The poverty of Critical Theory in International Relations: Habermas, Linklater and the failings of cosmopolitan critique

Within and outside of the discipline of International Relations, Frankfurt School Critical Theory faces a "crisis of critique" that is affecting its ability to generate analyses and political interventions that are relevant to the present world-historical conjuncture. This article seeks to identify the theoretical origins of this predicament by investigating the meta-theoretical architecture of the prevailing, Habermasian framework of critique. I contend that the binary ontology and methodology of society that lies at the heart of the Habermasian paradigm has effected an uncoupling of normative critique from substantive social and political analysis and results in a severe weakening of both Critical Theory's "explanatory-diagnostic" and "anticipatory-utopian" capabilities. Thereafter, I discuss the determinate ways in which these issues have manifested in critical theoretical interventions on international politics by exploring both Habermas's own writings on the post-national constellation and Andrew Linklater's theory of cosmopolitanism and sociology of global morals. Both projects, it is argued, rely on a reductive, functionalist analysis of global political dynamics and express a political perspective that lacks a definite critical content. Ultimately, the article contends that a re-vitalisation of Critical Theory in IR must necessarily involve a clarification of its fundamental categories of analysis and a recovery of the orientation towards totalising critique.

Keywords

Critical Theory, Frankfurt School, Habermas, Linklater, cosmopolitanism, system and lifeworld

‘We are living through a capitalist crisis of great severity without a critical theory that could adequately clarify it’ (Fraser, 2014: 56).

Introduction

Wherever one looks, Frankfurt School Critical Theory (CT) is in crisis. Outside of the discipline of International Relations (IR), in the fields of political philosophy and social theory, concerns are growing about the ability of Frankfurt School theory to make itself relevant to the present world-historical conjuncture (see for instance Fraser, 2014; Azmanova, 2014; Kim, 2014; Zambrana, 2013). What is increasingly being noted is the double failure of Habermasian and post-Habermasian CT to articulate a convincing analysis of current real-world dynamics of capitalist crisis and social disintegration and to disclose possibilities for political transformation (Kompridis, 2006). Michael Thompson (2014), for instance, has lamented the ‘neo-Idealist’ character of contemporary Frankfurt School theory, capable of expressing an emancipatory perspective only in the rarefied terms of ‘the structure of language, forms of justification or [...] mutual recognition’ (Thompson, 2014: 780-781); Albena Azmanova (2014: 357) has similarly spoken of an ‘overdose of Ideal theory’ having ‘depleted Critical Theory's resources for a direct engagement with the socio-structural dynamics of neoliberal capitalism’ and manifesting as a veritable ‘crisis of critique’; while Amy Kim (2014: 373) has provocatively announced the arrival of a ‘post-Critical’ phase of Frankfurt School theorising defined by the abandonment of the critique of political economy and the transition into a form of ‘socially conscientious and cosmopolitan liberalism’.

Meanwhile, within the discipline of IR, there are signs that the intellectual space that Frankfurt School-inspired theorists have traditionally occupied - that of higher-order debates over the epistemological and normative assumptions of IR scholarship - is declining in prominence and losing vitality (See the contributions to the recent ‘end of IR theory’ issue

of EJIR, such as Dunne et al., 2013). In this context, the kind of programmatic and meta-theoretical intervention that constituted much of critical theoretical work in IR in the 1980s and 1990s (see Ashley, 1981; Hoffman, 1991) appears today decidedly out of fashion. As Milja Kurki (2011: 130-137) has observed, what remains today of CT in IR is 'increasingly fragmented', lacking in practical relevance and operating 'within very specific orientations and with theoretical, rather than more generalist, political interests in focus'.

When viewed together, these diverse contributions point to a sense in which Frankfurt School theory is experiencing a generalised debilitation of its ability to interpret and clarify 'the struggles and wishes of the age' (Marx, 1975: 209), an affliction which goes beyond discipline-contingent preoccupations and calls into question the very foundations of the contemporary framework of critique. This in turns opens the positive possibility - which this article seeks to explore - of developing an examination of the state of critical theorising in IR that proceeds in dialogue with the wider Frankfurt School literature as well as other Marxian approaches interested in constructing a 'theory of the historical course of the present epoch' (Horkheimer, quoted in Outhwaite, 2013: vii).

The specific aim of this article is to diagnose the current predicament of Frankfurt School CT and identify the theoretical origins of its present crisis with regards to its engagement with international politics. I argue firstly that the present "crisis of critique" represents the point of culmination of a longer decline of Frankfurt School theorising, defined by the progressive uncoupling of normative critique from substantive social and political-economic analysis. Using Seyla Benhabib's (1986) understanding of the Frankfurt School project as defined by an 'explanatory-diagnostic' and an 'anticipatory-utopian' aspect, I describe critical theorising in the Habermasian and post-Habermasian era as characterised by the growing separation between the two tasks, resulting on the one hand in an a-critical, functionalist analysis of capitalism and political power and on the other in a socially disembedded and

abstract normativity. Secondly, I contend that a crucial node in this development is represented by Jürgen Habermas's critique of the early Frankfurt School's Marxism and his reconstruction of CT on the basis of an ontological and methodological dualism. Habermas's theory of system and lifeworld – which sets the basic theoretical coordinates of the currently dominant, communicative-cosmopolitan paradigm of critique - I argue lies at the roots of CT's current predicament. Thirdly, I claim that the weaknesses of the Habermasian framework manifest themselves with particular clarity in CT's engagements with and theorisations of the realm of "the international". Looking at the works of Jürgen Habermas and Andrew Linklater, I maintain that CT's dealings with international politics have failed to develop either an effective diagnostic framework that can explain contemporary global dynamics or a political perspective that can inspire emancipatory struggles. Instead, Frankfurt School theories of IR have on the one hand relied on a simplistic account of economic and political globalisation as a neutral and univocal evolutionary process and on the other have produced a normative theory of cosmopolitanism that lacks a definite critical content. Lastly, I propose that for the "crisis of critique" to be overcome CT needs to undo the severance of normative critique from social and political-economic analysis, move beyond the Habermasian framework and re-gain an orientation towards a "totalising" form of critique.

The article is organised in two sections: In the first, I present the general ontological and methodological architecture of contemporary Frankfurt School theory as it emerged from Habermas's critique and reconstruction of "classical" CT. I then explore the main problems associated with this social-theoretical framework by discussing a number of critiques levelled against it by feminist theory (Fraser, 1985; Landes, 1988), critical political economy (Streeck, 2014; 2015; 2016), and Marxism (Postone, 1993; Anderson, 1998; Bidet, 2008). In particular, I reconstruct the cascading effect by which the model of system and lifeworld produces a depoliticised conception of capitalism, a romanticised account of civil society

and ultimately informs a weakened critical perspective on contemporary society. In the second section I turn to the cosmopolitan theories of IR developed by Habermas and Linklater and explore the concrete ways in which the limitations of the prevailing framework are manifest in critical theorisation of international politics. Lastly, I draw the implications of this diagnosis for the future of CT and advance a proposal for its revitalisation.

Habermasian theory and the origins of the present crisis

The influence of Jürgen Habermas on the evolution of CT can hardly be overstated. His endeavour to reconstruct the theoretical and normative foundations of the Frankfurt School project in a new social domain - that of democratic deliberation and linguistic interaction - constituted a 'programmatic overhaul' which fundamentally reset the research agenda of CT (Scheuerman, 2006: 86). The extent to which the paradigmatic shift he advocated shaped the development of CT is such that one can reasonably portray the vast majority of Frankfurt School scholarship after Habermas as - in one way or another - *post-Habermasian* (Allen, 2016).[1] Whereas discussions on the impact of Habermas on contemporary CT typically centre on the normative-philosophical components of his work, I focus in this section on the social-theoretical architecture of the Habermasian project as it relates to Marxism and the early Frankfurt School. This, I suggest, is important for two reasons: Firstly, because Habermas's model of society as system and lifeworld constitutes the fundamental ontological and methodological framework on which not only his, but most of contemporary Frankfurt School research is still based today; secondly, because it is to here - at the level of the basic meta-theoretical parameters of the Habermasian paradigm of critique - that the

[1] Space constraints do not make it possible to adequately discuss other important scholars in contemporary Critical Theory, chief amongst them the 'third generation' theorist Axel Honneth. For the purposes of this article, I take Honneth's theory of recognition to represent a supplement and development of Habermas's basic framework of critique, rather than a fundamental, paradigmatic alternative to it.

origins of the present crisis of critique can be traced.

Habermas's theory of capitalist society

The paradigm of critique that underlies contemporary Frankfurt School theorising was originally developed as an attempt to "rescue" CT from the dead-end reached by the first generation of critical scholars by means of an interrogation and reconstruction of their 'hidden or tacit Marxist orthodoxy' (Habermas, 1973: 201; 1979). For Habermas (2007), by the 1960s, the "early" Frankfurt School had been brought to a theoretical as well as political standstill, that could in turn be understood as the *exhaustion* of a particular conception of Historical Materialism. Specifically, he argued that the 'classical form of critical theory' had '[fallen] apart' because of its untenable commitment to a *productivist* ontology and a *totalised* form of critique (Habermas, 1982: 232). For Habermas (1979: 98), the central analytical lapse that the early Frankfurt School had inherited from Marxism lie in its theory of historical development as a process reducible to a singular logic of evolution: that of the expansion of 'technical and organisational knowledge, of instrumental and strategic action, in short, of *productive forces*'. This economically reductionist reading of history - which elsewhere had elicited an optimistic determinism regarding the necessary onset of a socialist order - had inspired in Adorno and Horkheimer the hellish vision of a "totally administered society" in which all individuality and every sphere of social life would be absorbed by rational calculus and the principle of exchange (Habermas, 1982: 232). The identification of societal development with the creeping expansion of instrumental reason, Habermas (2007: 111) argued, had ultimately led the early Frankfurt scholars to surrender themselves to an 'uninhibited scepticism regarding reason' itself, resulting in a 'groundless', 'totalised' critique as a 'philosophy of despair' (Heller, 1982: 22).

In response to this predicament, Habermas set out to undertake a comprehensive reconstruction of the meta-theoretical architecture of CT. For him, the core fallacy of the early Frankfurt School's "production paradigm" had been the failure to account for the 'learning processes' that take place 'in the dimension of moral insight, practical knowledge, communicative action, and the consensual regulation of action conflicts' (Habermas, 1979: 97-98). The early critical scholars, he argued, had simply overlooked the fact that the 'normative structures' of society 'do not simply follow the path of development of reproductive processes' as in the Marxian model of base and superstructure but have their own independent, '*internal history*' (Habermas, 1979: 117). According to Habermas, this recognition that there are patterns of rationality and social action other than the objectifying logic of instrumental reason opened up the possibility of escaping the deadlock of early CT. By rectifying Historical Materialism's neglect of normative structures and taking heed of the parallel 'rationalisation process' of humanity's moral and communicative competencies, he believed it would be possible to develop a corrective to the negativistic theory of history of the early Frankfurt School and in so doing secure the normative foundations for a revival of critical social theory (Habermas, 1987: 397). Concretely, then, Habermas called for the reductionist ontology and totalised critique of the early Frankfurt School to be replaced with a new framework of critique capable of accounting for both material-productive *and* normative-communicative patterns of societal evolution. This new paradigm of critique - which still informs Frankfurt School scholarship today - was to be based on a methodological and ontological *dualism* (Habermas, 1992: 443).

To begin with, Habermas contended that the study of modern society could no longer proceed from one standpoint alone but must incorporate two different perspectives. On the one hand, critical social theory should be carried out from the standpoint of an *external observer*. From this point of view, society appears as a complex, impersonal and self-maintaining *system*. That is, as a set of relatively autonomous spheres - the economic, the

political, the socio-cultural - that run according to their own operative logic and fulfil a particular function in the reproduction of social life (Habermas, 1987: 153). This “system” perspective – which, for Habermas, was analogous to the structural analysis of capitalism developed by classical Marxism - he saw as having its most advanced articulation in the systems-theory of Talcott Parsons and Niklas Luhmann, who drew inspiration from biology and cybernetics to model society as an ensemble of functionally differentiated, boundary-maintaining subsystems (Habermas, 1987: 185-186, 225; 1991: 255). On the other hand, Habermas (1987: 127-140) argued that CT must now also incorporate the viewpoint of the *internal participant* to a social group. From this perspective, society would appear as a *lifeworld* - the symbolic and normative horizon within which the communicative interaction between members of a community takes place. The perspective on society as lifeworld, which corresponded for Habermas to the tradition of hermeneutic-interpretive sociology, would therefore study the shared cultural and moral resources, traditions and intersubjective understandings upon which participants in communication draw to make each other’s utterances intelligible. By incorporating both interpretivist and functionalist insights into its analysis, Habermas held that CT could regain the ability to fulfil what Seyla Benhabib (1986: 226) calls the two core components of critique: on the one hand, the ‘external’, systems-theoretical perspective would take care of the ‘explanatory-diagnostic’ task, developing an analysis of the ‘contradictions and dysfunctionalities’ that characterise non-communicative social domains such as the market economy and the state; on the other hand, the ‘internal’ lifeworld perspective would interpret the norms and values of a community in terms of their capacity for moral progress and in that way honours the ‘anticipatory-utopian’ aspect of critique (Habermas, 1987: 314).

To this first methodological binary, Habermas (1991: 255) then added a second ontological one: system and lifeworld, ‘which are initially introduced merely as different perspectives adopted in observing the same phenomena, also acquire essentialist connotations for

modern societies and open up a view of differently structured domains of social reality itself'. Capitalist society itself was, for Habermas (1987: 138), to be understood as a *bifurcated* social world in which the two system and lifeworld perspectives and the two instrumental and communicative rationalisation processes, become embodied in *ontologically distinct* domains of social life, overseeing respectively the material and the symbolic reproduction of society. On the one hand, the lifeworld denotes the intersubjective space that is institutionalised in the liberal public sphere, where the norms and meanings of a community are set and renegotiated communicatively in accord with the principle of rational consensus (Habermas, 1991: 252); on the other hand, as the realm of economic reason and bureaucratic administration, the system constitutes an 'objectified context of life' that has 'uncoupled' from the symbolic universe of the lifeworld to 'congeal into the "second nature" of a norm-free sociality' (Habermas, 1987: 173). In other words, those areas of social life that are organised by an instrumental logic such as the economy and the state are to be understood for Habermas as objective domains that are defined by a set of formal-structural properties and exist independently of the normative composition of the lifeworld.

On the basis of this "two-level" model of society Habermas set out to reconstruct the critique of capitalist modernity developed by the early Frankfurt School. According to him, the expansion of instrumental reason that Adorno and Horkheimer had identified as the defining pattern of modernisation could now be reframed as the progressive uncoupling of the system from the communicative and normative structures of the lifeworld, occurring in the form of a 'switching over' of social domains from linguistic to money- and power-mediated interactions (Habermas, 1991: 257-258). In advanced capitalist societies, Habermas (1987: 304) argued, this dynamic reaches a point where that the 'cognitive-instrumental rationality' embodied by the system 'surges beyond the bounds of the economy and state into other, communicatively structured areas of life and achieves dominance there at the expense of moral-political and aesthetic-practical rationality'. Habermas (1987: 343) came to refer to

this process - which he saw materialising in the ‘monetarisation’ and ‘bureaucratisation’ of a growing number of areas of private and public life, from education to health, from the privatisation of public spaces to the commodification of culture - as the ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’ by the system.

At the same time, Habermas sought to dissipate the early Frankfurt School’s despondency by stressing the resistive power of democratic deliberation and dialogic interaction. Ultimately, he saw capitalism as a paradoxical and conflicted stage of societal development in which the unprecedented moral and communicative evolution of the lifeworld also ‘makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself’ (Habermas, 1987: 186). Modernisation was thus reconfigured as a tale of two opposite forms of rationality - one, communicative and normative, the other, instrumental and purposive - that become institutionalised into fundamentally incongruous social structures. Capitalism and democracy - the operative logics of system and lifeworld respectively - are caught for Habermas (1987: 345) in ‘an *indissoluble* tension’, since within them ‘two opposed principles of societal integration compete for primacy’. Contrary to the socialist aspirations of Marxian theory, however, he did not think this contradiction could be subsumed under a new totality. Since for Habermas (1982: 223) democracy is not sufficient on its own to coordinate the overall reproduction of social life, any idea of redressing the uncoupling of the system by bringing the economy and the state under full democratic control would have to be rejected as regressive and potentially catastrophic. Instead, he argued:

> ‘[…] radical democratization now aims for a shifting of forces within a ‘separation of powers’ that itself is to be maintained in principle. […] The goal is no longer to supersede an economic system having a capitalist life of its own and a system of domination having a bureaucratic life of its own but to erect a democratic dam against

> the colonializing *encroachment* of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld' (Habermas, 1992: 444).

The defence of the autonomy of the lifeworld as the domain of instantiation of the emancipatory power of communication therefore became the central imperative of Habermas's reconstructed critical project. CT as a whole was thus reconfigured as a more limited political project, aiming not at the total critique of society but rather at the strengthening of those liberal institutional and legal frameworks - such as the public sphere and the Constitution - through which the normative demands of the lifeworld can be put forward and the system's most destructive 'side effects' be 'contained' (Habermas, 1991: 260; 1992: 470).

The antinomies of Habermasian theory

If the theory of society as system and lifeworld constitutes the meta-theoretical cornerstone of the Habermasian paradigm of critique, it is also the sources of its most serious problems and deficiencies. The main ways in which the framework devised by Habermas is problematic are two: it is essentialist in its conception of capitalism and civil society; and it relies on a teleological philosophy of history.

The first problem has to do with the rendition of system and lifeworld as ontologically distinct planes, the former having objective-structural properties and the latter interpretive-intersubjective ones. This move is crucial to Habermas's project because it allows him to identify in the lifeworld *qua* public sphere an emancipatory domain within existing society that is already integrated democratically through linguistic deliberation and thus has the potential, according to his formal pragmatics, of developing forms of universal rational

understanding. Ultimately, however, this ontological bisection of reality binds his CT to a *romanticised* account of civil society institutions and a reified and *depoliticised* understanding of capitalism and the state.

With regards to the former point, feminist scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1985) have shown that separating material from symbolic reproduction, 'assigning structural properties to one set of institutions (the official economy and the state) and interpretive ones to another set (the family and the "public sphere")' reproduces a sanitised and ideologically distorted conception of civil society. Using the example of childrearing, Fraser (1985: 106-107) has shown how conceiving the household as a purely symbolic space conceals the fact that the family can also be a site of labour and gendered exploitation. The representation of civil society as a realm that is ordered purely by the principles of democracy and solidarity occludes the fact that, as feminist historian Joan Landes (1988: 7) has shown, 'the bourgeois public sphere is essentially, not just contingently, masculinist'. More broadly, this is emblematic of a failure to recognise the extent to which coercion, domination and exclusion are constitutive elements of civil society and not merely dysfunctions of an essentially pure, emancipatory space (Cooper, 2015).

Conversely, casting the system as an objective, value-free realm means that Habermas is locked into a minimal definition of state and economy as characterised solely by two things: their function of securing the material reproduction of society and their integration through the media of power and money respectively. This leaves Habermasian CT with a very crude conception of economy and state which is, firstly, incapable of grasping more determinate features of capitalism as a social formation or differentiating between different forms of capitalism (Postone, 1993: 251-252); and secondly takes at face value the separation of 'the political' from 'the economic' and thus re-naturalises capitalism as an impartial and necessary social order (Bidet, 2008: 690). As Wolfgang Streeck (2015: 10) has commented,

this signifies a major *regression* for CT, such that the 'fundamental insight of political economy is forgotten: that the natural laws of the economy, which appear to exist by virtue of their own efficiency, are in reality nothing but projections of social-power relations which present themselves ideologically as technical necessities'. Concretely, this means that Habermasian social theory is left to depend on a minimal analytic schema with very limited explanatory power, one in which complex political-economic dynamics are reduced to a simplistic diagnostic matrix. Be it the breakdown of embedded liberalism in the 1970s (Habermas, 2001: 53; 2003b: 93), the debt crisis in the Eurozone (Habermas, 2012: 5) or, as I will discuss in the next section, the dynamics of globalisation, everything is reduced to a manifestation of 'imbalances' between the different subsystems of modern society. What is thereby left out is not only the possibility of talking about the internal contradictions of capitalism, but also an account of the strategic agency of institutions, state apparatuses and broader social forces (Streeck, 2014: 13/18).

The result is that Habermas merely replaces the *monological,* economistic reductionism he imputed to orthodox Marxism and the early Frankfurt School with a *dual* reductionism - one in which, as noted by the French Marxist Jacques Bidet (2008, 687), all social antagonisms are 'retranslated into the cleavage between two modes of integration' and real social actors become abstracted away as particular instantiations of one or the other kind of rational action and functional logic.

The second core issue with Habermas's two-level model of society relates to the progressive theory of social evolution that underlies it. Habermasian theory relies on the assumption that there exist fixed and linear "logics of development" guiding both system and lifeworld that determine the fundamental formative stages through which all human societies must go through (Owen, 2002: 64-65; Habermas, 1979: 144). On the one hand, the development of the system is driven for Habermas by the growth of societal complexity and manifests in the

succession of ever more sophisticated modes of production and bureaucratic administration. On the other, the evolution of the lifeworld mirrors the moral development of the individual as described in the cognitive psychology of Kohlberg and Piaget and consists in the progressive maturation of the collective capacity for critical judgment and universal rational understanding (Habermas, 1987: 147). The overall *movement* of historical development is constituted in Habermasian theory by the 'periodic interplay' between these two logics, in the form of an alternating rhythm of systemically induced *opening* - i.e. the undoing of an existing social order by the expansion of economic or technological forces - followed by a lifeworld *closure* - i.e. a 'socially integrative' reorganisation of the social formation at a more advanced level (Habermas, 2012: 113). The overall *content* of history is society's matching of the systemic problems created at any given stage of development by the achievement of higher levels of rationality and universality (Habermas, 1987: 174).

The problem with this model of social evolution is that it reproduces some of the more questionable features of the orthodox Marxist philosophy of history that Habermas had set out to distance himself from in the first place (Heller, 1982: 36). Yet again, Habermas (1979: 139) proceeds by substituting a 'dogmatic' and 'unilinear' conception of historical progress with a 'weaker' and bilinear one which nonetheless shares the same basic structure. What is most problematic for the purposes of CT is the notion that human history can be read as an inherently directional and progressive unfolding, to be reconstructed *retrospectively* as a moral-practical learning process leading up to European modernity and *prospectively* as the advancing release of the promise of universal rational agreement. On the one hand, this lends itself to a triumphalist and undialectical reading of history that highlights its successes while removing its ambivalences (Owen, 2002: 179; Fine & Smith, 2003: 484; Allen, 2014: 12). On the other, it supports the belief that the future course of history can be speculatively *predetermined* by means of a normative theory of legal and moral evolution (Streeck, 2016: 11). As I will demonstrate in the next section with regards to critical theories of

cosmopolitanism, the idea of moral-rational progress is thereby elevated to the status of an absolute, meta-normative principle that *overrides* the need for substantive, critical analysis (Allen, 2016, 38-39). In this way, as Nikolas Kompridis (2006: 257) has observed, the progressive theory of history as the normative foundation of the Habermasian paradigm of critique becomes 'an impermeable "rocking hull" that cannot be penetrated by history, by contingency, by experience - capable of intervening in history without being deformed by it'.

Crucially, these limitations inherent to the social ontology of Habermasian theory are not merely issues of abstract philosophical and meta-theoretical concern but directly translate into a weakened form of critique. The core issue here is that the thesis of the uncoupling of lifeworld and system mandates a parallel bisection of CT into two methodologically distinct components: one interpretive and normative; the other functionalist and analytical. This generates a paradoxical situation in which, as Jonathan Joseph (2002) observes, 'the more emphasis that hermeneutics places on the conceptual and intersubjective nature of social life, the more a positivistic view is embraced in conceiving of the non-social other' (Joseph, 2002: 155). The transition to a communicative paradigm of critique - which was promised to restore CT on stable ontological and normative grounds - is therefore revealed to entail a significant condition: that all political-economic and social enquiry be devolved to 'traditional' social theory and critique be confined to the interpretation of lifeworld contexts alone. Effectively, this means that a *division of labour* is established at the heart of Habermasian CT such that the tasks of normative critique and substantive analysis are effectively divorced.

To return to Seyla Benhabib's (1986) summary of the core tasks of CT as the 'explanatory-diagnostic' and the 'anticipatory-utopian', the Habermasian paradigm can thus be characterised as a framework of critique which *isolates* and *compartmentalises* these two dimensions to the detriment of both. On the one hand, the social-theoretical component is

severely crippled in its critical reach and must rely on the analytical categories of functionalist theory. Consequently, the only critique of capitalism that it is now possible is an *external* critique of its 'dysfunctional side effects' and intrusions on other subsystems (Bidet, 2008: 682/692). On the other hand, the ostensibly normative side of CT is cut off from specifying either the specific societal circumstances it seeks to transforms, or the concrete social forces that could possibly achieve that. Instead, normative critique is carried out in a neo-Kantian fashion by the analytical means of political philosophy and through speculative theories of moral development (Azmanova, 2014: 356). The outcome is a state of affairs in which, as William Scheuerman (2006: 94) has commented, CT oscillates between the empty radicalism of its procedural utopia and the practical resignation demanded by its social and political analysis. Since this antinomy cannot be solved, CT's tendency is to sublimate it in assertions of the already emerging coincidence of "what is" and "what is normatively desirable" (Anderson, 1998: 42-44; Anievas, 2010: 154-155). I will now show what this means concretely in relation to CT's interventions in international politics.

Critical Theory and international politics

When viewed in terms of its overall intellectual history, the encounter between Frankfurt School CT and the field of international politics is a relatively recent development. The first generation of Frankfurt School theorists had little to say about global affairs, other than some sporadic remarks on the destructive potential of modern war. Neither did Habermas initially engage much with the realm of the international, spending the early parts of his career either refining his philosophy of language or addressing the internal transformations of post-War European societies (Diez & Stefans, 2005: 127).

Where things began to change is a very precise historical juncture, namely the end of the

Cold War and the onset of the “unipolar moment” in international affairs. In the context of an apparent waning of national borders and traditional power politics, of seemingly unstoppable global economic restructuring and expanding worldwide communications, of a victorious liberal democratic order and an emerging regime of human rights protection, that very realm of international politics which had long appeared blocked, impervious to change and devoid of emancipatory possibilities, suddenly looked to be open for new normative theorisations (Calhoun, 2002: 887; Beardsworth, 2011). For CT, the 1990s marked the beginning of an age of sustained engagement with international politics on at least two fronts (Scheuerman, 2006: 87). On the one hand, Habermas himself became increasingly interested in what he saw as an unfolding ‘legal and political reorganisation of the world society’ along ‘post-national’ lines and in the opportunities this offered for a ‘transnationalisation of democracy’ (Habermas, 2000; 2015: 64). In particular, Habermas and scholars such as David Held and Daniele Archibugi turned their attention to how deliberative democratic procedures and cosmopolitan legal frameworks could become institutionalised at regional or even global level and thus provide an answer to the threats of unbridled globalisation (Scheuerman, 2006: 87; Beardsworth, 2011: 40-41). On the other hand, within the discipline of IR a number of critical scholars such as Andrew Linklater (1990; 1998) and Mark Hoffman (1991) started deploying concepts and themes derived from the Frankfurt School tradition to critique dominant forms of scholarship and advance alternative readings of international politics guided by an explicit emancipatory interest.

In this last section I discuss both of these steams of critical theoretical engagement with international politics by tracing the evolution of the work of the two authors that best embody them: Habermas’s writings on the ‘post-national constellation’ and Linklater’s normative theory of cosmopolitanism and sociology of global morals. Although they developed in relative autonomy from each other, both projects display the limitations I have outlined with

regards to the contemporary paradigm of critique.[2] I argue first of all that their explanatory-diagnostic component is essentially a-critical and based on a functionalist reading of globalisation as a coherent, linear process mandating simple technical solutions. Secondly, I contend that their normative or anticipatory-utopian contribution is carried out in terms of a hermeneutic of international society and ultimately relies on the abstract identification of a process of moral evolution. These weaknesses ultimately find expression in Habermas's and Linklater's respectively harder and softer visions of cosmopolitanism. The former turns into a theodicy in which the imperative of accomplishing the next step of societal evolution trumps all other considerations; the latter resolves into a consolatory narrative of long-term moral progress in inter-societal relations. Neither, I claim, satisfies the requirements of a CT of international politics.

Habermas and the 'post-national constellation'

Habermas's critical engagement with international politics is explicitly built on the binary framework I outlined and critiqued in the previous two sections. Accordingly, his investigation proceeds along two separate tracks - one analysing in functionalist terms the transformations of economic and political subsystems in the age of globalisation; the other interpreting the normative and legal evolution of world society and assessing the possibilities for further moral development in the global arena.

The systems-diagnostic side of Habermas's inquiry was first coherently set out in 2001 and has essentially remained unchanged to this day. Its basic structure consists of three core points: firstly, that a 'structural transformation of the world economic system' has begun in the 1990s that can be summarised under the term 'globalisation' and is characterised by the

[2] Discussing Linklater's work is useful in this instance because it illustrates how the reconstruction of Critical Theory on the basis of the model of system and lifeworld has shaped critical theoretical scholarship well beyond Habermas's own work.

intensification of world-wide economic and communication flows and the dismantling of trade barriers (Habermas, 2001: 51); secondly, that as part of this development, a dangerous *imbalance* has been created between the *global* scale of the operation of the market economy and the still *territorially*-bound political-administrative subsystem (Habermas, 2001: 51; 2009: 92). This results in a severe contraction of the state's ability to intervene in the economy, levy taxes and secure the provision of social goods and ultimately risks destabilising the entire social system (Habermas, 2000: 52); thirdly, that a stabilisation of the social system under these conditions can only occur if politics 'catch[es] up with runaway markets' by reconstituting itself at a supranational level (Habermas, 2000: 54; 2012: 106-9). For this to happen, the political and administrative functions which have historically been attached to the nation-state have to be 'transferred […] to larger political entities which could manage to keep pace with a transnational economy' (Habermas, 2001: 52).

This relatively simple explanatory-diagnostic model of an emerging 'post-national constellation' Habermas then integrates with a parallel hermeneutic interpretation of normative and legal progress in world society. Here Habermas's argument is that a series of global developments that started after the Second World War and intensified with the end of the Cold War - ranging from the strengthening of supranational institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union to the constitutionalisation of human rights and the growing importance of transnational fora such as the World Trade Organisation and the G-8 - demonstrate the existence of a general, evolutionary trend away from conventional, inter-state relations and towards the creation of more advanced regimes of global governance (Habermas, 2001: 69-71; 2006: 176-177; 2009: 97). For Habermas (2006: 19-20), this dynamic can be interpreted in legal-normative terms as a transition from the old institutions of 'classical international law' to what Kant foresaw as a new 'cosmopolitan legal regime'. This constitutes a significant 'civilising' advance over the previous, Westphalian international

regime on at least two fronts: firstly, because for the first time it is not only states that are the referents of international law, but also individuals and their rights as world citizens (Habermas, 2006: 124); secondly, because the constitutionalisation of international law - i.e. the subordination of the nation-state to superior judicial authority - constitutes vital progress in the 'rationalisation of the exercise of political power' and the 'domestication of international violence' in the world arena (Habermas, 2015: 10/56).

At this point, Habermas's two strands of inquiry - the functionalist and the normative - suddenly converge. The 'post-national constellation' created by the pressures of globalisation 'meets the constitutionalisation of international law halfway' (Habermas, 2006: 177), in that both evolutionary dynamics point in the same direction: the overcoming of the present framework of inter-state relations and the creation of 'a stable infrastructure for a global domestic policy' in the form of a cosmopolitan political order (Habermas, 2001: 56).

Having defined the overall world-historical trajectory, Habermas dedicates much of his later work to solving the residual questions raised by this cosmopolitan scenario and to determining the intermediate institutional steps to its realisation. The main outstanding political issue for Habermas is that of the future of democracy. (Habermas, 2001: 61-62; 2012: 16). On the one hand, he notes that the functionalist solution of 'shifting upwards' the competencies of the nation-state remains normatively problematic as long as the democratic deficit of supranational institutions is not filled by some form of transnational democratic process (Habermas, 2015: 52). On the other hand, he is also cognisant of the fact that the persisting weakness of cosmopolitan solidarity makes it difficult for the conventional model of democratic sovereignty based on a collective, self-legislative body to be "scaled up" beyond the national or regional level (Fine & Smith, 2003: 474). To respond to this challenge, Habermas suggests a major revision of Kant's original design. Kant's ideal of a state-like 'world republic', he argues, needs to be replaced by a more nuanced and realistic model of

a ‘decentered world society as a multilevel system’ that builds on and reforms existing global institutions (Habermas, 2006: 135-136). Within this speculative design, the experience of the European Union assumes central importance. Not only does the EU constitute a first, ‘suitable example’ of politics following ‘the lead of the market in constructing supranational political agencies’ (Habermas, 1998: 123); its very existence represents ‘a point of departure for the development of a transnational network of regimes that together could pursue a world domestic policy, even in the absence of a world government’ (Habermas, 2003b: 96). In its role of trailblazer for the constitution of ‘more far-reaching cosmopolitanism’, the EU takes on for Habermas (2012: 11) a veritable ‘civilising role’: that of providing a ‘test’ of the ‘will and capability of citizens, of political elites and the mass media, to conclude the next stage of integration at least within the euro zone - and in the process to take the civilisation of the exercise of political authority one step further’ (Habermas, 2012: 20).

Andrew Linklater: cosmopolitanism and the sociology of states-systems

If Habermas’s engagement with international politics can effectively be summarised as the justification of the *functional necessity* and *normative desirability* of a cosmopolitan world order, the work of Andrew Linklater represents a more sustained and in-depth attempt at theorising the evolving normative structure of international society, understood as the ensemble of the standards of conduct and shared moral understandings and conventions defining a particular states-system. Having emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as one of the leading figures in a broader critical theoretical movement in the discipline of IR, Linklater has been an important presence in the critical study of international politics for more than four decades. During that time, his perspective has developed significantly from an initial focus on international political theory and the definition of an “updated” Kantian cosmopolitan vision that integrates Habermas’s discourse ethics (Linklater, 1998) to a more

sociologically-informed inquiry into ‘long-term patterns of change’ in humanity’s responses to vulnerability and harm (Linklater, 2007a: 145). Despite the fact that over the past decade Linklater has increasingly sought to complement the normative framework of Habermasian theory with ‘non-partisan’ forms of enquiry such as Norbert Elias’s work on the ‘civilising process’ and the English School tradition of IR (Linklater, 2011: 22/193; Devetak et al, 2013: 489), his body of work as a whole represents one of the more comprehensive attempts to articulate a critical theoretical perspective on IR.

Linklater’s early works on international political theory are dominated by the concern with identifying the different stages of development ‘of the freedom of human subjects in the area of their international relations' (Linklater, 1982: xii). In his first book, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (1982), Linklater pursues this goal by constructing an ideal-typical, hierarchical scale of different ‘intersocietal forms’, ordered by ‘the extent to which each approximates the conditions of realised human freedom’ (Linklater, 1982: xi-xii). Starting from the Hobbesian ‘state of nature’-condition which characterises relations between tribal groups, Linklater distinguishes two further stages of moral development: the modern states-systems - with its limited advances in securing rights to its citizens - and finally a ‘post-national’, cosmopolitan order which ‘affords protection to all human subjects as equals’ (Linklater, 1982: 199). This final stage, which Linklater identifies with Kant’s notion of ‘a universal kingdom of ends’, represents for him the most morally advanced conceivable way of organising inter-societal relations (Linklater, 1982: 100). In *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998), having in the meantime encountered Jürgen Habermas’s work, Linklater refines this three-stage normative model in two ways: firstly, he integrates the concept of ‘moral-practical learning’ as the mechanism by which normative evolution occurs in international relations (Linklater, 1998: 121); secondly, Linklater further specifies the normative basis of the final, cosmopolitan stage by incorporating Habermas’s philosophy of language. Responding in particular to post-structuralist concerns about ‘the potential for

domination […] inherent in all universalising perspectives', Linklater now envisages a 'thin conception of cosmopolitanism with no fixed and final vision of the future', based on the procedural rules of Habermas's ethics of discourse (Linklater, 1998: 47-48). This 'dialogic cosmopolitanism' aims no longer at the application of a predetermined set of moral principles, but rather at the 'widening of the circle of those who have rights to participate in dialogue' (Linklater, 1998: 96).

After the turn of the millennium, the focus of Linklater's work shifts progressively away from philosophical and normative questions and towards a greater engagement with sociological inquiry. Underlying this transition are two developments. Firstly, Linklater is increasingly dissatisfied with ideal-normative theorising and seeks to complement the speculative history of moral development he had relied on thus far with a sociological investigation of real-world processes of change in international society (Devetak et al, 2013: 489). Secondly, Linklater becomes critical of Habermas's 'decorporealised' and excessively rationalistic normative theory, suggesting that the emotional aversion to pain and suffering and the aspiration to see them minimised may represent a stronger moral foundation for a universalising project (Linklater, 2007a: 144-146). These shifts in research orientation are accompanied by a change in primary theoretical references. Even though Habermas and his discourse ethics remain important normative anchors throughout his work (Devetak et al, 2013: 487), Linklater is increasingly drawn to two sociological approaches from outside the critical theoretical tradition: Norbert Elias's analysis of civilising processes and the English School in IR. From Elias's study of the European civilising process between the 15th and the 20th century, Linklater draws the orientation towards analysing long-term trends in the collective development of '[s]ocial controls on violence and constraints on impulsive behaviour' (Linklater, 2004: 9-11; 2010: 158); from the English School, he takes the interest in developing a 'comparative sociology of states-systems' that explores 'how far different international systems have thought harm to individuals a moral problem for the world as a

whole […] and have developed […] cosmopolitan harm conventions' (Linklater, 2002: 320; 2011: ix). Combining the long-term, evolutionary perspective of the former with the latter's focus on international society, Linklater (2004: 21) now seeks to write a 'sociology of global civilising processes' that asks first, how far 'efforts to prevent physical cruelty […] have developed in different states-systems'; and second, 'whether or not a global conscience or cosmopolitan moral emotions have greater influence in the modern states-system than in earlier epochs'.

Culminating so far in the 2011 book '*The problem of harm in world politics*', this new research agenda is framed by Linklater (2007a; 2011) no longer as a Critical Theory of IR but in the more circumscribed terms of a 'sociology of global morals with an emancipatory intent'. Compared to Habermas's writings on international politics discussed above, two things clearly set Linklater's approach apart. Firstly, Linklater tends to adopt a detached and long-term perspective on the question of normative progress in world history and refrains from intervening directly on issues of immediate political concern (Linklater, 2011: 193); secondly, whereas Habermas seeks to articulate a comprehensive diagnosis of contemporary international trends throughout the economic, political and cultural spheres, Linklater's analysis is more limited in scope, concerning itself with developments occurring in what in Habermasian terms can be described as the normative and legal structure of the lifeworld. Apart from some references to 'rising levels of global interconnectedness' and the challenges posed by globalisation and political fragmentation (see Linklater, 1998: 32; 2007b: 2; 2011: 260), there seems to be little interest on Linklater's part to engage in an analysis of political and economic global dynamics, the focus remaining firmly centred on the moral regulation of social conduct in and between societies. These elements do not mean, however, that Linklater abandons the terms and purposes of CT completely, nor that his work lacks a political dimension. Where Habermas's intervention consists in the unwavering assertion of the functionally and normatively desirable path of historical

development and the devising of all necessary intermediate moves to secure it, Linklater's political message is of a more cautious, unassuming kind. What his research aims to do is develop a 'grand narrative' capable of communicating a sense in which humanity as a universal subject is undergoing a civilising process and, over millennia, has secured partial but important advances in the constitutionalisation of harm conventions (Linklater, 2011: 260-261). This performs for Linklater a doubly useful function: one the one hand, to 'document the struggles of the species, celebrate its achievements, and explain threats to its survival and to its ability to live decently' can induce individuals to relativise their attachment to national communities and 'encourage cosmopolitan identification' (Linklater, 2011: 259); on the other, '[s]tudies of long-term processes of social development can complement the efforts by transnational advocacy networks to promote appropriate conceptions of global moral and political responsibility' (Linklater, 2011: 263).

Critique

Both Linklater's and Habermas's research on international politics falls within the bounds of the ontological and methodological framework of contemporary CT I discussed above. In different ways, they both remove the analysis of economic and political dynamics from the purview of critique and delegate it to non-critical, functionalist analysis. In Habermas's case, this takes the explicit form of a separate, systems-theoretical account of objective global dynamics in terms of the imbalance between economic and political subsystems. In the case of Linklater, the explanatory task is satisfied by the postulation of an overarching trend in human history towards 'higher levels of global interconnectedness' (Linklater, 2011: 75/260-261). For both, the core of the investigation lies in resolving the normative questions raised by this premise by reconstructing the parallel moral-learning process through which the symbolic and legal structure of international society has evolved up to the presently nascent

"cosmopolitan condition".

Insofar as they (implicitly or explicitly) adopt that framework of critique, however, Linklater and Habermas's IR works also exhibit the problems I discussed above as deriving from the ontology and methodology of system and lifeworld. Specifically, what becomes manifest in critical theoretical engagements with international politics is how the uncoupling of critique from political and economic analysis degrades both the capacity to generate incisive diagnoses of the central contradictions and dynamics of the age and the ability to articulate possibility-disclosing critiques and political interventions.

In terms of their analysis of the systemic tendencies of world politics, Habermas and Linklater fall back on the prevailing intellectual motif of the 1990s, that is, the theory of globalisation as an epoch-making intensification and expansion of social relations across economic, political and cultural spheres (Habermas, 1998: 120; Linklater, 1998: 32-34). However, as Justin Rosenberg (2005) has extensively shown, the category of globalisation is severely flawed as an *explanatory* device and inhibits the development of more incisive critical investigations into either the global dynamics of the capitalist economy or the power-political dimension of international relations.[3]

With regards to the former, the analysis of the international conjuncture after the end of the Cold War as explained by global economic integration (Habermas, 2001: 51) and 'ever-advancing global interconnectedness' (Linklater, 2011: 261) displays all the weaknesses of the essentialised conception of capitalism I discussed in the previous section. Because in this conception "money is money" and nothing more needs to be established than its functional requirements, the only causally-effective variables that are made available for

[3] For Rosenberg (2005: 10-11), the limit of globalisation theory resides in the category mistake of attributing causal properties to a descriptive, geographical term. In so doing, globalisation theory obscures the fact that the 'undeniably dramatic *spatio-temporal* phenomena of the 1990s were overwhelmingly produced by a process of social change - and not *vice versa*'.

analysis are the level of internal complexity achieved by the economic system and its spatial scale of operation. Concretely, this means that attempts at explanation can never go beyond the superficial assertion that climate change, global economic crises or the decline of the Welfare State are all 'challenges' opened up by the newly attained level and scale of systemic integration (Habermas, 2000: 52-53; 2001: 88; 2015: 57); or that, in Linklater's words, 'rising levels of interconnectedness have made it possible for people to cause more destructive forms of harm over greater distances' (Linklater, 2010: 203). The surrendering of the conceptual vocabulary of political-economic critique in favour of the categories of traditional theory thus translates into the practical impossibility to discuss the social forces and struggles and dynamics that compose and define the present global conjuncture.

As to the latter point, Habermas's and Linklater's understanding of the structure of world politics as undergoing an evolutionary transition driven by globalisation hampers the elaboration of any deeper theoretical reflection on the distinctive character of "the international" as a domain of social life. The core issue here is that by taking the vantage point of an already emerging 'post-national constellation' in which state sovereignty and relations of power are being civilised and replaced by cosmopolitan conventions and regimes of governance, Linklater and Habermas come to rely on a juxtaposition between a Westphalian, *international* states-system and a post-Westphalian, globalised and *cosmopolitan* one. In an analogous way to the globalisation theorists critiqued by Rosenberg, they thus find in the simplistic model of a "Westphalian system" characterised by sovereignty, territoriality and the primacy of power over reason a 'vision of the past against which their image of a "globalising" present [can] be dramatically contrasted' (Rosenberg, 2005: 17). More interested in tracing the contours of this promising new political order than in exploring the functionings of the old - keen, in other words, to be theorists of *cosmopolitanism* rather than of *international relations* - they end up reifying both. On the one hand, as R.B.J. Walker (1999) and Fine & Smith (2003) have noted with regards to Linklater

and Habermas respectively, cosmopolitanism as the affirmation of universal moral principles is lifted out of its historical context and set up as an ideal alternative to that same modern nation-state with which it 'has coexisted […] ever since it was born' (Fine & Smith, 2003: 484); on the other hand, international relations and the entire *problematique* of power politics are consigned to orthodox theorisations of 'classical international law' (Habermas, 2006: 119-120; 2012: 55) and the 'Westphalian states-system' (Linklater, 1998: 8; 2007b: 98/104) - that is, to realist conceptions of a political system organised around the principle of international anarchy (see Habermas, 1998: 126; 2012: 10; Linklater, 2011: 20). Ultimately, this means that CT's analysis not only fails to make significant advances over traditional conceptions of IR, but also ignores the important work being undertaken in other strands of critical inquiry to question and complicate the ahistorical categories that underlie classical conceptions of the modern states-system (see Teschke, 2003).

Meanwhile, the critical and emancipatory dimension of Linklater's and Habermas' international theories consists in the assertion that a process of normative development can be identified in global relations the culmination of which - a cosmopolitan world order - is now within reach. Of this Habermas and Linklater offer respectively a harder and a softer variant, each with worrying political implications.

In Habermas's stronger formulation, functionalist and normative processes converge today in making the overcoming of the nation-state and the empowerment of supranational institutions both a technical necessity and a political imperative. There simply is, he states in 2003, 'no sensible alternative to the ongoing development of international law into a cosmopolitan order that offers an equal and reciprocal hearing for the voices of all those affected' (Habermas, 2003a: 370). What Wolfgang Streeck (2016: 7) calls the 'unconditional partisanship for the non-national and supranational' thus becomes the cornerstone of Habermas's political *Weltanschauung.* Every global political issue of the last three decades

- from the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s to the 2008 global financial crisis - is refracted through the lens of what progress in international politics *must* look like, emerging either as an encouraging anticipation of the world to come or as a frustrating deviation. Thus, for instance, the 1991 Gulf War 'augurs well for the future' in that it shows the UN 'carrying out a global domestic policy' through the implementation of "police law" (Habermas, 2006: 169), while the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is met with unease as the unilateralism with which it is carried out dishonours the role of the United States 'as the pacemaker for progress on [the] cosmopolitan path' (Habermas, 2003a: 365). Most recently, this formula by which any political issue or circumstance is reduced to the significance it holds for the prospect of a cosmopolitan future has been deployed by Habermas in the context of the EU. Because the cosmic perspective of humankind's moral evolution trumps all other things, every concrete political-economic and social objection must be set aside and 'European unification' be defended for its 'civilising role' in showing the way forward to 'a more far-reaching cosmopolitanism' (Habermas, 2012: 11) and because renouncing it 'would also be to turn one's back on world history' (Habermas, 2015: 17).

The problem with a theory in which no political consideration is allowed to intervene other than the concern over the execution of the functionally and normatively predetermined course of history is that it tends to become the *opposite* of a critical theory: that is, a *theodicy* in which all that happens can in one way or another be explained by reference to the necessary unfolding of progress; in which every crisis, war or emergency is a mere "challenge" that drives humanity forward towards what it was meant to achieve all along (Anievas, 2010: 154; Anderson: 2012, 52; Heins, 2016: 10). Thus when put through Habermas' political formula, the debt crisis in the Eurozone and the pressures of financialisation re-emerge as a 'cunning of economic reason' that 'forces us to act' and pushes governments and national citizens to accept further supranational integration (Habermas, 2012: 49-50; 2015: 68/76); the NATO bombings in Kosovo in 1999, even though

they did not respect international law, at least ‘anticipate’ and drive forward the constitutionalisation of human rights (Habermas, 1999: 269; Anderson, 2005: 27-28); and the entire arc of European modernity, its history of ‘class struggle, imperialistic conquest and colonial atrocities, of world wars and crimes against humanity, postcolonial destruction and cultural uprooting’ (Habermas, 2012: 10-11) is redeemed in light of the messianic role it plays in preparing the final advent of the cosmopolitan Eden (Anderson, 2012: 52).

Compared to the grandiloquence and triumphalism of Habermas’s pronunciations, Linklater’s stance certainly represents a more cautious and guarded counterpoint. For Linklater, the crucial task of a CT of IR today is to provide normative resources that NGOs and ‘transnational advocacy networks’ can ‘harness[…] in struggles to reduce or eradicate pointless and relievable harm’ (Linklater, 2011: 264). Concretely, Linklater has sought to develop this in two ways: in his early works, he focused on articulating ‘visions’ of a post-Westphalian state that would be ‘appropriate’ for the coming phase of global interconnectedness (Linklater, 2007a: 90-91; 2010: 101); later, he aimed to generate new ‘grand narratives’ of moral progress in international society that could supplant the old, realist narratives built around the notion of the immutability of the nation-states system (Linklater, 2011: 265-266). In either form, Linklater’s political perspective presents some serious limitations. With regards to the former, his emancipatory theory of cosmopolitanism is still vulnerable to the charge brought against it by Beate Jahn in 1998: that while certainly being *normative*, in the sense of expressing an idea of what international society ought to be like, it is not necessarily *critical*, because as a normative vision ‘it has not been derived from an analysis of the contradictions of the [existing international order] and it is not even formulated as a negation of the existing injustices’ (Jahn, 1998: 615/622). Concretely, this means that cosmopolitanism as a critical category remains a blunt weapon, a normative hypothesis which only recognises ‘internally defined problems’ (Kim, 2014: 377) such as how to minimise the influence of wealth and power inequalities on democratic deliberation

or how to devise procedural rules of participation that guarantee inclusivity, but which has little to say about the present context of capitalist crisis and rising social antagonism. As to the latter, the reconstruction of a process of moral-practical development that runs through human history, 'civilising' relations between individuals and society, can certainly have a *consolatory* function in countering fatalistic conceptions of IR and showing how international society has gone further than ever before in implementing cosmopolitan harm conventions. It has however equally little to contribute to a *critical* reading of the present. Beyond repeating Elias' warning that regressive, 'decivilising processes […] *always* attend the civilising process' (Linklater, 2004: 9) and are still possible today, Linklater can offer no further account of the actual social forces and collective interests that underlie each of these tendencies and are involved in defining the development of international relations. The problem with a consolatory theory, then, is that when separated from substantive critique it is easily debased into an *apologia* of the present - that is, into the comforting message that "things have never been this good" (Anderson, 2007: 127-128; Anievas, 2010).

Ultimately, then, critical theoretical perspectives on international politics tend to oscillate between two equally problematic political positions: on the one hand is the identification of the "struggle of the age" to which CT is to contribute in the opposition between the clear historical necessity of a cosmopolitan order and the 'mental blocks', archaic structures of thinking and emotional attachments to 'particularistic communities' holding it back (Linklater, 2007b: 2); or more concretely, between progressive transnational networks and the all-discerning critical theorist on the one side and backwards looking, recalcitrant national populations, narrow-minded mass media and political elites lacking the courage to 'persuade' and 'enlighten' their electorates on the other (Habermas, 2012: 4; 2015: 79/90); on the other hand is the apologetic role of a modern Pangloss, the character in Voltaire's *Candide* assuring that "all is for the best" while earthquakes, war and malady rage through the world.

Conclusion

Frankfurt School CT is arguably distinctive among contemporary Marxist and post-Marxist approaches in its combination of an explanatory-diagnostic and an anticipatory-utopian dimension. Its aspiration is to cohere these two aspects into a form of critique that both clarifies the oppressive character of the existing social order and discloses strategies and possibilities for its transformation. As I have argued in this article, the prevailing form in which Frankfurt School critique is deployed today does not live up to that ambition. Crucially, a schism has opened between the analytical and normative dimensions of CT, such that the former is delegated to functionalist, a-critical theory while the latter is framed in increasingly rarefied and ideal terms. The result has been a growing difficulty on the part of CT to interpret and keep pace with societal transformations. Its engagements with IR manifest this with particular clarity. While the analysis is stuck in the *zeitgeist* of 1990s globalisation theory, cosmopolitanism as a normative vision of moral evolution offers little guidance in an age of capitalist crisis and social upheaval.

What this predicament calls for is nothing less than a comprehensive reassessment of the ontological and methodological commitments of Frankfurt School theory. In particular, it is time to acknowledge the failure of the Habermasian strategy to “save” CT from the immobilising consequences of economic reductionism by developing alongside it a second normative reductionism. That meta-theoretical project, which I have discussed in this article in terms of the theory of system and lifeworld, is faltering today because the reconstruction of CT that lies at its heart went too far and not far enough at the same time. It did not go far enough because in its critique of the early Frankfurt School’s Marxism it *entrenched* rather than challenged the idea of society as reducible to fixed and unassailable patterns of development. In so doing, CT ended up recreating within itself - only now in an optimistic

rather than fatalistic mould - the same essentialist and deterministic tendencies of that tradition's most rigid incarnations. At the same time, Habermasian CT went too far because it forgot and so rescinded Marxism's greatest advance: the insight that behind seemingly inexorable laws of history and natural economic and political facts lie concrete social relations that are constituted by human agency and open to change.

If this diagnosis is correct, then the way ahead for Frankfurt School CT lies neither in the perpetuation of its present mode nor simply in the reversal to a prior, pre-Habermasian form. Instead, the most promising path resides in the rejection of reductionist and determinist thinking *tout court* and a re-centring of critical scholarship on the determinate analysis and critique of the social and historical situation. In other words, any attempt to revitalise CT must take as its starting point the simple but crucial notion that the key to understanding the present is given neither by the Eden of communicative reason nor by the Inferno of total administration, but lies in the study of the manifold, contradictory and open-ended relations that pertain between concrete social forces operating across national and international, political and economic, private and public domains. In practice, this means that the *bifurcating* strategy of critique which underlies the communicative-cosmopolitan paradigm must be replaced by a new *totalising* strategy which aims at reintegrating the anticipatory-utopian and explanatory-diagnostic dimensions of critical theorising by way of a concretisation of the former and a politicisation of the latter. As others have argued (Fluck, 2014; Koddenbrock, 2014), the conceptual resources by which CT can accomplish such a renewal while avoiding the pitfalls of deterministic thinking already exist within the Marxian tradition. Moreover, critical literatures such as Marxist IR theory and historical sociology as well as neo-Gramscian International Political Economy have long been dealing with the issue of how to theorise in non-reductionist ways the relation between capitalism, "the international", social agents and ideational structures and it is in dialogue with those approaches that CT's reconstruction as an analytically cutting-edge and politically vibrant

project is most likely to succeed.

From the perspective of a broader, collaborative critical theoretical enterprise, the Frankfurt School focus on the socially-transformative and possibility-disclosing role of critique can add a unique and invaluable contribution that explores a question - that of emancipation - often evoked but rarely explored in other Marxian literatures (Worth, 2011). In this context, the work that critical theories of IR have already carried out on the normative development of international society and the idea of cosmopolitanism could - once it is integrated with, rather than separated from, the study of social processes of power and global capitalism - play a vital role in the definition of a new emancipatory project in international politics.

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