

Rationalization as Domination:

The Evolution of Marxian and Weberian views on the Rationalization of Society

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ABSTRACT

The writings of Marx, Weber, Horkheimer, Adorno, Lukács, Marcuse, and Habermas focus very heavily on the issues of alienation, domination, and social stratification under capitalism. Though these thinkers wrote extensively about the same topics, they frequently disagreed about the causes and consequences of the social problems they explored. All were able to recognize the rise of a new type of domination that came in the form of the increasing calculability and control of rationalization, but due to various disagreements on other matters of social theory, especially between Marx and Weber, a consensus on the meaning of rationalization for the individual remained just out of reach. The key disagreements center on the nature of social stratification as defined by Marx and Weber respectively, as well as their respective approaches to social theory as being driven by either a macro-level view of society in the case of Marx, or an individual-centered view in the case of Weber. These two opposing perspectives on rationalization manifested themselves in parallel lines of thought for the majority of the 20th century. Though the perspectives remained largely separate, the work of Weber could occasionally be seen as an influence in the work of some of the Critical Theorists. Starting with Marcuse, and continuing through the work of Habermas, a synthesis between the Marxian and Weberian elements of rationalization could begin to be seen. The history of the concept of rationalization demonstrates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to philosophy, especially within the domain of social theory.

The Enlightenment initiated massive changes to the social world which were widely expected to be beneficial both to the individual and society. The search for definitive answers to all previously unanswered questions represented, for humanity, a type of progress which was previously unthinkable, but more importantly it represented the possibility of being free from the fear of the unknown. Prior to the Enlightenment, humans relied on myth to satisfy their curiosity and allay their fear. Under the Enlightenment, however, mythology was pushed aside in favor of a new type of answer built on reason. Traditional social structures built on myth began to wither away, and society began its march towards a greater degree of control and domination over nature, guided by a strict adherence to rationality. The Enlightenment was characterized by the domination of nature, but the process of rationalization, a consequence of Enlightenment, can be characterized primarily by the domination of the individual.

With increasing rationalization, society saw the rise of the bureaucracy as the dominant form of organization behind most institutions, a declining emphasis on the importance of the individual in social life, and consequently, an ever increasing sense of alienation which came to characterize the relationships between individuals as well as the relationship between individuals and society. Despite the stated intention to use the concepts developed in the Enlightenment to bring about widespread prosperity, “the wholly enlightened earth,” as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno write in the opening pages of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, “is radiant with triumphant calamity.”¹

Though humanity has developed new ways of mastering the physical world, this mastery comes with a price; “Human beings purchase the increase in their power,” argue Horkheimer and Adorno, “with estrangement from that over which it is exerted.”² As humanity continues to dominate nature, humans become increasingly alienated from it. As the power of continued

rationalization brings about a multifaceted domination of the individual by the controlling forces within society, those forces become less personal; the growing abstraction of domination at the hands of the power which harnesses the rationalization process produces an even more sweeping, yet simultaneously less obvious form of alienation.

Comprehensive interpretations of the meaning of rationalization for society have been attempted from entirely within the realm of either philosophy or sociology, but a thorough understanding of the approaches taken by thinkers in each group is important in order to fully appreciate the complexity of the issue. The sociologists who have explored this issue have followed in the footsteps of Max Weber, one of the first thinkers to identify the process of rationalization, while the philosophical exploration of rationalization typically found its expression in early 20th century Marxist thought.

Under a Marxist interpretation of rationalization, the domination of the individual can be seen as proceeding along class lines. The view of society held by Marx, which focuses on the macroscopic perspective and emphasizes the mode of production as the foundation upon which all other social relations are dependent, offers some explanation for the rise of rationalization. The bourgeoisie, driven by the need to increase calculability and control, treats the worker as an instrumentality; the alienation that arises as a result of the worker's domination can be seen as an inevitable result of capitalism itself. The Weberian view, in contrast, held that the origin of rationalization could be found in the widespread change of attitudes and beliefs initiated by the protestant reformation. These changes were reinforced by the subsequent shift away from traditional forms of authority and toward rational-legal authority, and led inevitably to a form of bureaucratization that tended towards oligarchic domination of the individual.

The competing views of rationalization advanced by Weberian sociology and Marxist

philosophy co-existed until Marcuse, and later Habermas, developed a view of rationalization that began a synthesis of both perspectives. Considering the important role that Marx's thought played in the development of these divergent perspectives on rationalization, it is prudent to begin an exploration of the concept of rationalization by briefly examining the roots of the concept in the work of Karl Marx.

Karl Marx and Early Hints of Instrumental Rationality

When Marx undertook an analysis of society, he focused mainly on the macroscopic elements rather than on the more detailed interactions between individuals. While it is true that taken together these individual actions compose society as a whole, Marx's focus was still on the big picture. His understanding of the changes to the division of labor throughout history and their respective consequences on social life as described in *The German Ideology* is illustrative of this perspective, but Marx had already expressed this point much more directly; he wrote in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*:

Above all we must avoid postulating 'society' again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual *is the social being*. His manifestations of life, even if they may not appear in the direct form of *communal* manifestations of life are carried out in association with others – are therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*. Man's individual and species-life are not *different*, however much – and this is inevitable – the mode of existence of the individual is a more *particular* or more *general* mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more *particular* or more *general* individual life.³

Marx, in the passage above, explains that humans are social creatures, and that even when alone, humans are connected to one another in a profound way. Marx reiterated this point in *Theses on Feuerbach VI* when he said that “the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.”⁴ For Marx it was this ensemble which was truly worth his further exploration, and it is with this macroscopic perspective in mind

that Marx's contributions to the study of rationalization must be understood. An understanding of this concept, what Marx called the "species-being" is an important first step in understanding the perspective that later thinkers would take in light of the work of Marx.

Three other concepts which originated in the work of Marx would later become very important in the analysis of society: alienation, reification, and rationalization. While Marx devotes considerable time to the discussion of alienation throughout his work, the concepts of reification and rationalization were, in large part, developed by later philosophers who were inspired by Marx, not by Marx himself.

The concept of alienation is very important for both Marx and for the Critical Theorists. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx described three types of alienation: the alienation of a worker from the products of his labor, from his labor itself, and from other human beings.⁵ Marx showed that when a worker labors under capitalism, there is a diminishing sense of connection between the worker and the things the worker produces. The act of labor becomes mechanical, because it is not something the worker does of his own free will, but instead as a means to an end: to survive. Most importantly, labor under capitalism prevents humans from relating to each other within a social context on a human level, as a "species-being."

The concept of reification depends very heavily upon the concept of alienation, and it could even be seen as a specific type of alienation. In *Capital*, Marx devotes a short section to the discussion of commodity fetishism, which he says results from the mistaken view that commodities, not the labor that produced them, are what is truly valuable to society. Marx says in this section that there is a tendency under capitalism to create "material relations between persons and social relations between things."⁶ Georg Lukács, in his essay "Reification and the

Consciousness of the Proletariat,” agreed with Marx, explaining that “the universality of the commodity form is responsible both objectively and subjectively for the abstraction of the human labour incorporated in commodities,”⁷ and further argued that as a result of this abstraction, combined with the push towards rationalization motivated by a desire for higher efficiency and thus higher profits, the bourgeoisie treats the worker as “a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system.”⁸

Rationalization builds upon reification and alienation. Both the alienated quality of labor and the tendency to treat people as objects are important elements of instrumental rationality in modernity. Though Marx could not predict the specific shape that the process of rationalization would assume in the 20th century, he was prescient enough to recognize it in its early stages. Marx and Engels wrote in *The Communist Manifesto* that in its attempt to remove the impediment of tradition from the path of capital's expansion, the Bourgeoisie had “drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation.”⁹ This process of demystification made room for the rationality required by the markets in their quest for expansion, and the continued exploitation of the proletariat to those ends:

The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers. The bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation.¹⁰

Marx's work in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *Capital*, and *The Communist Manifesto* acknowledges the birth of the process of rationalization, though it would be left to later social theorists to delve deeper into the implications of such a profound change to the relationship between individuals and society.

Max Weber and the Iron Cage of Rationality

While Marx briefly considers the phenomenon of rationalization, for him, the most distinctive marker of modern society was the rise of the capitalist mode of production. All else was a consequence of this change to society's substructure. The resultant changes to society's superstructure, including the rise of the bureaucracy as the dominant form taken by most institutions, were explored in detail by another founder of modern sociology, Max Weber. The Weberian analysis of power, authority, social stratification, rationalization, and bureaucratization was an important step in the progression towards a more complete understanding of these social processes, but Weber's view did not conform particularly well with the Marxian view.

Weber did, however, take many cues from Marx, and though he was most certainly not a Marxist, Weber was clearly influenced heavily by the work of Marx. In the same section of *Capital* where Marx set the stage for Lukács to explore reification, Marx describes Protestantism as “the most fitting form of religion” for a society that, through the commodity form, allows the labor of the individual to be treated only as an indistinct part of the whole of the labor of society,¹¹ foreshadowing Weber’s analysis of the role religion played in the economic development of western society, though Weber, of course, drew a very different conclusion.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argued that, while not a sufficient condition for western capitalism, the ideas, including predestination, espoused by Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, are at least a necessary condition.¹² Religion, for Weber, was one of the most important elements of a complete analysis of society. While Marx, Engels, and other previous thinkers focused heavily on relationships between classes under capitalism, Weber explored the reasons that lie behind the rise of western capitalism – how the religious ideals of Calvinism facilitated the spread of the ideology of capitalism. Individual beliefs in

societies where Calvinism had taken hold were very important to Weber, and an attempt to understand them became part of a method he used for analyzing society. Weber's method, called "verstehen" in German – literally meaning "understanding" - emphasized the importance of the individual's experience in the world and included this inner experience as a component of any larger analysis of society.¹³

Weber's emphasis on the individual was a major departure from Marx. Where Marx emphasized the importance of the macroscopic view of society in light of the division of labor, Weber spent considerable energy exploring individual beliefs and the effects those beliefs had on choices made by individual actors.¹⁴

While changes in religious attitudes, in Weber's view, allowed for the spread of capitalism in the west, this change alone was not sufficient to give birth to the complex form of rationalization which would become such a large part of Weber's social analysis. Weber's conceptualization of rationalization finds its genesis not only in his work on religion, but also in his departure from Marx's view of social stratification as the result only of social class. Marx wrote in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* that "capital is... the governing power over labour and its products. [The capitalist's] power is the purchasing power of his capital, which nothing can withstand."¹⁵ Weber agrees with Marx that one's position in the economy, as either one who maintains control over the products of their labor or one who is forced to sell the products of their labor for survival, is a major factor that drives social stratification, "'Property' and 'lack of property'" Weber explains, "are, therefore, the basic categories of all class situations."¹⁶ This simple dichotomy, however, is not the end of Weber's view of social stratification as it was for Marx. Weber, in fact, criticizes the popular Marxian view of social stratification because it assumes that classes always act as a unified whole according to class

interests rather than simply responding simultaneously according to individual interests:

That men in the same class situation regularly react in mass actions to such tangible situations as economic ones in the direction of those interests that are most adequate to their average number is an important and after all simple fact for the understanding of historical events. However, this fact must not lead to that kind of pseudo-scientific operation with the concepts of class and class interests which is so frequent these days and which has found its most classic expression in the statement of a talented author, that the individual may be in error concerning his interests but that the class is infallible about its interests.¹⁷

The identity of the “talented author” that Weber refers to could reasonably be assumed to be Marx, however given Weber's use of the phrase “these days” it is also imaginable that he was referring to one of the early 20th century Marxist writers.

Weber goes on to describe two other forms of power, beyond simple economic power, which he believed to be causal factors behind social stratification: status power, and party power. For Weber, status power was seen as being derived from social prestige, and party power was essentially the ability to exert political influence.¹⁸ Weber's understanding of power and its relationship with social stratification was an integral part of his overall worldview, and not only would it become the foundation for his exploration of rationalization, but it would later become an important source of inspiration for several other thinkers, particularly Jürgen Habermas.

Weber's conception of authority is closely related to his interpretation of power. For Weber, authority is nothing more than legitimated power; the exercise of power can be seen as legitimate or illegitimate, but the response one has towards the exercise of power is the result of concrete social forces.¹⁹ Weberian authority takes three forms, but the form most relevant to the discussion of rationalization is rational-legal authority, which is the authority that the state exercises over individuals through the bureaucratic structure of law. Because society is trending towards rationalization, rational-legal authority, which is the most bureaucratic form of authority,

is the authority form that grew to become most important in modernity. There may be a kind of interdependence between rational-legal authority and rationalization because at the same time that this form of authority came to dominate as a result of rationalization, it also helped to hasten the continuation of the rationalization process. In this way, rational-legal authority and rationalization can be seen as self-reinforcing elements of society in modernity.

Weber used the well-known metaphor of an “iron cage,” or to more precisely reflect the literal translation from German, a “housing hard as steel”²⁰ to describe rationalization, which he believed was the result of the inescapability of the bureaucratization process, enforced by the rational-legal authority structure. The consequences of this cage for the individual were dire. In *Economy and Society* Weber argues that “bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge.”²¹ The ability of the administrators to use their understanding of the bureaucratic process to achieve their goals at the expense of those who lacked that knowledge had a tendency, according to Weber, to lead to plutocracy. Bureaucratic domination inevitably resulted in “a spirit of formalistic impersonality... without affection or enthusiasm” under which “the dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations.”²² Weber's focus on individuality may well have informed his prescient understanding of the wide-ranging social responses to rationalization.

Throughout the course of his life, Weber developed a complex and far reaching theory of rationalization that depended upon his views on class, authority, power, social stratification, and bureaucratization. These ideas were quite influential, and despite Weber's departure from Marx, many of his ideas even came to influence the thinking of explicitly Marxist thinkers in the mid to late 20th century.

Herbert Marcuse and Technological Rationality

Herbert Marcuse's philosophy is deeply rooted in the Marxian tradition, but the subtle influence of Weber can also be seen as a common thread throughout Marcuse's work. Though Marcuse's thinking evolved significantly over time, the influence of these two thinkers continues to exert itself in his writing in various ways. Marcuse's understanding of the rationalization of society through what he calls "technological rationality" represents the next step in the understanding of this process, and begins to synthesize the views on rationality expressed by both Marx and Weber.

Marcuse began to explain his interpretation of the rationalization of society in a 1941 essay entitled "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology." In the essay, Marcuse defines what he describes as "technological rationality," explains its origin, and explores the many consequences of its existence, including the effects on individuality, power and control, the perception of the truth, and human thought. He refers throughout the essay to the "apparatus," which represents the totality of the institutions and political and social structures which comprise the ruling order. This essay illustrates the degree to which Marcuse, in the earlier part of his career, was influenced by both Weber and Marx.

Technological rationality, according to Marcuse, is a consequence of the call for efficiency of industry, which must incorporate new technologies in order to remain profitable.²³ With the quest for increased profit as the main guiding principle behind all actions undertaken by industry, a shift occurs in the thinking of the individuals who must use rationality to support their own best interests. Weber's emphasis on the importance of the individual in social life seems to have had an influence on Marcuse's thinking on this matter. The "iron cage" of rationalization, according to Weber, had very negative consequences for the individual, and the view Marcuse

expresses here expands upon Weber's original insight.

With the growth and development of industry, individuals in the working class found themselves in a position that required them to align their own interests with those of industry, because failure to do so meant the possible loss of the only means they had of supporting themselves – the sale of their labor to industry. The interests of industry have become focused primarily on ever-increasing levels of efficiency through the use of increasingly complex technology. Marcuse explains that this shift in thinking from individual rationality to technological rationality forced individuals to fundamentally shift the basis of their decision making process:

Profitable employment of the apparatus dictates to a great extent the quantity, form and kind of commodities to be produced, and through this mode of production and distribution, the technological power of the apparatus affects the entire rationality of those whom it serves... Individualistic rationality has been transformed into technological rationality. It is by no means confined to the subjects and objects of large scale enterprises, but characterizes the pervasive mode of thought and even the manifold forms of protest and rebellion. This rationality establishes standards of judgment and fosters attitudes which make men ready to accept and even to introcept the dictates of the apparatus.²⁴

Technological rationality was more than the means through which the leaders of industry increased their efficiency, but it was also a new form of social control. This form of control, as Marcuse would later argue in *One Dimensional Man*, is responsible for the internalization of the values of the apparatus, which leads humans to identify more with commodities and their production than they do with each other. Under technological rationality, demystification and rationalization have progressed to such an extent that human beings no longer think and act as individuals, but instead their actions and beliefs correspond with the preferred values of the apparatus. More importantly, they don't recognize this internalization of values as such; people under the control of the apparatus still believe that they are making choices based on individual

rationality.

This view represents a synthesis of Weber's assertion that rationalization was driven in part by individual beliefs, and the view, in Marxist philosophy, that rationalization originates in the alienation and reification that stem from class relations. The social control employed by the apparatus is itself a form of class antagonism, but it relies heavily upon the beliefs of those it dominates. In order to perpetuate its continued domination of the workers, the apparatus has recognized the need to obscure the nature of this relationship, engendering in the minds of the workers the belief that the interests of the proletariat are aligned with the interests of the bourgeoisie. The apparatus creates a choice between compliance and insouciance on the one hand, and resistance and hardship on the other. Presented with this choice, individuals find submission to be the most rational course of action:

Man does not experience this loss of his freedom as the work of some hostile and foreign force; he relinquishes his liberty to the dictum of reason itself. The point is that today the apparatus to which the individual is to adjust and adopt himself is so rational that individual protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational.²⁵

Marcuse's view is one where advanced industrial society, still in the process of facilitating the global expansion of capital, must to that end be designed around control - mental as well as physical - in support of the prevailing order. As Marcuse's view matured, he came to see the creation of desires as one of the most important forms of control. The process by which new desires were manufactured in the 20th century took on new life under the industrial society of modernity. Marcuse writes in the opening chapter of *One Dimensional Man*:

The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.²⁶

Commoditization as described by Marx had reached new levels by the 20th century.

Commoditization had progressed so far that, to Marcuse, the individual identity began to disappear into an amalgamation of commodities. It was no longer the case that the individual prioritized the acquisition of certain commodities based on individual wants, but instead individual wants were themselves driven by commodities, and the individual was in turn defined by their acquisition. This new development was more than the intensification of Marxian alienation. The subversion of individual identity, according to Marcuse, has precipitated the necessity of reforming the understanding of Marxian alienation, because as Marcuse believed, “the extent to which this civilization transforms the object world into an extension of man's mind and body makes the very notion of alienation questionable.”²⁷ The inner world of the individual is created, modified, and controlled by the outside world of commodities, and the line between inner and outer has been blurred to such an extent that it becomes impossible to distinguish the subjective beliefs of the individual from the external creations of the objective world. Marcuse explains that “the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence. There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere in all forms.”²⁸

Marcuse represents the beginning of a synthesis between the Marxian and Weberian views of rationality. Under a Marxist interpretation, the domination inherent in rationalization was monolithic and one-sided. It could be said to result entirely from the capitalist mode of production and the inevitable alienation and reification that it brings. Weber's interpretation of rationalization left more room for a consideration of the role that individual beliefs played in the advance of rationalization, starting with religious beliefs, but carrying on to beliefs about authority and bureaucracy. Marcuse sees the relevance of both points of view. He recognizes that at its heart, this issue is one based upon social class, wherein divisions along class lines – the division between the capitalists and the workers – were primary, but he also argues that it is the

beliefs of the workers which perpetuate their domination at the hands of the apparatus. The apparatus is sustained through the beliefs of the workers which it dominates. Under Marcuse, the split between the Marxian and Weberian views narrows as a synthesis of both perspectives begins to emerge.

Jürgen Habermas and Communicative Rationality

By the second half of the twentieth century, the rationalization of society as a philosophical and sociological concept had been through various iterations under the study of multiple thinkers across several disciplines. From Weber's rationalization and rational-legal authority, to the instrumental rationality of Horkheimer and Adorno, continuing on to the technological rationality of Marcuse, the concept of rationalization had changed considerably. Jürgen Habermas, a member of the second generation of Critical Theorists, carried on the study of the rationalization of society, and offered critiques of previous views while opening up new avenues of exploration for a well-known concept. The synthesis between the typically Weberian sociological view of rationality and the more Marxian-inspired views expressed by thinkers in the tradition of the Critical Theorists may be most evident in the work of Habermas. Indeed, William Outhwaite noted in his critical introduction to Habermas that while “Max Weber has been described as a bourgeois Marx, Habermas might be summarily characterized as a Marxist Weber.”²⁹ At the same time, Habermas has major disagreements with earlier Critical Theorists like Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse when it comes to views on rationality, science, and technology. While the earlier Critical Theorists believed that the force of rationalization was a singular and overwhelmingly negative process, Habermas believes that rationalization may actually take place in more than one compartmentalized area of life simultaneously, and that in some cases these changes are negative, but in others they may be positive. This distinction places

Habermas much more in line with Weber, who recognized the compartmentalization of the capacity for domination in the forms of political power, money, and social prestige.

Habermas believes that within the “Lifeworld,” or the world of everyday experience, rationalization commonly takes the form of the rationalization of communication, a process he called “communicative rationality.” Habermas argues that this form of rationalization is a good thing because, within the Lifeworld, individuals seek to engage in undistorted communication which leads to a greater level of understanding for all parties involved.³⁰ The forms of distorted communication which individuals seek to overcome stand in contrast to what Habermas describes as the “ideal speech situation,” wherein distorting elements like power play no role in the efficiency of communication.³¹

The Lifeworld, in the philosophy of Habermas, can be contrasted with the “System.” The System is made up of institutions, and rationalization within this sphere is a process which tends to harm the individual. As the rationalization of the System continues, the System becomes more powerful and begins to encroach upon the Lifeworld. This is a process which Habermas describes as the “colonization of the Lifeworld.”³² Communication becomes systematically distorted by the controlling influence of the System as it colonizes the Lifeworld.

Habermas' view of rationality incorporates and refines the views expressed by both Weberians and Critical Theorists. According to Habermas, there is an inherent desire for consensus between individuals communicating within the Lifeworld.³³ One individual may be willing to yield to the demands of another if those demands are seen as reasonable and mutually beneficial. Discourse can be used in this way to arrive at a “rationally motivated consensus.”³⁴ This, in essence, echoes Weber’s view of authority as legitimated power. The relationships between individuals in the Lifeworld are built around the desire for consensus, or to put it

another way, by the desire to dialogically legitimate the claims made by one individual for a right to exercise power over another – to build consensus about which use of power is legitimate.

Habermas' distinction between System and Lifeworld is reminiscent of Weber's observation that power can be divided into the distinct realms of class, status, and political influence. Both Weber and Habermas recognized that power works differently depending on who exercises it and how they exercise it. Weber recognized a transition from traditional authority, which was based on ritual and tradition, and acknowledged the importance of the individual, to the more impersonal rational legal authority, which served to isolate and alienate the individual and lock them in the “iron cage.” This view is very similar to the view, expressed by Habermas, of the Lifeworld being colonized by the System. It is because the System encroaches upon the Lifeworld that rationalization is seen as negative, but the same forces of rationalization, when acting only within the Lifeworld, can serve to increase the efficiency of communication, and thus increase the likelihood of individuals forming a consensus:

Inasmuch as social actions are coordinated through reaching understanding, the formal conditions of rationally motivated agreement specify how participants' relations to one another can be rationalized. As a general principle, they count as rational to the extent that the yes/no decisions that carry a given consensus issue from the interpretive processes of the participants themselves. Correspondingly, a lifeworld can be regarded as rationalized to the extent that it permits interactions that are not guided by normatively *ascribed* agreement but – directly or indirectly – by communicatively *achieved* understanding.³⁵

According to Habermas, rationalization within the lifeworld does not represent the domination of the subject by the object world as seen in the interpretations of rationalization advocated by previous theorists, but represents instead a form of intersubjectivity. Unlike Marcuse, Habermas engaged directly with the work of Weber, and Weber's influence can not only be felt in Habermas' work, but Habermas himself made this connection explicitly, saying that “Weber was right to fix on [the economic system and the administrative system] in order to decode

modernization as a rationalization harboring contradictions within itself.”³⁶ Though Habermas found common ground with Weber, the two were not in total agreement. While he believed Weber’s attention was focused on the right ideas, Habermas was critical of the lack of depth in Weber’s analysis:

Because Weber's action theory is too narrowly gauged, he is unable to see in money and power the media which, *by substituting for language*, make possible the differentiation of subsystems of purposive-rational action. It is these media, and not directly the purposive-rational action orientations themselves, that need to be institutionally and motivationally anchored in the lifeworld. The legitimacy of the legal order and the moral-practical foundation of the realms of action that are regulated by law – that is, formally organized – form the links that connect the economic system (differentiated out via money) and the administrative system (differentiated out via power) to the lifeworld.³⁷

Similarly, Habermas finds elements within Marxian notions of rationalization with which to both agree and disagree. Towards the end of the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas undertakes a systematic critique of the form of rationalization described by Marx and Lukács, and the form of instrumental reason advanced by Horkheimer, and Adorno. Habermas summarizes the argument made by Marx and Lukács:

Marx characterizes the effect of assimilating the normative and the subjective to the status of perceptible and manipulable things as objectivation... To the degree that the wage laborer becomes dependent on the market for his entire existence, anonymous valorization processes encroach upon his lifeworld and destroy the ethical order of communicatively established intersubjectivity by turning social relations into purely instrumental relations.³⁸

Marx and Lukács believe that capitalism contains within it the means of its own destruction. The objectification of the workers, according to Lukács, creates the material and subjective conditions necessary to induce the workers to revolt against their objectification, though Habermas criticizes Lukács for failing to provide details about the mechanism by which the proletariat might rise to class consciousness as a result of their objectification.³⁹ On the other hand, Habermas argues that in the view of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, “the scientific-

technical forces of production appear to... merge with the relations of production and to lose entirely their power to burst the system. The rationalized world contracts to a 'false' totality."⁴⁰ Horkheimer and Adorno believed that as a result of instrumental reason, the objective world constituted the subjective world and demolished any hope of escape from domination through subjectivity. Habermas criticizes this view of the reification of consciousness as being arrived at through a series of unnecessary abstractions ending in contradiction, concluding that in order to accept Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis, one must simultaneously believe that truth can be determined through a critique of instrumental reason, but that at the same time, truth is not accessible due to the effects of total alienation.⁴¹

Habermas concludes that, despite their ability to recognize discrete elements of a comprehensive theory of rationalization, each of the above thinkers ultimately misses the mark as they attempt to understand rationalization in terms of consciousness instead of in terms of language.⁴² In contrast to the subject-object dialectic assumed by earlier theorists with regard to the problem of rationalization, Habermas proposes an orientation focused on intersubjectivity.

Habermas benefits from the groundwork laid by Weber, but he also takes into consideration the view, expressed by the earlier Critical Theorists, that instrumental rationality is harmful to individual autonomy. His recognition of the negative, controlling elements of instrumental reason as understood by the early Critical Theorists is revealed in his discussion of systematically distorted communication and the colonization of the Lifeworld. Habermas recognizes that when power is exerted by the System, not in an effort to build consensus, but instead instrumentally, the effects on individuals are overwhelmingly negative. Habermas holds a more nuanced view of the process of rationalization than any of the thinkers that came before him. His thinking is informed by the work, not only of Marx, Lukács, and the earlier Critical

Theorists, but also by Weber; Habermas takes into consideration the various ways in which power exists and the ways in which it may be applied, providing a necessary synthesis of the views of both groups of thinkers.

Conclusion

Marx's exploration of the fetishization of commodities, his views on the connections between the social substructure and the superstructure, his understanding of labor relations as social relations, and his view of the connections between class and power were fundamental to the work done by both sociologists and philosophers in the 20th century. For Marx, any hints of rationalization were simply the result of labor relations and commodity fetishism; as the bourgeoisie continued to increase the efficiency of their exploitation of the workers, the social superstructure necessarily changed to accommodate the increasing efficiency, and the result was the loss of the traditional way of life known to many before the birth of Capitalism. Weber, rooted though he was in the work of Marx, believed that not only class, but also power served to dictate the relationships among people and between the individual and society. Rationalization, for Weber, resulted necessarily from the changes of individual beliefs and attitudes which allowed for the rise of the rational-legal authority behind the process of bureaucratization, which created for the individual an "iron cage" of rationality. The early Critical Theorists, particularly Horkheimer and Adorno, believed that rationalization was a result of the demystification inherent in the Enlightenment, and subsequently science came to be a form of ideology.

The innately human desire to find answers to fundamental questions served as part of the driving force behind the Enlightenment. In an effort to satiate their curiosity, humans allowed for the birth of instrumental reason, which provided new avenues for answering these nagging

questions, but also allowed for unseen social forces to exert a new form of control over the vast majority of individuals, shaping their thoughts to such an extent that they are unaware of the controlling influences and will even fight to defend and preserve them. Instrumental reason and the technology that it gave rise to allowed for the domination, not only of nature, but of human beings as well. Marcuse, building upon the work of Horkheimer and Adorno, viewed not only science, but also technology as an ideological barrier to human liberation from domination.

The concept of rationalization, one of the most important areas of study for the Critical Theorists, has become, under Habermas, a broad field of study which includes elements introduced by many previous thinkers. It is Habermas' ability to incorporate the views of not only the Critical Theorists, but of Weber as well – something many other Critical Theorists failed to do as effectively - which made Habermas' contributions so valuable. The importance of the work done by the early members of the Frankfurt School should not be deemphasized in light of the work of Habermas. To the contrary, their views, though less nuanced, are still extraordinarily important in the history of the development of the concept of rationalization, and they serve to highlight the value of an interdisciplinary approach for anyone who seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of rationalization.

Notes

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10. Ibid.
11. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1976), 1:172.
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13. Ibid., 175
14. Ibid.
15. Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974), 35
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26. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 9.
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28. Ibid., 11
29. William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), accessed March 18, 2016, Frostburg State University's Catalog e-book, 3.
30. George Ritzer, *Contemporary Sociological Theory and its Classical Roots: The Basics*, 2nd ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003), 121.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. James Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 34
34. Ibid., 41
35. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 1:339-340.
36. Ibid., 342
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid., 358
39. Ibid., 368

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 379

42. Ibid., 378-379

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