1

Critical Theory: Method and Content

This is a chapter on the method and content of critical social theory. To some extent, this chapter recapitulates and summarizes results from my previous volume, *Post-Cartesian Meditations*.[1] In that work I achieved the standpoint of critical social theory in principle. The task of this volume is to work out the implications of this standpoint.

Because my work is an attempt to develop the implications of a critical modernism in social theory, such a work attempts to be methodologically conscious. In contrast to the postmodernism of thinkers such as Nietzsche, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, late Heidegger, and Adorno, mine is a work that argues for a link between rationality and critique, affirms a reflective, critical conscious subject, links a fallibillistic, transcendental component with interpretation and critique, and is oriented to an overcoming of capitalism. This critical modernism, then, is in the tradition of such thinkers as Marx and Hegel, Husserl and Ricoeur, Marcuse and Sartre, Habermas and Apel.[2]

One aspect of a critical modernism as I am describing it is its methodological consciousness. As Descartes' *Discourse on Method,* Kant's reflections on the method of metaphysics, Hegel's discussions in his numerous prefaces on the superiority of philosophical dialectic to other methods, Husserl's numerous inquiries into phenomenological method, and Habermas' reflections on the foundation of critical theory indicate, this methodological consciousness is one of the enduring legacies of modernity and the Enlightenment. If the legitimate demands of a critical, reflective subject to know what she is talking about and why are to be met, then we need to give an account of method.

Methodological consciousness, a reflective, communal subject, rationality linked to critique, a unity of description, interpretation, and critique, and liberating transcendence of capitalism are the touchstones of an authentic critical modernism. Needless to say, to those tempted by or already influenced by postmodernism, none of these elements is self-evidently valid or valuable. One of the tasks of a critical modernism, while listening to and learning in

loving struggle from its postmodernist antagonist, is to demonstrate also its superiority as an alternative. To some extent I have begun this task in *Post-Cartesian Mediations,* and I am continuing it in this book.[3]

Suffice it to say here, initially, that I do not accept Gadamer's disjunction between truth and method in hermeneutics. That disjunction rests, it seems to me, on a mistaken positivistic, logicistic reading of rational method, a sense of method as mechanical application, and an ignoring of the role that the intelligent, reflective, critical subject plays in using method. If method is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results,[4] then only subjects operating intelligently and reasonably can grasp the pattern, see the implications of following it, decide to use it, and apply it to their lives and work. The results yielded by the method, then, will not be automatic or mechanical but will be as good, as deep, and as enlightened as the intelligent subject who is using it. Finally, if rationality is fundamentally communicative and dialogal, as I will argue, then such rationality is not ordered to controlling the other.

As I have shown in *Post-Cartesian Meditations,* genuine insight, judgment, and decision, even in science, are never mechanical or objectivistic. Nor is method to be identified with scientific method, for there is also the transcendental method proper to philosophy: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding concerning my own experiencing, understanding, judgment, and deciding in relation to the life-world. If the field for verifying the hypotheses of science is that of objective, physical data, the field for verifying claims in philosophy is that of my own socially and linguistically mediated experience.[5]

Dialectical Phenomenology as Form

The basic conception of philosophical method emerging from *Post-Cartesian Meditations* I have defined as dialectical phenomenology. This is a conception of phenomenology as descriptive and hermeneutical, where the hermeneutical itself is twofold: a moment of receptive listening and a moment of critique or suspicion. Corresponding to the present of internal time consciousness is a descriptive, eidetic understanding of experience; corresponding to the past is hermeneutical recovery of tradition; and corresponding to the future is a moment of critique or suspicion anticipating and pointing toward a more humane society. Hermeneutical recovery, description, and critique, each with its own standards of validity, are the essential interrelated moments of dialectical phenomenology.

Implied in this conception of method, also, is a dialectical interpenetration of universal and particular. Eidetic description gets at what is universal and necessary in the life-world. Examples are the necessarily perspectival

character of perception, the way in which reflection is founded on perception, and the essentially motivated character of freedom—"I choose because . . . " Hermeneutics interprets and criticizes particular human formations, for example, capitalism or state socialism on a social level, neurosis or psychosis on an individual level. Description, however, is necessary for interpretation because description supplies the basic terms, concepts, and norms of interpretation. I cannot criticize alienated labor unless I know what labor is; I cannot criticize inauthentic subjectivity unless I know what a subject is.

Interpretation, however, fills out and completes what would remain merely abstract and indeterminate on a descriptive level. Interpretation is to description as full is to empty. Knowing what freedom essentially is, I criticize inauthentic freedom in the concrete. Also, interpretation, in the narrower sense of receptive listening, and critique keep description honest.[6] Through inquiry into particular personal and historical structures, I test which of my putative eidetic claims are genuinely universal and necessary and which are merely the results of particular historical conditioning and bias. The isolated, one-sided independence and dualism of the Cartesian ego is a reflection of an emerging bourgeois order; the consciousness of method is legitimate. Interpretation, then, not only completes but also tests and criticizes description, enabling it to avoid becoming arrogantly or naïvely ideological. Interpretation and description, we might say, mutually found one another. Interpretation without description is blind and arbitrary; description without interpretation is incomplete and naive.[7]

Eidetic description enables us to recover the basic essential structures of each level of conscious experience, for example, that perception is awareness of a figure on a ground. Such description also enables us to understand and affirm fundamental relationships among levels. Here the most fundamental is that among experience, understanding, judgment, and decision.

Experience is awareness of the given, for example, being hit on the head by an apple, hearing and being moved by a poem, and looking at a painting. Understanding is the hypothetical grasp of intelligible pattern in the given, the law governing the fall of the apple, the meaning of the poem, the structure of the painting. Judgment is the verification or falsification of the hypothesis. Is the hypothesis, meaning, or structure true or false? Decision is the explicit level of freedom where I move from cognition to commitment, knowledge to love, abstract possibility to action.[8]

As I have already indicated, experience can be of two kinds, external and internal data, data of sense and data of consciousness. Correspondingly, understanding, judgment, and decision can be of two kinds, dealing either with external objects or the self. Corresponding to knowledge of external objects is empirical method; corresponding to data of consciousness is philos-

ophy as descriptively generalized empirical method. The point is that, in a way analogous to science, philosophy can exercise methodological control over its procedures and rigorously verify its claims. This point will be important as we expand dialectical phenomenology into an ethics and social theory. A methodologically conscious critical theory does not have to give up the mantle of rationality to the positive sciences, as postmodernists suspect, but possesses its own more fundamental, more comprehensive, and more critical rationality.[9]

The subject, then, is a receptive, active, questioning subject. Questions for intelligence arise on the level of understanding: "What is it?" "Why is it?" or "How is it?" Questions for reflection arise on the level of judgment: "Is it so?" or "Is it true?" Questions for decision arise on the level of freedom: "Should I do it?" or "Will I do it?" Each level presupposes and yet goes beyond the preceding level. Decision presupposes judgment, yet goes beyond cognition to practical choice, commitment, action, praxis. Judgment presupposes understanding, yet goes beyond it by moving from the hypothetical to the real. Understanding presupposes experience, yet goes beyond it by moving from the immediate to the mediate. Supplying the continuity among levels is the desire to know as that moves me from experience to understanding to judgment to decision. The desire to know expresses itself in questions. Because mere experience is not sufficient, I ask questions for intelligence. Because mere bright ideas are not enough, I ask questions for reflection. Because mere knowing without praxis is not enough, I ask questions for decision.[10]

Corresponding to the four levels of experiencing, understanding, judgment, and decision are the four transcendental precepts: "be attentive," "be intelligent," "be reasonable," and "be responsible." The subject, even on the cognitional level, is not value-free but rather is "normed" by such values. Corresponding to the necessity to adequately phenomenologically describe experience in all of its richness and nuance is the precept "be attentive" Corresponding to the necessity to be logically consistent and coherent and to see for myself apart from the "they" is the precept "be intelligent." Corresponding to the necessity to judge responsibly on the basis of the evidence is the precept "be reasonable." Corresponding to the necessity of choosing a method that adequately reflects who and what the self is in its full range and being faithful to that method and that self is the precept "be responsible."

The basic, first, fundamental philosophical task is to experience, understand, judge, and choose myself as such a subject. Because this is a process terminating in a choice, we could describe it as a kind of praxis. There are others as well, internal to critical theory, such as interpretation and critique, but these are impossible or deficient without this most fundamental praxis. This is the theoretical praxis proper to the philosopher as philosopher. It leads up to, illumines, and is completed by the practical praxis of the activist, the

organizer, the revolutionary, but is not reducible to this in methodology, fundamental concepts, or criteria of validity. Critical theory, we could say, has a relative autonomy in relation to this practical practice.[11]

Thus far, we have discussed the phenomenological aspects of "dialectical phenomenology" far more than the dialectical aspects. In what sense is this method dialectical?

1. Opposites such as mind and body, self and other, individual and society, "is" and "ought" interact or interpenetrate reciprocally.
2. We are committed to dialectical *Aufhebung* phenomenologically, logically, and historically. Phenomenologically, dialectical phenomenology transcends, criticizes, and retains what is valid in previous positions such as Marxism and phenomenology, empiricism and idealism, Kant and Hegel. Logically, higher viewpoints emerge that retain, criticize, and transcend lower viewpoints such as empiricism and idealism. Historically, of course, democratic socialism should transcend capitalism and state socialism while retaining what is morally, aesthetically, and scientifically valid in these forms of social life.
3. "Dialectic" refers to the encounter between opposing positions generally present in each chapter before phenomenological description occurs.
4. Dialectic refers to the moment of critique or suspicion that complements and completes description and receptive interpretation.
5. Dialectic indicates that knowledge and the world are parts of a purposive process wherein opposites initially opposed to one another can become united at a higher level, a higher viewpoint.

Dialectical Phenomenology as Content: Beyond the Bourgeois Ego to the Post-Bourgeois Self

My *Post-Cartesian Meditations* has both negative and positive results. The main negative result is that the Cartesian ego, independent, dualistic, ahistorical, individualistic, at the basis of modern thought and modern life must be overcome dialectically. The positive result is the emergence of a postbourgeois self, interdependent, integrated, historical, social. As I argued in that book, this positive result is philosophical rather than sociopolitical. This present book investigates the conditions for the political emergence of such a self. Such a bourgeois self manifests itself in the realities and ideologies of reification, individualism, and scientism. To live in western, late capitalist society is to experience being transformed from subject into object, social individual to rugged individual, and self-conscious person to scientific object. I am what I make, and the more I have the more I am. In late capitalist society I experience my life as an object of economic, social, and political

manipulation and control, alienated, powerless, anomic. Overcoming such conditions implies the emergence of a postbourgeois self, relational, participative, efficacious.[12]

To say that such a self is a philosophical result is not to say that it is purely ideal or postulated. For I am first of all talking eidetically and hermeneutically: when we reflect seriously on human experience, we discover that to be interdependent, integrated, social, linguistic, historical. However, we also discover that this essential selfhood is contradicted by the structures, institutions, and ideals of capitalism. Capitalism in a contradictory way creates the conditions for modern, integral selfhood but then systematically frustrates the realization of such selfhood.

If dialectical phenomenology, then, is the method, this communal self emerging from a context of capitalism is the object or content of this book. Or to put it another way, capitalism in its contradictory structure of positing and frustrating the conditions for selfhood is the object. The full life-world is not simply the life-world as eidetically, descriptively present but the life-world as structured also by capitalist social relations. The life-world is a unity of particular and universal.

One implication of this point is that dialectical phenomenology cannot remain fully content in a contemplative manner with what it discovers. It cannot, after the manner of Hegel's absolute knowing, simply look at what has been wrought and say, "It is good." Because dialectical phenomenology is hermeneutical as well as descriptive, suspicious as well as receptive, and because what it discovers hermeneutically is alienating capitalist social relations, there is necessarily a futural, utopian dimension to such a philosophy. Such a phenomenology is prospective as well as retrospective, practical-critical as well as theoretical-hermeneutical. Hegel's claim that the Owl of Minerva only looks back might be appropriate in a historical, social world in which alienation and injustice are overcome in principle. In our sexist, racist, capitalist world, however, such a view is false. In our world such a philosophy only becomes an uncritical reflection and legitimation of an alienated status quo.

In an alienated, unjust world, philosophy, if it is to be true, has to be utopian and critical. Such a claim implies that the hard, capitalist present is a false present contradicting the exigency of human life and philosophy for an integrated noncontradictory, harmonious, just world.

As I will argue in this book, the constitution of a post-bourgeois social world has six stages:

1. The descriptive, eidetic account of the self in the life-world, begun in the first book and completed in this one.

2. The development of an ethics appropriate to and expressing the exigencies of this intersubjective self.
3. The interpretation and explanation of modernity and capitalism as forms of life.
4. The critique of capitalism and, to some extent, state socialism as a form of life.
5. The argument for democratic socialism.
6. Reflection on the possibility for democratic socialism and praxis necessary to bring it about.

As I have organized the book, the argument for democratic socialism emerges as a consequence of my ethics. And the argument about the possibility of democratic socialism emerges as a consequence and part of my critique of capitalism. The movement of the book, then, is from abstract to concrete, theory to praxis, description to explanation, interpretation to critique, past to future. Dialectical phenomenology, if it is to be faithful to itself, must be radical and utopian. A rationality that refuses to be such is mutilated and half-hearted. A merely bourgeois rationality and freedom is a truncated rationality and freedom.

Rationality, in its capacity to raise the further question, conceive the ideal, conceptual universal, posit an ideal ethical community of ends, criticize an existing community for not living up to those ideals, and project a more human alternative, is essentially utopian. One can, of course, refuse to raise the further question, smudge the difference between universal and particular, deny in a positivistic manner the relevance of ethics, and, therefore, express a scientific praxis and conception of reason that just mirrors the capitalistic status quo. If, however, people are essentially subjects and not objects, if the refusal to raise the further question is obscurantist, if nominalism is false, if positivism is self-contradictory, and if scientism is untrue, then such moves betray themselves as irrational, arbitrary, half-hearted, timid. I can only embrace capitalism at the price of contradicting, sacrificing, inhibiting my rationality and freedom. I can only be faithful to rationality and freedom by becoming critical. The way out of the dilemma, if I wish to be fully rational and authentic, is obvious.

The bourgeois subject is not the subject as such. One of the most provocative claims made by some of the postmodernists and even leftist modernists is the equation of subjectivity with domination. For postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida, such a claim requires the deemphasizing or jettisoning of the subject for a politics of differences and practices.

A first step in addressing this issue is to distinguish between the subject as such and the isolated, individualistic, totally autonomous Cartesian subject.

Rejection of the latter does not imply rejection of the former. Rather, we can move to a sense of the subject as embodied, linguistic, intersubjective, rooted in tradition.

Another confusion is identifying the subject with the instrumentally rational subject. However, both analytic philosophy and phenomenology have shown us the fallacy of this move. Analytic philosophy has shown us the way the subject is involved in ethical as well as descriptive language games, is capable of performative as well as constative utterances, and employs illocutionary as well as locutionary speech. Phenomenology has shown us different levels and kinds of experience: perceptual, reflective, aesthetic, scientific, political, religious. The basic intention of both traditions is to break up the identity between the instrumentally rational subject and the subject as such. As Husserl shows us in his *Crisis,* science is both a part of the life-world and founded on it. In at least two ways, science is derivative, not ultimate.[13]

Another misleading equation is that between the subject and consciousness. If one takes Freud seriously, as structuralists such as Lacan argue, then I have to own up to the subversion of the subject by the unconscious. But to Lacan, we can oppose Ricoeur who moves dialectically from the Cartesian subject through its decentering and overturning in a Freudian problematic to a broader, more comprehensive sense of subjectivity as a unity of conscious and unconscious, rationality and desire, reflectivity and spontaneity. I recover my unconsciousness consciously through sublimation, interpretation, and conversation with my psychotherapist. "Where id was, there ego shall be."[14]

Another flawed equation is that between subjectivity and the active subject. Such an equation, resting on the Cartesian, Kantian paradigm of subjectivity, very easily lends itself to a model of domination and control. However, if perception is receptive, then the human being is receptive. Again the ethical requirement of dialogal rather than coercive speech in interaction expresses the same insight, as does the necessary loss of self in giving oneself to the art object or text in interpretation. The true subject is the perceptive, dialogal, open subject. "I lose myself in order to find myself."[15]

An additional erroneous equation is that between subjectivity and strict self-identity. Some self-identity is necessary, but this identity is a union and difference in at least these senses: the dependence of reflection on the body, the mediation of consciousness by language, the mediation of consciousness by the unconscious, the openness of the subject to the other in dialogue, the immersion of the self in tradition and history. The subject is already permeated with difference.[16]

But one might ask if I am not trying too hard. If I have to make these distinctions to save a philosophy of the subject, then perhaps I should just jettison it and move to a communicative praxis as Benhabib does. However,

such praxis meaningfully presupposes and implies subjectivity in at least the five following senses:

1. As a carrier of the four validity claims, comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, and rightness, I can conform to these or not, live up to them or not.
2. As embodied, I am "here" present to the other "there."
3. I understand and judge for myself in dialogue; I can understand or not, mislead or not, agree with someone or not.
4. I am responsible for decisions to conform or not to conform, to do this or that, to help this person or that person.
5. The subject is the developed individual that Habermas and Mead argue is the product of socialization; as a result of meeting this person, receiving this education, living in this city, I am a certain definite kind of individual.

Communicative praxis in these senses presupposes subjectivity. Intersubjectivity is subjectivity.[17]

Unity of Content and Form: Dialectical Phenomenology as Critical Social Theory

Dialectical phenomenology as method, then, points toward the concrete universal, capital as a unity of universal and particular. As descriptive, dialectical phenomenology reflects upon those aspects of the life-world that are invariant and universal. As hermeneutical, dialectical phenomenology reflects upon capitalism as a particular social form of life with the intent of transforming and overcoming such a form of life. Dialectical phenomenology as critical social theory, then, is permeated with a practical, critical intent. Only a radically transformed social world is worthy of the self-appropriated subject.

When I describe capitalism as *the* object of critical social theory, I am indicating, speaking most concretely and determinately, what I intend to emphasize as a critical theorist in the West. I must confront capitalism as the socioeconomic system operating in the West. State socialism in the East, of course, has been another form of domination, equally virulent or more virulent than late capitalism. It shares with capitalism the properties of scientism, reification, alienation, and class rule. It differs with capitalism in being a dominantly *political* rather than *economic* form of class domination, and in not incorporating sufficiently in its institutions the gains occurring in the last centuries in democracy and respect for individual rights.

State socialism, therefore, is paradoxical in relation to the aims of critical theory. On the one hand, in its orientation to economic planning, stated commit-

ment to democratization of that process, ability to abolish private property and unemployment, and intention to overcome economic class domination, it represents a step forward from capitalism. On the other hand, in its economic inefficiency, its contempt for individual rights, its lack of economic and political democracy, and its substitution of political for economic class domination, it falls behind the achievements of the West. A fully adequate critical social theory says, dialectically, "a plague on both your houses." The main theoretical and practical task is to work out a humane alternative to both late capitalism and state socialism. The full range of critical social theory includes other alienated structures such as state socialism; while reflecting on this somewhat, I will emphasize for the above reasons late capitalism in the West.[18]

Because dialectical phenomenology has two main aspects, a descriptive and a hermeneutical, it is divided into two main parts, the first descriptive-eidetic and the second interpretive-critical. The first part subdivides into two main parts, a description and an eidetic reflection on basic realities of human social experience such as action, power, labor, violence, and truth, and an account of right, morality, and justice. The second part divides into two main parts, the first dominantly but not exclusively interpretive and explanatory comprising the first three chapters, and the second dominantly but not exclusively suspicious and critical. The second critical part also subdivides into two main parts, a critique of capitalism as irrational and unjust, and reflection on transformative praxis leading to a democratic socialism. In affirming a hermeneutical-explanatory moment as a third main stage in critical theory, I do not mean to imply that there are not substages within this main stage. Following Tony Smith, I think that the best formulation of those stages is to distinguish among empirical research, theory construction to explain what has been empirically discovered, and more general models that integrate the research and theory and are in turn verified by them. Thus, the claims about distribution of wealth and income made in Chapter 13 are results of research, value theory used to explain such results is an example of theory, and "late capitalism" is a model, similar to "modernity" in Chapter 11, and "historical materialism" in Chapter 10.[19]

Part One emphasizes the universal structures of human experience and the principles of right, morality, and justice; the second part is a reflection on the particular historical gestalt of capitalism. Although the universal is emphasized in Part One and the particular in Part Two, universal and particular interact in each part and between parts. Thus, in Part One we move from the particular experience of praxis to an understanding of such praxis to judging the general structures of such experience and the principles of right, morality, and justice. In Part Two we use general concepts and principles as bases for interpreting and criticizing capitalism as a form of life and moving to particular kinds of praxis to overcome capitalism.

Because of the relationship between Parts One and Two, the reader will note a certain parallelism between certain chapters in each part. Thus, the chapter on theory and practice in Part One corresponds to the final chapter on transforming praxis in Part Two; the chapter on rationality and critique corresponds to the chapter on the dialectic of Enlightenment; the chapter on understanding and explanation corresponds to the chapter on system and life-world; and, finally, the chapter on ethics and justice corresponds to that on the unjust irrationality of late capitalism.

Cognitional and volitional structure, articulated earlier in our discussion of transcendental method, also operates in each part of the book. In Part One of the book is the movement from experience of action to understanding and judgment concerning what truly is to reflection and decision on the level of freedom about the principles of right, morality, and justice. In Part Two we discuss the experience of the alienating effects of capitalism as a form of life, interpret and criticize this form of life, and choose an appropriate transformative praxis.

We can, then, discern a similarity and difference between such acts and the relationships between acts as they occur in the two parts. Experience of action and of alienation are both experiences of the given, but these have a different object or, at the very least, a different emphasis—the former focusing on those aspects of human experience that yield the descriptive, eidetic universal and the latter on those aspects of experience that yield the hermeneutical, critical particular. The eidetic universal and structures of capitalism are both based on intelligible patterns in the given, but one is the eidetic universal common to all epochs and the other the structure of a particular historical epoch. Similarly, judgment about the truth of a putative universal differs in content from judgment about the truth of a particular interpretation or the rationality of a particular historical epoch such as capitalism, just as the choice of the principles of justice differs from the critique of a society according to those principles or the choice of a praxis that would realize those principles in a certain historical epoch. Experience, understanding, judgment, and decision are the same formally in Parts One and Two, insofar as they are the same kinds of acts, but they differ in content between Parts One and Two. The difference in content is that between universal as experienced, understood, judged, and chosen and particular as experienced, understood, judged, and chosen.

The book, then, inscribes a movement, a process, a direction: from the universal to the particular. Descriptively and eidetically, I reflect on the basic terms and realities that have to be understood in order to make the interpretation and critique. I develop an ethic and theory of justice. I interpret and explain capitalism as a form of life. In the light of a theory of justice I criticize capitalism as a form of life.

Next is a movement from theory to praxis: from eidetic description to

justice to interpretation to critique to action. Further is a movement from eidetic description through interpretation to explanation, from immediacy to mediation. Then I move from a less comprehensive to a more comprehensive account, from my immediate, intersubjective life-world to the social world as a unity of life-world and system. Next we move from particular experiences of action, power, and other phenomena to universal ethical claims in Part One; in Part Two, we move from very general reflections on historical materialism to more precise, determinate reflections on capitalism as a form of life and the praxis necessary to overcome it. When we consider the whole movement from the beginning of the book to the end, we move from action as experienced to action as a praxis of overcoming capitalism, from an immediate to a mediated immediacy.

We can see, then, how these stages build on and go beyond one another: no ethics without eidetic description, no interpretation-explanation without description and ethics, no critique without interpretation, no praxis without critique. The controversy of the theory-praxis relationship that has been so much discussed in contemporary leftist literature receives some clarification here: theory points toward transformative praxis but is not reducible to it. Theory as initially descriptive, ethical, hermeneutical, and critical has its own proper standards and criteria but points toward a transformative praxis. In this sense, theory itself is a transformative praxis. True theory is a unity of theory and praxis; true praxis is a unity of theory and practice. The Marxist and Hegelian formulations approximate one another here and, to some extent, dovetail.

Finally, we note a circle in the book insofar as we move from the "immediacy" of experience as described to the immediacy of action as practiced. Since part of the initial experience, however, is action, we move from an immediate to a mediated immediacy. In this book, therefore, as in *Post-Cartesian Meditations*, is a circle.[20]

The movement in *Post-Cartesian Mediations* is from the experience of alienation to final reflection and critique of that alienation pointing toward a transformative praxis. In this book, we start from the experience of that praxis in an alienated capitalist context. We ascend to the mediation of theory, descriptive, ethical, hermeneutical, and critical, and descend to the immediacy of praxis.

I put quotation marks around "immediacy" because experience is never purely immediate but always is mediated by conscious or unconscious psychological or social structures. The experience with which I begin is the result of the first book, described, interpreted, criticized. This experience, then, is only relatively immediate in relation to the further description, interpretation, and critique to take place in this book.

Such a conception of critical theory enables us to avoid the mistake of

taking the part for the whole. Basic description is not ethics, is not interpretation, is not critique, and is not practical, political praxis. These build on one another and relate to one another, but are not reducible to one other. Because critical theory is this process of movement from initial description to praxis, a division of labor arises in critical theory. The phenomenologist of action is not the theorist of justice; the theoretician is not the reflector on praxis.

We can also avoid the opposite extremes of historicism and abstract foundationalism. We avoid historicism through recourse to the invariant eidetic and ethical structures of the human communicative subject. We avoid an irrelevant foundationalism by insisting that these structures are related to concrete interpretation, critique, and praxis. Critique without eidetics is blind, arbitrary, and relativistic; eidetics without critique is empty, incomplete, and ideological. The human subject is the essential but often unacknowledged core of critical theory.

Even in unfolding this sense of method united to content in critical theory, we can see several different senses of praxis. First is the choice on the level of freedom of transcendental method and the transcendental precepts. Next is the theoretical praxis of critical theory as a process, then the stage of critique and suspicion. Next is the practical praxis led up to by description, interpretation, and critique. Finally is the experienced reality and idea of communicative praxis.

Note here, and I will develop this point more fully later, that theory and praxis are relative concepts and realities; neither makes sense fully without the other. Each one of the above notions of praxis contrasts with a notion of theory. To choice, the first sense, we can contrast transcendental method as theory, to critical theory as a process oriented to transforming society a sense of theory as contemplative disclosure, to critique and suspicion eidetic description and interpretation, to practical praxis the previous stages of basic description, ethics, interpretation and critique; and finally, to communicative praxis, scientific, aesthetic, and ethical, a contemplative disclosure of being for its own sake.

Finally, as a way of summing up, we can say that critical theory can be considered as method, process, object, content, and goal. As method, it simply is the use of description, interpretation, and critique to reflect on the alienating, unjust social structures of capitalism as a form of life. As process, it is simply the moving through the stages of description, ethics, interpretation, suspicion, and reflection on praxis. As object, critical theory makes certain claims descriptively, hermeneutically, and critically about capitalism as a form of life. As we shall see, the content or doctrines of critical theory are variable in a way that the method is not. The invariability of method rests upon the transcendental structure of the subject, the transcendental precepts, time consciousness as a unity of past, present, and future, the criteria for

interpretation and critique, the four validity claims in the ideal speech situation, and the principles of morality and justice. On the other hand, the role that the state plays becomes much more active and interventionist in the twentieth century. It is this relative invariability of method that makes some limited sense of Lukács' claim about Marxism being true even if all of its basic claims should change.[21]

Finally, the goal of critical theory is the transformation of society in light of the principles of right, morality, and justice. We should note here that the evaluation by critical theory can take three different forms: society is basically just and harmonious, not requiring even serious reform; society is just in principle but does require serious reform; society is irrational and unjust in principle and a radical transformation is required. It is this latter judgment that I will argue for in this book.

This book has four main goals: to develop the notion of method in critical theory, to determine the content of this method, modern capitalism as a form of life, to exemplify this method in practice by producing some basic propositions about twentieth-century capitalism, and to argue the legitimacy and possibility of democratic socialism as an alternative to capitalism and state socialism. These four purposes imply a grounding, expanding, reconstructing, retaining or rejecting of truth claims in Marx and the Marxist tradition. Marxism needs much more of a descriptive, reflective grounding in the social subject than it has received thus far. Crisis theory, for example, needs to be expanded to include not only economic but also rationality, legitimation, and motivation crises. The notion of historical materialism needs to be reconstructed to include not only an economic but also a political and aesthetic component. Value theory should be retained, but economism or reductionism should be rejected. Finally, we require a revised conception of the role of the state in twentieth-century capitalism.[22]