burden of proof for this stronger
claim is substantial. Rather than providing a comprehensive defense of this claim,
which would be beyond the scope of the present study, I will suggest some promis-
ing lines of argument that might be pursued in its support.

 The question of how we can rationally justify social critique presupposes that
rational justification in social theory is possible. But do the normative claims of so-
cial critique admit of rational justification? Critical social theory, of course, assumes
that they do, but we need to justify this claim before we can go on to discuss how
they can be justified.[30] The normative claims of social critique concern the norms
and structures of society; hence they involve the individuals of a given society in
their social relations to each other. In the modern era, however, factual propositions
are typically distinguished from normative propositions. One way to understand

critical social theory is that it aims to reintegrate these empirical and normative moments of practices of social thought that have become distinguished in modern history. That is, critical social theory wants to overcome the modern distinction between "is" and "ought." Despite the efforts of critical social theory to overcome the distinction in practice between fact and value, that is, between "is" and "ought," this distinction is a theoretical presupposition of social critique, since questions of the normative justification of given social norms only arise when conventional justification is no longer recognized as foundational: "[A]n ethical question first exists when the agreement of actions with the factually valid norms of a society are no longer recognized as the final instance of a 'justification' of these actions."[31] Thus, the is/ought distinction must still be made at a higher level of analysis when considering the justification of social norms. By this, I mean that we can (and should, when performing social critique) distinguish between de facto social norms that are justified merely by appeal to convention from social norms that are legitimately valid (TCA I, 287). In contrast to conventional norms, legitimate social norms deserve to be recognized as valid, hence implying the possibility of their being rationally justified. The practice of social critique, then, is interested in the legitimacy of preexisting social norms, that is, whether or not they are rationally justifiable.

Typically, social theorists respond to the question of the legitimacy of social norms in one of two fundamentally opposed ways. On the one hand, those who believe in the validity of the application of reason in practical matters enter into argumentation regarding the proper form justification of social norms should take. On the other hand, those who have rejected the validity of the notion of practical reason argue that social norms cannot be rationally justified. These skeptics typically argue that we cannot distinguish legitimate from illegitimate social norms (at least insofar as legitimacy makes reference to some notion of rational justification), because that very distinction presupposes an idea of practical reason that they reject. They argue that we need methods other than rational argumentation, such as genealogical critique, to identify those social norms that have repressive consequences. This is an important debate in contemporary philosophy and it will not be settled here. Nevertheless, I agree with those defenders of practical reason who maintain that norms and values are open to rational justification. So if a social theorist wants to practice social critique, then that social theorist must, when challenged, present and defend arguments in support of the normative claims necessarily embedded within the critique. Thus, assuming that norms and values can be rationally justified, the very practice of social critique pragmatically requires the use of some conception of reason, such that social critique necessarily involves practical reason.

To choose to abstain from rational argumentation with respect to social critique can have various results. Perhaps those skeptics who recognize and accept the lack of a possible rational justification for sociocritical claims simply refrain from engaging in social critique. Typically, however, the denial of the possibility of rational justification of norms does not prevent socially conscious individuals from practicing social critique. Many skeptical social critics (such as Rorty, or Foucault)

will formulate a critique but justify it only on the basis of intuitive insight, or by reference to the norms of a tradition or culture, thus leaving the normative justification of that critique unexamined. This, of course, is little more than mere opinion, which some social critics have asserted is a perfectly legitimate mode of social criticism. Furthermore, many (if not all) of these socially conscious skeptics do engage in reasoned argumentation about the possibilities and limitations of the practice of social critique. The consequence is that they are caught in what Habermas has labeled a "performative contradiction." An agent commits a performative contradiction when asserting "a constative speech act $k(p)$ [which] rests on noncontingent presuppositions whose propositional content contradicts the asserted proposition p" (MCCA, 80). Hence, if skeptics intend to practice social critique, then, if challenged, they must (in a pragmatic sense) enter into a process of rational argumentation in order to justify the normativity of their critique. This is not, however, an a priori claim about a metaphysical necessity. The claim that the practice of social critique necessarily involves normative claims that require justification is based upon the unavoidable (for us, here and now) pragmatic presuppositions of communication. Thus, I will adopt the position that in order to engage in social critique, one must make use of some conception of rational justification.

But what does it mean to rationally justify a normative claim? At a general level, the process of rational justification involves the giving and evaluating of reasons that purportedly support the claim that has been advanced. Following Toulmin and others' analysis, there are four basic elements involved in a justificatory argument: there is the *claim* in need of justification, the *grounds* that delimit the facts of the situation, the *warrant* that is the rule of inference from the grounds to the conclusion, and the *backing* from which the warrant is inferred.[32] There are two implications of this analysis that I am interested in here. First, the formal-pragmatic structure of the practice of rational justification involves the assertion of a claim and the giving and evaluation of reasons in support of that claim. So whether it is the validity of the facts of the case under consideration (the grounds), or the inference (the warrant), or the support (the backing) that is contested, the only way to make the case is by presenting further arguments with the same pragmatic structure in support of the contested claim. Second, I am interested in the various types of backing that are appealed to when asserting normative claims. So if the backing is conventional, say, "Given the present-day understanding of what the demands of equity in human relations require," and it is contested, the proponent might argue either that convention constitutes the final standard with respect to normative claims, or that there is a further standard to which we can appeal.[33]

Now there are various types of (final) backing that can be appealed to when making normative claims. To simplify matters somewhat, historically there have been two primary approaches regarding the (final) backing of social norms: foundationalism and skepticism.[34] The foundationalist appeals to a set of self-evident axioms from which the conclusion of the argument can be deductively derived. Don Herzog describes the salient features of foundationalist justification: "[A]ny political justification worthy of the name must be grounded on principles that are

(1) undeniable and immune to revision and (2) located outside society and politics."[35] In social theory this results in a form of foundationalism that claims to derive sociopolitical norms from a set of timeless and necessary first principles, for example a theory of human nature, or natural law.

The skeptic, on the other hand, rejects the very existence of foundational axioms. Skeptical arguments can take various forms, but perhaps the most popular currently is either cultural relativism or historicism. Cultural relativists take the position that sociopolitical norms can be justified only with reference to a particular culture, and that it is illegitimate to attempt to provide a justification for them that claims transcultural validity. Historicists take a parallel position, arguing that sociopolitical norms can be justified only with reference to a particular historical time frame, and that no sociopolitical norms can be legitimately justified transhistorically. To be sure, this is an oversimplification of the issues involved and of the possible positions with respect to normative justification. Nevertheless, it is adequate for my aims, since it represents the extreme antithetical forms of justification in contemporary sociopolitical theory. The truly challenging question facing the critical social theorist is whether a form of justification can be conceived that avoids these two extremes.

As I have indicated, the idea of a critical social theory has at its core a fundamental tension that derives from the intention of critical social theory to generate a rational critique. This rationality refers to the rational justification of the normative orientation of critique, and rational justification is fulfilled by the giving and the accepting of reasons for normative claims in processes of argumentation.[36] The results of this justificatory process are (ideally) rational because they are based solely on reasons. The idea is that any social agent who possesses basic speaking and acting competencies would under ideal conditions be rationally convinced of the rightness of the norm being justified. The implication is that the results of processes of rational justification are universally valid. This is important for critical social theory, since the systematic intentions of critical social theory are such that the normative claims it generates are universally valid, where the claim is not justified from a merely particular, interested perspective, but from an impartial, third-person perspective. In other words, universally valid normative claims are justified from the moral point of view.

But how are we to conceive of this moral point of view if we accept the claim (as critical social theory does) that the contents of our ideas are historically conditioned? If the way that we, as thinking and acting beings, relate to the subjective, the social, and the objective worlds is unavoidably conditioned by our sociohistorical contexts, then how can we posit a moral point of view that escapes the relativism and historicism that seem to follow from this fact? As Stephen White lucidly describes the problem, it is one of justifying the standpoint of the social critic within history, that is without appealing to ahistorical, transcendental groundings: "[I]f the prescriptions of critical theory are historically conditioned along with those of bourgeois ideology, how can one set of prescriptions be defended as more valid or rational than the other?"[37]

The challenge for a critical social theory, then, is to rationally justify its own normative orientation while being reflective of its own sociohistorical embeddedness, and at the same time to avoid relativism. In this section I defend the following claim, which I call the "Relevancy Thesis" (RT). RT states that one way that a critical social theory can rationally (and universally) ground its normative claims while at the same time avoiding relativism and historicism is by offering a theoretical model of what would count as progressive social change. In other words, critical social theory can rationally justify its own normative claims by making reference to a theoretical model that explains progress in social relations. I want to set aside for the moment the problem of determining what is meant here by social "progress." No doubt this will prove to be a highly controversial issue, but for my present purposes, I want only to focus on the idea of a theoretical framework that can give some account of social progress however progress might be defined. I understand this theoretical model along the lines of a theory of social evolution.

The objection might be made that we do not need a theoretical model to accomplish this task. We can (according to this objection) perform a kind of piecemeal criticism that relies upon a less totalizing conception of progress. We know, for example, that oppressing a group of people in order to satisfy our own interests is unjust, and that any social change that reduces oppression should be considered progressive. This notion of piecemeal social critique, however, implies an implicit claim that the critiques it generates are universally valid. If there is no such claim attached, it is not clear how this form of social critique can avoid the charge of relativism, that is, that its claims are relative only to a particular perspective, and thus, at least potentially, ideological. On the other hand, if the piecemeal critic acknowledges the universal claim attached to his or her critiques, then a theoretical explication of what counts as progressive social change seems to be needed. For only by generating a theoretical model can we clarify just what is intended when we claim a specific change to be progressive.

Typically, in sociopolitical philosophy normative statements are grounded with reference to a concept of the person. This is what grounds Kant's moral and political philosophy, and what, as some have argued, grounds Rawls's theory of justice.[38] However, critical theory reflects on its own origins and recognizes that even our current conceptions of the person are historically conditioned. That is, our very conceptions of ourselves develop and change throughout history; for this reason there can be in principle no ahistorical concept that transcends history. So it seems that the obvious conclusion is that we also cannot make sociocritical judgments that are universal, that is, that transcend the historical process, and thus our sociocritical judgments are necessarily relative to our historical perspective. Further, this historicist position would seem to lack any claim to rationality and rationality's concomitant claim to universality.

I suggest that it is unwarranted to infer that we lack any rational grounds for social critique from the premise that we are inescapably historical beings. If it is possible to reconstruct the history of contemporary social structures, then we should be able to identify deformations that result in social pathologies. Also, by knowing the historical trajectories of currently existing social structures, we could

also identify the undeveloped potentials inherent in them, and thus which changes in the future are preferable to others. This conceptual model of progressive social change, then, would provide us with the means to justify rationally the normative claims of legitimate social critique. In other words, it is my claim that a general theory of social evolution can adequately ground the normative orientation of social critique. This approach possesses the virtues of not making a foundational appeal to a transcendental grounding of norms, but it justifies a universalist critique that avoids relativism. Let me emphasize that this theory itself does not claim any sort of transcendental status; it is itself fallible and open to revision since it is itself historically conditioned as well. It is a reconstructive theory such that it only reconstructs past historical developments, and has no predictive power. The function of this social evolutionary framework is to provide an interpretation of the genealogy of our social order, and to provide intersubjectively valid (in the sense of being impartial) grounds for making normative claims about alternative orderings of social structures. That is, the theory of social evolution would describe the history of the development of our self-understandings, and in doing so it would provide grounds for making rational judgments concerning which changes are preferable to others.

The difficulty that immediately presents itself has to do with the construction of a legitimate social evolutionary framework that does not impose historically conditioned categories as rational ones. In other words, how can we specify what counts as progressive social change without engaging in revisionist history writing, and how can we be secure in the claim that our understanding of the past does not simply idealize the present as the pinnacle of history? The tradition of the philosophy of history is full of examples of this sort of triumphalism, in which the present social order is interpreted to be the highest achievement of human society. To be sure, critical theory does not naively celebrate the achievement of the present as the highest stage in history, rather it notes the failures of the present alongside of its achievements. The difficulty with philosophies of history relevant to the present discussion is that they claim to have access to a uniquely rational understanding of the historical process, and based on this they derive an explanation of progress in history. Yet this explanation of the progress of history itself transcends historical forces. It is supposed to be rational, and thus not a result of historical forces. A critical social theory, on the other hand, explicitly recognizes the historicity of even its own categories, and thus cannot claim unique access to an ideal of objective reason. How, then, can we conceive of social evolution such that it itself is not ahistorical? I suggest (following Habermas) that rather than adopting an external perspective with respect to progress in history, as has been done in various philosophies of history, we adopt an internal perspective in order to account for progressive social change. We should attempt to explicate the historical conditions of our present situation from within the historical process itself. The question then becomes, can we give an account of progressive social change from the perspective of the historical agents and still justify a claim of universality? Since my aim in this section is to argue for the relevance and necessity of a conception of progress to critical social theory, giving a substantive conception of progress is beyond its scope. I will suggest, however, that from the internal perspective of the social

agents themselves, progressive social change appears as a learning process. So what critical social theory is in need of is an account of this learning process that explains social progress.

In my discussion above I have made a case for the relevance of the idea of progressive social change to critical social theory. But now I want to present arguments in defense of a stronger claim, what I call the "Necessity Thesis" (NT). NT states that any adequate critical social theory (that is, one that can rationally ground its normative orientation) must incorporate a theoretical model of what would count as progressive social change. The necessity of this claim is not a metaphysical necessity. It is a pragmatic necessity relating to the practice of social critique. That is, insofar as we engage in argumentative practices concerning social norms, and those practices embody certain pragmatic presuppositions, we cannot avoid relying upon a conception of progressive social change. As I mentioned above, I cannot here provide a comprehensive defense of this thesis; I can only suggest a few promising arguments in support of it. First, since both the object of investigation (social relations) and the categories by which we understand them are historically conditioned (that is, they are embedded within history), an adequate critical social theory cannot justify its normative orientation by appeal to ahistorical, transcendental grounds. The consequence is that since critical social theory is itself historically conditioned, the only way to justify its normative orientation is to give an account of the theory's own historicity. Second, it can be shown that the pragmatic structures of the performance of social critique are based on an assumption of progressive social change.

As Hegel has shown, it is a characteristic feature of modernity that we have become increasingly conscious of our embeddedness in history. It is also characteristic of modernity that we come to reflect upon our own rational capacities, and a consequence of this is that we have become increasingly conscious of our power to rationally direct (to some extent at least) the historical process.[39] Even if we do not make our own history consciously and in a rational manner, we do affect its course. Furthermore, if we have learned anything from the critique of reason that was initiated by Kant, and completed by Hegel, it is that the very categories of our understanding are historically conditioned. We have come to recognize that there are mental structures that determine how we understand the world and ourselves, and that these structures evolve in history. Whether the structures of understanding evolve for biological reasons, or as a result of processes of social evolution, we have no good reasons to believe that these structures are ahistorical.[40]

This claim is supported by the linguistic turn in philosophy, in which we have come to appreciate the implications of the fact that humans interact with each other by means of symbols that represent meanings. Though the medium that dominates social interaction is language, other media carry meanings as well. The meanings carried by linguistic symbols, however, are ambiguous, so interpretation is required to understand their meanings. The consequence is that the nature of the object of social theory requires a hermeneutic methodology in order to understand social phenomena. But hermeneutics' fundamental principle is that the

investigator brings his or her own worldview and set of beliefs to the interpretive situation, and thus can only understand a symbol relative to his or her own meaningful history. Thus, hermeneutic methodology results in contextualism, where the understanding of the symbolically mediated social world is relative to the self-understanding of the interpreter. So not only do humans make their own history, but the categories of thought by which we can understand that history are themselves historical. The unavoidable historicity of both the object (society) and the subject (human understanding) of our social existence demands that any adequate understanding of the social would take into account this historicity. It is not adequate, however, to merely acknowledge the historicity of both the subject and the object. Although critical social theory accepts the premise of the historicity of both the subject and object of social inquiry, an adequate critical social theory, in order to be critical, would need to be capable of distinguishing between progressive and regressive historical change. If critical social theory did not possess this capacity, then it would not be able to distinguish better from worse social orderings, as determined by some impartial means.[41] Critical social theory would be forced to become decisionistic, in the sense that once alternative historical paths were described, we could only choose between them. That is, there would be no principle of choice to which we could appeal. Perhaps in the end this is all that we can do. But for now, if we want to practice rational social critique, then we need to search for a criterion or a set of criteria that can ground a rational choice between alternative futures. For a critical social theory to achieve its ends, it must incorporate an account of progressive social change.

My second argument is a pragmatic analysis of social critique. I argue that the structure of the very performance of critique implies a notion of progressive social change. A social critic by definition aspires to do more than describe a given society or its parts. Social critics intend to critique the perceived injustice inherent in a particular social order. The statements of social critique, in criticizing the injustice of some social object, imply a more just ordering of social relations.[42] In pointing out the injustice present in social order A, the social critic implies that there exist possible alternative social orders, B, C, D, and so on some of which are better than social order A.[43] In what way some are better is not important here (they might be less unjust, or less oppressive), but what is important is the implication contained in the critique that real alternatives are possible. If social critics assert that in critiquing existing social conditions they do not mean to imply the existence of real alternatives, then their critical propositions are vacuous. Or, if social critics claim that their aim is merely to prevent conditions from worsening, then there is no implication of a better alternative. To begin, this notion of social critique explicitly relies upon a philosophy of history, for it relies upon the claim that progress is impossible. Given our current justificatory criteria, it is difficult to see how this philosophy of history could be justified with acceptable reasons. Furthermore, it is not clear in what sense this is social critique. At the most it is an extremely thin conception of critique, and at the least it is simply empty. Perhaps, though, they would concede that while their social critique implies the possibility

of alternative orderings of social relations it does not take a normative position with respect to any one of those possible alternatives. This is a common claim among poststructuralists and postmodernists, who typically claim that social critique can best be understood as merely pointing out the injustices within existing social conditions, with no pretensions to making prescriptive claims. This seems mistaken from both internal and external perspectives.

Assuming with Marx that the point is not simply to interpret the world, but to change it, then the fundamental motivation of social critique is to reduce social injustice. It seems rather incoherent for social critics to claim that they perform social critique without any intention at all of reducing social injustice. Thus, internally the actual performance of public social criticism—that is, social criticism that is performed in the public sphere, and not done only privately—tacitly assumes the possibility of theoretically distinguishing between progressive and regressive social change. When one performs social criticism by expressing to a public some criticism of a social phenomenon, and subsequently gives reasons in defense of that assertion, there is a pragmatic assumption presupposed. Social critics engage in public discourse about social injustice with at least the implicit purpose of eliminating or reducing that injustice or oppression (or motivating others to do so), and changing social structures to eliminate or reduce injustice or oppression necessitates some understanding of the potentials and limitations of concrete social change. In order for us to reduce injustice, we need to know what the present social formation allows in the form of change, both in the sense of what the potentials contained by the present social order are, and what the limitations are that condition social change as set by the structure of the present social order. So despite the intentions of some social critics, the objective act of engaging in social critique implies at the least the possibility of progressive social change.[44] This holds for any conception of progress, so for the purposes of this argument it is not necessary to be more specific about what counts as progress at this point.

From an external perspective, the statements of social criticism are explicitly prescriptive. This means that in stating what ought to be the case, they imply that concrete social change for the better is at least possible. Publicly asserted statements of social criticism possess a normative function. Whatever the intentions of the critic, they are understood by others as prescriptive statements about present social conditions, whether or not the critic intended them that way. Statements of social criticism possess both negative and positive aspects; they negate the social order under investigation, while implying that real alternatives exist. So the statements of social criticism themselves make reference implicitly to some notion of progressive social change.

Critical Hermeneutics

While Habermas has been famously criticized for his defense of the power of reason, he has also been criticized for not taking history seriously enough.[45] David Hoy has argued that Habermas's move towards Kantianism and the accompany-

ing "transcendental turn" led Habermas into a "transcendental narcissism" in which he claims a special status for the justification of his own theory. The implication of this transcendental narcissism is that the seriousness of Habermas's commitment to taking history seriously is brought into question. Although I would dispute Hoy's critique of Habermas, the question I want to examine here is whether it isn't possible to take history too seriously. According to Hoy, "[T]he primary intention of [hermeneutics] is to take history seriously," and "[f]rom Foucault's and Gadamer's points of view . . . Habermas has not taken history and a self-transforming, hermeneutical reflection seriously enough."[46] For Hoy, the choice seems to be between either a transcendental narcissism in which one's own theory is grounded in an ahistorical way, or a thoroughgoing historicism in which even one's own critical reflections are historically situated and radically contingent. In rejecting the first Hoy opts for the second, yet he claims that the historicism of hermeneutic reflection does not entail an invidious relativism. Hoy remains unclear, however, concerning how hermeneutic reflection avoids this invidious relativism, in part, I will argue, because he refuses to clarify the normative assumptions presupposed by hermeneutic reflection. Hoy is concerned to defend a conception of hermeneutics that is reflective only in the sense that it opens up the possibility for alternative self-understandings. But this limited understanding of hermeneutic reflection takes history too seriously because the generation of alternative self-understandings does not constitute an adequate form of social critique.

　　In order to gain a clear understanding of Hoy's conception of hermeneutic reflection it will be useful to look at his more recent debate with Thomas McCarthy over the proper conception of critical social theory.[47] In this debate Hoy articulates and defends a form of hermeneutic reflection that he calls "genealogical hermeneutics." Against McCarthy's more universalistic, and in Hoy's view ahistoricist, conception of critical theory, Hoy formulates a situated conception of social critique the primary virtue of which is its emphatic rejection of the universalizing tendencies of traditional theory. A primary objection that Hoy makes against the standard Frankfurt School conception of an interdisciplinary critical social theory is that it is preoccupied with theory, especially with a theory about what constitutes an adequate critical theory. By contrast, he claims that self-described critical theorists can engage in critical activity that is fully adequate without being in possession of a critical theory per se. He asks, "What makes a theory 'critical'? To be critical must one have a theory?"[48] He suggests that one need not have a theory to engage in the practice of social critique. Moreover, he argues that the very idea of a critical theory is in tension, since not only can we engage in social critique without a theory, but having a theory of social critique only hinders the practice of critical activity. He proposes that rather than constructing a metatheory about how theories can be critical, we should engage directly in critical activity, which he conceives as a critical history. Thus, he argues, "[W]hat is needed is the more concrete practice of critical *history*, that is, genealogical critiques of the specific, concrete ways in which we have been socialized subliminally."[49]

Although Hoy is especially concerned to emphasize that his conception of critical social theory, genealogical hermeneutics, is not a form of theory in any traditional sense, he objects to the application of the term "theory" to his critical history primarily because he conceives of theory in a hypostatized manner. As he argues earlier in his discussion, he does not see a qualitative difference between traditional and critical theory, at least as Max Horkheimer has drawn the distinction.[50] According to Hoy, Horkheimer's conception of the theoretical character of critical theory is found in its comparison of a totalizing comprehension of society with a more rationally organized possible social order. On this interpretation, social theories are totalizing and utopian, and Hoy objects to both of these characteristics. He argues that we can engage in critical activity without constructing totalizing social theories, that is, social theories that do not purport to explain systematically the totality of social relations and processes, and without postulating some utopian social order. Moreover, he argues that both of these characteristics of critical social theory (as they were formulated by Horkheimer) contradict, or at least are in tension with, the goals of social critique. Totalizing social theories typically distort social reality in their representation of it, and thus they legitimate ideological self-understandings. And projections of utopias can also mask ideological self-understandings, since they are often based on essentialist conceptions of the person. Thus Hoy concludes that elevating critical activity to critical theory is neither necessary nor desirable.

The difficulty with this argument is that Hoy appears to conceive of theory in a traditional, scientistic sense. He seems to not fully appreciate that which is distinctive about critical theory, as opposed to traditional theory: its reflexivity. Critical theory explicitly reflects upon its own social origins and social function. Assuming that we are in possession of a conception of critical social theory that adequately accomplishes this task, there is no reason to think that this conception of (critical) theory would unavoidably mask ideological distortions. To be sure, any social theory will contain distortions, but if the theory is critical in the sense of being self-reflective, those distortions themselves are at least open to being revealed. Moreover, it is far from clear how a critical history, as distinct from a critical theory, avoids this concern.

In contradistinction to traditional theory as Hoy conceives it, genealogical hermeneutics is conceived to be a critical methodology that operates by tracing the genealogies of concrete concepts, discourses, and understandings in order to unmask the contingency and arbitrariness of our self-understandings. For Hoy the essential difference between this conception and the traditional conception of critical theory defended by McCarthy and Habermas is that genealogical hermeneutics does not "construe itself as seeing through illusions and showing us how society really is."[51] It does not claim to generate disenchantment; it only seeks to illuminate our self-understandings as essentially contingent. It performs this task by formulating and constructing new perspectives from which we can understand ourselves, and as such it also presents alternative self-understandings.

On this understanding of genealogical hermeneutics, however, we would seem to be left with an invidious relativism of self-understandings with no principled way

to choose between them. As Hoy notes in "Taking History Seriously," "both change and proliferation [of interpretations] are not necessarily for the better."[52] But Hoy has not made clear how the social critic who engages in genealogical hermeneutic inquiry might choose between the plurality of self-understandings that such a methodology generates. Nonetheless, Hoy seems to suggest that genealogical hermeneutics does offer at least some normative resources for assessing the relative value of alternative self-understandings, for he maintains that

> [a]long the way it may be unmasking previous interpretations. Since what is un-masked is self-interpretation, this unmasking through genealogical critical history can now be seen not simply in traditional epistemological terms as "revealing reality," but also modally as "deconstructing necessity." That is, genealogical research will show that self-understandings that are taken as universal, eternal and necessary have a history, with a beginning, and therefore, possibly, an end. Genealogy thus shows that self-understandings are interpretations, and it can bring us to suspect that conceptions of ourselves that we have taken to be necessary are only contingent. In making this contingency manifest, genealogy makes it possible for people to see that they could want to be different from how they are.[53]

But what is it that genealogical hermeneutics unmasks? Does it simply unmask the fact that our self-understandings are social and historical constructs and thus contingent and not necessary? Or does it unmask the truth about our self-understandings? Hoy expressly allows for both interpretations in the paragraph just quoted, so it is clear that despite Hoy's earlier claim to the contrary, genealogical hermeneutics does in fact seek to reveal our self-understandings as false or illusory and replace them with better, truer, less distorted self-interpretations.

These considerations point out what I see as a fundamental tension in Hoy's conception of critical theory, the tension between the refusal of genealogical hermeneutics to clarify or attempt to theoretically justify its normative stance and the unacknowledged yet unavoidable normative assumptions that are necessary for any practice of social criticism. This tension becomes manifest when Hoy attempts to explicate how genealogical hermeneutics is critical. For genealogical hermeneutics, the goal is no longer emancipation from oppressive social conditions; rather it is "inquiry," where inquiry is "the reinterpretation of what was already an interpretation."[54] But he is quick to note that this is not simply an agonistic model of argumentation in which the best argument wins. Instead, the goal of genealogical hermeneutics is to find "new descriptions of ourselves that locate new possibilities in our situation."[55] Given the description so far, it is not clear in what sense genealogical hermeneutics is a form of social critique since there is no attempt to integrate any sort of a normative stance with respect to the various self-understandings that have been generated.

The normativity of genealogical hermeneutics, however, is not absent; it simply has the status of an unacknowledged assumption. For Hoy goes on to state that "[t]hese reinterpretations [generated by genealogical hermeneutics] may even change what the premises are, . . . good interpretation can alter our conception of

what is to be argued and what our premises mean."⁵⁶ This, of course, begs the question of what counts as a good interpretation: what are the standards for assessing the proffered interpretations? The giving of an adequate account of these standards will require more than mere critical activity; it will require a critical theory, that is, a theory that is self-reflective on its own conditions. Since genealogical hermeneutics is nothing more than a critical activity, it essentially lacks the capacity for self-reflection; it must simply assume some such standards for distinguishing those interpretations that are good and emancipatory from those that are bad and oppressive. It is this cryptonormativity that I find so troubling in Hoy's conception of critical social theory.

Another way to put this objection is that genealogical hermeneutics is ambiguous as to what role an account of sociocultural learning plays in the conception. Presumably Hoy thinks that sociocultural learning takes place when bad, or distorted, interpretations are replaced by good, or less distorted, ones. As I have argued, genealogical hermeneutics implicitly presupposes some idea of learning while explicitly rejecting it. Genealogical hermeneutics, as Hoy has described it, simply generates the possibility of alternative self-interpretations. To be sure, this is a necessary function of a critical social theory, but it certainly is not sufficient. Merely unmasking distorted self-interpretations does not in itself generate concrete alternative self-understandings. Indeed, describing the hermeneutic process as one in which distorted interpretations are unmasked implies a normative account of what count as undistorted interpretations. But Hoy's account of genealogical hermeneutics lacks the normative basis to justify this description of its own activities. The consequence is that genealogical hermeneutics does not, and cannot, justify its normative stance regarding which of the alternative self-understandings is to be preferred: it provides no normative orientation that is generative of emancipation. Without this normative guidance, genealogical hermeneutics is a hollow methodology that only abstractly negates its object.

But, as I have argued, genealogical hermeneutics does not, in the hands of Hoy, function in this manner. It does not simply abstractly negate given self-understandings, because it does imply that its own methods generate emancipation; after all, Hoy formulates this conception in the context of a debate concerning the proper understanding of critical social theory. Genealogical hermeneutics is supposed to simply generate the critical space for alternative self-understandings, yet Hoy asserts that we cannot choose to go back to unmasked self-understandings; they "are not real *alternatives* for us. . . ."⁵⁷ Once again the normative assumptions of genealogical hermeneutics are made manifest. Why are these unmasked self-understandings not real alternatives for us? Hoy is here relying on the ambiguity of the term "unmasked," for here he clearly means more than that the contingency of the self-understandings is revealed; he means that they are also revealed be distorted, that is, deficient in some way. By asserting that genealogical hermeneutics reveals these self-understandings to be deficient, the unacknowledged normative assumptions of Hoy's project come to the surface. But since Hoy wants to maintain that genealogical hermeneutics only generates possi-

ble alternative self-understandings without making any normative judgments as to their quality, what prevents us from choosing an unmasked self-understanding over an alternative? When we come to understand the deformations inherent in a particular self-understanding, the deformed self-understanding does not present its deformity in some self-evident way. Rather, we recognize the deformed self-understanding as deformed only because we compare it to some normative standard. The normative orientations and values that are implicit in the background lifeworld in which we are all embedded color our perception of the unmasked, deformed self-understanding as deformed. Thus, the rejection of the unmasked, deformed self-understanding is grounded in a background framework according to which we order alternative self-understandings. Thus, Hoy's understanding of genealogical hermeneutics presupposes some notion of sociocultural learning, since he intimates that we emancipate ourselves from distorted self-understandings by seeing them as distorted, and thus deficient.

If the previous considerations have been persuasive, then it should be apparent that any adequate conception of critical social theory will necessarily be theoretical; it cannot be conceived simply as a critical activity, for an adequate critical social theory must be self-reflective, and while critical activity reflects upon its object, it does not reflect upon its own conditions. What this means in practice is that an adequate critical social theory will need to make essential reference to a critical theory of social change that can account for both what has been gained and what has been lost in processes of historical transformation. To be sure, this does not mean that we appeal to a philosophy of history, nor even to a theory of history. A critical theory of social change is a reconstructive science that seeks to uncover the deep sociohistorical structures that condition and shape historical change, and as such it is open and fallible. Thus, a critical theory of social change will engage in genealogical hermeneutics, but it will not conflate critical social theory as such with this critical activity. Hoy's conception of genealogical hermeneutics is a valuable instrument for social criticism, but it cannot function as an adequate critical social theory because it does not reflect upon its own normative assumptions, and this is a necessary condition of any adequate critical social theory.

Summary

In this first chapter I have examined the role that a notion of progress plays in the very idea of a critical social theory. I have argued on the basis of Horkheimer's early formulations of critical theory that such a notion is an essential part of any adequate critical theory. I further substantiated this claim by critically engaging the claims of critical hermeneutics, which shares the purpose of social critique with critical theory, but without, or so it claims, resorting to reifying theoretical constructs. I argued that critical hermeneutics implicitly presupposes a conception of progress, and that its refusal to make this explicit amounts to a dogmatism that is at odds with the fundamental self-reflective nature of critical

theory. To further set the grounds for my inquiry into Habermas's theory of so-cial evolution, in the next chapter I will sketch an overview of Habermas's con-ception of critical social theory. Part of my argument in this study is that this theory is an essential part of Habermas's critical theory, and that one cannot fully comprehend his critical theory on the basis only of the formal pragmatics of lan-guage. To warrant this claim I need to show carefully how his critical theory nec-essarily relies on a conception of progressive social change.